Arthur Conan Doyle

The Refugees

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The Refugees

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The Refugees is a historical novel, centring on the fate of the Huguenots during the reign of Louis XIV and the revoking of the Edict of Nantes.

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The Refugees
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Part I. In the old world

Chapter I. The man from America

It was the sort of window which was common in Paris about the end of the seventeenth century. It was high, mullioned, with a broad transom across the centre, and above the middle of the transom a tiny coat of arms – three caltrops gules upon a field argent – let into the diamond-paned glass. Outside there projected a stout iron rod, from which hung a gilded miniature of a bale of wool which swung and squeaked with every puff of wind. Beyond that again were the houses of the other side, high, narrow, and prim, slashed with diagonal wood-work in front, and topped with a bristle of sharp gables and corner turrets. Between were the cobble-stones of the Rue St. Martin and the clatter of innumerable feet.

Inside, the window was furnished with a broad bancal of brown stamped Spanish leather, where the family might recline and have an eye from behind the curtains on all that was going forward in the busy world beneath them. Two of them sat there now, a man and a woman, but their backs were turned to the spectacle, and their faces to the large and richly furnished room. From time to time they stole a glance at each other, and their eyes told that they needed no other sight to make them happy.

Nor was it to be wondered at, for they were a well-favoured pair. She was very young, twenty at the most, with a face which was pale, indeed, and yet of a brilliant pallor, which was so clear and fresh, and carried with it such a suggestion of purity and innocence, that one would not wish its maiden grace to be marred by an intrusion of colour. Her features were delicate and sweet, and her blue-black hair and long dark eyelashes formed a piquant contrast to her dreamy gray eyes and her ivory skin. In her whole expression there was something quiet and subdued, which was accentuated by her simple dress of black taffeta, and by the little jet brooch and bracelet which were her sole ornaments. Such was Adele Catinat, the only daughter of the famous Huguenot cloth-merchant.

But if her dress was sombre, it was atoned for by the magnificence of her companion. He was a man who might have been ten years her senior, with a keen soldier face, small well-marked features, a carefully trimmed black moustache, and a dark hazel eye which might harden to command a man, or soften to supplicate a woman, and be successful at either. His coat was of sky-blue, slashed across with silver braidings, and with broad silver shoulder-straps on either side. A vest of white calamanca peeped out from beneath it, and knee-breeches of the same disappeared into high polished boots with gilt spurs upon the heels. A silver-hilted rapier and a plumed cap lying upon a settle beside him completed a costume which was a badge of honour to the wearer, for any Frenchman would have recognised it as being that of an officer in the famous Blue Guard of Louis the Fourteenth. A trim, dashing soldier he looked, with his curling black hair and well-poised head. Such he had proved himself before now in the field, too, until the name of Amory de Catinat had become conspicuous among the thousands of the valiant lesser noblesse who had flocked into the service of the king.

They were first cousins, these two, and there was just sufficient resemblance in the clear-cut features to recall the relationship. De Catinat was sprung from a noble Huguenot family, but having lost his parents early he had joined the army, and had worked his way without influence and against all odds to his present position. His father's younger brother, however, finding every path to fortune barred to him through the persecution to which men of his faith were already subjected, had dropped the "de" which implied his noble descent, and he had taken to trade in the city of Paris, with such

success that he was now one of the richest and most prominent citizens of the town. It was under his roof that the guardsman now sat, and it was his only daughter whose white hand he held in his own.

"Tell me, Adele," said he, "why do you look troubled?"

"I am not troubled, Amory,"

"Come, there is just one little line between those curving brows. Ah, I can read you, you see, as a shepherd reads the sky."

"It is nothing, Amory, but – "

"But what?"

"You leave me this evening."

"But only to return to-morrow."

"And must you really, really go to-night?"

"It would be as much as my commission is worth to be absent. Why, I am on duty to-morrow morning outside the king's bedroom! After chapel-time Major de Brissac will take my place, and then I am free once more."

"Ah, Amory, when you talk of the king and the court and the grand ladies, you fill me with wonder."

"And why with wonder?"

"To think that you who live amid such splendour should stoop to the humble room of a mercer."

"Ah, but what does the room contain?"

"There is the greatest wonder of all. That you who pass your days amid such people, so beautiful, so witty, should think me worthy of your love, me, who am such a quiet little mouse, all alone in this great house, so shy and so backward! It is wonderful!"

"Every man has his own taste," said her cousin, stroking the tiny hand. "It is with women as with flowers. Some may prefer the great brilliant sunflower, or the rose, which is so bright and large that it must ever catch the eye. But give me the little violet which hides among the mosses, and yet is so sweet to look upon, and sheds its fragrance round it. But still that line upon your brow, dearest."

"I was wishing that father would return."

"And why? Are you so lonely, then?"

Her pale face lit up with a quick smile. "I shall not be lonely until to-night. But I am always uneasy when he is away. One hears so much now of the persecution of our poor brethren."

"Tut! my uncle can defy them."

"He has gone to the provost of the Mercer Guild about this notice of the quartering of the dragoons."

"Ah, you have not told me of that."

"Here it is." She rose and took up a slip of blue paper with a red seal dangling from it which lay upon the table. His strong, black brows knitted together as he glanced at it.

"Take notice," it ran, "that you, Theophile Catinat, cloth-mercer of the Rue St. Martin, are hereby required to give shelter and rations to twenty men of the Languedoc Blue Dragoons under Captain Dalbert, until such time as you receive a further notice. [Signed] De Beaupre (Commissioner of the King)."

De Catinat knew well how this method of annoying Huguenots had been practised all over France, but he had flattered himself that his own position at court would have insured his kinsman from such an outrage. He threw the paper down with an exclamation of anger.

"When do they come?"

"Father said to-night."

"Then they shall not be here long. To-morrow I shall have an order to remove them. But the sun has sunk behind St. Martin's Church, and I should already be upon my way."

"No, no; you must not go yet."

"I would that I could give you into your father's charge first, for I fear to leave you alone when these troopers may come. And yet no excuse will avail me if I am not at Versailles. But see, a horseman has stopped before the door. He is not in uniform. Perhaps he is a messenger from your father."

The girl ran eagerly to the window, and peered out, with her hand resting upon her cousin's silver-corded shoulder.

"Ah!" she cried, "I had forgotten. It is the man from America. Father said that he would come to-day."

"The man from America!" repeated the soldier, in a tone of surprise, and they both craned their necks from the window. The horseman, a sturdy, broad-shouldered young man, clean-shaven and crop-haired, turned his long, swarthy face and his bold features in their direction as he ran his eyes over the front of the house. He had a soft-brimmed gray hat of a shape which was strange to Parisian eyes, but his sombre clothes and high boots were such as any citizen might have worn. Yet his general appearance was so unusual that a group of townsfolk had already assembled round him, staring with open mouth at his horse and himself. A battered gun with an extremely long barrel was fastened by the stock to his stirrup, while the muzzle stuck up into the air behind him. At each holster was a large dangling black bag, and a gaily coloured red-slashed blanket was rolled up at the back of his saddle. His horse, a strong-limbed dapple-gray, all shiny with sweat above, and all caked with mud beneath, bent its fore knees as it stood, as though it were overspent. The rider, however, having satisfied himself as to the house, sprang lightly out of his saddle, and disengaging his gun, his blanket, and his bags, pushed his way unconcernedly through the gaping crowd and knocked loudly at the door.

"Who is he, then?" asked De Catinat. "A Canadian? I am almost one myself. I had as many friends on one side of the sea as on the other. Perchance I know him. There are not so many white faces yonder, and in two years there was scarce one from the Saguenay to Nipissing that I had not seen."

"Nay, he is from the English provinces, Amory. But he speaks our tongue. His mother was of our blood."

"And his name?"

"Is Amos – Amos – ah, those names! Yes, Green, that was it – Amos Green. His father and mine have done much trade together, and now his son, who, as I understand, has lived ever in the woods, is sent here to see something of men and cities. Ah, my God! what can have happened now?"

A sudden chorus of screams and cries had broken out from the passage beneath, with the shouting of a man and the sound of rushing steps. In an instant De Catinat was half-way down the stairs, and was staring in amazement at the scene in the hall beneath.

Two maids stood, screaming at the pitch of their lungs, at either side. In the centre the aged man-servant Pierre, a stern old Calvinist, whose dignity had never before been shaken, was spinning round, waving his arms, and roaring so that he might have been heard at the Louvre. Attached to the gray worsted stocking which covered his fleshless calf was a fluffy black hairy ball, with one little red eye glancing up, and the gleam of two white teeth where it held its grip. At the shrieks, the young stranger, who had gone out to his horse, came rushing back, and plucking the creature off, he slapped it twice across the snout, and plunged it head-foremost back into the leather bag from which it had emerged.

"It is nothing," said he, speaking in excellent French; "it is only a bear."

"Ah, my God!" cried Pierre, wiping the drops from his brow. "Ah, it has aged me five years! I was at the door, bowing to monsieur, and in a moment it had me from behind."

"It was my fault for leaving the bag loose. The creature was but pupped the day we left New York, six weeks come Tuesday. Do I speak with my father's friend, Monsieur Catinat?"

"No, monsieur," said the guardsman, from the staircase. "My uncle is out, but I am Captain de Catinat, at your service, and here is Mademoiselle Catinat, who is your hostess."

The stranger ascended the stair, and paid his greetings to them both with the air of a man who was as shy as a wild deer, and yet who had steeled himself to carry a thing through. He walked with

them to the sitting-room, and then in an instant was gone again, and they heard his feet thudding upon the stairs. Presently he was back, with a lovely glossy skin in his hands. "The bear is for your father, mademoiselle," said he. "This little skin I have brought from America for you. It is but a trifle, and yet it may serve to make a pair of mocassins or a pouch."

Adele gave a cry of delight as her hands sank into the depths of its softness. She might well admire it, for no king in the world could have had a finer skin. "Ah, it is beautiful, monsieur," she cried; "and what creature is it? and where did it come from?"

"It is a black fox. I shot it myself last fall up near the Iroquois villages at Lake Oneida."

She pressed it to her cheek, her white face showing up like marble against its absolute blackness. "I am sorry my father is not here to welcome you, monsieur," she said; "but I do so very heartily in his place. Your room is above. Pierre will show you to it, if you wish."

"My room? For what?"

"Why, monsieur, to sleep in!"

"And must I sleep in a room?"

De Catinat laughed at the gloomy face of the American.

"You shall not sleep there if you do not wish," said he.

The other brightened at once and stepped across to the further window, which looked down upon the court-yard. "Ah," he cried. "There is a beech-tree there, mademoiselle, and if I might take my blanket out yonder, I should like it better than any room. In winter, indeed, one must do it, but in summer I am smothered with a ceiling pressing down upon me."

"You are not from a town then?" said De Catinat.

"My father lives in New York – two doors from the house of Peter Stuyvesant, of whom you must have heard. He is a very hardy man, and he can do it, but I – even a few days of Albany or of Schenectady are enough for me. My life has been in the woods."

"I am sure my father would wish you to sleep where you like and to do what you like, as long as it makes you happy."

"I thank you, mademoiselle. Then I shall take my things out there, and I shall groom my horse."

"Nay, there is Pierre."

"I am used to doing it myself."

"Then I will come with you," said De Catinat, "for I would have a word with you. Until to-morrow, then, Adele, farewell!"

"Until to-morrow, Amory."

The two young men passed downstairs together, and the guardsman followed the American out into the yard.

"You have had a long journey," he said.

"Yes; from Rouen."

"Are you tired?"

"No; I am seldom tired."

"Remain with the lady, then, until her father comes back."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I have to go, and she might need a protector."

The stranger said nothing, but he nodded, and throwing off his black coat, set to work vigorously rubbing down his travel-stained horse.

Chapter II. A Monarch in Deshabille

It was the morning after the guardsman had returned to his duties. Eight o'clock had struck on the great clock of Versailles, and it was almost time for the monarch to rise. Through all the long corridors and frescoed passages of the monster palace there was a subdued hum and rustle, with a low muffled stir of preparation, for the rising of the king was a great state function in which many had a part to play. A servant with a steaming silver saucer hurried past, bearing it to Monsieur de St. Quentin, the state barber. Others, with clothes thrown over their arms, bustled down the passage which led to the ante-chamber. The knot of guardsmen in their gorgeous blue and silver coats straightened themselves up and brought their halberds to attention, while the young officer, who had been looking wistfully out of the window at some courtiers who were laughing and chatting on the terraces, turned sharply upon his heel, and strode over to the white and gold door of the royal bedroom.

He had hardly taken his stand there before the handle was very gently turned from within, the door revolved noiselessly upon its hinges, and a man slid silently through the aperture, closing it again behind him.

"Hush!" said he, with his finger to his thin, precise lips, while his whole clean-shaven face and high-arched brows were an entreaty and a warning. "The king still sleeps."

The words were whispered from one to another among the group who had assembled outside the door. The speaker, who was Monsieur Bontems, head valet de Chambre, gave a sign to the officer of the guard, and led him into the window alcove from which he had lately come.

"Good-morning, Captain de Catinat," said he, with a mixture of familiarity and respect in his manner.

"Good-morning, Bontems. How has the king slept?"

"Admirably."

"But it is his time."

"Hardly."

"You will not rouse him yet?"

"In seven and a half minutes." The valet pulled out the little round watch which gave the law to the man who was the law to twenty millions of people.

"Who commands at the main guard?"

"Major de Brissac."

"And you will be here?"

"For four hours I attend the king."

"Very good. He gave me some instructions for the officer of the guard, when he was alone last night after the petit coucher. He bade me to say that Monsieur de Vivonne was not to be admitted to the grand lever. You are to tell him so."

"I shall do so."

"Then, should a note come from her – you understand me, the new one – "

"Madame de Maintenon?"

"Precisely. But it is more discreet not to mention names. Should she send a note, you will take it and deliver it quietly when the king gives you an opportunity."

"It shall be done."

"But if the other should come, as is possible enough – the other, you understand me, the former – "

"Madame de Montespan."

"Ah, that soldierly tongue of yours, captain! Should she come, I say, you will gently bar her way, with courteous words, you understand, but on no account is she to be permitted to enter the royal room."

"Very good, Bontems."

"And now we have but three minutes."

He strode through the rapidly increasing group of people in the corridor with an air of proud humility as befitted a man who, if he was a valet, was at least the king of valets, by being the valet of the king. Close by the door stood a line of footmen, resplendent in their powdered wigs, red plush coats, and silver shoulder knots.

"Is the officer of the oven here?" asked Bontems.

"Yes, sir," replied a functionary who bore in front of him an enamelled tray heaped with pine shavings.

"The opener of the shutters?"

"Here, sir."

"The remover of the taper?"

"Here, sir."

"Be ready for the word." He turned the handle once more, and slipped into the darkened room.

It was a large square apartment, with two high windows upon the further side, curtained across with priceless velvet hangings. Through the chinks the morning sun shot a few little gleams, which widened as they crossed the room to break in bright blurs of light upon the primrose-tinted wall. A large arm-chair stood by the side of the burnt-out fire, shadowed over by the huge marble mantel-piece, the back of which was carried up twining and curving into a thousand arabesque and armorial devices until it blended with the richly painted ceiling. In one corner a narrow couch with a rug thrown across it showed where the faithful Bontems had spent the night.

In the very centre of the chamber there stood a large four-post bed, with curtains of Gobelin tapestry looped back from the pillow. A square of polished rails surrounded it, leaving a space some five feet in width all round between the enclosure and the bedside. Within this enclosure, or ruelle, stood a small round table, covered over with a white napkin, upon which lay a silver platter and an enamelled cup, the one containing a little Frontiniac wine and water, the other bearing three slices of the breast of a chicken, in case the king should hunger during the night.

