

## CHAPTER XX

### THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

#### I. FROISSART'S ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF CRÉCY

197. The great battle between the French and English at Crécy (1346). (From Froissart's *Chronicles*.)

[Having reached a point near Crécy,] the king of England was well informed how the French king followed after him to fight. Then he said to his company: "Let us take here some plot of ground, for we will go no farther till we have seen our enemies. I have good cause here to abide them, for I am on the right heritage of the queen, my mother, the which land was given her at her marriage; I will challenge it of mine adversary, Philip of Valois." And because he had not the eighth part in number of men that the French king had, therefore he commanded his marshals to choose a plot of ground somewhat for his advantage; and so they did, and thither the king and his host went. . . .

That night the king made a supper to all his chief lords of his host, and made them good cheer; and when they were all departed to take their rest, then the king entered into his oratory and kneeled down before the altar, praying God devoutly that if he fought the next day he might achieve the expedition to his honor. Then about midnight he laid him down to rest, and in the morning he rose betimes and heard mass, and the prince his son with him; and the most part of his company were confessed and received the communion; and after the mass was said, he commanded every man to be armed and to draw to the field, to the same place before appointed. . . .

Then [after arranging his army in three divisions,] the king lept on a palfrey, with a white rod in his hand, one of his marshals on the one hand and the other on the other hand. He rode from rank to rank, desiring every man to

take heed that day to his right and honor. He spake it so sweetly and with so good countenance and merry cheer that all such as were discomfited took courage in the seeing and hearing of him. And when he had thus visited all his battles [i.e. divisions] it was then nine of the day. Then he caused every man to eat and drink a little, and so they did at their leisure. And afterward they ordered again their battles. Then every man lay down on the earth, his helmet and his bow by him, to be the more fresher when their enemies should come.

This Saturday the French king rose betimes and heard mass in Abbeville, in his lodging in the abbey of St. Peter, and he departed after the sun rising. [He dispatched four knights to view the English, who let them alone and permitted them to return to the king as they had come. The knights advised the king that the French should defer the attack until the morrow.] Then the king commanded that it should be so done. Then his two marshals rode, one before, another behind, saying to every banner, "Tarry and abide here in the name of God and St. Denis." They that were foremost tarried, but they that were behind would not tarry, but rode forth, and said how they would in no wise abide till they were as far forward as the foremost. And when they that were before saw them come on behind, then they rode forward again, so that the king nor his marshals could not rule them.

So they rode without order or good array till they came in sight of their enemies; and as soon as the foremost saw them, they reculed them aback without good array, whereof they behind had marvel and were abashed, and thought that the foremost company had been fighting. Then they might have had leisure and room to have gone forward if they had listed, but some went forth while some abode still.

The commons, of whom all the ways between Abbeville and Crécy were full, when they saw that they were near to their enemies, took their swords and cried, "Down with them! Let us slay them all." There were no man, though he were present, that could imagine or show the truth of the

King Edward cheers his forces, who arrange themselves with care and deliberation.

Hasty and disorderly approach of the French.



evil order that was among the French party, — and yet they were a marvelous great number. What I write in this book I learned especially of the Englishmen, who beheld their dealing; and also certain knights of Sir John of Hainault's, who was always about King Philip, showed me what they knew.

The Englishmen, who were in three battles lying on the ground to rest them, as soon as they saw the Frenchmen approach, they rose upon their feet, fair and easily without any haste, and arranged their battles. The first was the prince's battle, and the archers there stood in manner of a harrow and the men-at-arms in the bottom of the battle. The earl of Northampton and the earl of Arundel with the second battle were on the wing in good order, ready to comfort the prince's battle, if need were.

The Genoese mercenaries forced to lead the attack.

The lords and knights of France came not to the engagement together in good order, for some came before and some came after, in such evil order that one of them did trouble another. When the French king saw the Englishmen his blood changed and he said to his marshals, "Make the Genoese go on before and begin the battle in the name of God and St. Denis." There were of the Genoese crossbows about fifteen thousand, but they were so weary of going afoot that day a six leagues armed with their crossbows that they said to their constables, "We be not well ordered to fight this day, for we be not in the case to do any great deed of arms; we have more need of rest." . . .

