

point of Speier—and now—now the cathedral was in flames, and death—slow, lingering, and agonizing—had overtaken the Hyena of Esslingen!

CHAPTER V.

THE DUCHESS OF ORLEANS.

"I CAN never consent to such a disgraceful marriage for my son," cried Elizabeth-Charlotte to her husband.

"Madame, I look upon it as a great honor that my son should espouse the daughter of the king."

"The daughter of shame and infamy—the daughter of a man who, violating his marriage-vow—"

"Madame," interrupted the duke, "you forget that you are speaking of his majesty the King of France!"

"King of France? There is no question of a king, but of my brother-in-law, of whose faults—nay, sins, I may surely speak, within the walls of my own cabinet, I suppose."

"Madame," replied the duke, trying to draw up his small person until he fairly stood on tiptoe, "madame, I forbid you to express yourself in such terms of your sovereign and mine."

"Forbid me to speak the truth, you mean. And to be sure, at a court like this, where everybody feeds on flattery, truth is strangely out of place."

"Like yourself, for instance," observed the duke.

"Yes, like myself," replied the duchess, with a sweet smile that illumined her plain features, and lent them a passing beauty. "I believe that I am most unwelcome among the fine and fashionable folks of Paris; but it is not my fault that I am here, a poor, homely sparrow in a flock of peacocks and parrots."

"Madame," replied the duke, pompously, "if you choose to consider yourself as a sparrow, you have my full consent to do so, although I must say that it is somewhat presuming for any one so to designate the woman whom I honored with my hand. But I must always regret that you have never dis-

played enough tact to lay aside your plebeian German manners, and resume those of the courtly and elegant entourage of the refined King of France."

The eyes of the duchess shot fire, and the hue on her cheeks deepened to scarlet.

"Your manners may be refined, monseigneur; but God shield me from your morals! The war you are waging against my native land is one of assassination and rapine; and oh! how I wish that I were free to leave France forever, that I might suffer and die with my dear, slaughtered countrymen! But dearly as I love my native land, I love my children still more. Maternal love is stronger in my heart than patriotism, and my Elizabeth and my Philip are more to me than Germany!"

"You say nothing of me," observed the duke, sentimentally. "Am I, then, nothing to you?"

"Yes, monseigneur, you are the father of my children. I plighted my faith to you, and I have kept my marriage-vows. But you know, as well as I, that we were both nothing but royal merchandise, bartered for reasons of state, and that we have never been congenial. Nevertheless, I love you as the father of my Philip! for he has your handsome face and your refined and courtly bearing."

"Madame," returned the duke, blushing with gratification, "I thought you disdained to flatter."

"I do not flatter you, monseigneur," cried the duchess, cordially grasping his hand, and leading him to the mantel, over which hung a full-length portrait of the youthful Duke de Chartres. "See," exclaimed she with affectionate pride, "see what a beautiful picture Mignet has made of him. It was done in secret in Mignet's studio, and was brought to me yesterday as a birthday present from my boy."

"It was very thoughtless of Philip to visit Mignet," objected the duke. "He too often forgets his rank and relationship to the king."

"Forgive him, monseigneur. He forgot his station, to remember his filial affection," and for several moments the mother's eyes were fondly fixed upon the portrait. "Look!" resumed she; "these are your eyes, your well-developed fore-

head, your aquiline nose, your pleasant and expressive mouth. In your youth, you were as handsome as he—I have often heard it said that you were the handsomest cavalier in Paris.”

“Except the king, madame—except the king! I am too loyal a subject to excel his majesty in anything. I am glad, however, that you think my son resembles me; to me there is a blended likeness of both his parents in his countenance.”

“Never, never!” exclaimed Elizabeth-Charlotte, with animation. “There is no trace of my coarse features in that aristocratic face; and yet, like the owl that hatched the eagle’s egg, I am proud of calling him my son. And now, monseigneur, let me implore of you not to cross the escutcheon of our eaglet with the bar-sinister that disgraces the arms of Mademoiselle de Blois.”

“Madame,” exclaimed the duke, much irritated, “speak more respectfully of the daughter of Louis XIV.! She has been recognized by his majesty, and there is no stain upon her arms.”