As Bontems passed noiselessly across the room, his feet sinking into the moss-like carpet, there was the heavy close smell of sleep in the air, and he could near the long thin breathing of the sleeper. He passed through the opening in the rails, and stood, watch in hand, waiting for the exact instant when the iron routine of the court demanded that the monarch should be roused. Beneath him, from under the costly green coverlet of Oriental silk, half buried in the fluffy Valenciennes lace which edged the pillow, there protruded a round black bristle of close-cropped hair, with the profile of a curving nose and petulant lip outlined against the white background. The valet snapped his watch, and bent over the sleeper.

"I have the honour to inform your Majesty that it is half-past eight," said he.

"Ah!" The king slowly opened his large dark-brown eyes, made the sign of the cross, and kissed a little dark reliquary which he drew from under his night-dress. Then he sat up in bed, and blinked about him with the air of a man who is collecting his thoughts.

"Did you give my orders to the officer of the guard, Bontems?" he asked.

"Yes, sire."

"Who is on duty?"

"Major de Brissac at the main guard, and Captain de Catinat in the corridor."

"De Catinat! Ah, the young man who stopped my horse at Fontainebleau. I remember him. You may give the signal, Bontems."

The chief valet walked swiftly across to the door and threw it open. In rushed the officer of the ovens and the four red-coated, white-wigged footmen, ready-handed, silent-footed, each intent upon his own duties. The one seized upon Bontem's rug and couch, and in an instant had whipped them off into an ante-chamber, another had carried away the en cas meal and the silver taper-stand; while

a third drew back the great curtains of stamped velvet and let a flood of light into the apartment. Then, as the flames were already flickering among the pine shavings in the fireplace, the officer of the ovens placed two round logs crosswise above them, for the morning air was chilly, and withdrew with his fellow-servants.

They were hardly gone before a more august group entered the bed-chamber. Two walked together in front, the one a youth little over twenty years of age, middle-sized, inclining to stoutness, with a slow, pompous bearing, a well-turned leg, and a face which was comely enough in a mask-like fashion, but which was devoid of any shadow of expression, except perhaps of an occasional lurking gleam of mischievous humour. He was richly clad in plum-coloured velvet, with a broad band of blue silk; across his breast, and the glittering edge of the order of St. Louis protruding from under it. His companion was a man of forty, swarthy, dignified, and solemn, in a plain but rich dress of black silk, with slashes of gold at the neck and sleeves. As the pair faced the king there was sufficient resemblance between the three faces to show that they were of one blood, and to enable a stranger to guess that the older was Monsieur, the younger brother of the king, while the other was Louis the Dauphin, his only legitimate child, and heir to a throne to which in the strange workings of Providence neither he nor his sons were destined to ascend.

Strong as was the likeness between the three faces, each with the curving Bourbon nose, the large full eye, and the thick Hapsburg under-lip, their common heritage from Anne of Austria, there was still a vast difference of temperament and character stamped upon their features. The king was now in his six-and-fortieth year, and the cropped black head was already thinning a little on the top, and shading away to gray over the temples. He still, however, retained much of the beauty of his youth, tempered by the dignity and sternness which increased with his years. His dark eyes were full of expression, and his clear-cut features were the delight of the sculptor and the painter. His firm and yet sensitive mouth and his thick, well-arched brows gave an air of authority and power to his face, while the more subdued expression which was habitual to his brother marked the man whose whole life had been spent in one long exercise of deference and self-effacement. The dauphin, on the other hand, with a more regular face than his father, had none of that quick play of feature when excited, or that kingly serenity when composed, which had made a shrewd observer say that Louis, if he were not the greatest monarch that ever lived, was at least the best fitted to act the part.

Behind the king's son and the king's brother there entered a little group of notables and of officials whom duty had called to this daily ceremony. There was the grand master of the robes, the first lord of the bed-chamber, the Duc du Maine, a pale youth clad in black velvet, limping heavily with his left leg, and his little brother, the young Comte de Toulouse, both of them the illegitimate sons of Madame de Montespan and the king. Behind them, again, was the first valet of the wardrobe, followed by Fagon, the first physician, Telier, the head surgeon, and three pages in scarlet and gold who bore the royal clothes. Such were the partakers in the family entry, the highest honour which the court of France could aspire to.

Bontems had poured on the king's hands a few drops of spirits of wine, catching them again in a silver dish; and the first lord of the bedchamber had presented the bowl of holy water with which he made the sign of the cross, muttering to himself the short office of the Holy Ghost. Then, with a nod to his brother and a short word of greeting to the dauphin and to the Due du Maine, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat in his long silken night-dress, his little white feet dangling from beneath it – a perilous position for any man to assume, were it not that he had so heart-felt a sense of his own dignity that he could not realise that under any circumstances it might be compromised in the eyes of others. So he sat, the master of France, yet the slave to every puff of wind, for a wandering draught had set him shivering and shaking. Monsieur de St. Quentin, the noble barber, flung a purple dressing-gown over the royal shoulders, and placed a long many-curled court wig upon his head, while Bontems drew on his red stockings and laid before him his slippers of embroidered velvet. The monarch thrust his feet into them, tied his dressing-gown, and passed out to the fireplace, where he

settled himself down in his easy-chair, holding out his thin delicate hands towards the blazing logs, while the others stood round in a semicircle, waiting for the grand lever which was to follow.

"How is this, messieurs?" the king asked suddenly, glancing round him with a petulant face. "I am conscious of a smell of scent. Surely none of you would venture to bring perfume into the presence, knowing, as you must all do, how offensive it is to me."

The little group glanced from one to the other with protestations of innocence. The faithful Bontems, however, with his stealthy step, had passed along behind them, and had detected the offender.

"My lord of Toulouse, the smell comes from you," he said.

The Comte de Toulouse, a little ruddy-cheeked lad, flushed up at the detection.

"If you please, sire, it is possible that Mademoiselle de Grammont may have wet my coat with her casting-bottle when we all played together at Marly yesterday," he stammered. "I had not observed it, but if it offends your Majesty – "

"Take it away! take it away!" cried the king. "Pah! it chokes and stifles me! Open the lower casement, Bontems. No; never heed, now that he is gone. Monsieur de St. Quentin, is not this our shaving morning?"

"Yes, sire; all is ready."

"Then why not proceed? It is three minutes after the accustomed time. To work, sir; and you, Bontems, give word for the grand lever."

It was obvious that the king was not in a very good humour that morning. He darted little quick questioning glances at his brother and at his sons, but whatever complaint or sarcasm may have trembled upon his lips, was effectually stifled by De St. Quentin's ministrations. With the nonchalance born of long custom, the official covered the royal chin with soap, drew the razor swiftly round it, and sponged over the surface with spirits of wine. A nobleman then helped to draw on the king's black velvet haut-de-chausses, a second assisted in arranging them, while a third drew the night-gown over the shoulders, and handed the royal shirt, which had been warming before the fire. His diamond-buckled shoes, his gaiters, and his scarlet inner vest were successively fastened by noble courtiers, each keenly jealous of his own privilege, and over the vest was placed the blue ribbon with the cross of the Holy Ghost in diamonds, and that of St. Louis tied with red. To one to whom the sight was new, it might have seemed strange to see the little man, listless, passive, with his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the burning logs, while this group of men, each with a historic name, bustled round him, adding a touch here and a touch there, like a knot of children with a favourite doll. The black undercoat was drawn on, the cravat of rich lace adjusted, the loose overcoat secured, two handkerchiefs of costly point carried forward upon an enamelled saucer, and thrust by separate officials into each side pocket, the silver and ebony cane laid to hand, and the monarch was ready for the labours of the day.

During the half-hour or so which had been occupied in this manner there had been a constant opening and closing of the chamber door, and a muttering of names from the captain of the guard to the attendant in charge, and from the attendant in charge to the first gentleman of the chamber, ending always in the admission of some new visitor. Each as he entered bowed profoundly three times, as a salute to majesty, and then attached himself to his own little clique or coterie, to gossip in a low voice over the news, the weather, and the plans of the day. Gradually the numbers increased, until by the time the king's frugal first breakfast of bread and twice watered wine had been carried in, the large square chamber was quite filled with a throng of men many of whom had helped to make the epoch the most illustrious of French history. Here, close by the king, was the harsh but energetic Louvois, all-powerful now since the death of his rival Colbert, discussing a question of military organisation with two officers, the one a tall and stately soldier, the other a strange little figure, undersized and misshapen, but bearing the insignia of a marshal of France, and owning a name which was of evil omen over the Dutch frontier, for Luxembourg was looked upon already as the successor of Conde, even as his companion Vauban was of Turenne. Beside them, a small white-haired clerical with a

kindly face, Pere la Chaise, confessor to the king, was whispering his views upon Jansenism to the portly Bossuet, the eloquent Bishop of Meaux, and to the tall thin young Abbe de Fenelon, who listened with a clouded brow, for it was suspected that his own opinions were tainted with the heresy in question. There, too, was Le Brun, the painter, discussing art in a small circle which contained his fellow-workers Verrio and Laguerre, the architects Blondel and Le Notre, and sculptors Girardon, Puget, Desjardins, and Coysevox, whose works had done so much to beautify the new palace of the king. Close to the door, Racine, with his handsome face wreathed in smiles, was chatting with the poet Boileau and the architect Mansard, the three laughing and jesting with the freedom which was natural to the favourite servants of the king, the only subjects who might walk unannounced and without ceremony into and out of his chamber.

"What is amiss with him this morning?" asked Boileau in a whisper, nodding his head in the direction of the royal group. "I fear that his sleep has not improved his temper."

"He becomes harder and harder to amuse," said Racine, shaking his head. "I am to be at Madame De Maintenon's room at three to see whether a page or two of the Phedre may not work a change."

"My friend," said the architect, "do you not think that madame herself might be a better consoler than your Phedre?"

"Madame is a wonderful woman. She has brains, she has heart, she has tact – she is admirable."

"And yet she has one gift too many."

"And that is?"

"Age."

"Pooh! What matter her years when she can carry them like thirty? What an eye! What an arm! And besides, my friends, he is not himself a boy any longer."

"Ah, but that is another thing."

"A man's age is an incident, a woman's a calamity."

"Very true. But a young man consults his eye, and an older man his ear. Over forty, it is the clever tongue which wins; under it, the pretty face."

"Ah, you rascal! Then you have made up your mind that five-and-forty years with tact will hold the field against nine-and-thirty with beauty. Well, when your lady has won, she will doubtless remember who were the first to pay court to her."

"But I think that you are wrong, Racine."

"Well, we shall see."

"And if you are wrong – "

"Well, what then?"

"Then it may be a little serious for you."

"And why?"

"The Marquise de Montespan has a memory."

"Her influence may soon be nothing more."

"Do not rely too much upon it, my friend. When the Fontanges came up from Provence, with her blue eyes and her copper hair, it was in every man's mouth that Montespan had had her day. Yet Fontanges is six feet under a church crypt, and the marquise spent two hours with the king last week. She has won once, and may again."

"Ah, but this is a very different rival. This is no slip of a country girl, but the cleverest woman in France."

"Pshaw, Racine, you know our good master well, or you should, for you seem to have been at his elbow since the days of the Fronde. Is he a man, think you, to be amused forever by sermons, or to spend his days at the feet of a lady of that age, watching her at her tapestry-work, and fondling her poodle, when all the fairest faces and brightest eyes of France are as thick in his salons as the tulips in a Dutch flower-bed? No, no, it will be the Montespan, or if not she, some younger beauty."

"My dear Boileau, I say again that her sun is setting. Have you not heard the news?"

"Not a word."

"Her brother, Monsieur de Vivonne, has been refused the entre."

"Impossible!"

"But it is a fact."

"And when?"

"This very morning."

"From whom had you it?"

"From De Catinat, the captain of the guard. He had his orders to bar the way to him."

"Ha! then the king does indeed mean mischief. That is why his brow is so cloudy this morning, then. By my faith, if the marquise has the spirit with which folk credit her, he may find that it was easier to win her than to slight her."

"Ay; the Mortemarts are no easy race to handle."

"Well, heaven send him a safe way out of it! But who is this gentleman? His face is somewhat grimmer than those to which the court is accustomed. Ha! the king catches sight of him, and Louvois beckons to him to advance. By my faith, he is one who would be more at his ease in a tent than under a painted ceiling."

The stranger who had attracted Racine's attention was a tall thin man, with a high aquiline nose, stern fierce gray eyes, peeping out from under tufted brows, and a countenance so lined and marked by age, care, and stress of weather that it stood out amid the prim courtier faces which surrounded it as an old hawk might in a cage of birds of gay plumage. He was clad in a sombre-coloured suit which had become usual at court since the king had put aside frivolity and Fontanges, but the sword which hung from his waist was no fancy rapier, but a good brass-hilted blade in a stained leather-sheath, which showed every sign of having seen hard service. He had been standing near the door, his black-feathered beaver in his hand, glancing with a half-amused, half-disdainful expression at the groups of gossips around him, but at the sign from the minister of war he began to elbow his way forward, pushing aside in no very ceremonious fashion all who barred his passage.

Louis possessed in a high degree the royal faculty of recognition. "It is years since I have seen him, but I remember his face well," said he, turning to his minister. "It is the Comte de Frontenac, is it not?"

"Yes, sire," answered Louvois; "it is indeed Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, and formerly governor of Canada."

"We are glad to see you once more at our lever," said the monarch, as the old nobleman stooped his head, and kissed the white hand which was extended to him. "I hope that the cold of Canada has not chilled the warmth of your loyalty."

"Only death itself, sire, would be cold enough for that."

"Then I trust that it may remain to us for many long years. We would thank you for the care and pains which you have spent upon our province, and if we have recalled you, it is chiefly that we would fain hear from your own lips how all things go there. And first, as the affairs of God take precedence of those of France, how does the conversion of the heathen prosper?"

"We cannot complain, sire. The good fathers, both Jesuits and Recollets, have done their best, though indeed they are both rather ready to abandon the affairs of the next world in order to meddle with those of this."

"What say you to that, father?" asked Louis, glancing, with a twinkle of the eyes, at his Jesuit confessor.

"I say, sire, that when the affairs of this world have a bearing upon those of the next, it is indeed the duty of a good priest, as of every other good Catholic, to guide them right."

"That is very true, sire," said De Frontenac, with an angry flush upon his swarthy cheek; "but as long as your Majesty did me the honour to intrust those affairs no my own guidance, I would brook no interference in the performance of my duties, whether the meddler were clad in coat or cassock."

"Enough, sir, enough!" said Louis sharply. "I had asked you about the missions."

"They prosper, sire. There are Iroquois at the Sault and the mountain, Hurons at Lorette, and Algonquins along the whole river cotes from Tadousac in the East to Sault la Marie, and even the great plains of the Dakotas, who have all taken the cross as their token. Marquette has passed down the river of the West to preach among the Illinois, and Jesuits have carried the Gospel to the warriors of the Long House in their wigwams at Onondaga."

"I may add, your Majesty," said Pere la Chaise, "that in leaving the truth there, they have too often left their lives with it."

"Yes, sire, it is very true," cried De Frontenac cordially. "Your Majesty has many brave men within your domains, but none braver than these. They have come back up the Richelieu River from the Iroquois villages with their nails gone, their fingers torn out, a cinder where their eye should be, and the scars of the pine splinters as thick upon their bodies as the fleurs-de-lis on yonder curtain. Yet, with a month of nursing from the good Ursulines, they have used their remaining eye to guide them back to the Indian country once more, where even the dogs have been frightened at their haggled faces and twisted limbs."

"And you have suffered this?" cried Louis hotly. "You allow these infamous assassins to live?"

"I have asked for troops, sire."

"And I have sent some."

"One regiment."

"The Carignan-Saliere. I have no better in my service.

"But more is needed, sire."