Also the same season there fell a great rain, and a flash of lightning with a terrible thunder, and before the rain there came flying over both battles a great number of crows for fear of the tempest coming. Then anon the air began to wax clear, and the sun to shine fair and bright, the which was right in the Frenchmen's eyes and on the Englishmen's backs.

When the Genoese were assembled together and began to approach they uttered a great cry to abash the Englishmen, but these stood still and stirred not for all that. Then the Genoese a second time made a fell cry and stepped forward a

little; but the Englishmen removed not one foot. Thirdly they shouted again and went forth until they came within shot. Then they shot fiercely with their crossbows. Then the English archers stepped forth one pace and let fly their arrows so wholly and so thick that it seemed snow. When the Genoese felt the arrows piercing through their heads, arms, and breasts, many of them cast down their crossbows and did cut their strings and returned discomfited.

When the French king saw them fly away he said, "Slay these rascals, for they shall let and trouble us without reason." Then ye should have seen the men-at-arms dash in among them and they killed a great number of them; and ever still the Englishmen shot where they saw the thickest press. The sharp arrows ran into the men-at-arms and into their horses, and many fell, horses and men, among the Genoese, and when they were down they could not rise again; the press was so thick that one overthrew another. And also among the Englishmen there were certain rascals that went afoot with great knives, and they went in among the men-at-arms and slew and murdered many as they lay on the ground, both earls, barons, knights, and squires; whereof the king of England was after displeased, for he had rather that they had been taken prisoners. . . .

[The division led by the king's son, the Black Prince, being hard pressed,] they sent a messenger to the king, who was on a little windmill hill. Then the knight said to the king, "Sir, the earl of Warwick and the earl of Oxford, Sir Raynold Cobham, and others, such as be about the prince your son, are fiercely fought withal and are sorely handled; wherefore they desire you that you and your battle will come and aid them; for if the Frenchmen increase, as they doubt they will, your son and they will have much ado." Then the king said, "Is my son dead, or hurt, or on the earth felled?" "No, sir," quoth the knight, "but he is hardly matched, wherefore he hath need of your aid." "Well," said the king, "return to him and to them that sent you hither, and say to them that they send no more to me for any adventure that falleth, as long as my son is alive; and also say to them that they



suffer him this day to win his spurs; for if God be pleased, I will that this expedition be his, and the honor thereof, and to them that be about him."

## II. HOW KING JOHN OF FRANCE WAS TAKEN PRISONER BY THE ENGLISH AT POITIERS

198. Cap-  
ture of King  
John (1356).  
(From  
Froissart's  
Chronicles.)

Ofttimes the adventures of amours and of war are more fortunate and marvelous than any man can think or wish. Truly this battle, the which was near to Poitiers in the fields of Beauvoir and Maupertuis, was right great and perilous, and many deeds of arms there were done the which all came not to knowledge. The fighters on both sides endured much pain. King John with his own hands did that day marvels in arms. He had an ax in his hands wherewith he defended himself and fought in the breaking of the press. . . .

The pursuit endured to the gates of Poitiers. There were many slain and beaten down, horse and man, for they of Poitiers closed their gates and would suffer none to enter; wherefore in the street before the gate was horrible murder, men hurt and beaten down. The Frenchmen yielded themselves as far as they might know an Englishman: there were divers English archers that had four, five, six prisoners. . . .

Then there was a great press to take the king, and such as knew him cried, "Sir, yield you, or else ye are but dead." [A French knight in the service of the English king made his way through the press] and said in good French, "Sir, yield you." The king beheld the knight and said, "To whom shall I yield me? Where is my cousin, the prince of Wales? If I might see him, I would speak with him." The knight answered and said, "Sir, he is not here; but yield you to me and I shall bring you to him." "Who be you?" quoth the king. "Sir," quoth he, "I am Denis of Morbeke, a knight of Artois; but I serve the king of England because I am banished from the realm of France and have forfeited all that I had there." Then the king gave him his right gauntlet, saying, "I yield me to you."