“Pardon me—it is not in the power of any sovereign to erase the foul blot of her birth; and I shudder when I think of an alliance between the son of the Duke of Orleans and grandson of the Elector Palatine, and the daughter of a king’s leman. If his majesty mentions the subject to me, I shall tell him as much.”

“Impossible!” cried the duke, aghast. “I have already promised that you would solicit the honor of an alliance with Mademoiselle de Blois.”

“You promised what I will not perform. Do you suppose that I, by birth and marriage a royal princess, would debase myself so far as to ask for my son’s wife the daughter of a harlot who drove the hapless queen to her grave? and to take her by the hand, and present her to the court as *my* daughter? I would rather absent myself forever from court, and I will certainly not attend the king’s ball to-night.”

“You cannot do that, for you accepted the invitation yesterday.”

“Yesterday I knew not the humiliation implied in my acceptance. To-day I know it, and I will excuse myself, and be sick.”

“Madame, I command you to appear at the ball,” cried out the enraged duke, “and we shall see whether you presume to rebel against my conjugal authority.”

“I shall not rebel,” replied the duchess. “Since you command my presence, you shall have it; but I warn you that I shall mortally offend the king, for—”

The duke was about to protest anew against his wife’s blasphemy, when the old German lady of honor, who presided over the toilet of her highness, rushed into the room in a state of great agitation.

“What is the matter, Katharina?” asked the duchess.

“Your royal highness,” replied Katharina, panting, “a courier has just arrived from the Countess Louise. He has ridden day and night to deliver his message, and, although he is covered with mud and dust, he insisted that I should announce him to your royal highness.”

“A courier from Louise!” murmured the duchess. “Something must have happened! Go, Kathi, bid him come into my little parlor.—Will monseigneur excuse me? I am deeply concerned lest some misfortune should have befallen my sister.”

“Sister! Is the Countess Louise the daughter of a princess Palatine?”

“No, monseigneur; you know that she is the daughter of the Countess Dagenfeld, my father’s wedded wife—although never acknowledged as such—because she was not of royal birth. There is no bar-sinister on Louise’s shield; she is truly and honorably my half-sister.”

The duchess bowed and hastened to her parlor, where the courier was awaiting her arrival.

“Has anything happened to the countess? Is she ill? Have I lost my dear relative?”

“No, your royal highness. Your princely relatives are well, and here—here is—”

He made an attempt to place a letter in her hand, but reeled and fell, exhausted, at her feet.

“Pardon me, madame,” said he, “I have been for three days and nights in the saddle. My strength has given way—I cannot rise. But read your letter, I implore you.”

The duchess stooped, and took it from his nerveless hand ; then, commending him to the care of Katharina, she broke the seal and began to read.

Its contents affected her so terribly, that her teeth chattered, her knees trembled, and, throwing herself upon the sofa, she covered her face with her hands and wept.

But she wept for a moment only.

"Katharina," cried she, to her old confidante, who was chafing the temples of the courier, "leave that poor youth for a moment, and fetch me a mantilla and hood. I must go to the king at once !"

"Your royal highness is in a *négligé*," remonstrated Katharina ; "I will have to dress you."

"I cannot wait to be dressed," cried Elizabeth-Charlotte ; "speed away, and bring me my wrappings. God be praised, the king will be at home ! Thousands of lives depend upon my intercession !"

Katharina returned with the mantilla, which, without the least regard to grace, her royal highness flung over her stout figure, while she jerked the hood over her head with an impetuosity that made the old lady wring her hands.

"Oh, her hair is down, and the hood all twisted to one side," murmured the mistress of the toilet, as the duchess, indifferent to all forms of civilization, dashed down the staircase and leaped into her carriage.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DELIVERANCE OF TRIER.

THE equipage thundered along the streets of Paris, and drew up before the hooded door, at the side entrance of the Louvre, which was especially reserved for the use of the royal family.

The duchess sprang from her carriage, hurried up the staircase, almost stumbling over the sentry as he made an attempt to present arms, and flew into the antechamber that led to the cabinet of the king.

She came in like a frigate under full sail, but was encountered by a gentleman of the privy chamber, who barred the entrance.

"Make way for me—do !" said she, clasping her hands. "I must see his majesty this very moment."

"His majesty is in secret conference with the Marquis de Louvois and Madame de Maintenon," was the reply. "Not even your royal highness can obtain admittance."