"There are the Canadians themselves. Have you not a militia? Could you not raise force enough to punish these rascally murderers of God's priests? I had always understood that you were a soldier."

De Frontenac's eyes flashed, and a quick answer seemed for an instant to tremble upon his lips, but with an effort the fiery old man restrained himself. "Your Majesty will learn best whether I am a soldier or not," said he, "by asking those who have seen me at Seneffe, Mulhausen, Salzbach, and half a score of other places where I had the honour of upholding your Majesty's cause."

"Your services have not been forgotten."

"It is just because I am a soldier and have seen something of war that I know how hard it is to penetrate into a country much larger than the Lowlands, all thick with forest and bog, with a savage lurking behind every tree, who, if he has not learned to step in time or to form line, can at least bring down the running caribou at two hundred paces, and travel three leagues to your one. And then when you have at last reached their villages, and burned their empty wigwams and a few acres of maize fields, what the better are you then? You can but travel back again to your own land with a cloud of unseen men lurking behind you, and a scalp-yell for every straggler. You are a soldier yourself, sire. I ask you if such a war is an easy task for a handful of soldiers, with a few censitaires straight from the plough, and a troop of coureurs-de-bois whose hearts are all the time are with their traps and their beaver-skins."

"No, no; I am sorry if I spoke too hastily," said Louis. "We shall look into the matter at our council."

"Then it warms my heart to hear you say so," cried the old governor. "There will be joy down the long St. Lawrence, in white hearts and in red, when it is known that their great father over the waters has turned his mind towards them."

"And yet you must not look for too much, for Canada has been a heavy cost to us, and we have many calls in Europe."

"Ah, sire, I would that you could see that great land. When your Majesty has won a campaign over here, what may come of it? Glory, a few miles of land Luxembourg, Strassburg, one more city in the kingdom; but over there, with a tenth of the cost and a hundredth part of the force, there is a world ready to your hand. It is so vast, sire, so rich, so beautiful! Where are there such hills, such forests, such rivers? And it is all for us if we will but take it. Who is there to stand in our way? A few nations of scattered Indians and a thin strip of English farmers and fishermen. Turn your thoughts there, sire, and in a few years you would be able to stand upon your citadel at Quebec, and to say there is one great empire here from the snows of the North to the warm Southern Gulf, and from the waves of the ocean to the great plains beyond Marquette's river, and the name of this empire is France, and her king is Louis, and her flag is the fleurs-de-lis."

Louis's cheek had flushed at this ambitious picture, and he had leaned forward in his chair, with flashing eyes, but he sank back again as the governor concluded.

"On my word, count," said he, "you have caught something of this gift of Indian eloquence of which we have heard. But about these English folk. They are Huguenots, are they not?"

"For the most part. Especially in the North."

"Then it might be a service to Holy Church to send them packing. They have a city there, I am told. New – New – How do they call it?"

"New York, sire. They took it from the Dutch."

"Ah, New York. And have I not heard of another? Bos – Bos – "

"Boston, sire."

"That is the name. The harbours might be of service to us. Tell me, now, Frontenac," lowering his voice so that his words might be audible only to the count, Louvois, and the royal circle, "what force would you need to clear these people out? One regiment, two regiments, and perhaps a frigate or two?"

But the ex-governor shook his grizzled head. "You do not know them, sire," said he. "They are stern folk, these. We in Canada, with all your gracious help, have found it hard to hold our own. Yet these men have had no help, but only hindrance, with cold and disease, and barren lands, and Indian wars, but they have thriven and multiplied until the woods thin away in front of them like ice in the sun, and their church bells are heard where but yesterday the wolves were howling. They are peaceful folk, and slow to war, but when they have set their hands to it, though they may be slack to begin, they are slacker still to cease. To put New England into your Majesty's hands, I would ask fifteen thousand of your best troops and twenty ships of the line."

Louis sprang impatiently from his chair, and caught up his cane. "I wish," said he, "that you would imitate these people who seem to you to be so formidable, in their excellent habit of doing things for themselves. The matter may stand until our council. Reverend father, it has struck the hour of chapel, and all else may wait until we have paid out duties to heaven." Taking a missal from the hands of an attendant, he walked as fast as his very high heels would permit him, towards the door, the court forming a lane through which he might pass, and then closing up behind to follow him in order of precedence.

Chapter III. The holding of the door

Whilst Louis had been affording his court that which he had openly stated to be the highest of human pleasures – the sight of the royal face – the young officer of the guard outside had been very busy passing on the titles of the numerous applicants for admission, and exchanging usually a smile or a few words of greeting with them, for his frank, handsome face was a well-known one at the court. With his merry eyes and his brisk bearing, he looked like a man who was on good terms with Fortune. Indeed, he had good cause to be so, for she had used him well. Three years ago he had been an unknown subaltern bush-fighting with Algonquins and Iroquois in the wilds of Canada. An exchange had brought him back to France and into the regiment of Picardy, but the lucky chance of having seized the bridle of the king's horse one winter's day in Fontainebleau when the creature was plunging within a few yards of a deep gravel-pit had done for him what ten campaigns might have failed to accomplish. Now as a trusted officer of the king's guard, young, gallant, and popular, his lot was indeed an enviable one. And yet, with the strange perversity of human nature, he was already surfeited with the dull if magnificent routine of the king's household, and looked back with regret to the rougher and freer days of his early service. Even there at the royal door his mind had turned away from the frescoed passage and the groups of courtiers to the wild ravines and foaming rivers of the West, when suddenly his eyes lit upon a face which he had last seen among those very scenes.

"Ah, Monsieur de Frontenac!" he cried. "You cannot have forgotten me."

"What! De Catinat! Ah, it is a joy indeed to see a face from over the water! But there is a long step between a subaltern in the Carignan and a captain in the guards. You have risen rapidly."

"Yes; and yet I may be none the happier for it. There are times when I would give it all to be dancing down the Lachine Rapids in a birch canoe, or to see the red and the yellow on those hill-sides once more at the fall of the leaf."

"Ay," sighed De Frontenac. "You know that my fortunes have sunk as yours have risen. I have been recalled, and De la Barre is in my place. But there will be a storm there which such a man as he can never stand against. With the Iroquois all dancing the scalp-dance, and Dongan behind them in New York to whoop them on, they will need me, and they will find me waiting when they send. I will see the king now, and try if I cannot rouse him to play the great monarch there as well as here. Had I but his power in my hands, I should change the world's history."

"Hush! No treason to the captain of the guard," cried De Catinat, laughing, while the stern old soldier strode past him into the king's presence.

A gentleman very richly dressed in black and silver had come up during this short conversation, and advanced, as the door opened, with the assured air of a man whose rights are beyond dispute. Captain de Catinat, however, took a quick step forward, and barred him off from the door.

"I am very sorry, Monsieur de Vivonne," said he, "but you are forbidden the presence."

"Forbidden the presence! I? You are mad!" He stepped back with gray face and staring eyes, one shaking hand half raised in protest,

"I assure you that it is his order."

"But it is incredible. It is a mistake."

"Very possibly."

"Then you will let me past."

"My orders leave me no discretion."

"If I could have one word with the king."

"Unfortunately, monsieur, it is impossible."

"Only one word."

"It really does not rest with me, monsieur."

The angry nobleman stamped his foot, and stared at the door as though he had some thoughts of forcing a passage. Then turning on his heel, he hastened away down the corridor with the air of a man who has come to a decision.

"There, now," grumbled De Catinat to himself, as he pulled at his thick dark moustache, "he is off to make some fresh mischief. I'll have his sister here presently, as like as not, and a pleasant little choice between breaking my orders and making an enemy of her for life. I'd rather hold Fort Richelieu against the Iroquois than the king's door against an angry woman. By my faith, here is a lady, as I feared! Ah, Heaven be praised! it is a friend, and not a foe. Good-morning, Mademoiselle Nanon."

"Good-morning, Captain de Catinat."

The new-comer was a tall, graceful brunette, her fresh face and sparkling black eyes the brighter in contrast with her plain dress.

"I am on guard, you see. I cannot talk with you."

"I cannot remember having asked monsieur to talk with me."

"Ah, but you must not pout in that pretty way, or else I cannot help talking to you," whispered the captain. "What is this in your hand, then?"

"A note from Madame de Maintenon to the king. You will hand it to him, will you not?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle. And how is Madame, your mistress?"

"Oh, her director has been with her all the morning, and his talk is very, very good; but it is also very, very sad. We are not very cheerful when Monsieur Godet has been to see us. But I forget monsieur is a Huguenot, and knows nothing of directors."

"Oh, but I do not trouble about such differences. I let the Sorbonne and Geneva fight it out between them. Yet a man must stand by his family, you know."

"Ah! if Monsieur could talk to Madame de Maintenon a little! She would convert him."

"I would rather talk to Mademoiselle Nanon, but if – "

"Oh!" There was an exclamation, a whisk of dark skirts, and the soubrette had disappeared down a side passage.

Along the broad, lighted corridor was gliding a very stately and beautiful lady, tall, graceful, and exceedingly haughty. She was richly clad in a bodice of gold-coloured camlet and a skirt of gray silk trimmed with gold and silver lace. A handkerchief of priceless Genoa point half hid and half revealed her beautiful throat, and was fastened in front by a cluster of pearls, while a rope of the same, each one worth a bourgeois' income, was coiled in and out through her luxuriant hair. The lady was past her first youth, it is true, but the magnificent curves of her queenly figure, the purity of her complexion, the brightness of her deep-lashed blue eyes and the clear regularity of her features enabled her still to claim to be the most handsome as well as the most sharp-tongued woman in the court of France. So beautiful was her bearing, the carriage of her dainty head upon her proud white neck, and the sweep of her stately walk, that the young officer's fears were overpowered in his admiration, and he found it hard, as he raised his hand in salute, to retain the firm countenance which his duties demanded.

"Ah, it is Captain de Catinat," said Madame de Montespan, with a smile which was more embarrassing to him than any frown could have been.

"Your humble servant, marquise."

"I am fortunate in finding a friend here, for there has been some ridiculous mistake this morning."

"I am concerned to hear it."

"It was about my brother, Monsieur de Vivonne. It is almost too laughable to mention, but he was actually refused admission to the lever."

"It was my misfortune to have to refuse him, madame."

"You, Captain de Catinat? And by what right?" She had drawn up her superb figure, and her large blue eyes were blazing with indignant astonishment.

"The king's order, madame."

"The king! Is it likely that the king would cast a public slight upon my family? From whom had you this preposterous order?"

"Direct from the king through Bontems."

"Absurd! Do you think that the king would venture to exclude a Mortemart through the mouth of a valet? You have been dreaming, captain."

"I trust that it may prove so, madame."

"But such dreams are not very fortunate to the dreamer. Go, tell the king that I am here, and would have a word with him."

"Impossible, madame."

"And why?"

"I have been forbidden to carry a message."

"To carry any message?"

"Any from you, madame."

"Come, captain, you improve. It only needed this insult to make the thing complete. You may carry a message to the king from any adventuress, from any decayed governess" – she laughed shrilly at her description of her rival – "but none from Francoise de Mortemart, Marquise de Montespan?"

"Such are my orders, madame. It pains me deeply to be compelled to carry them out."

"You may spare your protestations, captain. You may yet find that you have every reason to be deeply pained. For the last time, do you refuse to carry my message to the king?"

"I must, madame."

"Then I carry it myself."

She sprang forward at the door, but he slipped in front of her with outstretched arms.

"For God's sake, consider yourself, madame!" he entreated. "Other eyes are upon you."

"Pah! Canaille!" She glanced at the knot of Switzers, whose sergeant had drawn them off a few paces, and who stood open-eyed, staring at the scene.

"I tell you that I will see the king."

"No lady has ever been at the morning lever."

"Then I shall be the first."

"You will ruin me if you pass."

"And none the less, I shall do so."

The matter looked serious. De Catinat was a man of resource, but for once he was at his wits' end. Madame de Montespan's resolution, as it was called in her presence, or effrontery, as it was termed behind her back, was proverbial. If she attempted to force her way, would he venture to use violence upon one who only yesterday had held the fortunes of the whole court in the hollow of her hand, and who, with her beauty, her wit, and her energy, might very well be in the same position to-morrow? If she passed him, then his future was ruined with the king, who never brooked the smallest deviation from his orders. On the other hand, if he thrust her back, he did that which could never be forgiven, and which would entail some deadly vengeance should she return to power. It was an unpleasant dilemma. But a happy thought flashed into his mind at the very moment when she, with clenched hand and flashing eyes, was on the point of making a fresh attempt to pass him.

"If madame would deign to wait," said he soothingly, "the king will be on his way to the chapel in an instant."

"It is not yet time."

"I think the hour has just gone."

"And why should I wait, like a lackey?"

"It is but a moment, madame."

"No, I shall not wait." She took a step forward towards the door.

But the guardsman's quick ear had caught the sound of moving feet from within, and he knew that he was master of the situation.

"I will take Madame's message," said he.

"Ah, you have recovered your senses! Go, tell the king that I wish to speak with him."

He must gain a little time yet. "Shall I say it through the lord in waiting?"

"No; yourself."

"Publicly?"

"No, no; for his private ear."

"Shall I give a reason for your request?"

"Oh, you madden me! Say what I have told you, and at once."

But the young officer's dilemma was happily over.

At that instant the double doors were swung open, and Louis appeared in the opening, strutting forwards on his high-heeled shoes, his stick tapping, his broad skirts flapping, and his courtiers spreading out behind him. He stopped as he came out, and turned to the captain of the guard.

"You have a note for me?"

"Yes, sire."

The monarch slipped it into the pocket of his scarlet undervest, and was advancing once more when his eyes fell upon Madame de Montespan standing very stiff and erect in the middle of the passage. A dark flush of anger shot to his brow, and he walked swiftly past her without a word; but she turned and kept pace with him down the corridor.

"I had not expected this honour, madame," said he.

"Nor had I expected this insult, sire."

"An insult, madame? You forget yourself."

"No; it is you who have forgotten me, sire."

"You intrude upon me."

"I wished to hear my fate from your own lips," she whispered. "I can bear to be struck myself, sire, even by him who has my heart. But it is hard to hear that one's brother has been wounded through the mouths of valets and Huguenot soldiers for no fault of his, save that his sister has loved too fondly."

"It is no time to speak of such things."

"When can I see you, then, sire?"

"In your chamber."

"At what hour?"

"At four."

"Then I shall trouble your Majesty no further." She swept him one of the graceful courtesies for which she was famous, and turned away down a side passage with triumph shining in her eyes. Her beauty and her spirit had never failed her yet, and now that she had the monarch's promise of an interview she never doubted that she could do as she had done before, and win back the heart of the man, however much against the conscience of the king.

Chapter IV. The father of his people

Louis had walked on to his devotions in no very charitable frame of mind, as was easily to be seen from his clouded brow and compressed lips. He knew his late favourite well, her impulsiveness, her audacity, her lack of all restraint when thwarted or opposed. She was capable of making a hideous scandal, of turning against him that bitter tongue which had so often made him laugh at the expense of others, perhaps even of making some public exposure which would leave him the butt and gossip of Europe. He shuddered at the thought. At all costs such a catastrophe must be averted. And yet how could he cut the tie which bound them? He had broken other such bonds as these; but the gentle La Valliere had shrunk into a convent at the very first glance which had told her of waning love. That was true affection. But this woman would struggle hard, fight to the bitter end, before she would quit the position which was so dear to her. She spoke of her wrongs. What were her wrongs? In his intense selfishness, nurtured by the eternal flattery which was the very air he breathed, he could not see that the fifteen years of her life which he had absorbed, or the loss of the husband whom he had supplanted, gave her any claim upon him. In his view he had raised her to the highest position which a subject could occupy. Now he was weary of her, and it was her duty to retire with resignation, nay, even with gratitude for past favours. She should have a pension, and the children should be cared for. What could a reasonable woman ask for more?