The prince of Wales, who was courageous and cruel as a lion, took that day great pleasure to fight and chase his enemies. The lord John Chandos, who was with him, all that day never left him nor never took heed of taking any prisoner. Then at the end of the battle he said to the prince, "Sir, it were good that you rested here and set your banner a-high in this bush, that your people may draw hither, for they be sore spread abroad, nor can I see no more banners nor pennons of the French party. Wherefore, sir, rest and refresh you, for ye be sore chafed."

[Then the prince sent two lords to get news of the French king.] These two lords took their horses and departed from the prince and rode up a little hill to look about them. Then they perceived a flock of men-at-arms coming together right slowly, and there was the French king afoot in great peril, for the Englishmen and Gascons were his masters. They had taken him from Sir Denis Morbeke perforce, and such as were most of force said, "I have taken him"; "Nay," quoth another, "I have taken him." So they strave which should have him. Then the French king, to eschew that peril, said, "Sirs, strive not: lead me courteously, and my son, to my cousin the prince, and strive not for my taking, for I am so great a lord as to make you all rich." The king's words somewhat appeased them. Howbeit, ever as they went they made riot and brawled for the taking of the king.

When the two aforesaid lords saw and heard that noise and strife among them, they came to them and said, "Sirs, what is the matter that ye strive for?" "Sirs," said one of them, "it is for the French king, who is here taken prisoner, and there be more than ten knights and squires that challenge the taking of him and of his son." Then the two lords entered into the press and caused every man to draw back, and commanded them in the prince's name, on pain of their heads, to make no more noise nor to approach the king no nearer without they were commanded. Then every man gave room to the lords, and they alighted and did their reverence to the king, and so brought him and his son in peace to the prince of Wales. . . .



How the Black Prince received the French king with knightly courtesy.

The same day of the battle at night the prince made a supper in his lodging to the French king and to the most of the great lords that were prisoners. The prince made the king and his son, the lord James of Bourbon, the lord John of Artois, the earl of Tancreville, the earl of Estampes, the earl Dammartin, the earl Joinville, and the lord of Partenay, to sit all at one board, and the other lords, knights, and squires at other tables. And always the prince served before the king as humbly as he could, and would not sit at the king's board for any desire that the king could make, for he said he was not sufficient to sit at the table with so great a prince as the king was.

Then he said to the king: "Sir, for God's sake, make none evil nor heavy cheer, though God this day did not consent to follow your will; for, sir, surely the king, my father, shall bear you as much honor and amity as he may do, and shall accord with you so reasonably that ye shall ever be friends together after. And, sir, methink ye ought to rejoice, though the expedition be not as ye would have had it, for this day ye have won the high renown of prowess and have surpassed this day in valiantness all other of your party. Sir, I say not this to mock you, for all that be of our party, that saw every man's deeds, are plainly accorded by true sentence to give you the prize and chaplet."

### III. FEARFUL DEVASTATION WROUGHT IN FRANCE BY THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

199. Sack of Limoges (1370) by the Black Prince. (From Froissart's *Chronicles*.)

[Having mined the town walls,] the miners set fire into their mine, and so the next morning, as the prince had ordained, there fell down a great piece of the wall and filled the moats, whereof the Englishmen were glad and were ready armed in the field to enter the town. The foot-men might well enter at their ease, and so they did, and ran to the gate and beat down the fortifying and barriers, for there was no defense against them: it was done so suddenly that they of the town were not aware thereof.

Then the prince, the duke of Lancaster, the earl of Cambridge, the earl of Pembroke, Sir Guichard d'Angle, and all the others, with their companies, entered into the city, and all other foot-men ready apparelled to do evil, and to pill and rob the city, and to slay men, women, and children; for so it was commanded them to do. It was a great pity to see the men, women, and children that kneeled down on their knees before the prince for mercy. But he was so inflamed with ire that he took no heed of them, so that none was heard, but all put to death as they were met withal, and such as were nothing culpable.