"So much the better if Louvois is there. Let me pass—I command you, let me pass !"

"Indeed, madame, you know not what you ask. I have received stringent orders to admit nobody."

"The royal family are never included in these prohibitions," cried the duchess.

"But to-day, your royal highness, I was placed here to prevent their coming ! You well know that none but the princes and princesses of the blood would presume to make use of this entrance."

"It concerns the lives of thousands !" urged the duchess.

"Did it concern that of my own son, I would know better than to seek to save it by disobeying his majesty's orders."

"You will not—positively will not let me pass ?"

"I dare not, madame."

"Then you must excuse me, but I shall force my way," returned Elizabeth-Charlotte, grasping the slender form of the king's gentleman, and, with her powerful hands, flinging him into the corner of the room, while she strode rapidly to the opposite door, and opened and had closed it again before her opponent had recovered his breath.

Before touching the bolt of the door which opened directly into the king's cabinet, she paused to recover her breath, and to gather courage for the coming interview. She trembled from head to foot, and leaned against the wall for support. But Elizabeth-Charlotte was not a woman to be deterred, by fear of kings, from what she deemed her duty. With the resolution that characterized her, she uttered one short ejaculation for help from above, and opened the door.

Louvois was in the act of speaking. "Sire, our arms are as successful in Italy as they have been in Germany, where town

after town has been taken without the drawing of a sword—where the people have offered the keys of all the fortresses to your generals, and have welcomed the advent of our troops with joy.”

“Your majesty,” cried the duchess, coming forward, “do not believe him! He tells a falsehood—O God! what a falsehood!”

The astonishment of that cabinet-council is not to be described. The king rose from his seat and confronted her with eyes that flamed with anger.

“Madame,” exclaimed the grand monarque, in a rage, “were you not told that I would see nobody this morning?”

“Yes, your majesty; so emphatically told, that, before I could make my way to your presence, I was obliged to hurl your gentleman to the other side of the room. It is not his fault that I am here!”

Madame de Maintenon rolled up her eyes, Louvois sneered, and Louis, looking as if he wished that he could consume his sister-in-law with a glance, turned around to his minister.

“Monsieur Louvois, be so good as to forget the imprudent words that madame has just spoken. It is impossible that a princess of the blood should so far forget her own dignity as to lay hands on an attendant of the king. Take care that the indiscretion of her royal highness go no farther than these walls; and, if you hear it spoken of, contradict it flatly.”

“Your majesty,” exclaimed the duchess, “that is the very way to make everybody believe it, for surely nobody will believe Monsieur Louvois.”

“Sire,” said Louvois, shrewdly, “I was about to communicate tidings of the greatest importance to your majesty. I would be glad of your permission to resume our conference. It is late, and—”

“Madame,” cried Louis, “once for all, leave this room, and interrupt us no longer.”

“Does your majesty suppose that, after forcing my way to your presence, I intend to retreat without accomplishing the object for which I came? I entreat of you, hear me, and judge for yourself whether my pertinacity is not justified by the occasion of my intrusion.”

“Very well, madame,” replied Louis. “I will remember that you are my brother’s wife, and forget an excess of presumption which, were you not my sister-in-law, would merit the Bastille. Speak, and let us hear your petition. It needs to be one of moment to earn your pardon.”

With these words, Louis threw himself into his arm-chair, and, pointing to a tabouret at hand, requested her royal highness to be seated. The duchess looked around the room, and, seeing a vacant arm-chair a little farther off, she rolled it forward, and seated herself with great grandeur. This chair belonged to Madame de Maintenon, who, a moment previous, had risen and walked to the window.

She became very red in the face, and, coming directly in front of the duchess, said: “Madame, this is my own arm-chair; be so good as to excuse me if I ask you to rise.”

“Impossible, my dear marquise, impossible!” was the rejoinder. “His majesty requests me to be seated, and this is the only seat in the room that accords with my rank. If his majesty allows you to seat yourself in his presence, and that of a princess of the blood, there is a tabouret which doubtless was placed for your accommodation on such occasions.”

Madame de Maintenon looked imploringly at the king, hoping that he would interfere; but he did not. His eyes were cast down, and it was plain that no help was to be expected from him. His unacknowledged spouse was therefore obliged to yield the point, and put up with the tabouret.

