

"You are accused not only of raising spirits, but of citing the devil," pursued Laraynie, in tones of marked reproof. "Have you ever seen the devil?"

"Oh, yes! He is before me now. He is old, ugly, and wears the disguise of a presiding judge."

This time the applause rang through the council-chamber. It was accompanied by shouts of laughter, and no more attempt was made by the amused spectators to preserve the least semblance of decorum. The president, pale with rage, rose from his seat, and darting fiery glances at the irreverent crowd, whom the duchess had named as her particular friends, he cried out:

"The trial is over, and I hereby dismiss the court."

"What—already?" said the duchess, rising languidly from her seat. "Have you nothing more to say to me, my dear President Laraynie?"

Her "dear president" vouchsafed not a word in reply: he motioned to his compeers to rise, and they all betook themselves to their hall of conference. When the door had closed behind them, Marianna addressed her friends.

"My lords," said she, "I must apologize for the exceeding dulness of the scene you have just witnessed. But who would ever have imagined that such wise men could ask such a tissue of silly questions? I had hoped to experience a sensation by having a distant glimpse of the headsman's axe, and lo! I am cheated into an exhibition of President Laraynie's long ears!" *

"Come, Marianna," said her husband, passing her arm within his. "It is time for our drive to the *Pré aux Clercs*; the king and court are doubtless there already."

"And I shall annoy Madame de Maintenon by entertaining his majesty with an account of the absurd comedy that has just been performed in the council-chamber of the Arsenal."

So saying, Marianna led the way, and, followed by her adherents, left the tribunal of justice, and drove off in triumph to the *Pré aux Clercs*.

* The duchess's own words. This account of the trial is historical.—See *Rénée*, "The Nieces of Mazarin," p. 395.

CHAPTER III.

A SKIRMISH.

INSTEAD of accompanying his aunt from the council-chamber to her carriage, Eugene fell back, and joined two young men, who were walking arm in arm just behind the duke and duchess.

They greeted him with marked cordiality, and congratulated him upon the presence of mind with which he had captured the judicial arm-chair, and pressed it into the service of his aunt.

"My cousins of Conti are pleased to jest," replied Eugene. "Such praise befits not him who removes a chair, but him who unsettles a throne."

"Have you any such ambitious designs?" asked Prince Louis de Conti, sportively.

"Why not?" returned his brother, Prince de la Roche. "It would not be the first time that such a feat had been performed by an ecclesiastic. Cardinal Mazarin removed the throne of France from the Louvre to his bedchamber, and what Giulio Mazarini once accomplished, may perchance be repeated by his kinsman, the abbé."

"Who tells you that I am a priest?" said Eugene.

"First—your garb; second, the will of your family; and third, the command of the king."

"You forget the will of the individual most interested. But of that anon—I have a request to make of you both."

"It is granted in advance," exclaimed the brothers with one voice.

"Thank you, gracious kinsmen. Will you, then, accept a seat in my carriage, and drive with me to the *Pré aux Clercs*?"

"With pleasure. Is that all?"

"Almost all," replied Eugene, laughing. "What else remains to be done, must be performed by myself."

"Ah! There is something then in the wind? May we ask what it is?"

"You will witness it, and that is all I require of you. But here is my carriage. Be so kind as to step in."

Conrad stood at the portière, and, while the young Princes de Conti were entering the coach, he drew from under his cloak a slender parcel, which he presented to his lord.

Eugene received it with a smiling acknowledgment. "Is all prepared?" he asked.

"Yes, your highness. Old Philip is in ecstasies, and the other lackeys are like a pack of hounds on the eve of a fox-chase."

"They shall hear the fanfare presently," returned Eugene, following his cousins, and taking his seat opposite to them.

"What is that?" asked the Prince de Conti pointing to the long, thin roll of white paper which Eugene held in his hand.

"I suspect that it is a crucifix, and Eugene is going to entrap us into a confession," returned De la Roche, who loved to banter his cousin.

"We shall see," replied Eugene, opening the paper, and exhibiting its contents.

"A whip!" exclaimed De Conti.

"Yes, a stout, hunting-whip!" echoed De la Roche. "Are we to go on a fox-hunt, dear little abbé?"