There was no pity taken of the poor people who wrought never no manner of treason, yet they bought it dearer than the great personages, such as had done the evil and trespass. There was not so hard a heart within the city of Limoges and if he had any remembrance of God, but that wept pitiously for the great mischief that they saw before their eyen, for more than three thousand men, women, and children were slain that day. God have mercy on their souls, for I trow they were martyrs.

And thus entering into the city, a certain company of Englishmen entered into the bishop's palace, and there they found the bishop; and so they brought him to the prince's presence, who beheld him right fiercely and felly, and the best word that he could have of him was how he would have his head stricken off, and so he was had out of his sight. . . .

Thus the city of Limoges was pilld, robbed, and clean brent and brought to destruction.

Father Denifle, a distinguished Dominican scholar, has brought together from the Vatican archives — of which he is the head — and from other sources a volume of letters and other material depicting the fearful results of the Hundred Years' War in France, especially upon the churches and monasteries. The following extracts relating to the period following the death of Joan of Arc



will give some idea of the general impression produced by reading his book.

200. How the count of Arundel burned a town and hanged the inhabitants (ca. 1433).

The count of Arundel, John Fitz-Alain, attacked Millé and its church with fire. The women, boys, and old men took refuge in the tower of the church, but were soon surrounded by flames. The lead of the roof melted and fell in burning drops on the miserable folk below, and even the molten metal of the bells ran down upon them. All but two perished. The fire not only destroyed the church, but all the houses within a wide circuit to the number of more than seven hundred. The wretched inhabitants and the cultivators of the soil were ordered to be hung.

Over one half of the churches about Quercy destroyed by 1441.

Out of one thousand churches in the region of Quercy, when the war with the English was done there were scarce three or four hundred left in which services could be held, so completely was everything devastated and consumed. Certain parishes, for example those of Fraissinet and St. Caprassius, were entirely deserted by their former inhabitants, so that the bishop of Bourges was forced to give the lands belonging to his temporalities as fiefs to those living at a distance.

201. Conditions in the time of Charles VII.

Charles VI being dead, Charles VII succeeded to his father in the kingdom, in the year of our Lord 1422, when he was about twenty-two years of age. In his time, owing to the long wars which had raged within and without, the lethargy and cowardliness of the officers and commanders who were under him, the destruction of all military discipline and order, the rapacity of the troopers, and the general dissolution into which all things had fallen, such destruction had been wrought that from the river Loire to the Seine, — even to the Somme, — the farmers were dead or had fled, and almost all the fields had for many years lain without cultivation or any one to cultivate them. A few districts might indeed be excepted, where if any agriculture remained, it was because they were far from cities, towns, or castles,

and in consequence the constant excursions of the despoilers could not be extended to them. Lower Normandy, embracing the bishoprics of Bayeux and Coutances, which were under English rule, were far from the headquarters of the enemy, nor could they be easily reached by the depredators. They therefore remained somewhat better off in the matter of population and cultivators, but nevertheless were often afflicted by the greatest misfortunes, as will appear later.

We have ourselves beheld the vast regions of Champagne, Brie, Chartres, Perche, Beauvais, . . . Amiens, Abbeville, Soissons, Laon, and beyond toward Hainault, well-nigh deserted, untilled, without husbandmen, grown up to weeds and briers. In many places where fruit trees could flourish these had grown up into dense forests. The vestiges of such ruin, unless the divine clemency shall aid mere human endeavor, will, it is to be feared, last for long years to come.

If any kind of cultivation was still carried on in the regions enumerated, it could only be done close to cities, towns, or castles, no farther away than the watch could be seen, stationed on a high lookout, whence he could observe the robbers as they approached. He would then give the alarm by means of a bell, or a hunter's horn, to those in the fields or vineyard, so that they could betake themselves to a place of safety. This happened so frequently in many places that so soon as the oxen and plow animals were loosed, having heard the signal of the watch, they would, taught by long experience, rush to a place of safety in a state of terror. Even the pigs and sheep did the same.