“Now, madame,” said Louis, as though rousing himself from profound meditation, “I await your pleasure.”

“Sire,” cried the duchess, “I have come hither to accuse yonder traitor, who, in your majesty’s name, is perpetrating deeds of horror that are enough to brand any sovereign with infamy. Did I not hear him say, as I entered this room, that the French army was received with open arms by the Germans?”

“You did, madame. As a proof of the truth of this assertion, here are the very keys of all the towns and fortresses we have besieged.”

The king pointed to a basket wreathed with flowers, wherein lay a heap of gigantic keys.

"Oh, sire," exclaimed the duchess, "these keys were purchased with blood and pillage. Your soldiers have not marched into Germany like the invading armies of a civilized nation; they have come as incendiaries and assassins. Witness my father's castle, which they reduced to a heap of ashes."

"My dear madame," said Louis, deprecatingly, "war is not a pastime. I regret that it was necessary to burn your father's castle; but you perceive that it was not burned in vain, for your countrymen, since then, have shown themselves amenable to reason."

"Sire, you are shamefully deceived; and I have come to lay at the foot of your throne the plaint of an unhappy people. Ah, you little know what crimes are being committed in your name! General Montclas himself shed tears when Mannheim was sacked and destroyed; and, when the people of Durlach were driven by your soldiery into the very midst of the flames that were consuming their homes, the Duke de la Roche remonstrated with the Marquis de Crequi on the atrocity of the crime. What do you suppose was the answer of the marquis? 'Le roi le veut!'"

"Is this so?" asked the king, turning to Louvois, who was hiding his troubled countenance in the embrasure of a window.

"Sire, I have never heard of it before," replied the minister.

"Well may he say that he never heard of it, if he means that your majesty never gave such an order to him!" cried Elizabeth-Charlotte. But if he means that he did not order these massacres, he tells an untruth. He is avenging on the people of Germany the laurels which Prince Eugene has earned in the service of the emperor, and which, but for him, would have redounded to the glory of France. Oh, sire! this war is one of personal vengeance on the part of your wicked subject; it is not waged for your honor or advantage. I ask in his presence, did the King of France order the destruction of Worms and Speier? Was it by the order of our gracious sovereign that the very house of God was committed to the flames?"

"Can such a crime have been perpetrated in my name?" cried Louis, with indignation.

"Sire," replied Louvois, "your majesty has said it—'War is no pastime.'"

"He does not deny it," cried the duchess, wiping away her tears, and struggling for composure to go on. "But what is done, is done—Worms and Speier are in ashes, and their murdered inhabitants at rest. But, oh, my liege, my gracious lord, the city of Trier is threatened with the same fate! For three days the people have been crying in vain for mercy.—At your feet, sire, I implore you, have pity, and save them from butchery!"

And the duchess, with hands upraised, and eyes that were streaming with tears, sank on her knees before the king.

Louis rose hastily from his seat.

"Rise, madame," said he, "and let us retire to yonder embrasure. I wish to speak with you in private."

So saying, he gave her his hand, and conducted her to a deep recess at the farther end of the room, which was, in fact, a small apartment furnished with seats—a cabinet within a cabinet. He loosened the gold cord that confined the curtain to the side, and it fell to the floor—a thick, heavy portière that shut all sound from the apartment without. Not satisfied with this, the king opened the casement, that the hum from the street below might effectually drown their voices.

"Now, madame," said he, "we will converse openly and without reserve, as it befits near relatives to do. Has your husband confided to you my wishes?"

"What wishes?" asked the duchess, who, in her anxiety for the fate of Trier, had forgotten the occurrences of the day.

Louis was piqued. "I allude to my matrimonial plans for your son and my daughter; and I beg you to observe that where I have a right to command, I am gracious enough to request their fulfilment. It is understood that the Duke de Chartres is to be betrothed to Mademoiselle de Blois this evening?"

"Sire," murmured Elizabeth-Charlotte, who began to understand how much she was risking by her mediation in favor of Trier, "sire, I implore you to save the lives of thousands of human beings, and you answer me by questions as to the marriage of my son!"

"My dear sister," returned the king, with a smile, "surely you take more interest in the fate of your child, than in that of a remote town in Germany. My brother has already consented that our children should be united; and, as you are here, I wish to hear from your own lips that the union gives you as much satisfaction as it will afford to me."