And then his motives for discarding her were so excellent. He turned them over in his mind as he knelt listening to the Archbishop of Paris reciting the Mass, and the more he thought, the more he approved. His conception of the deity was as a larger Louis, and of heaven as a more gorgeous Versailles. If he exacted obedience from his twenty millions, then he must show it also to this one who had a right to demand it of him. On the whole, his conscience acquitted him. But in this one matter he had been lax. From the first coming of his gentle and forgiving young wife from Spain, he had never once permitted her to be without a rival. Now that she was dead, the matter was no better. One favourite had succeeded another, and if De Montespan had held her own so long, it was rather from her audacity than from his affection. But now Father La Chaise and Bossuet were ever reminding him that he had topped the summit of his life, and was already upon that downward path which leads to the grave. His wild outburst over the unhappy Fontanges had represented the last flicker of his passions. The time had come for gravity and for calm, neither of which was to be expected in the company of Madame de Montespan.

But he had found out where they were to be enjoyed. From the day when De Montespan had introduced the stately and silent widow as a governess for his children, he had found a never-failing and ever-increasing pleasure in her society. In the early days of her coming he had sat for hours in the rooms of his favourite, watching the tact and sweetness of temper with which her dependent controlled the mutinous spirits of the petulant young Duc du Maine and the mischievous little Comte de Toulouse. He had been there nominally for the purpose of superintending the teaching, but he had confined himself to admiring the teacher. And then in time he too had been drawn into the attraction of that strong sweet nature, and had found himself consulting her upon points of conduct, and acting upon her advice with a docility which he had never shown before to minister or mistress. For a time he had thought that her piety and her talk of principle might be a mere mask, for he was accustomed to hypocrisy all round him. It was surely unlikely that a woman who was still beautiful, with as bright an eye and as graceful a figure as any in his court, could, after a life spent in the gayest circles, preserve the spirit of a nun. But on this point he was soon undeceived, for when his own language had become warmer than that of friendship, he had been met by an iciness of manner and a brevity of speech which had shown him that there was one woman at least in his dominions who had a higher respect for herself than for him. And perhaps it was better so. The placid pleasures of friendship were very soothing after the storms of passion. To sit in her room every afternoon, to listen to talk which was

not tainted with flattery, and to hear opinions which were not framed to please his ear, were the occupations now of his happiest hours. And then her influence over him was all so good! She spoke of his kingly duties, of his example to his subjects, of his preparation for the World beyond, and of the need for an effort to snap the guilty ties which he had formed. She was as good as a confessor – a confessor with a lovely face and a perfect arm.

And now he knew that the time had come when he must choose between her and De Montespan. Their influences were antagonistic. They could not continue together. He stood between virtue and vice, and he must choose. Vice was very attractive too, very comely, very witty, and holding him by that chain of custom which is so hard to shake off. There were hours when his nature swayed strongly over to that side, and when he was tempted to fall back into his old life. But Bossuet and Pere la Chaise were ever at his elbows to whisper encouragement, and, above all, there was Madame de Maintenon to remind him of what was due to his position and to his six-and-forty years. Now at last he had braced himself for a supreme effort. There was no safety for him while his old favourite was at court. He knew himself too well to have any faith in a lasting change so long as she was there ever waiting for his moment of weakness. She must be persuaded to leave Versailles, if without a scandal it could be done. He would be firm when he met her in the afternoon, and make her understand once for all that her reign was forever over.

Such were the thoughts which ran through the king's head as he bent over the rich crimson cushion which topped his prie-dieu of carved oak. He knelt in his own enclosure to the right of the altar, with his guards and his immediate household around him, while the court, ladies and cavaliers, filled the chapel. Piety was a fashion now, like dark overcoats and lace cravats, and no courtier was so worldly-minded as not to have had a touch of grace since the king had taken to religion. Yet they looked very bored, these soldiers and seigneurs, yawning and blinking over the missals, while some who seemed more intent upon their devotions were really dipping into the latest romance of Scudery or Calpernedi, cunningly bound up in a sombre cover. The ladies, indeed, were more devout, and were determined that all should see it, for each had lit a tiny taper, which she held in front of her on the plea of lighting up her missal, but really that her face might be visible to the king, and inform him that hers was a kindred spirit. A few there may have been, here and there, whose prayers rose from their hearts, and who were there of their own free will; but the policy of Louis had changed his noblemen into courtiers and his men of the world into hypocrites, until the whole court was like one gigantic mirror which reflected his own likeness a hundredfold.

It was the habit of Louis, as he walked back from the chapel, to receive petitions or to listen to any tales of wrong which his subjects might bring to him. His way, as he returned to his rooms, lay partly across an open space, and here it was that the suppliants were wont to assemble. On this particular morning there were but two or three – a Parisian, who conceived himself injured by the provost of his guild, a peasant whose cow had been torn by a huntsman's dog, and a farmer who had had hard usage from his feudal lord. A few questions and then a hurried order to his secretary disposed of each case, for if Louis was a tyrant himself, he had at least the merit that he insisted upon being the only one within his kingdom. He was about to resume his way again, when an elderly man, clad in the garb of a respectable citizen, and with a strong deep-lined face which marked him as a man of character, darted forward, and threw himself down upon one knee in front of the monarch.

"Justice, sire, justice!" he cried.

"What is this, then?" asked Louis. "Who are you, and what is it that you want?"

"I am a citizen of Paris, and I have been cruelly wronged."

"You seem a very worthy person. If you have indeed been wronged you shall have redress. What have you to complain of?"

"Twenty of the Blue Dragoons of Languedoc are quartered in my house, with Captain Dalbert at their head. They have devoured my food, stolen my property, and beaten my servants, yet the magistrates will give me no redress.'

"On my life, justice seems to be administered in a strange fashion in our city of Paris!" exclaimed the king wrathfully.

"It is indeed a shameful case," said Bossuet.

"And yet there may be a very good reason for it," suggested Pere la Chaise. "I would suggest that your Majesty should ask this man his name, his business, and why it was that the dragoons were quartered upon him."

"You hear the reverend father's question."

"My name, sire, is Catinat, by trade I am a merchant in cloth, and I am treated in this fashion because I am of the Reformed Church."

"I thought as much!" cried the confessor.

"That alters matters," said Bossuet.

The king shook his head and his brow darkened. "You have only yourself to thank, then. The remedy is in your hands."

"And how, sire?"

"By embracing the only true faith."

"I am already a member of it, sire."

The king stamped his foot angrily. "I can see that you are a very insolent heretic," said he. "There is but one Church in France, and that is my Church. If you are outside that, you cannot look to me for aid."

"My creed is that of my father, sire, and of my grandfather."

"If they have sinned it is no reason why you should. My own grandfather erred also before his eyes were opened."

"But he nobly atoned for his error," murmured the Jesuit.

"Then you will not help me, sire?"

"You must first help yourself."

The old Huguenot stood up with a gesture of despair, while the king continued on his way, the two ecclesiastics, on either side of him, murmuring their approval into his ears.

"You have done nobly, sire."

"You are truly the first son of the Church."

"You are the worthy successor of St. Louis."

But the king bore the face of a man who was not absolutely satisfied with his own action.

"You do not think, then, that these people have too hard a measure?" said he.

"Too hard? Nay, your Majesty errs on the side of mercy."

"I hear that they are leaving my kingdom in great numbers."

"And surely it is better so, sire; for what blessing can come upon a country which has such stubborn infidels within its boundaries?"

"Those who are traitors to God can scarce be loyal to the king," remarked Bossuet. "Your Majesty's power would be greater if there were no temple, as they call their dens of heresy, within your dominions."

"My grandfather promised them protection. They are shielded, as you well know, by the edict which be gave at Nantes."

"But it lies with your Majesty to undo the mischief that has been done."

"And how?"

"By recalling the edict."

"And driving into the open arms of my enemies two millions of my best artisans and of my bravest servants. No, no, father, I have, I trust, every zeal for Mother-Church, but there is some truth in what De Frontenac said this morning of the evil which comes from mixing the affairs of this world with those of the next. How say you, Louvois?"

"With all respect to the Church, sire, I would say that the devil has given these men such cunning of hand and of brain that they are the best workers and traders in your Majesty's kingdom. I know not how the state coffers are to be filled if such tax-payers go from among us. Already many have left the country and taken their trades with them. If all were to go, it would be worse for us than a lost campaign."

"But," remarked Bossuet, "if it were once known that the king's will had been expressed, your Majesty may rest assured that even the worst of his subjects bear him such love that they would hasten to come within the pale of Holy Church. As long as the edict stands, it seems to them that the king is lukewarm, and that they may abide in their error."

The king shook his head. "They have always been stubborn folk," said he.

"Perhaps," remarked Louvois, glancing maliciously at Bossuet, "were the bishops of France to make an offering to the state of the treasures of their sees, we might then do without these Huguenot taxes."

"All that the Church has is at the king's service," answered Bossuet curtly.

"The kingdom is mine and all that is in it," remarked Louis, as they entered the Grand Salon, in which the court assembled after chapel, "yet I trust that it may be long before I have to claim the wealth of the Church."

"We trust so, sire," echoed the ecclesiastics.

"But we may reserve such topics for our council-chamber. Where is Mansard? I must see his plans for the new wing at Marly." He crossed to a side table, and was buried in an instant in his favourite pursuit, inspecting the gigantic plans of the great architect, and inquiring eagerly as to the progress of the work.

"I think," said Pere la Chaise, drawing Bossuet aside, "that your Grace has made some impression upon the king's mind."

"With your powerful assistance, father."

"Oh, you may rest assured that I shall lose no opportunity of pushing on the good work."

"If you take it in hand, it is done."

"But there is another who has more weight than I."

"The favourite, De Montespan?"

"No, no; her day is gone. It is Madame de Maintenon."

"I hear that she is very devout."

"Very. But she has no love for my Order. She is a Sulpitian. Yet we may all work to one end. Now if you were to speak to her, your Grace."

"With all my heart."

"Show her how good a service it would be could she bring about the banishment of the Huguenots."

"I shall do so."

"And offer her in return that we will promote – " he bent forward and whispered into the prelate's ear.

"What! He would not do it!"

"And why? The queen is dead."

"The widow of the poet Scarron!"

"She is of good birth. Her grandfather and his were dear friends."

"It is impossible."

"But I know his heart, and I say it is possible."

"You certainly know his heart, father, if any can. But such a thought had never entered my head."

"Then let it enter and remain there. If she will serve the Church, the Church will serve her. But the king beckons, and I must go."

The thin dark figure hastened off through the throng of courtiers, and the great Bishop of Meaux remained standing with his chin upon his breast, sunk in reflection.

By this time all the court was assembled in the Grand Salon, and the huge room was gay from end to end with the silks, the velvets, and the brocades of the ladies, the glitter of jewels, the flirt of painted fans, and the sweep of plume or aigrette. The grays, blacks, and browns of the men's coats toned down the mass of colour, for all must be dark when the king was dark, and only the blues of the officers' uniforms, and the pearl and gray of the musketeers of the guard, remained to call back those early days of the reign when the men had vied with the women in the costliness and brilliancy of their wardrobes. And if dresses had changed, manners had done so even more. The old levity and the old passions lay doubtless very near the surface, but grave faces and serious talk were the fashion of the hour. It was no longer the lucky coup at the lansquenet table, the last comedy of Moliere, or the new opera of Lully about which they gossiped, but it was on the evils of Jansenism, on the expulsion of Arnauld from the Sorbonne, on the insolence of Pascal, or on the comparative merits of two such popular preachers as Bourdaloue and Massilon. So, under a radiant ceiling and over a many-coloured floor, surrounded by immortal paintings, set thickly in gold and ornament, there moved these nobles and ladies of France, all moulding themselves upon the one little dark figure in their midst, who was himself so far from being his own master that he hung balanced even now between two rival women, who were playing a game in which the future of France and his own destiny were the stakes.

Chapter V. Children of Belial

The elderly Huguenot had stood silent after his repulse by the king, with his eyes cast moodily downwards, and a face in which doubt, sorrow, and anger contended for the mastery. He was a very large, gaunt man, raw-boned and haggard, with a wide forehead, a large, fleshy nose, and a powerful chin. He wore neither wig nor powder, but Nature had put her own silvering upon his thick grizzled locks, and the thousand puckers which clustered round the edges of his eyes, or drew at the corners of his mouth, gave a set gravity to his face which needed no device of the barber to increase it. Yet in spite of his mature years, the swift anger with which he had sprung up when the king refused his plaint, and the keen fiery glance which he had shot at the royal court as they filed past him with many a scornful smile and whispered gibe at his expense, all showed that he had still preserved something of the strength and of the spirit of his youth. He was dressed as became his rank, plainly and yet well, in a sad-coloured brown kersey coat with silver-plated buttons, knee-breeches of the same, and white woollen stockings, ending in broad-toed black leather shoes cut across with a great steel buckle. In one hand he carried his low felt hat, trimmed with gold edging, and in the other a little cylinder of paper containing a recital of his wrongs, which he had hoped to leave in the hands of the king's secretary.

His doubts as to what his next step should be were soon resolved for him in a very summary fashion. These were days when, if the Huguenot was not absolutely forbidden in France, he was at least looked upon as a man who existed upon sufferance, and who was unshielded by the laws which protected his Catholic fellow-subjects. For twenty years the stringency of the persecution had increased until there was no weapon which bigotry could employ, short of absolute expulsion, which had not been turned against him. He was impeded in his business, elbowed out of all public employment, his house filled with troops, his children encouraged to rebel against him, and all redress refused him for the insults and assaults to which he was subjected. Every rascal who wished to gratify his personal spite, or to gain favour with his bigoted superiors, might do his worst upon him without fear of the law. Yet, in spite of all, these men clung to the land which disowned them, and, full of the love for their native soil which lies so deep in a Frenchman's heart, preferred insult and contumely at home to the welcome which would await them beyond the seas. Already, however, the shadow of those days was falling upon them when the choice should no longer be theirs.

Two of the king's big blue-coated guardsmen were on duty at that side of the palace, and had been witnesses to his unsuccessful appeal. Now they tramped across together to where he was standing, and broke brutally into the current of his thoughts.

"Now, Hymn-books," said one gruffly, "get off again about your business."

"You're not a very pretty ornament to the king's pathway," cried the other, with a hideous oath. "Who are you, to turn up your nose at the king's religion, curse you?"

The old Huguenot shot a glance of anger and contempt at them, and was turning to go, when one of them thrust at his ribs with the butt end of his halberd.

"Take that, you dog!" he cried. "Would you dare to look like that at the king's guard?"

"Children of Belial," cried the old man, with his hand pressed to his side, "were I twenty years younger you would not have dared to use me so."

"Ha! you would still spit your venom, would you? That is enough, Andre! He has threatened the king's guard. Let us seize him and drag him to the guard-room."

The two soldiers dropped their halberds and rushed upon the old man, but, tall and strong as they were, they found it no easy matter to secure him. With his long sinewy arms and his wiry frame, he shook himself clear of them again and again, and it was only when his breath had failed him that the two, torn and panting, were able to twist round his wrists, and so secure him. They had hardly won their pitiful victory, however, before a stern voice and a sword flashing before their eyes, compelled them to release their prisoner once more.

It was Captain de Catinat, who, his morning duties over, had strolled out on to the terrace, and had come upon this sudden scene of outrage. At the sight of the old man's face he gave a violent start, and drawing his sword, had rushed forward with such fury that the two guardsmen not only dropped their victim, but, staggering back from the threatening sword-point, one of them slipped and the other rolled over him, a revolving mass of blue coat and white kersey.

"Villains!" roared De Catinat. "What is the meaning of this?"

The two had stumbled on to their feet again, very shamefaced and ruffled.