#### IV. "THE VISION OF PIERS THE PLOWMAN"

From a literary standpoint, by far the most important of the many productions in prose and verse relating to the conditions in England in the times of the Peasant Revolt is *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ascribed to

202. Extracts from *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*.



Langland, who appears to have been born about 1332, and to have given the last revision to his poem shortly before the year 1400. Much is said by Langland of the hard lot of the peasant, the abuses in the Church, the seven cardinal sins, and the various Christian virtues. The following passages in modern English prose illustrate the spirit, charm, and interest of the little book.<sup>1</sup>

What Piers had withal to stave off hunger until the harvest.

"I have no penny," said Piers, "to buy pullets, nor geese, nor pigs, but I have two green cheeses, a few curds and cream, and an oat-cake, and two loaves of beans and bran baked for my children. And yet I say, by my soul, I have no salt bacon nor eggs forsooth to make collops, but I have parsley and leeks and many cabbages, and eke a cow and a calf and a cart mare to draw my dung a-field while the drought lasteth, and by this provision we must live till Lammastide; and by that I hope to have harvest in my croft, and then may I get thy dinner [O Hunger] as it pleaseth me well."

How Covetousness appeared.

Then [among the cardinal sins] came Covetousness. I cannot describe him, so hungry and hollow Sir Harvey looked. He was beetle-browed and also thick-lipped, with two bleared eyes like a blind hag; and like a leathern purse his cheeks lolled about even lower than his chin and they trembled with old age. And his beard was beslobbered with bacon like a bondsman's. A hood was on his head above a lousy hat, and he was in a tawny coat twelve winters old, and full of vermin, and all dirty and torn to rags, and full of creeping lice;—except a louse were a good leaper he could not have walked on that scurvy coat, it was so threadbare.

The poet gives at the close of his poem his notion of the relative worth of good conduct ("Do-well") as against confidence in papal pardons and in masses said after one's death.

<sup>1</sup> I borrow, with slight changes, from Miss Kate Warren's spirited and scholarly prose version (London, 1899).

And all this maketh me think upon my dream. And how the priest found no pardon like Do-well and thought that Do-well surpassed indulgences, saying mass two or three years for departed souls, and bishops' letters; and how Do-well shall be worthier received at the day of doom, and shall surpass all the pardons of St. Peter's church.

Now the pope hath power to grant people the power to pass into heaven without any penance. This is our belief, as learned men teach us. *Quodcumque ligaveris super terram, erit ligatum in celis*, etc.<sup>1</sup> And so I truly believe (Lord forbid otherwise!) that pardon and penance and prayers indeed cause souls to be saved which have sinned deadly seven times. But to trust these three-year masses methinketh truly is not so safe for the soul, certes, as is Do-well.

Therefore, I counsel you, ye men who are rich on this earth and have three-year masses in trust of your treasure, be ye never the bolder to break the ten commandments; and especially, ye masters, mayors, judges, who are held for wise men and have the wealth of this world and can purchase pardon and the pope's bulls. At the dreadful doom when the dead shall rise and all come before Christ to render account,—how thou didst lead thy life here and didst keep his laws, and how thou didst do day by day, the doom will declare. A bagful of pardons there, or provincial letters,—or though ye be found in the fraternity of all the four monastic orders, and have doublefold indulgences,—except Do-well help you, I set your letters and pardons at the worth of a pea shell!

#### V. CHARLES THE BOLD OF BURGUNDY AND THE SWISS

What ease or what pleasure did Charles, duke of Burgundy, enjoy more than our master, King Louis? In his youth, indeed, he had less trouble, for he did not begin to enter upon any action till nearly the two-and-thirtieth year of his age; so that before that time he lived in great ease

203. Charles the Bold and the Swiss. (From the *Memoires of Commines*.)

<sup>1</sup> "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," etc.



and quiet. . . . From the time Duke Charles undertook his war to recover the towns in Picardy (which our master had redeemed from Duke Philip), and joined himself with the lords of the kingdom in the war called the Public Good, what pleasure, what tranquillity had he? He had continual trouble and labor, without the least cessation or refreshment, either to his body or mind; for ambition got entire possession of his heart and constantly spurred him on to attempt new conquests.

Arduous life  
of Charles  
the Bold.