"Sire, the Duke de Chartres is but a lad—wild and untamed. He is not fit to be the husband of any woman."

The king frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Sire, he is but sixteen years of age—a boy; and it is not customary for princes of the blood to marry before the age of eighteen."

"I know that as well as yourself. It is no question of marriage, only one of betrothal. Mademoiselle de Blois is but twelve, and no fitter to be married than your son. But it is well for young people to know that they are bound by honor to restrain their passions and curb their irregularities. If the Duke de Chartres is untamed, you have the means of keeping him within bounds, and of forcing him to lead a chaste and virtuous life."

"Oh, sire, you know full well that the promises of their parents do not bind youthful hearts. My Philip is inclined to dissipation, and it would be an unfortunate match for Mademoiselle de Blois."

"Give me a direct answer to my inquiry. Do you consent to the betrothal of your son with my daughter?"

Elizabeth-Charlotte burst into tears. "Sire, I—I—cannot," murmured she.

The king flushed with anger. "I thought so," said he. "You are nothing but a mass of prejudices, which you would rather die than relinquish. Very well, madame; I bow to your prejudices, and will make no vain efforts to overcome them. Excuse me if, as regards your petition, I echo your words, 'I cannot.'"

"Oh, sire," cried the duchess, "the cases are not parallel. I plead for the lives of so many unfortunates!"

"And I for my own gratification; and assuredly a wish of the King of France is of a little more importance than the fate of a miserable German town."

"Your majesty, it would cost you but a word to earn the blessings of so many grateful hearts."

"And it would cost you but a word to give rank and an unequivocal position to my favorite daughter. For if a woman like yourself, recognized as a model of propriety, acknowledge her as your son's bride, you insure an honorable future to all my children not born to the throne. It is in your power to raise Mademoiselle de Blois to the rank of a legitimate princess of the blood, and thereby to confer a favor upon her father."

"Oh, sire, indeed I cannot! Ask any thing of me but that! It would give the lie to all the teachings of my life! It would be an acknowledgment of the worthlessness of chastity—of honor! Oh, forgive me! My brain reels; I know not what I say!"

"*But I do*; and I have heard enough. I shall countermand the soirée, and seek another bridegroom for Mademoiselle de Blois. But Trier shall fall, and on your head be the fate of its inhabitants!"

He rose and would have put aside the portière, but his hand was convulsively clutched, and the duchess, in a voice that was hoarse with agony, gasped:

"Have I understood? You would barter the fate of Trier for my consent to this unnatural marriage!"

"Yes, by God, I do!" was the profane and passionate reply of the king.

"Stay—stay," murmured she, trembling in every limb. "Would you rescue the city if I consented?"

"I will do so, with pleasure."

The duchess shivered, clasped her hands together, and, closing her eyes as though to hide her humiliation from Heaven, she retracted her refusal, and then fell almost insensible into an arm-chair.

The king approached her and kissing her, said, "Madame, from my heart, I thank you."

The poor duchess scarcely heeded these gracious words. She had received a blow that well-nigh blunted her heart to the sufferings of her countrymen. But she had made the sacrifice of her principles, and she must reap the reward of that terrible sacrifice.

"Sire," said she, as soon as she had recovered strength enough to articulate, "sire, fulfil your promise immediately, or it will be too late."

"Give me your hand, dear sister," replied Louis. "Once more I thank you for the happiness you have conferred upon me, and the first gift of Mademoiselle de Blois to her mother-in-law shall be the safety of Trier. I implore you, try to love the poor child, for my sake."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRE-TONGS.

RAISING the curtain, Louis XIV. offered his hand, and the royal brother and sister-in-law re-entered the cabinet, where their return was eagerly awaited by Madame de Maintenon, and uneasily expected by the minister of war.

"Monsieur de Louvois," said the king, "I am in possession of all the details that relate to the shameful abuse that has been made of my name in Germany. The cruel practices which you have authorized toward an innocent population must cease at once, and our troops be commanded to prosecute the war as becomes the army of a Christian nation."

The king, while he spoke these words, was gradually advancing to his writing-desk, which stood close to the mantel. Seating himself in his arm-chair, he turned his countenance away from the penetrating glances of De Maintenon, and began to play with the bronze shovel and tongs that lay crossed upon the fender.