"We are, dear, tall prince, and we shall shortly set out."

"Things begin to look serious," observed De Conti, with a searching glance at the pale, resolute face of his young relative. "You do not really intend to chase your fox in presence of the king?"

"Yes, I do. I intend to prove to his majesty that I am not altogether unskilled in worldly craft, and, as regards my fox, I intend that all Paris shall witness his punishment."

"You mean that you have been insulted, and are resolved to disgrace the man that has insulted you?" asked De la Roche.

"You have guessed," said Eugene, deliberately, as he unwound the long lash of the whip, and tried its strength.

"But Eugene," said De Conti, earnestly, "remember that such degradation is only to be wiped out with blood, and that your cloth will not protect you from the consequences of so unpriestly an act."

Eugene's eyes flashed fire. "Hear me," said he. "If my

miserable garb could prevent me from vindicating my honor as a man, I would rend it into fragments, and cast it away as the livery of a coward. A man's dress is not a symbol of his soul; and so help me, God! this brown cassock shall some day be transformed into the panoply of a soldier. But see! The carriage stops, and we are about to taste the joys ineffable of seeing the King of France drive by."

Two outriders in the royal livery were now seen to gallop down the *allée*, as a signal for all vehicles whatsoever to drive aside until the royal equipages had passed by.

In this manner Louis was accustomed to exhibit himself to the admiring gaze of his subjects, and to bestow upon them the unspeakable privilege of a stray beam from the "son of France." Never had he shed his rays upon a more numerous or more magnificent concourse than the one assembled in the *Pré aux Clercs*; for the Duchess de Bouillon had just entered with her cortège, and the *allée* was lined on either side with splendid equipages and their outriders—pages, equestrians, and foot-passengers.

His majesty was gazing around, bowing affably to the crowd, when he perceived the Duchess de Bouillon, and caught her eye. Louis waved his hand, and smiled; and this royal congratulation filled up the measure of Marianna's content. At that moment his face was illumined by an expression of genuine feeling, perhaps a reflection of the light of a love which had shone upon it in the golden morning of his youth.

The king's coach had gone by; following came the equipages of the royal family, and the princes of the blood: then—

"My dear cousin," said Eugene, "be on your guard, and if the glasses of our carriage-windows begin to splinter, close your eyes, for—"

At this moment the coach darted suddenly forward, and took its place behind the royal cortège. There was a tremendous concussion of wheels and shafts, a crash of broken panes, a stamping and struggling of horses; and, above all this din, the frantic oaths of the coachmen that had suffered from the collision.

"What do you mean, you ill-mannered churl! What do

you mean by driving in front of my horses?" cried a loud and angry voice.

"What do you mean yourself, clown!" was the furious reply of the Jehu addressed. "My horses were merely advancing to take the position which belongs to them of right, and how dare you stop the way!"

"Do you hear?" asked Eugene, with composure. "The drama begins, and I and my whip will shortly appear on the stage. It was my trusty old Philip who began the fray, and—it has already gone from words to blows, for it seems to me I heard something like a box on the ear—"

"You did indeed!" exclaimed the Prince de Conti; "but what on earth can it mean?"

"You will find out presently," replied Eugene. "But wait a moment, I must listen for my cue—"

"Your cue will have to be a thunder-clap, if you are to hear it above all this racket," said De la Roche, slightly lowering one of the windows, and looking cautiously out. "Devil take me! but it is a veritable pitched battle. These knights of the hammer-cloth are dexterous in the use of their fists, and every one of your servants, Eugene, are engaged in the fight!"

The prince's last words were lost to his listeners, for a tremendous crash drowned his voice, and something fell heavily to the ground.

"This is my cue," cried Eugene. "Come—I am about to make my début." And before he had time to rise from his seat, the portière flew open, and Conrad hastily took down the carriage-steps.

"Is his coach overturned?" asked the prince.

"Yes, your highness, and he is inside. His footmen tried to get him out; but with the help of some of our friends we fell upon them, and so gave them plenty of occupation, until your highness was ready to appear."