He was always in the field during summer, exposing his person to the greatest danger, taking the care and command of the whole army upon himself; and yet he thought his work too little. He was the first that rose and the last that went to bed in the camp; and he slept in his clothes, like the poorest foot soldier in the army. In winter, when the campaign was over, he was busily employed about raising money; six hours every morning he set apart for conferences, and for giving audience to ambassadors. And in this perpetual hurry of affairs he ended his days, and was killed by the Swiss in the battle of Nancy; so that it cannot be said that he enjoyed one happy day from the time of his beginning to aggrandize himself to the hour of his death. And then what were the fruits of all his pains and labor? Or what necessity was there of his so doing?—since he was a rich prince, and already had towns and territories large enough to have made him happy, if he could have been contented with them.

How the  
Swiss  
defeated  
Charles the  
Bold at  
Granson  
(1476).

All hopes of an accommodation with the Swiss being entirely vanished, their ambassadors returned to acquaint their masters with the duke of Burgundy's absolute refusal of their propositions, and to make preparations for their defense. The duke marched with his army into the Pays de Vaud, which the Swiss had taken from the Count of Romont, and he took three or four towns belonging to Monsieur de Château-Guyon, which the Swiss had seized upon but defended very ill. From thence he advanced to besiege a place called Granson (which also belonged to

Monsieur de Château-Guyon), into which they had thrown seven or eight hundred of their best troops; and because it was near to them, they had resolved to defend it to the last extremity. The duke's army was mightily increased, for he daily received considerable reinforcements out of Lombardy and Savoy; for he employed strangers rather than his own subjects, of whom he might have formed a sufficient army that would have been more faithful and valiant. . . .

He had a fine train of artillery, and he lived in great pomp and magnificence in the camp, to show his grandeur and riches to the Italian and German ambassadors who were sent to him; and he had all his valuable jewels, plate, and rich furniture with him: besides he had great designs upon the duchy of Milan, where he expected to find a considerable party of sympathizers.

It was not many days after the duke's investing Granson before the garrison, being terrified with his continual battering it with cannon, surrendered at discretion, and were all put to the sword. The Swiss were assembled, but they were not very numerous, as several of them have told me (for that country produced not so many soldiers as was imagined, and still fewer than at present, because of late many of them have left their husbandry and followed the wars). . . .

The duke of Burgundy, contrary to the advice of his officers, resolved to advance and meet the enemy at the foot of the mountains, to his great disadvantage; for he was already posted in a place much more proper for an engagement, being fortified on one side with his artillery and on the other by a lake, so that to all appearance there was no fear of his being injured by the enemy. He had detached a hundred of his archers to secure a certain pass at the entrance of the mountains, and was advancing forward himself, when the Swiss attacked him, while the greatest part of his army was still in the plain.

The foremost troops designed to fall back; but the infantry that were behind, supposing they were running away, retreated toward their camp, and some of them behaved themselves handsomely enough; but, in the end, when they



arrived in their camp, they wanted courage to make a stand and defend themselves, and they all fled, and the Swiss possessed themselves of their camp, in which were all their artillery and a vast number of tents and pavilions, besides a great deal of valuable plunder, for they saved nothing but their lives.

The duke lost all his finest rings, but of men, not above seven men-at-arms; the rest fled, and the duke with them. It may more properly be said of him, "that he lost his honor and his wealth in one day," than it was of King John of France, who, after a brave defense, was taken prisoner at the battle of Poitiers.

This was the first misfortune that ever happened to the duke of Burgundy in his whole life, for in the rest of his enterprises he always acquired either honor or advantage. But what a mighty loss did he sustain that day by his perverseness and scorn of good advice! How greatly did his family suffer! In what a miserable condition it is at present, and how like to continue so! How many great princes and states became his enemies, and openly declared against him, who but the day before the battle were his friends, or at least pretended to be so!