"If you please, captain," said one, saluting, "this is a Huguenot who abused the royal guard."

"His petition had been rejected by the king, captain, and yet he refused to go."

De Catinat was white with fury. "And so, when a French citizen has come to have a word with the great master of his country, he must be harassed by two Swiss dogs like you?" he cried. "By my faith, we shall soon see about that!"

He drew a little silver whistle from his pocket, and at the shrill summons an old sergeant and half a dozen soldiers came running from the guard-room.

"Your names?" asked the captain sternly.

"Andre Meunier."

"And yours?"

"Nicholas Klopper."

"Sergeant, you will arrest these men, Meunier and Klopper."

"Certainly, captain," said the sergeant, a dark grizzled old soldier of Conde and Turenne.

"See that they are tried to-day."

"And on what charge, captain?"

"For assaulting an aged and respected citizen who had come on business to the king."

"He was a Huguenot on his own confession," cried the culprits together.

"Hum!" The sergeant pulled doubtfully at his long moustache. "Shall we put the charge in that form, captain? Just as the captain pleases." He gave a little shrug of his epauletted shoulders to signify his doubt whether any good could arise from it.

"No," said De Catinat, with a sudden happy thought. "I charge them with laying their halberds down while on duty, and with having their uniforms dirty and disarranged."

"That is better," answered the sergeant, with the freedom of a privileged veteran. "Thunder of God, but you have disgraced the guards! An hour on the wooden horse with a musket at either foot may teach you that halberds were made for a soldier's hand, and not for the king's grass-plot. Seize them! Attention! Right half turn! March!"

And away went the little clump of guardsmen with the sergeant in the rear.

The Huguenot had stood in the background, grave and composed, without any sign of exultation, during this sudden reversal of fortune; but when the soldiers were gone, he and the young officer turned warmly upon each other.

"Amory, I had not hoped to see you!"

"Nor I you, uncle. What, in the name of wonder, brings you to Versailles?"

"My wrongs, Amory. The hand of the wicked is heavy upon us, and whom can we turn to save only the king?"

The young officer shook his head. "The king is at heart a good man," said he. "But he can only see the world through the glasses which are held before him. You have nothing to hope from him."

"He spurned me from his presence."

"Did he ask your name?"

"He did, and I gave it."

The young guardsman whistled. "Let us walk to the gate," said he. "By my faith, if my kinsmen are to come and bandy arguments with the king, it may not be long before my company finds itself without its captain."

"The king would not couple us together. But indeed, nephew, it is strange to me how you can live in this house of Baal and yet bow down to no false gods."

"I keep my belief in my own heart."

The older man shook his head gravely.

"Your ways lie along a very narrow path," said he, "with temptation and danger ever at your feet. It is hard for you to walk with the Lord, Amory, and yet go hand in hand with the persecutors of His people."

"Tut, uncle!" said the young man impatiently. "I am a soldier of the king's, and I am willing to let the black gown and the white surplice settle these matters between them. Let me live in honour and die in my duty, and I am content to wait to know the rest."

"Content, too, to live in palaces, and eat from fine linen," said the Huguenot bitterly, "when the hands of the wicked are heavy upon your kinsfolk, and there is a breaking of phials, and a pouring forth of tribulation, and a wailing and a weeping throughout the land."

"What is amiss, then?" asked the young soldier, who was somewhat mystified by the scriptural language in use among the French Calvinists of the day.

"Twenty men of Moab have been quartered upon me, with one Dalbert, their captain, who has long been a scourge to Israel."

"Captain Claude Dalbert, of the Languedoc Dragoons? I have already some small score to settle with him."

"Ay, and the scattered remnant has also a score against this murderous dog and self-seeking Ziphite."

"What has he done, then?"

"His men are over my house like moths in a cloth bale. No place is free from them. He sits in the room which should be mine, his great boots on my Spanish leather chairs, his pipe in his mouth, his wine-pot at his elbow, and his talk a hissing and an abomination. He has beaten old Pierre of the warehouse."

"Ha!"

"And thrust me into the cellar."

"Ha!"

"Because I have dragged him back when in his drunken love he would have thrown his arms about your cousin Adele."

"Oh!" The young man's colour had been rising and his brows knitted at each successive charge, but at this last his anger boiled over, and he hurried forward with fury in his face, dragging his elderly companion by the elbow. They had been passing through one of those winding paths, bordered by high hedges, which thinned away every here and there to give a glimpse of some prowling faun or weary nymph who slumbered in marble amid the foliage. The few courtiers who met them gazed with surprise at so ill-assorted a pair of companions. But the young soldier was too full of his own plans to waste a thought upon their speculations. Still hurrying on, he followed a crescent path which led past a dozen stone dolphins shooting water out of their mouths over a group of Tritons, and so through an avenue of great trees which looked as if they had grown there for centuries, and yet had in truth been carried over that very year by incredible labour from St. Germain and Fontainebleau. Beyond this point a small gate led out of the grounds, and it was through it that the two passed, the elder man puffing and panting with this unusual haste.

"How did you come, uncle?"

"In a caleche."

"Where is it?"

"That is it, beyond the auberge."

"Come, let us make for it."

"And you, Amory, are you coming?"

"My faith, it is time that I came, from what you tell me. There is room for a man with a sword at his side in this establishment of yours."

"But what would you do?"

"I would have a word with this Captain Dalbert."

"Then I have wronged you, nephew, when I said even now that you were not whole-hearted towards Israel."

"I know not about Israel," cried De Catinat impatiently. "I only know that if my Adele chose to worship the thunder like an Abenaqui squaw, or turned her innocent prayers to the Mitche Manitou, I should like to set eyes upon the man who would dare to lay a hand upon her. Ha, here comes our caleche! Whip up, driver, and five livres to you if you pass the gate of the Invalides within the hour."

It was no light matter to drive fast in an age of springless carriages and deeply rutted roads, but the driver lashed at his two rough unclipped horses, and the caleche jolted and clattered upon its way. As they sped on, with the road-side trees dancing past the narrow windows, and the white dust streaming behind them, the guardsman drummed his fingers upon his knees, and fidgeted in his seat with impatience, shooting an occasional question across at his grim companion.

"When was all this, then?"

"It was yesterday night."

"And where is Adele now?"

"She is at home."

"And this Dalbert?"

"Oh, he is there also!"

"What! you have left her in his power while you came away to Versailles?"

"She is locked in her room."

"Pah! what is a lock?" The young man raved with his hands in the air at the thought of his own impotence.

"And Pierre is there?"

"He is useless."

"And Amos Green."

"Ah, that is better. He is a man, by the look of him."

"His mother was one of our own folk from Staten Island, near Manhattan. She was one of those scattered lambs who fled early before the wolves, when first it was seen that the king's hand waxed heavy upon Israel. He speaks French, and yet he is neither French to the eye, nor are his ways like our ways."

"He has chosen an evil time for his visit."

"Some wise purpose may lie hid in it."

"And you have left him in the house?"

"Yes; he was sat with this Dalbert, smoking with him, and telling him strange tales."

"What guard could he be? He is a stranger in a strange land. You did ill to leave Adele thus, uncle."

"She is in God's hands, Amory."

"I trust so. Oh, I am on fire to be there!"

He thrust his head through the cloud of dust which rose from the wheels, and craned his neck to look upon the long curving river and broad-spread city, which was already visible before them, half hid by a thin blue haze, through which shot the double tower of Notre Dame, with the high spire of St. Jacques and a forest of other steeples and minarets, the monuments of eight hundred years of devotion. Soon, as the road curved down to the river-bank, the city wall grew nearer and nearer, until they had passed the southern gate, and were rattling over the stony causeway, leaving the broad Luxembourg upon their right, and Colbert's last work, the Invalides, upon their left. A sharp turn brought them on to the river quays, and crossing over the Pont Neuf, they skirted the stately Louvre,

and plunged into the labyrinth of narrow but important streets which extended to the northward. The young officer had his head still thrust out of the window, but his view was obscured by a broad gilded carriage which lumbered heavily along in front of them. As the road broadened, however, it swerved to one side, and he was able to catch a glimpse of the house to which they were making.

It was surrounded on every side by an immense crowd.

Chapter VI. A house of strife

The house of the Huguenot merchant was a tall, narrow building standing at the corner of the Rue St. Martin and the Rue de Biron. It was four stories in height, grim and grave like its owner, with high peaked roof, long diamond-paned windows, a frame-work of black wood, with gray plaster filling the interstices, and five stone steps which led up to the narrow and sombre door. The upper story was but a warehouse in which the trader kept his stock, but the second and third were furnished with balconies edged with stout wooden balustrades. As the uncle and the nephew sprang out of the caleche, they found themselves upon the outskirts of a dense crowd of people, who were swaying and tossing with excitement, their chins all thrown forwards and their gaze directed upwards. Following their eyes, the young officer saw a sight which left him standing bereft of every sensation save amazement.

From the upper balcony there was hanging head downwards a man clad in the bright blue coat and white breeches of one of the king's dragoons. His hat and wig had dropped off, and his close-cropped head swung slowly backwards and forwards a good fifty feet above the pavement. His face was turned towards the street, and was of a deadly whiteness, while his eyes were screwed up as though he dared not open them upon the horror which faced them. His voice, however, resounded over the whole place until the air was filled with his screams for mercy.

Above him, at the corner of the balcony, there stood a young man who leaned with a bent back over the balustrades, and who held the dangling dragoon by either ankle. His face, however, was not directed towards his victim, but was half turned over his shoulder to confront a group of soldiers who were clustering at the long, open window which led out into the balcony. His head, as he glanced at them, was poised with a proud air of defiance, while they surged and oscillated in the opening, uncertain whether to rush on or to retire.

Suddenly the crowd gave a groan of excitement. The young man had released his grip upon one of the ankles, and the dragoon hung now by one only, his other leg flapping helplessly in the air. He grabbed aimlessly with his hands at the wall and the wood-work behind him, still yelling at the pitch of his lungs.

"Pull me up, son of the devil, pull me up!" he screamed. "Would you murder me, then? Help, good people, help!"

"Do you want to come up, captain?" said the strong clear voice of the young man above him, speaking excellent French, but in an accent which fell strangely upon the ears of the crowd beneath.

"Yes, sacred name of God, yes!"

"Order off your men, then."

"Away, you dolts, you imbeciles! Do you wish to see me dashed to pieces? Away, I say! Off with you!"

"That is better," said the youth, when the soldiers had vanished from the window. He gave a tug at the dragoon's leg as he spoke, which jerked him up so far that he could twist round and catch hold of the lower edge of the balcony. "How do you find yourself now?" he asked.

"Hold me, for heaven's sake, hold me!"

"I have you quite secure."

"Then pull me up!"

"Not so fast, captain. You can talk very well where you are."

"Let me up, sir, let me up!"

"All in good time. I fear that it is inconvenient to you to talk with your heels in the air."

"Ah, you would murder me!"

"On the contrary, I am going to pull you up."

"Heaven bless you!"

"But only on conditions."

"Oh, they are granted! I am slipping!"

"You will leave this house – you and your men. You will not trouble this old man or this young girl any further. Do you promise?"

"Oh yes; we shall go."

"Word of honour?"

"Certainly. Only pull me up!"

"Not so fast. It may be easier to talk to you like this. I do not know how the laws are over here. Maybe this sort of thing is not permitted. You will promise me that I shall have no trouble over the matter."

"None, none. Only pull me up!"

"Very good. Come along!"

He dragged at the dragoon's leg while the other gripped his way up the balustrade until, amid a buzz of congratulation from the crowd, he tumbled all in a heap over the rail on to the balcony, where he lay for a few moments as he had fallen. Then staggering to his feet, without a glance at his opponent, he rushed, with a bellow of rage, through the open window.

While this little drama had been enacted overhead, the young guardsman had shaken off his first stupor of amazement, and had pushed his way through the crowd with such vigour that he and his companion had nearly reached the bottom of the steps. The uniform of the king's guard was in itself a passport anywhere, and the face of old Catinat was so well known in the district that everyone drew back to clear a path for him towards his house. The door was flung open for them, and an old servant stood wringing his hands in the dark passage.

"Oh, master! Oh, master!" he cried.

"Such doings, such infamy! They will murder him!"

"Whom, then?"

"This brave monsieur from America. Oh, my God, hark to them now!"

As he spoke, a clatter and shouting which had burst out again upstairs ended suddenly in a tremendous crash, with volleys of oaths and a prolonged bumping and smashing, which shook the old house to its foundations. The soldier and the Huguenot rushed swiftly up the first flight of stairs, and were about to ascend the second one, from the head of which the uproar seemed to proceed, when a great eight-day clock came hurtling down, springing four steps at a time, and ending with a leap across the landing and a crash against the wall, which left it a shattered heap of metal wheels and wooden splinters. An instant afterwards four men, so locked together that they formed but one rolling bundle, came thudding down amid a debris of splintered stair-rails, and writhed and struggled upon the landing, staggering up, falling down, and all breathing together like the wind in a chimney. So twisted and twined were they that it was hard to pick one from the other, save that the innermost was clad in black Flemish cloth, while the three who clung to him were soldiers of the king. Yet so strong and vigorous was the man whom they tried to hold that as often as he could find his feet he dragged them after him from end to end of the passage, as a boar might pull the curs which had fastened on to his haunches. An officer, who had rushed down at the heels of the brawlers, thrust his hands in to catch the civilian by the throat, but he whipped them back again with an oath as the man's strong white teeth met in his left thumb. Clapping the wound to his mouth, he flashed out his sword and was about to drive it through the body of his unarmed opponent, when De Catinat sprang forward and caught him by the wrist.

"You villain, Dalbert!" he cried.

The sudden appearance of one of the king's own bodyguard had a magic effect upon the brawlers. Dalbert sprang back, with his thumb still in his mouth, and his sword drooping, scowling darkly at the new-comer. His long sallow face was distorted with anger, and his small black eyes blazed with passion and with the hell-fire light of unsatisfied vengeance. His troopers had released

their victim, and stood panting in a line, while the young man leaned against the wall, brushing the dust from his black coat, and looking from his rescuer to his antagonists.

"I had a little account to settle with you before, Dalbert," said De Catinat, unsheathing his rapier.

"I am on the king's errand," snarled the other.

"No doubt. On guard, sir!"

"I am here on duty, I tell you!"

"Very good. Your sword, sir!"

"I have no quarrel with you."

"No?" De Catinat stepped forward and struck him across the face with his open hand. "It seems to me that you have one now," said he.

"Hell and furies!" screamed the captain. "To your arms, men! Hola, there, from above! Cut down this fellow, and seize your prisoner! Hola! In the king's name!"

At his call a dozen more troopers came hurrying down the stairs, while the three upon the landing advanced upon their former antagonist. He slipped by them, however, and caught out of the old merchant's hand the thick oak stick which he carried.

"I am with you, sir," said he, taking his place beside the guardsman.

"Call off your canaille, and fight me like a gentleman," cried De Catinat.

"A gentleman! Hark to the bourgeois Huguenot, whose family peddles cloth!"

"You coward! I will write liar on you with my sword-point!"

He sprang forward, and sent in a thrust which might have found its way to Dalbert's heart had the heavy sabre of a dragoon not descended from the side and shorn his more delicate weapon short off close to the hilt. With a shout of triumph, his enemy sprang furiously upon him with his rapier shortened, but was met by a sharp blow from the cudgel of the young stranger which sent his weapon tinkling on to the ground. A trooper, however, on the stair had pulled out a pistol, and clapping it within a foot of the guardsman's head, was about to settle the combat, once and forever, when a little old gentleman, who had quietly ascended from the street, and who had been looking on with an amused and interested smile at this fiery sequence of events, took a sudden step forward, and ordered all parties to drop their weapons with a voice so decided, so stern, and so full of authority, that the sabre points all clinked down together upon the parquet flooring as though it were a part of their daily drill.