"Well—let him out, Conrad. I am ready for him! Come," added he, turning to his cousins. "Come, and let us survey the field."

In truth, the Pré aux Clercs, at this moment, resembled a battle-ground. Although the royal cortège had long gone by, the promenaders were too curious to follow; they all remained

to see the end of this turbulent opening. Every one had witnessed old Philip's manœuvre, and everybody knew that the point of attack was the carriage of Barbesieur Louvois, for the footmen of the Countess de Soissons had been seen to seize the horses' reins, and force them out of the way.

And now the coaches were all emptied of their occupants, who crowded around the spot which Eugene, with his two cousins, was seen approaching. They began to comprehend that this was no uproar among lackeys, but a serious misunderstanding between their masters. The Dukes de Bouillon, de Larochejaquelein, and de Luynes, the Princes de Belmont and Condé, and many other nobles of distinction, came forward and followed Prince Eugene to the field of action. The coachman and lackeys of Barbesieur Louvois were trying to force the footmen of the Countess de Soissons to right their overturned coach. Old Philip cried out that the Princes de Cargnan took precedence of all manner of Louvois of whatever generation, and that he would not stir. His companions had applauded his spirit, and both parties having found allies among the other retainers of the nobles on the ground, the battle had become general, and the number of fists engaged was formidable.

The tumult was at its height when the clear, commanding tones of Eugene's voice were heard.

"Churl and villain!" exclaimed he, "are you at last in my power?"

In a moment every eye was turned upon the speaker, who, just as Barbesieur was emerging from the coach-window, seized and held him prisoner. The belligerent lackeys were so astounded, that on both sides the upraised fists were suspended, while old Philip, taking advantage of the momentary lull, cried out in stentorian tones:

"Armistice for the servants! Their lords are here to decide the difficulty!"

Down went the fists, and all parties gazed in breathless silence at the pale, young David, who confronted his Goliath with as firm reliance on the justice of his cause as did the shepherd-warrior of ancient Israel. Eugene was pale and collected, but his nostrils were distended, and his eyes were aflame

Barbesieur's great chest heaved with fury, as he felt himself in the grasp of his puny antagonist, and turning met the glance of the son of Olympia de Soissons.

For a few moments no word was spoken. The two enemies exchanged glances; while princes, dukes, counts, and their followers, looked on with breathless interest and expectation.

Barbesieur now made one supreme effort to escape, but all in vain. With one thrust of his muscular arm, Eugene forced him back into the coach, his nether limbs within, his great trunk without the window.

"Miserable coward," said the prince, "who to escape from the dangers of a fray among lackeys, have taken refuge in the carriage of a nobleman! Monsieur Louvois will assuredly have you punished for your presumption; but before he hears of your insolence toward him, you shall be chastised for the injuries you have inflicted upon me."

"Dare harm one hair of my head," muttered Barbesieur, between his teeth, "and your life shall be the forfeit. My father will avenge me."

"So be it; but first, let me avenge my mother," cried Eugene, raising his whip on high.

"Eugene, Eugene," exclaimed the Duke de Bouillon, trying to reach his kinsman in time to prevent the descending stroke, "you are mistaken. This gentleman is no intruder in the coach of the Louvois; it is Barbesieur de Louvois himself!"

"It is you that are in error," returned Eugene, holding fast to his prisoner, who looked like some great monster in a trap. "This is not Monsieur Louvois; this is a leader of mobs, an instigator of riots. He is the knave that incited the people of Paris to malign my mother, and to stone her palace.—Here! Philip! Conrad! Men of my household, do you not recognize this man?"

"Ay, ay!" was the prompt response, "he is the very man that led on the rabble."

"He is. The captain of the guard allowed him to escape, but before he left I promised him a horsewhipping, and I never break my word.—You are a villain, for you have de-

famed a noble lady.—Take this! You are a liar, for you have accused her of crime.—Take this! You are a poltroon, for while you were inciting others to violent deeds, you hid your face, and denied your name.—Take this!"

At each opprobrious epithet, the lash fell heavily upon the shoulders of Barbesieur, and every blow was answered by a cry of mingled pain and rage. The multitude looked on in silence, almost in terror; for who could calculate the consequence of such an indignity offered to such a family!