And what was the cause of this war? A miserable cart-load of sheepskins that the count of Romont had taken from a Swiss in his passage through his estates. If God Almighty had not forsaken the duke of Burgundy, it is scarce conceivable that he would have exposed himself to such great dangers upon so small and trivial an occasion; especially considering the offers the Swiss had made him, and that his conquest of such enemies would yield him neither profit nor honor; for at that time the Swiss were not in such esteem as now, and no people in the world could be poorer. A gentleman who had been one of their first ambassadors to the duke of Burgundy told me that one of his chief arguments to dissuade the duke from attacking them was that there was nothing for him to gain from them; for their country was barren and poor, and he believed that, if all his countrymen were taken prisoners, all the money they

could raise for their ransom would not buy spurs and bridles for the duke's army.

The poor Swiss were mightily enriched by the plunder of the duke's camp. • At first they did not understand the value of the treasure they were masters of, especially the common soldiers. One of the richest and most magnificent tents in the world was cut into pieces. There were some of them that sold quantities of dishes and plates of silver for about two sous of our money, supposing they had been pewter.

His great diamond (perhaps the largest and finest jewel in Christendom), with a large pearl fixed to it, was taken up by a Swiss, put up again into the case, thrown under a wagon, taken up again by the same soldier, and after all offered to a priest for a florin, who bought it and sent it to the magistrates of that country, who returned him three francs as a sufficient reward. They took also three very rich jewels, called the Three Brothers, another large ruby called La Hatte, and another called the Ball of Flanders, which were the fairest and richest in the world; besides a prodigious quantity of other goods, which has since taught them what fine things may be purchased for money; inasmuch as their victories, the esteem the king had of their service afterwards, and the presents he made them, have enriched them prodigiously.

How the poor Swiss mountaineers misunderstood the treasure that fell into their hands.

## VI. LOUIS XI OF FRANCE

Small hopes and comfort ought poor and inferior people to have in this world, considering what so great a king suffered and underwent, and how he was at last forced to leave all, and could not, with all his care and diligence, protract his life one single hour. I knew him, and was entertained in his service in the flower of his age and at the height of his prosperity, yet I never saw him free from labor and care. Of all diversions he loved hunting and hawking in their seasons, but his chief delight was in dogs. . . . In hunting, his eagerness and pain were equal to his pleasure, for his chase was the stag, which he always ran down. He

204. Character and troublous death of Louis XI. (From the *Memoires of Commines*.)

The king's laborious interest in the chase.



rose very early in the morning, rode sometimes a great distance, and would not leave his sport, let the weather be never so bad. And when he came home at night he was often very weary and generally in a violent passion with some of his courtiers or huntsmen; for hunting is a sport not always to be managed according to the master's direction; yet, in the opinion of most people, he understood it as well as any prince of his time. He was continually at these sports, lodging in the country villages to which his recreations led him, till he was interrupted by business; for during the most part of the summer there was constantly war between him and Charles, duke of Burgundy, while in the winter they made truces.

Trouble over  
Roussillon.

He was also involved in some trouble about the county of Roussillon, with John, king of Arragon, father of Peter of Castile, who at present is king of Spain. For though both of them were poor, and already at variance with their subjects in Barcelona and elsewhere, and though the son had nothing but the expectation of succeeding to the throne of Don Henry of Castile, his wife's brother (which fell to him afterwards), yet they made considerable resistance; for that province being entirely devoted to their interest, and they being universally beloved by the people, they gave our king abundance of trouble, and the war lasted till his death, and many brave men lost their lives in it, and his treasury was exhausted by it. So that he had but a little time during the whole year to spend in pleasure, and even then the fatigues he underwent were excessive.

When his body was at rest his mind was at work, for he had affairs in several places at once, and would concern himself as much in those of his neighbors as in his own, putting officers of his own over all the great families, and endeavoring to divide their authority as much as possible. When he was at war he labored for a peace or a truce, and when he had obtained it he was impatient for war again. He troubled himself with many trifles in his government which he had better have let alone; but it was his temper, and he could not help it. Besides, he had a prodigious

memory, and he forgot nothing, but knew everybody, as well in other countries as in his own. . . .