"Upon my word, gentlemen, upon my word!" said he, looking sternly from one to the other. He was a very small, dapper man, as thin as a herring, with projecting teeth and a huge drooping many-curled wig, which cut off the line of his skinny neck and the slope of his narrow shoulders. His dress was a long overcoat of mouse-coloured velvet slashed with gold, beneath which were high leather boots, which, with his little gold-laced, three-cornered hat, gave a military tinge to his appearance. In his gait and bearing he had a dainty strut and backward cock of the head, which, taken with his sharp black eyes, his high thin features, and his assured manner, would impress a stranger with the feeling that this was a man of power. And, indeed, in France or out of it there were few to whom this man's name was not familiar, for in all France the only figure which loomed up as large as that of the king was this very little gentleman who stood now, with gold snuff-box in one hand, and deep-laced handkerchief in the other, upon the landing of the Huguenot's house. For who was there who did not know the last of the great French nobles, the bravest of French captains, the beloved Conde, victor of Recroy and hero of the Fronde? At the sight of his pinched, sallow face the dragoons and their leader had stood staring, while De Catinat raised the stump of his sword in a salute.

"Heh, heh!" cried the old soldier, peering at him.

"You were with me on the Rhine – heh? I know your face, captain. But the household was with Turenne."

"I was in the regiment of Picardy, your Highness. De Catinat is my name."

"Yes, yes. But you, sir, who the devil are you?"

"Captain Dalbert, your Highness, of the Languedoc Blue Dragoons."

"Heh! I was passing in my carriage, and I saw you standing on your head in the air. The young man let you up on conditions, as I understood."

"He swore he would go from the house," cried the young stranger. "Yet when I had let him up, he set his men upon me, and we all came downstairs together."

"My faith, you seem to have left little behind you," said Conde, smiling, as he glanced at the litter which was strewed all over the floor. "And so you broke your parole, Captain Dalbert?"

"I could not hold treaty with a Huguenot and an enemy of the king," said the dragoon sulkily.

"You could hold treaty, it appears, but not keep it. And why did you let him go, sir, when you had him at such a vantage?"

"I believed his promise."

"You must be of a trusting nature."

"I have been used to deal with Indians."

"Heh! And you think an Indian's word is better than that of an officer in the king's dragoons?"

"I did not think so an hour ago."

"Hem!" Conde took a large pinch of snuff, and brushed the wandering grains from his velvet coat with his handkerchief of point.

"You are very strong, monsieur," said he, glancing keenly at the broad shoulders and arching chest of the young stranger. "You are from Canada, I presume?"

"I have been there, sir. But I am from New York."

Conde shook his head. "An island?"

"No, sir; a town."

"In what province?"

"The province of New York."

"The chief town, then?"

"Nay; Albany is the chief town."

"And how came you to speak French?"

"My mother was of French blood."

"And how long have you been in Paris?"

"A day."

"Heh! And you already begin to throw your mother's country-folk out of windows!"

"He was annoying a young maid, sir, and I asked him to stop, whereon he whipped out his sword, and would have slain me had I not closed with him, upon which he called upon his fellows to aid him. To keep them off, I swore that I would drop him over if they moved a step. Yet when I let him go, they set upon me again, and I know not what the end might have been had this gentleman not stood my friend."

"Hem! You did very well. You are young, but you have resource."

"I was reared in the woods, sir."

"If there are many of your kidney, you may give my friend De Frontenac some work ere he found this empire of which he talks. But how is this, Captain Dalbert? What have you to say?"

"The king's orders, your Highness."

"Heh! Did he order you to molest the girl? I have never yet heard that his Majesty erred by being too harsh with a woman." He gave a little dry chuckle in his throat, and took another pinch of snuff.

"The orders are, your Highness, to use every means which may drive these people into the true Church."

"On my word, you look a very fine apostle and a pretty champion for a holy cause," said Conde, glancing sardonically out of his twinkling black eyes at the brutal face of the dragoon. "Take your men out of this, sir, and never venture to set your foot again across this threshold."

"But the king's command, your Highness."

"I will tell the king when I see him that I left soldiers and that I find brigands. Not a word, sir! Away! You take your shame with you, and you leave your honour behind." He had turned in an instant from the sneering, strutting old beau to the fierce soldier with set face and eye of fire. Dalbert shrank back from his baleful gaze, and muttering an order to his men, they filed off down the stair with clattering feet and clank of sabres.

"Your Highness," said the old Huguenot, coming forward and throwing open one of the doors which led from the landing, "you have indeed been a saviour of Israel and a stumbling-block to the froward this day. Will you not deign to rest under my roof, and even to take a cup of wine ere you go onwards?"

Conde raised his thick eyebrows at the scriptural fashion of the merchant's speech, but he bowed courteously to the invitation, and entered the chamber, looking around him in surprise and admiration at its magnificence. With its panelling of dark shining oak, its polished floor, its stately marble chimney-piece, and its beautifully moulded ceiling, it was indeed a room which might have graced a palace.

"My carriage waits below," said he, "and I must not delay longer. It is not often that I leave my castle of Chantilly to come to Paris, and it was a fortunate chance which made me pass in time to be of service to honest men. When a house hangs out such a sign as an officer of dragoons with his heels in the air, it is hard to drive past without a question. But I fear that as long as you are a Huguenot, there will be no peace for you in France, monsieur."

"The law is indeed heavy upon us."

"And will be heavier if what I hear from court is correct. I wonder that you do not fly the country."

"My business and my duty lie here."

"Well, every man knows his own affairs best. Would it not be wise to bend to the storm, heh?"

The Huguenot gave a gesture of horror.

"Well, well, I meant no harm. And where is this fair maid who has been the cause of the broil?"

"Where is Adele, Pierre?" asked the merchant of the old servant, who had carried in the silver tray with a squat flask and tinted Venetian glasses.

"I locked her in my room, master."

"And where is she now?"

"I am here, father." The young girl sprang into the room, and threw her arms round the old merchant's neck. "Oh, I trust these wicked men have not hurt you, love!"

"No, no, dear child; none of us have been hurt, thanks to his Highness the Prince of Conde here."

Adele raised her eyes, and quickly drooped them again before the keen questioning gaze of the old soldier. "May God reward your Highness!" she stammered. In her confusion the blood rushed to her face, which was perfect in feature and expression. With her sweet delicate contour, her large gray eyes, and the sweep of the lustrous hair, setting off with its rich tint the little shell-like ears and the alabaster whiteness of the neck and throat, even Conde, who had seen all the beauties of three courts and of sixty years defile before him, stood staring in admiration at the Huguenot maiden.

"Heh! On my word, mademoiselle, you make me wish that I could wipe forty years from my account." He bowed, and sighed in the fashion that was in vogue when Buckingham came to the wooing of Anne of Austria, and the dynasty of cardinals was at its height.

"France could ill spare those forty years, your Highness."

"Heh, heh! So quick of tongue too? Your daughter has a courtly wit, monsieur."

"God forbid, your Highness! She is as pure and good – "

"Nay, that is but a sorry compliment to the court. Surely, mademoiselle, you would love to go out into the great world, to hear sweet music, see all that is lovely, and wear all that is costly, rather

than look out ever upon the Rue St. Martin, and bide in this great dark house until the roses wither upon your cheeks."

"Where my father is, I am happy at his side," said she, putting her two hands upon his sleeve. "I ask nothing more than I have got."

"And I think it best that you go up to your room again," said the old merchant shortly, for the prince, in spite of his age, bore an evil name among women. He had come close to her as he spoke, and had even placed one yellow hand upon her shrinking arm, while his little dark eyes twinkled with an ominous light.

"Tut, tut!" said he, as she hastened to obey. "You need not fear for your little dove. This hawk, at least, is far past the stoop, however tempting the quarry. But indeed, I can see that she is as good as she is fair, and one could not say more than that if she were from heaven direct. My carriage waits, gentlemen, and I wish you all a very good day!" He inclined his be-wigged head, and strutted off in his dainty, dandified fashion. From the window De Catinat could see him slip into the same gilded chariot which had stood in his way as he drove from Versailles.

"By my faith," said he, turning to the young American, "we all owe thanks to the prince, but it seems to me, sir, that we are your debtors even more. You have risked your life for my cousin, and but for your cudgel, Dalbert would have had his blade through me when he had me at a vantage. Your hand, sir! These are things which a man cannot forget."

"Ay, you may well thank him, Amory," broke in the old Huguenot, who had returned after escorting his illustrious guest to the carriage. "He has been raised up as a champion for the afflicted, and as a helper for those who are in need. An old man's blessing upon you, Amos Green, for my own son could not have done for me more than you, a stranger."

But their young visitor appeared to be more embarrassed by their thanks than by any of his preceding adventures. The blood flushed to his weather-tanned, clear-cut face, as smooth as that of a boy, and yet marked by a firmness of lip and a shrewdness in the keen blue eyes which spoke of a strong and self-reliant nature.

"I have a mother and two sisters over the water," said he diffidently.

"And you honour women for their sake?"

"We always honour women over there. Perhaps it is that we have so few. Over in these old countries you have not learned what it is to be without them. I have been away up the lakes for furs, living for months on end the life of a savage among the wigwams of the Sacs and the Foxes, foul livers and foul talkers, ever squatting like toads around their fires. Then when I have come back to Albany where my folk then dwelt, and have heard my sisters play upon the spinet and sing, and my mother talk to us of the France of her younger days and of her childhood, and of all that they had suffered for what they thought was right, then I have felt what a good woman is, and how, like the sunshine, she draws out of one's soul all that is purest and best."

"Indeed, the ladies should be very much obliged to monsieur, who is as eloquent as he is brave," said Adele Catinat, who, standing in the open door, had listened to the latter part of his remarks.

He had forgotten himself for the instant, and had spoken freely and with energy. At the sight of the girl, however, he coloured up again, and cast down his eyes.

"Much of my life has been spent in the woods," said he, "and one speaks so little there that one comes to forget how to do it. It was for this that my father wished me to stay some time in France, for he would not have me grow up a mere trapper and trader."

"And how long do you stop in Paris?" asked the guardsman.

"Until Ephraim Savage comes for me."

"And who is he?"

"The master of the Golden Rod."

"And that is your ship?"

"My father's ship. She has been to Bristol, is now at Rouen, and then must go to Bristol again. When she comes back once more, Ephraim comes to Paris for me, and it will be time for me to go."

"And how like you Paris?"

The young man smiled. "They told me ere I came that it was a very lively place, and truly from the little that I have seen this morning, I think that it is the liveliest place that I have seen."

"By my faith," said De Catinat, "you came down those stairs in a very lively fashion, four of you together with a Dutch clock as an avant-courier, and a whole train of wood-work at your heels. And you have not seen the city yet?"

"Only as I journeyed through it yester-evening on my way to this house. It is a wondrous place, but I was pent in for lack of air as I passed through it. New York is a great city. There are said to be as many as three thousand folk living there, and they say that they could send out four hundred fighting-men, though I can scarce bring myself to believe it. Yet from all parts of the city one may see something of God's handiwork – the trees, the green of the grass, and the shine of the sun upon the bay and the rivers. But here it is stone and wood, and wood and stone, look where you will. In truth, you must be very hardy people to keep your health in such a place."

"And to us it is you who seem so hardy, with your life in the forest and on the river," cried the young girl. "And then the wonder that you can find your path through those great wildernesses, where there is naught to guide you."

"Well, there again! I marvel how you can find your way among these thousands of houses. For myself, I trust that it will be a clear night to-night."

"And why?"

"That I may see the stars."

"But you will find no change in them."

"That is it. If I can but see the stars, it will be easy for me to know how to walk when I would find this house again. In the daytime I can carry a knife and notch the door-posts as I pass, for it might be hard to pick up one's trail again, with so many folk ever passing over it."

De Catinat burst out laughing again. "By my faith, you will find Paris livelier than ever," said he, "if you blaze your way through on the door-posts as you would on the trees of a forest. But perchance it would be as well that you should have a guide at first; so, if you have two horses ready in your stables, uncle, our friend and I might shortly ride back to Versailles together, for I have a spell of guard again before many hours are over. Then for some days he might bide with me there, if he will share a soldier's quarters, and so see more than the Rue St. Martin can offer. How would that suit you, Monsieur Green?"

"I should be right glad to come out with you, if we may leave all here in safety."

"Oh, fear not for that," said the Huguenot. "The order of the Prince of Conde will be as a shield and a buckler to us for many a day. I will order Pierre to saddle the horses."

"And I must use the little time I have," said the guardsman, as he turned away to where Adele waited for him in the window.

Chapter VII. The new world and the old

The young American was soon ready for the expedition, but De Catinat lingered until the last possible minute. When at last he was able to tear himself away, he adjusted his cravat, brushed his brilliant coat, and looked very critically over the sombre suit of his companion.

"Where got you those?" he asked.

"In New York, ere I left."

"Hem! There is naught amiss with the cloth, and indeed the sombre colour is the mode, but the cut is strange to our eyes."

"I only know that I wish that I had my fringed hunting tunic and leggings on once more."

"This hat, now. We do not wear our brims flat like that. See if I cannot mend it." He took the beaver, and looping up one side of the brim, he fastened it with a golden brooch taken from his own shirt front. "There is a martial cock," said he, laughing, "and would do credit to the King's Own Musketeers. The black broad-cloth and silk hose will pass, but why have you not a sword at your side?"

"I carry a gun when I ride out."

"Mon Dieu, you will be laid by the heels as a bandit!"

"I have a knife, too."

"Worse and worse! Well, we must dispense with the sword, and with the gun too, I pray! Let me re-tie your cravat. So! Now if you are in the mood for a ten-mile gallop, I am at your service."

They were indeed a singular contrast as they walked their horses together through the narrow and crowded causeways of the Parisian streets. De Catinat, who was the older by five years, with his delicate small-featured face, his sharply trimmed moustache, his small but well-set and dainty figure, and his brilliant dress, looked the very type of the great nation to which he belonged.

His companion, however, large-limbed and strong, turning his bold and yet thoughtful face from side to side, and eagerly taking in all the strange, new life amidst which he found himself, was also a type, unfinished, it is true, but bidding fair to be the higher of the two. His close yellow hair, blue eyes, and heavy build showed that it was the blood of his father, rather than that of his mother, which ran in his veins; and even the sombre coat and swordless belt, if less pleasing to the eye, were true badges of a race which found its fiercest battles and its most glorious victories in bending nature to its will upon the seas and in the waste places of the earth.

"What is yonder great building?" he asked, as they emerged into a broader square.

"It is the Louvre, one of the palaces of the king."

"And is he there?"

"Nay; he lives at Versailles."

"What! Fancy that a man should have two such houses!"

"Two! He has many more – St. Germain, Marly, Fontainebleau, Clugny."

"But to what end? A man can but live at one at a time."

"Nay; he can now come or go as the fancy takes him."

"It is a wondrous building. I have seen the Seminary of St. Sulpice at Montreal, and thought that it was the greatest of all houses, and yet what is it beside this?"

"You have been to Montreal, then? You remember the fort?"

"Yes, and the Hotel Dieu, and the wooden houses in a row, and eastward the great mill with the wall; but what do you know of Montreal?"

"I have soldiered there, and at Quebec, too. Why, my friend, you are not the only man of the woods in Paris, for I give you my word that I have worn the caribou mocassins, the leather jacket, and the fur cap with the eagle feather for six months at a stretch, and I care not how soon I do it again,"

Amos Green's eyes shone with delight at finding that his companion and he had so much in common, and he plunged into a series of questions which lasted until they had crossed the river and

reached the south-westerly gate of the city. By the moat and walls long lines of men were busy at their drill.

"Who are those, then?" he asked, gazing at them with curiosity.