"And now," said Eugene, throwing the whip as far as he could send it, "now you are free! My mother's defamer has been lashed like a hound, and her son's heart is relieved of its load."

So saying, he turned his back, and joined the group, among whom his cousins were awaiting his return.

"Which of you, my lords," said he, "cried out that I was mistaken in the identity of yonder knave?"

"It was I, Eugene," replied the Duke de Bouillon.

"But you see your error now, do you not, uncle? since not only I, but my whole household proclaim him to be the ringleader of that riot, which forced my mother into exile."

"And yet he is assuredly Barbesieur Louvois," laughed the Prince de Conti.

"Well—we shall see," was the reply. "He has disengaged himself from his coach-window, and if he is a gentleman he will know what he has to do."

And Eugene returned to the place where Barbesieur was now standing, calling out to his friends to follow him.

"Are you quite sure, my lords, that this individual is Monsieur Louvois?"

They answered with one voice, "We are!" while all eyes were fixed upon the tall figure which, now relaxed and bent with shame, resembled the stricken frame of an old man; while his eyes were sedulously cast down, that they might not meet the glance of the meanest man who had witnessed his disgrace.

"I am still incredulous," said the prince. "But I reaffirm that this is the brutal ringleader of the mob that attacked my mother's home, and since I am ready to swear upon my honor

that it is he, have not I performed my duty by chastising him?"

"Yes, Prince of Savoy, if you are sure that it is he," was the unanimous reply.

"I can prove that it is he. When, in spite of my warning, he uplifted his right arm to urge the rabble to a new attack on the palace, I aimed a bullet at his elbow, and it reached its mark. Now, if this man be Monsieur Louvois, and not the knave I hold him to be, let him raise his right arm, and so brand me as a liar."

As he heard this challenge, Barbesieur trembled, and his face paled to a deadly whiteness. His right hand was buried in the breast of his coat, and well he knew that every eye was riveted upon that spot. He made one superlative effort to straighten his arm, but no sooner had he moved it than he uttered a stifled cry of pain, and the wounded limb fell helpless to his side.

"My lords," said Eugene, inclining his head, "you see that I am no calumniator. This is the churl who maligned my mother's name."

"And I am Barbesieur Louvois!" cried the *churl*, gnashing his teeth with rage. "I am Barbesieur Louvois, and you shall learn it to your sorrow, for my father will avenge the insult you have offered to his son."

"Your father!" echoed the Prince de Conti. "But yourself! What will *you* do to mend your bruised honor? A nobleman knows but one means of repairing that."

Barbesieur blushed, and then grew very pale. "You see that I am incapable of resorting to this means," replied he, in much confusion.

"Then you will not challenge the Prince de Carignan?"

"It is not in my power to send a challenge. My right arm is useless to me."

"Sir," said De Conti, haughtily, "there are blots on a man's honor, which can only be wiped out with blood; and when the right hand is powerless, a nobleman learns to use his left."

"I claim the privilege of waiting until I shall have regained the use of my right hand," returned Barbesieur with a sinister

glance at De Conti. "I cannot be sure of my aim with an unpractised left hand; and when I meet this miserable manikin, I wish to kill him.—Eugene of Savoy, you have offered me a deadly affront; and as soon as my wound is healed, you shall hear from me."

"Don't give yourself the trouble of sending me a challenge," returned Eugene coolly, "for I will not accept it."

"Not accept it!" echoed Barbesieur, unable to suppress the gleam of satisfaction that *would* shoot across his countenance. "Your valor then, which is equal to put opprobrium upon a defenceless man, will not bear you out to face him in a duel? What say these gentlemen here present, to such behavior on the part of a prince of the ducal house of Savoy?"