After a pause, during which he waited in vain for a reply from Louvois, he resumed: "Why do you not answer me, Louvois?"

"Sire, your wishes shall be fulfilled. The next courier that leaves for Germany, shall bear your royal commands to the army, and they shall be ordered to remain altogether on the defensive."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried the king.

"If your majesty intends to treat your enemies with clemency, you must expect no more victories, but remain content with the territory you have already acquired. What are we to do, if we are crippled by injudicious and false humanity? Must we relinquish our claims? Shall we content ourselves with having made threats which we are too pusillanimous to execute?"

"Monsieur," said Louis, haughtily, "you are becoming impertinent. Cease your questions, and obey my commands. Send off your couriers at once. Trier shall not be destroyed; nor shall its inhabitants be driven from their dwellings. Private property shall be respected, and the temples of the Most High held sacred."

"Sire," said Louvois, "I will obey; but, unhappily, as regards Trier, your clemency comes too late. I cannot save it."

"Cannot!" shouted Louis, who to please his sister-in-law had worked himself into a veritable fury. "Who dares say he cannot, when I command?"

"Your majesty, what is done cannot be undone."

At these words the king sprang from his chair, still holding the tongs in his hand.

"Do you mean to say that you have ordered new atrocities to be committed in Germany?" exclaimed he.

"Sire," replied Louvois defiantly, "if it pleases you to term the necessities of war atrocities, so be it. The people of Trier having imitated the stubbornness of those of Speier, I ordered them to be subjected to the same treatment."

"Sir," cried Louis, raising the tongs, as if he intended to assail his minister with them, "you shall countermand this order at once, or I will smite you as the lightning blasts the oak!" All this time he was advancing, until the tongs were in dangerous proximity with Louvois' head.*

The minister was thoroughly frightened. "Sire," exclaimed he, receding in terror, "would you murder me?"

"It would be too honorable an end for you to die by my hands," replied the king, letting fall his tongs. "But this I say to you: if Trier is destroyed I will make an example of

* Historical.—See "Memoirs of the Court of France," by the Marquis de Dangeau.

you that shall deter any other traitor from using my name to gratify his wicked revenge. Send off your couriers; nor return to this palace until you come to inform me that Trier is safe." So saying, the King turned his back, and began to converse with Madame de Maintenon on the subject of an afternoon ride; after which he offered his arm to his sister-in-law and conducted her himself to the head of the private staircase.

He had no sooner left the room than Louvois darted to the side of Madame de Maintenon, who was just about to raise a portière leading to her own apartments.

Catching her dress in his agitation, Louvois implored her to remain.

"Wherefore, monsieur?" asked she, coldly.

"Oh, madame, I fear that I shall never be able to rescue this accursed city, and, I implore you, be my mediatrix with his majesty."

"On what grounds, monsieur?"

"Oh, madame, you have enemies as well as I: let us make a compact together, and crush them all. Uphold me for this once, and you will not find me ungrateful."

"I fear no man's enmity," was the reply of the marquise. "My trust is in God, who ruleth all things."

"You refuse me then?" said Louvois.

"I am not in a position to defy the king, and uphold his rebellious subjects. Were I Queen of France, my influence would, perhaps, avail; as it is, I would advise you to make all speed to dispatch your couriers, and thereby rescue Trier and yourself."

With these consolatory words, the marquise disappeared; and Louvois, taking her advice, unpalatable though it was, rushed in undignified haste through the corridors, and, plunging into his carriage, was driven at full gallop to his hotel.

Twenty minutes later his couriers were on their way. To him who arrived at Trier first, Louvois promised a purse of one thousand louis d'ors, and, if he reached the city in time to save it, the sum was to be doubled.

Thanks to this reward, as well as to the dilatory movements of the courier that had borne the order for destruction, Trier

was saved on the very morning of the day which should have been its last.

Louvois was ordered to bring the news to the duchess in person.

She was in her cabinet with the Duke de Chartres, who had been complaining of the ugliness and stupidity of his affianced bride. Louvois was announced, and the duchess, in her impetuous way, hurried to the door and met him—not by way of welcoming him, however.

"I never expected to see you here under my roof," said she, "nor would I receive you had you not come from his majesty."