I am of opinion that if all the days of his life were computed in which his joys and pleasures outweighed his pain and trouble, they would be found so few, that there would be twenty mournful ones to one pleasant. He lived about sixty-one years, yet he always fancied he should never outlive sixty, giving this for a reason, that for a long time no king of France had lived beyond that age.

His last illness continued from Monday to Saturday night. Upon which account I will now make comparison between the evils and sorrows which he brought upon others and those which he suffered in his own person: for I hope his torments here on earth have translated him into paradise and will be a great part of his purgatory. And if, in respect of their greatness and duration, his sufferings were inferior to those he had brought upon other people, yet, if you consider the grandeur and dignity of his office, and that he had never before suffered anything in his own person, but had been obeyed by all people, as if all Europe had been created for no other end but to serve and be commanded by him, you will find that that little which he endured was so contrary to his nature and custom that it was more grievous for him to bear. . . .

Apprehensions and precautions of the dying Louis.

The king had ordered several cruel prisons to be made: some were cages of iron, and some of wood, but all were covered with iron plates both within and without, with terrible locks, about eight feet wide and seven high. The first contriver of them was the bishop of Verdun, who was immediately put in the first of them that was made, where he continued fourteen years. Many bitter curses he has had since for his invention, and some from me as I lay in one of them eight months together in the minority of our present king. He also ordered heavy and terrible fetters to be made in Germany, and particularly a certain ring for the feet, which was extremely hard to be opened, and fitted like an iron collar, with a thick weighty chain, and a great globe of iron at the end of it, most unreasonably heavy,

Louis XI's ideas of prison reform.



which contrivances were called the king's nets. However, I have seen many eminent and deserving persons in these prisons, with these nets about their legs, who afterwards came forth with great joy and honor, and received great rewards from the king.

This by way of digression. But to return to my principal design. As in his time this barbarous variety of prisons was invented, so before he died he himself was in greater torment and more terrible apprehension than those whom he had imprisoned; which I look upon as a great mercy toward him, and as part of his purgatory. And I have mentioned it here to show that there is no person, of what station or dignity soever, but suffers some time or other, either publicly or privately, especially if he has caused other people to suffer.

The king, toward the latter end of his days, caused his castle of Plessis-les-Tours to be encompassed with great bars of iron in the form of thick grating, and at the four corners of the house four sparrow nests of iron, strong, massy, and thick, were built. The grates were without the wall, on the farther side of the ditch, and sank to the bottom of it. Several spikes of iron weré fastened into the wall, set as thick by one another as was possible, and each furnished with three or four points. He likewise placed ten bowmen in the ditches, to shoot at any man that durst approach the castle before the opening of the gates; and he ordered that they should lie in the ditches, but retire to the sparrow nests upon occasion.

He was sensible enough that this fortification was too weak to keep out an army or any great body of men, but he had no fear of such an attack; his great apprehension was that some of the nobility of his kingdom, having intelligence within, might attempt to make themselves masters of the castle by night and, having possessed themselves of it, partly by favor and partly by force, might deprive him of the regal authority, and take upon themselves the administration of public affairs, upon pretense that he was incapable of business and no longer fit to govern.

The gate of the castle was never opened, nor the draw-bridge let down, before eight o'clock in the morning, at which time the officers were let in, and the captains ordered their guards to their several posts, with pickets of archers in the middle of the court, as in a town upon the frontiers that is closely guarded: nor was any person admitted to enter except by the wicket, and with the king's knowledge, unless it were the steward of his household and such persons as were not admitted into the royal presence.

Is it possible then to keep a prince (with any regard to his quality) in a closer prison than he kept himself? The cages which were made for other people were about eight feet square; and he (though so great a monarch) had but a small court of the castle to walk in, and seldom made use of that, but generally kept himself in the gallery, out of which he went into the chambers on his way to mass, but never passed through the court. Who can deny that he was a sufferer as well as his neighbors, considering how he was locked up and guarded, afraid of his own children and relations, and changing every day those very servants whom he had brought up and advanced; and though they owed all their preferment to him, yet he durst not trust any of them, but shut himself up in those strange chains and enclosures. If the place where he confined himself was larger than a common prison, he also was much greater than common prisoners.

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