"When I shall have spoken a few more words to you, they can decide. You have so outraged my mother, the Countess de Soissons, that the falsehood with which you have befouled her honored name can never be recalled! Not content with forcing her, by your persecutions, into exile, your emissaries preceded her to every point whereat she sought shelter, and incited the populace to refuse her the merest necessities of life! For wrongs such as these, nothing could repay me but the infliction of a degradation both public and complete. I have disgraced you; the marks of my lash are upon your back, and think you that I shall bestow upon you one drop of my blood wherewith to heal your stripes? No! I fight with no man whom I have chastised as I would a serf; but if you have a friend that will represent you, here is my gauntlet: let him raise it.—Gentlemen, which of you will be the proxy that shall cleanse the sullied honor of Barbesieur Louvois with his blood?"

"Not I," said the two Princes de Conti, simultaneously.

"Nor I," "Nor I," "Nor I!" echoed the others.

"Nor I," cried the Duke de la Roche Guyon, stepping forward so as to be conspicuous and generally heard. "I am the son-in-law of Monsieur Louvois, and unhappily this man is the brother of my dear and honored wife. But he is no kinsman of mine; and if I raise this glove, it is to return it to the Prince of Savoy, for among us all he has not an enemy. He stands in the midst of his friends, and they uphold and will

sustain him, let the consequences of this day be what they may."

With a deep inclination of the head, the duke returned his glove to Eugene, who, greatly affected, could scarcely murmur his thanks.

With glaring eyes and scowl of hatred, Barbesieur had listened, while his brother-in-law's repudiation of the tie that bound them to one another had deepened and widened the gashes of his disgrace. With muttered words of revenge, he mounted the horse of one of his grooms, and galloped swiftly out of sight of the detested Pré aux Clercs.

"Gentlemen," resumed the Duke de la Roche Guyon, "I am about to seek an audience with Monsieur Louvois, to relate to him the events that have just transpired; and to exact of him as a man of honor that he will seek no revenge for the affront offered to his son. Which of you, then, will accompany me as witness?"

"All, all," cried the cavaliers, with enthusiasm. "We sustain the Prince of Savoy, and if Minister Louvois injures a hair of his head, he shall be answerable for the deed to every nobleman in France."

"And you, dear Eugene, whither are you going?" asked De Conti, putting his hand on his cousin's shoulder, and contemplating him with looks of affectionate admiration.

"I?" said Eugene, softly. "I shall return home to the hall of my ancestors, there to hang this gauntlet below my mother's portrait. Would that kneeling I could lay it at her feet!"

He was about to turn away, when De Conti remarked, "I wonder whether Barbesieur will have the assurance to attend the court-ball to-night?"

"We shall see," replied Eugene, with a smile.

"We! Why, you surely will not present yourself before the king, until you find out in what way his majesty intends to view your attack upon the favorite son of his favorite minister?"

"I shall go to the ball to ascertain the sentiments of his majesty. You know how I abhor society, and how awkward I am in the presence of the beau monde; but not to attend this

ball would be an act of cowardice. I must overcome my disinclination to such assemblies, and learn my fate to-night."

CHAPTER IV.

LOUVOIS' DAUGHTER.

"ARE you really in earnest, *ma toute belle*?" said Elizabeth-Charlotte of Orleans. "Are you serious when you relinquish your golden hours of untrammelled existence, to become my maid of honor?"

The young girl, who was seated on a tabouret close by, lifted her great black eyes, and for a moment contemplated the large, good-natured features of the duchess; then, smiling as if in satisfaction at the survey, she replied:

"Certainly, if your highness accords me your gracious permission to attach myself to your person."

"And does your father approve? Has the powerful minister of his majesty no objection to have his daughter enter my service?"

"I told him that if he refused I would take the veil," returned the young girl, with quiet decision.

The duchess leaned forward, and contemplated her with interest. "Take the veil!" exclaimed she. "What should such a pretty creature do in a convent? You are not—you cannot be in earnest. Let those transform themselves into nuns who have sins upon their consciences, or sorrow within their hearts: you can have had no greater loss to mourn than the flight of a canary, or the death of a greyhound."

The maiden's eyes glistened with tears. "Your highness, I have lost a mother."

"Oh, how unfeeling of me to have forgotten it!" exclaimed the duchess. "But, in good sooth, this heartless court-life corrupts us all; we are so unaccustomed to genuine feeling, that we forget its existence on earth. Dear child, forgive me; I am thoughtless, but not cruel. Give me your hand and let us be friends."