"They are some of the king's soldiers."

"But why so many of them? Do they await some enemy?"

"Nay; we are at peace with all the world. Worse luck!"

"At peace. Why then all these men?"

"That they may be ready."

The young man shook his head in bewilderment. "They might be as ready in their own homes surely. In our country every man has his musket in his chimney corner, and is ready enough, yet he does not waste his time when all is at peace."

"Our king is very great, and he has many enemies."

"And who made the enemies?"

"Why, the king, to be sure."

"Then would it not be better to be without him?"

The guardsman shrugged his epaulettes in despair. "We shall both wind up in the Bastille or Vincennes at this rate," said he. "You must know that it is in serving the country that he has made these enemies. It is but five years since he made a peace at Nimeguen, by which he tore away sixteen fortresses from the Spanish Lowlands. Then, also, he had laid his hands upon Strassburg and upon Luxembourg, and has chastised the Genoans, so that there are many who would fall upon him if they thought that he was weak."

"And why has he done all this?"

"Because he is a great king, and for the glory of France."

The stranger pondered over this answer for some time as they rode on between the high, thin poplars, which threw bars across the sunlit road.

"There was a great man in Schenectady once," said he at last. "They are simple folk up yonder, and they all had great trust in each other. But after this man came among them they began to miss – one a beaver-skin and one a bag of ginseng, and one a belt of wampum, until at last old Pete Hendricks lost his chestnut three-year-old. Then there was a search and a fuss until they found all that had been lost in the stable of the new-comer, so we took him, I and some others, and we hung him up on a tree, without ever thinking what a great man he had been."

De Catinat shot an angry glance at his companion. "Your parable, my friend, is scarce polite," said he. "If you and I are to travel in peace you must keep a closer guard upon your tongue."

"I would not give you offence, and it may be that I am wrong," answered the American, "but I speak as the matter seems to me, and it is the right of a free man to do that."

De Catinat's frown relaxed as the other turned his earnest blue eyes upon him. "By my soul, where would the court be if every man did that?" said he. "But what in the name of heaven is amiss now?"

His companion had hurled himself off his horse, and was stooping low over the ground, with his eyes bent upon the dust. Then, with quick, noiseless steps, he zigzagged along the road, ran swiftly across a grassy bank, and stood peering at the gap of a fence, with his nostrils dilated, his eyes shining, and his whole face aglow with eagerness.

"The fellow's brain is gone," muttered De Catinat, as he caught at the bridle of the riderless horse. "The sight of Paris has shaken his wits. What in the name of the devil ails you, that you should stand glaring there?"

"A deer has passed," whispered the other, pointing down at the grass. "Its trail lies along there and into the wood. It could not have been long ago, and there is no slur to the track, so that it was not going fast. Had we but fetched my gun, we might have followed it, and brought the old man back a side of venison."

"For God's sake get on your horse again!" cried De Catinat distractedly. "I fear that some evil will come upon you ere I get you safe to the Rue St. Martin again!"

"And what is wrong now?" asked Amos Green, swinging himself into the saddle.

"Why, man, these woods are the king's preserves and you speak as coolly of slaying his deer as though you were on the shores of Michigan!"

"Preserves! They are tame deer!" An expression of deep disgust passed over his face, and spurring his horse, he galloped onwards at such a pace that De Catinat, after vainly endeavouring to keep up, had to shriek to him to stop.

"It is not usual in this country to ride so madly along the roads," he panted.

"It is a very strange country," cried the stranger, in perplexity. "Maybe it would be easier for me to remember what is allowed. It was but this morning that I took my gun to shoot a pigeon that was flying over the roofs in yonder street, and old Pierre caught my arm with a face as though it were the minister that I was aiming at. And then there is that old man – why, they will not even let him say his prayers."

De Catinat laughed. "You will come to know our ways soon," said he. "This is a crowded land, and if all men rode and shot as they listed, much harm would come from it. But let us talk rather of your own country. You have lived much in the woods from what you tell me."

"I was but ten when first I journeyed with my uncle to Sault la Marie, where the three great lakes meet, to trade with the Chippewas and the tribes of the west."

"I know not what La Salle or De Frontenac would have said to that. The trade in those parts belongs to France."

"We were taken prisoners, and so it was that I came to see Montreal and afterwards Quebec. In the end we were sent back because they did not know what they could do with us."

"It was a good journey for a first."

"And ever since I have been trading – first, on the Kennebec with the Abenaquis, in the great forests of Maine, and with the Micmac fish-eaters over the Penobscot. Then later with the Iroquois, as far west as the country of the Senecas. At Albany and Schenectady we stored our pelts, and so on to New York, where my father shipped them over the sea."

"But he could ill spare you surely?"

"Very ill. But as he was rich, he thought it best that I should learn some things that are not to be found in the woods. And so he sent me in the Golden Rod, under the care of Ephraim Savage."

"Who is also of New York?"

"Nay; he is the first man that ever was born at Boston."

"I cannot remember the names of all these villages."

"And yet there may come a day when their names shall be as well known as that of Paris."

De Catinat laughed heartily. "The woods may have given you much, but not the gift of prophecy, my friend. Well, my heart is often over the water even as yours is, and I would ask nothing better than to see the palisades of Point Levi again, even if all the Five Nations were raving upon the other side of them. But now, if you will look there in the gap of the trees, you will see the king's new palace."

The two young men pulled up their horses, and looked down at the wide-spreading building in all the beauty of its dazzling whiteness, and at the lovely grounds, dotted with fountain and with statue, and barred with hedge and with walk, stretching away to the dense woods which clustered round them. It amused De Catinat to watch the swift play of wonder and admiration which flashed over his companion's features.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked at last.

"I think that God's best work is in America, and man's in Europe."

"Ay, and in all Europe there is no such palace as that, even as there is no such king as he who dwells within it."

"Can I see him, think you?"

"Who, the king? No, no; I fear that you are scarce made for a court."

"Nay, I should show him all honour."

"How, then? What greeting would you give him?"

"I would shake him respectfully by the hand, and ask as to his health and that of his family."

"On my word, I think that such a greeting might please him more than the bent knee and the rounded back, and yet, I think, my son of the woods, that it were best not to lead you into paths where you would be lost, as would any of the courtiers if you dropped them in the gorge of the Saguenay. But hola! what comes here? It looks like one of the carriages of the court."

A white cloud of dust, which had rolled towards them down the road, was now so near that the glint of gilding and the red coat of the coachman could be seen breaking out through it. As the two cavaliers reined their horses aside to leave the roadway clear, the coach rumbled heavily past them, drawn by two dapple grays, and the Horsemen caught a glimpse, as it passed, of a beautiful but haughty face which looked out at them. An instant afterwards a sharp cry had caused the driver to pull up his horses, and a white hand beckoned to them through the carriage window.

"It is Madame de Montespan, the proudest woman in France," whispered De Catinat. "She would speak with us, so do as I do."

He touched his horse with the spur, gave a gambade which took him across to the carriage, and then, sweeping off his hat, he bowed to his horse's neck; a salute in which he was imitated, though in a somewhat ungainly fashion, by his companion.

"Ha, captain!" said the lady, with no very pleasant face, "we meet again."

"Fortune has ever been good to me, madame."

"It was not so this morning."

"You say truly. It gave me a hateful duty to perform."

"And you performed it in a hateful fashion."

"Nay, madame, what could I do more?"

The lady sneered, and her beautiful face turned as bitter as it could upon occasion.

"You thought that I had no more power with the king. You thought that my day was past. No doubt it seemed to you that you might reap favour with the new by being the first to cast a slight upon the old."

"But, madame – "

"You may spare your protestations. I am one who judges by deeds and not by words. Did you, then, think that my charm had so faded, that any beauty which I ever have had is so withered?"

"Nay, madame, I were blind to think that."

"Blind as a noontide owl," said Amos Green with emphasis.

Madame de Montespan arched her eyebrows and glanced at her singular admirer. "Your friend at least speaks that which he really feels," said she. "At four o'clock to-day we shall see whether others are of the same mind; and if they are, then it may be ill for those who mistook what was but a passing shadow for a lasting cloud." She cast another vindictive glance at the young guardsman, and rattled on once more upon her way.

"Come on!" cried De Catinat curtly, for his companion was staring open-mouthed after the carriage. "Have you never seen a woman before?"

"Never such a one as that."

"Never one with so railing a tongue, I dare swear," said De Catinat.

"Never one with so lovely a face. And yet there is a lovely face at the Rue St. Martin also."

"You seem to have a nice taste in beauty, for all your woodland training."

"Yes, for I have been cut away from women so much that when I stand before one I feel that she is something tender and sweet and holy."

"You may find dames at the court who are both tender and sweet, but you will look long, my friend, before you find the holy one. This one would ruin me if she can, and only because I have done

what it was my duty to do. To keep oneself in this court is like coming down the La Chine Rapids where there is a rock to right, and a rock to left, and another perchance in front, and if you so much as graze one, where are you and your birch canoe? But our rocks are women, and in our canoe we bear all our worldly fortunes. Now here is another who would sway me over to her side, and indeed I think it may prove to be the better side too."

They had passed through the gateway of the palace, and the broad sweeping drive lay in front of them, dotted with carriages and horsemen. On the gravel walks were many gaily dressed ladies, who strolled among the flower-beds or watched the fountains with the sunlight glinting upon their high water sprays. One of these, who had kept her eyes turned upon the gate, came hastening forward the instant that De Catinat appeared. It was Mademoiselle Nanon, the confidante of Madame de Maintenon.

"I am so pleased to see you, captain," she cried, "and I have waited so patiently. Madame would speak with you. The king comes to her at three, and we have but twenty minutes. I heard that you had gone to Paris, and so I stationed myself here. Madame has something which she would ask you."

"Then I will come at once. Ah, De Brissac, it is well met!"

A tall, burly officer was passing in the same uniform which De Catinat wore. He turned at once, and came smiling towards his comrade.

"Ah, Amory, you have covered a league or two from the dust on your coat!"

"We are fresh from Paris. But I am called on business. This is my friend, Monsieur Amos Green. I leave him in your hands, for he is a stranger from America, and would fain see all that you can show. He stays with me at my quarters. And my horse, too, De Brissac. You can give it to the groom."

Throwing the bridle to his brother officer, and pressing the hand of Amos Green, De Catinat sprang from his horse, and followed at the top of his speed in the direction which the young lady had already taken.

Chapter VIII. The rising sun

The rooms which were inhabited by the lady who had already taken so marked a position at the court of France were as humble as were her fortunes at the time when they were allotted to her, but with that rare tact and self-restraint which were the leading features in her remarkable character, she had made no change in her living with the increase of her prosperity, and forbore from provoking envy and jealousy by any display of wealth or of power. In a side wing of the palace, far from the central salons, and only to be reached by long corridors and stairs, were the two or three small chambers upon which the eyes, first of the court, then of France, and finally of the world, were destined to be turned. In such rooms had the destitute widow of the poet Scarron been housed when she had first been brought to court by Madame de Montespan as the governess of the royal children, and in such rooms she still dwelt, now that she had added to her maiden Francoise d'Aubigny the title of Marquise de Maintenon, with the pension and estate which the king's favour had awarded her. Here it was that every day the king would lounge, finding in the conversation of a clever and virtuous woman a charm and a pleasure which none of the professed wits of his sparkling court had ever been able to give to him, and here, too, the more sagacious of the courtiers were beginning to understand, was the point, formerly to be found in the magnificent salons of De Montespan, whence flowed those impulses and tendencies which were so eagerly studied, and so keenly followed up by all who wished to keep the favour of the king. It was a simple creed, that of the court. Were the king pious, then let all turn to their missals and their rosaries. Were he rakish, then who so rakish as his devoted followers? But woe to the man who was rakish when he should be praying, or who pulled a long face when the king wore a laughing one! And thus it was that keen eyes were ever fixed upon him, and upon every influence that came near him, so that the wary courtier, watching the first subtle signs of a coming change, might so order his conduct as to seem to lead rather than to follow.

The young guardsman had scarce ever exchanged a word with this powerful lady, for it was her taste to isolate herself, and to appear with the court only at the hours of devotion. It was therefore with some feelings both of nervousness and of curiosity that he followed his guide down the gorgeous corridors, where art and wealth had been strewn with so lavish a hand. The lady paused in front of the chamber door, and turned to her companion.

"Madame wishes to speak to you of what occurred this morning," said she. "I should advise you to say nothing to madame about your creed, for it is the only thing upon which her heart can be hard." She raised her finger to emphasise the warning, and tapping at the door, she pushed it open. "I have brought Captain de Catinat, madame," said she.

"Then let the captain step in." The voice was firm, and yet sweetly musical.

Obeying the command, De Catinat found himself in a room which was no larger and but little better furnished than that which was allotted to his own use. Yet, though simple, everything in the chamber was scrupulously neat and clean, betraying the dainty taste of a refined woman. The stamped-leather furniture, the La Savonniere carpet, the pictures of sacred subjects, exquisite from an artist's point of view, the plain but tasteful curtains, all left an impression half religious and half feminine but wholly soothing. Indeed, the soft light, the high white statue of the Virgin in a canopied niche, with a perfumed red lamp burning before it, and the wooden prie-dieu with the red-edged prayer-book upon the top of it, made the apartment look more like a private chapel than a fair lady's boudoir.

On each side of the empty fireplace was a little green-covered arm-chair, the one for madame and the other reserved for the use of the king. A small three-legged stool between them was heaped with her work-basket and her tapestry. On the chair which was furthest from the door, with her back turned to the light, madame was sitting as the young officer entered. It was her favourite position, and yet there were few women of her years who had so little reason to fear the sun, for a healthy

life and active habits had left her with a clear skin and delicate bloom which any young beauty of the court might have envied. Her figure was graceful and queenly, her gestures and pose full of a natural dignity, and her voice, as he had already remarked, most sweet and melodious. Her face was handsome rather than beautiful, set in a statuesque classical mould, with broad white forehead, firm, delicately sensitive mouth, and a pair of large serene gray eyes, earnest and placid in repose, but capable of reflecting the whole play of her soul, from the merry gleam of humour to the quick flash of righteous anger. An elevating serenity was, however, the leading expression of her features, and in that she presented the strongest contrast to her rival, whose beautiful face was ever swept by the emotion of the moment, and who gleamed one hour and shadowed over the next like a corn-field in the wind. In wit and quickness of tongue it is true that De Montespan had the advantage, but the strong common-sense and the deeper nature of the elder woman might prove in the end to be the better weapon. De Catinat, at the moment, without having time to notice details, was simply conscious that he was in the presence of a very handsome woman, and that her large pensive eyes were fixed critically upon him, and seemed to be reading his thoughts as they had never been read before.

"I think that I have already seen you, sir, have I not?"

"Yes, madame, I have once or twice had the honour of attending upon you though it may not have been my good fortune to address you."

"My life is so quiet and retired that I fear that much of what is best and worthiest at the court is unknown to me. It is the curse of such places that evil flaunts itself before the eye and cannot be overlooked, while the good retires in its modesty, so that at times we scarce dare hope that it is there. You have served, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame. In the Lowlands, on the Rhine, and in Canada."

"In Canada! Ah! What nobler ambition could woman have than to be a member of that sweet sisterhood which was founded by the holy Marie de l'Incarnation and the sainted Jeanne le Ber at Montreal? It was but the other day that I had an account of them from Father Godet des Marais. What joy to be one of such a body, and to turn from the blessed work of converting the heathen to the even more precious task of nursing back health and strength into those of God's warriors who have been struck down in the fight with Satan!"

It was strange to De Catinat, who knew well the sordid and dreadful existence led by these same sisters, threatened ever with misery, hunger, and the scalping-knife, to hear this lady at whose feet lay all the good things of this earth speaking enviously of their lot.