"Madame, I will withdraw as soon as my message is delivered," replied Louvois, haughtily. "His majesty has sent me to announce to your royal highness that Trier is safe."

"Now, God be thanked!" exclaimed Elizabeth-Charlotte solemnly.

"With your leave, madame, I withdraw," observed Louvois.

"Not yet. You have brought me tidings of one deliverance—I will impart to you another. Have you any news from my poor Laura?"

A cloud overspread the minister's brow. "I have not heard from her for more than a year, at which time she fled from her husband's castle, how or whither he has never been able to discover."

"And you—have you no idea of her whereabouts?"

"She must either have died, or have retired to a convent."

"She has done neither," replied the duchess.

"She lives!" cried Louvois, with more terror in his voice than joy.

"Yes; dear, ill-used Laura! She lives, and lives happily with him whose arm will protect her against future persecution."

"Your royal highness does not mean to say that my daughter has sought the protection of Prince Eugene?" cried Louvois.

"I do, indeed: they are united at last, whom you sought to put asunder."

"Great God!" was the minister's exclamation. "She has given herself up to shame! She lives publicly as the mistress of a man who was not worthy to become her husband! Your royal highness must have been misinformed."

"I have it from herself, nevertheless."

"And your royal highness, that bears the name of the most virtuous woman in Paris, is not shocked at her unchastity?"

"Unchastity! You talk of unchastity, who, while she was plighting her troth to this same Eugene, were not ashamed to prostitute her to Strozzi! Cease your disgusting cant, and learn that I acknowledge and respect the tie that binds your daughter to her real spouse: and woe to you, if you dare trouble the current of her peaceful life! Farewell. Say to his majesty that I shall be forever grateful for the deliverance of Trier."

"Philip," added she, when Louvois had left the room, "forgive me, beloved son, if I sacrificed you to the well-being of my oppressed countrymen! You say that your affianced is stupid; but every weary hour you spend in her society shall be repaid to you by the blessings of those whom you have saved from assassination. Moreover, Mademoiselle de Blois is not yet your bride, and many a thing may intervene to prevent you from being forced to espouse her. If your mother can do any thing to frustrate it, be sure that she will come to your assistance. Her consent was wrung from her, 'tis true—but not her willingness."

"Laura the mistress of Eugene of Savoy!" muttered Louvois, as he descended the marble staircase of the ducal palace. "And to propitiate that royal virago, I dare not revenge myself! But no!" said he suddenly, "no—I need not lift a finger. I will leave it to Barbesieur; *he* will attend to it. He will put an end to her infamous life!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BRAVE HEARTS.

THE embassy of Prince Eugene to Turin had been attended with the happiest results. His arguments in favor of the emperor had proved irresistible, for he had worked upon the pride as well as the ambition of his kinsman. He had addressed him as a "royal highness;" had promised him accession of territory; and finally had imparted to him a diplomatic secret which decided him at once to join the imperialists. In the event of any manifestation on the part of Victor Amadeus that was friendly toward the emperor, Louvois had ordered Marshal Catinat to take him prisoner, confine him in the fortress of Pignerolles, and appoint the duchess-dowager Regent of Savoy.

The astounding insolence of the French minister gained a zealous partisan for Leopold. "I am yours and the emperor's forever," cried the indignant duke. "And from my heart I hope that we may both have speedy opportunity to avenge the wrongs we have sustained at the hands of Louis XIV. and that atrocious villain—Louvois."

"As for my wrongs," replied Eugene, with a beaming smile, "they are all forgotten in my excess of happiness."

"So, then, you are happy at last?" asked Victor Amadeus, kindly.

"Supremely blest," was Eugene's emphatic reply.

"Supremely blest?" repeated the duke, shaking his head. "Pardon me if I think otherwise. Do you not think that you could be made happier by obtaining the sanction of the church to your liaison with the Marchioness de Strozzi?"

"I would be the proudest and happiest of created beings if I could call her my wife," sighed Eugene. "And since the subject has been broached between us, I will confide in you. I have written to the pope an account of Laura's fraudulent marriage with Strozzi, and I hope that his holiness will recognize the unlawfulness of that wicked transaction. It seems to me impossible that Religion should look upon it otherwise than as an act of falsehood."