"They are very good women," said he shortly, remembering Mademoiselle Nanon's warning, and fearing to trench upon the dangerous subject.

"And doubtless you have had the privilege also of seeing the holy Bishop Laval?"

"Yes, madame, I have seen Bishop Laval."

"And I trust that the Sulpitians still hold their own against the Jesuits?"

"I have heard, madame, that the Jesuits are the stronger at Quebec, and the others at Montreal."

"And who is your own director, monsieur?"

De Catinat felt that the worst had come upon him. "I have none, madame."

"Ah, it is too common to dispense with a director, and yet I know not how I could guide my steps in the difficult path which I tread if it were not for mine. Who is your confessor, then?"

"I have none. I am of the Reformed Church, madame."

The lady gave a gesture of horror, and a sudden hardening showed itself in mouth and eye. "What, in the court itself," she cried, "and in the neighbourhood of the king's own person!"

De Catinat was lax enough in matters of faith, and held his creed rather as a family tradition than from any strong conviction, but it hurt his self-esteem to see himself regarded as though he had confessed to something that was loathsome and unclean. "You will find, madame," said he sternly, "that members of my faith have not only stood around the throne of France, but have even seated themselves upon it."

"God has for His own all-wise purposes permitted it, and none should know it better than I, whose grandsire, Theodore d'Aubigny, did so much to place a crown upon the head of the great Henry. But Henry's eyes were opened ere his end came, and I pray – oh, from my heart I pray – that yours may be also."

She rose, and throwing herself down upon the prie-dieu sunk her face in her hands for some few minutes, during which the object of her devotions stood in some perplexity in the middle of the room, hardly knowing whether such an attention should be regarded as an insult or as a favour. A tap at the door brought the lady back to this world again, and her devoted attendant answered her summons to enter.

"The king is in the Hall of Victories, madame," said she. "He will be here in five minutes."

"Very well. Stand outside, and let me know when he comes. Now, sir," she continued, when they were alone once more, "you gave a note of mine to the king this morning?"

"I did, madame."

"And, as I understand, Madame de Montespan was refused admittance to the grand lever?"

"She was, madame."

"But she waited for the king in the passage?"

"She did."

"And wrung from him a promise that he would see her to-day?"

"Yes, madame."

"I would not have you tell me that which it may seem to you a breach of your duty to tell. But I am fighting now against a terrible foe, and for a great stake. Do you understand me?"

De Catinat bowed.

"Then what do I mean?"

"I presume that what madame means is that she is fighting for the king's favour with the lady you mentioned."

"As heaven is my judge, I have no thought of myself. I am fighting with the devil for the king's soul."

"'Tis the same thing, madame."

The lady smiled. "If the king's body were in peril, I could call on the aid of his faithful guards, and not less so now, surely, when so much more is at stake. Tell me, then, at what hour was the king to meet the marquise in her room?"

"At four, madame."

"I thank you. You have done me a service, and I shall not forget it."

"The king comes, madame," said Mademoiselle Nanon, again protruding her head.

"Then you must go, captain. Pass through the other room, and so into the outer passage. And take this. It is Bossuet's statement of the Catholic faith. It has softened the hearts of others, and may yours. Now, adieu!"

De Catinat passed out through another door, and as he did so he glanced back. The lady had her back to him, and her hand was raised to the mantel-piece. At the instant that he looked she moved her neck, and he could see what she was doing. She was pushing back the long hand of the clock.

Chapter IX. Le roi s'amuse

Captain de Catinat had hardly vanished through the one door before the other was thrown open by Mademoiselle Nanon, and the king entered the room. Madame de Maintenon rose with a pleasant smile and curtsied deeply, but there was no answering light upon her visitor's face, and he threw himself down upon the vacant arm-chair with a pouting lip and a frown upon his forehead.

"Nay, now this is a very bad compliment," she cried, with the gaiety which she could assume whenever it was necessary to draw the king from his blacker humours. "My poor little dark room has already cast a shadow over you."

"Nay; it is Father la Chaise and the Bishop of Meaux who have been after me all day like two hounds on a stag, with talk of my duty and my position and my sins, with judgment and hell-fire ever at the end of their exhortations."

"And what would they have your Majesty do?"

"Break the promise which I made when I came upon the throne, and which my grandfather made before me. They wish me to recall the Edict of Nantes, and drive the Huguenots from the kingdom."

"Oh, but your Majesty must not trouble your mind about such matters."

"You would not have me do it, madame?"

"Not if it is to be a grief to your Majesty."

"You have, perchance, some soft feeling for the religion of your youth?"

"Nay, sire; I have nothing but hatred for heresy."

"And yet you would not have them thrust out?"

"Bethink you, sire, that the Almighty can Himself incline their hearts to better things if He is so minded, even as mine was inclined. May you not leave it in His hands?"

"On my word," said Louis, brightening, "it is well put. I shall see if Father la Chaise can find an answer to that. It is hard to be threatened with eternal flames because one will not ruin one's kingdom. Eternal torment! I have seen the face of a man who had been in the Bastille, for fifteen years. It was like a dreadful book, with a scar or a wrinkle to mark every hour of that death in life. But Eternity!" He shuddered, and his eyes were filled with the horror of his thought. The higher motives had but little power over his soul, as those about him had long discovered, but he was ever ready to wince at the image of the terrors to come.

"Why should you think of such things, sire?" said the lady, in her rich, soothing voice. "What have you to fear, you who have been the first son of the Church?"

"You think that I am safe, then?"

"Surely, sire."

"But I have erred, and erred deeply. You have yourself said as much."

"But that is all over, sire. Who is there who is without stain? You have turned away from temptation. Surely, then, you have earned your forgiveness."

"I would that the queen were living once more. She would find me a better man."

"I would that she were, sire."

"And she should know that it was to you that she owed the change. Oh, Francoise, you are surely my guardian angel, who has taken bodily form! How can I thank you for what you have done for me?" He leaned forward and took her hand, but at the touch a sudden fire sprang into his eyes, and he would have passed his other arm round her had she not risen hurriedly to avoid the embrace.

"Sire!" said she, with a rigid face and one finger upraised.

"You are right, you are right, Francoise. Sit down, and I will control myself. Still at the same tapestry, then! My workers at the Gobelins must look to their laurels." He raised one border of the

glossy roll, while she, having reseated herself, though not without a quick questioning glance at her companion, took the other end into her lap and continued her work.

"Yes, sire. It is a hunting scene in your forests at Fontainebleau. A stag of ten tines, you see, and the hounds in full cry, and a gallant band of cavaliers and ladies. Has your Majesty ridden to-day?"

"No. How is it, Francoise, that you have such a heart of ice?"

"I would it were so, sire. Perhaps you have hawked, then?"

"No. But surely no man's love has ever stirred you! And yet you have been a wife."

"A nurse, sire, but never a wife. See the lady in the park! It is surely mademoiselle. I did not know that she had come up from Choisy."

But the king was not to be distracted from his subject.

"You did not love this Scarron, then?" he persisted. "He was old, I have heard, and as lame as some of his verses."

"Do not speak lightly of him, sire. I was grateful to him; I honoured him; I liked him."

"But you did not love him."

"Why should you seek to read the secrets of a woman's heart?"

"You did not love him, Francoise?"

"At least I did my duty towards him."

"Has that nun's heart never yet been touched by love then?"

"Sire, do not question me."

"Has it never – "

"Spare me, sire, I beg of you!"

"But I must ask, for my own peace hangs upon your answer."

"Your words pain me to the soul."

"Have you never, Francoise, felt in your heart some little flicker of the love which glows in mine?" He rose with his hands outstretched, a pleading monarch, but she, with half-turned bead, still shrank away from him.

"Be assured of one thing, sire," said she, "that even if I loved you as no woman ever loved a man yet, I should rather spring from that window on to the stone terraces beneath than ever by word or sign confess as much to you."

"And why, Francoise?"

"Because, sire, it is my highest hope upon earth that I have been chosen to lift up your mind towards loftier things – that mind the greatness and nobility of which none know more than I."

"And is my love so base, then?"

"You have wasted too much of your life and of your thoughts upon woman's love. And now, sire, the years steal on and the day is coming when even you will be called upon to give an account of your actions, and of the innermost thoughts of your heart. I would see you spend the time that is left to you, sire, in building up the Church, in showing a noble example to your subjects, and in repairing any evil which that example may have done in the past."

The king sank back into his chair with a groan. "Forever the same," said he. "Why, you are worse than Father la Chaise and Bossuet."

"Nay, nay," said she gaily, with the quick tact in which she never failed. "I have wearied you, when you have stooped to honour my little room with your presence. That is indeed ingratitude, and it were a just punishment if you were to leave me in solitude to-morrow, and so cut off all the light of my day. But tell me, sire, how go the works at Marly? I am all on fire to know whether the great fountain will work."

"Yes, the fountain plays well, but Mansard has thrown the right wing too far back. I have made him a good architect, but I have still much to teach him. I showed him his fault on the plan this morning, and he promised to amend it."

"And what will the change cost, sire?"

"Some millions of livres, but then the view will be much improved from the south side. I have taken in another mile of ground in that direction, for there were a number of poor folk living there, and their hovels were far from pretty."

"And why have you not ridden to-day, sire?"

"Pah! it brings me no pleasure. There was a time when my blood was stirred by the blare of the horn and the rush of the hoofs, but now it is all wearisome to me."

"And hawking too?"

"Yes; I shall hawk no more."

"But, sire, you must have amusement."

"What is so dull as an amusement which has ceased to amuse? I know not how it is. When I was but a lad, and my mother and I were driven from place to place, with the Fronde at war with us and Paris in revolt, with our throne and even our lives in danger, all life seemed to be so bright, so new, and so full of interest. Now that there is no shadow, and that my voice is the first in France, as France's is in Europe, all is dull and lacking in flavour. What use is it to have all pleasure before me, when it turns to wormwood when it is tasted?"

"True pleasure, sire, lies rather in the inward life, the serene mind, the easy conscience. And then, as we grow older, is it not natural that our minds should take a graver bent? We might well reproach ourselves if it were not so, for it would show that we had not learned the lesson of life."

"It may be so, and yet it is sad and weary when nothing amuses. But who is there?"

"It is my companion knocking. What is it, mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur Corneille, to read to the king," said the young lady, opening the door.

"Ah, yes, sire; I know how foolish is a woman's tongue, and so I have brought a wiser one than mine here to charm you. Monsieur Racine was to have come, but I hear that he has had a fall from his horse, and he sends his friend in his place. Shall I admit him?"

"Oh, as you like, madame, as you like," said the king listlessly. At a sign from Mademoiselle Nanon a little peaky man with a shrewd petulant face, and long gray hair falling back over his shoulders, entered the room. He bowed profoundly three times, and then seated himself nervously on the very edge of the stool, from which the lady had removed her work-basket. She smiled and nodded to encourage the poet, while the monarch leaned back in his chair with an air of resignation.

"Shall it be a comedy, or a tragedy, or a burlesque pastoral?" Corneille asked timidly.

"Not the burlesque pastoral," said the king with decision. "Such things may be played, but cannot be read, since they are for the eye rather than the ear."

The poet bowed his acquiescence.

"And not the tragedy, monsieur," said Madame de Maintenon, glancing up from her tapestry. "The king has enough that is serious in his graver hours, and so I trust that you will use your talent to amuse him."

"Ay, let it be a comedy," said Louis; "I have not had a good laugh since poor Moliere passed away."

"Ah, your Majesty has indeed a fine taste," cried the courtier poet. "Had you condescended to turn your own attention to poetry, where should we all have been then?"

Louis smiled, for no flattery was too gross to please him.

"Even as you have taught our generals war and our builders art, so you would have set your poor singers a loftier strain. But Mars would hardly deign to share the humbler laurels of Apollo."

"I have sometimes thought that I had some such power," answered the king complacently; "though amid my toils and the burdens of state I have had, as you say, little time for the softer arts."

"But you have encouraged others to do what you could so well have done yourself, sire. You have brought out poets as the sun brings out flowers. How many have we not seen – Moliere, Boileau, Racine, one greater than the other? And the others, too, the smaller ones – Scarron, so scurrilous and yet so witty – Oh, holy Virgin! what have I said?"

Madame had laid down her tapestry, and was staring in intense indignation at the poet, who writhed on his stool under the stern rebuke of those cold gray eyes.

"I think, Monsieur Corneille, that you had better go on with your reading," said the king dryly.

"Assuredly, sire. Shall I read my play about Darius?"

"And who was Darius?" asked the king, whose education had been so neglected by the crafty policy of Cardinal Mazarin that he was ignorant of everything save what had come under his own personal observation.

"Darius was King of Persia, sire."

"And where is Persia?"

"It is a kingdom of Asia."

"Is Darius still king there?"

"Nay, sire; he fought against Alexander the Great."

"Ah, I have heard of Alexander. He was a famous king and general, was he not?"

"Like your Majesty, he both ruled wisely and led his armies victoriously."

"And was King of Persia, you say?"

"No, sire; of Macedonia. It was Darius who was King of Persia."

The king frowned, for the slightest correction was offensive to him.

"You do not seem very clear about the matter, and I confess that it does not interest me deeply," said he. "Pray turn to something else."

"There is my Pretended Astrologer."

"Yes, that will do."

Corneille commenced to read his comedy, while Madame de Maintenon's white and delicate fingers picked among the many-coloured silks which she was weaving into her tapestry. From time to time she glanced across, first at the clock and then at the king, who was leaning back, with his lace handkerchief thrown over his face. It was twenty minutes to four now, but she knew that she had put it back half an hour, and that the true time was ten minutes past.

"Tut! tut!" cried the king suddenly. "There is something amiss there. The second last line has a limp in it, surely." It was one of his foibles to pose as a critic, and the wise poet would fall in with his corrections, however unreasonable they might be.

"Which line, sire? It is indeed an advantage to have one's faults made clear."

"Read the passage again."

> "Et si, quand je lui dis le secret de mon ame,
> Avec moins de rigueur elle eut traite ma flamme,
> Dans ma fayon de vivre, et suivant mon humeur,
> Une autre eut bientot le present de mon coeur."

"Yes, the third line has a foot too many. Do you not remark it, madame?"

"No; but I fear that I should make a poor critic."

"Your Majesty is perfectly right," said Corneille unblushingly. "I shall mark the passage, and see that it is corrected."

"I thought that it was wrong. If I do not write myself, you can see that I have at least got the correct ear. A false quantity jars upon me. It is the same in music. Although I know little of the matter, I can tell a discord where Lully himself would miss it. I have often shown him errors of the sort in his operas, and I have always convinced him that I was right."

"I can readily believe it, your Majesty." Corneille had picked up his book again, and was about to resume his reading when there came a sharp tap at the door.

"It is his Highness the minister, Monsieur de Louvois," said Mademoiselle Nanon.

"Admit him," answered Louis. "Monsieur Corneille, I am obliged to you for what you have read, and I regret that an affair of state will now interrupt your comedy. Some other day perhaps I

may have the pleasure of hearing the rest of it." He smiled in the gracious fashion which made all who came within his personal influence forget his faults and remember him only as the impersonation of dignity and of courtesy.

The poet, with his book under his arm, slipped out, while the famous minister, tall, heavily wigged, eagle-nosed, and commanding, came bowing into the little room. His manner was that of exaggerated politeness, but his haughty face marked only too plainly his contempt for such a chamber and for the lady who dwelt there. She was well aware of the feeling with which he regarded her, but her perfect self-command prevented her from ever by word or look returning his dislike.

"My apartments are indeed honoured to-day," said she, rising with outstretched hand. "Can monsieur condescend to a stool, since I have no fitter seat to offer you in this little doll's house? But perhaps I am in the way, if you wish to talk of state affairs to the king. I can easily withdraw into my boudoir."

"No, no, nothing of the kind, madame," cried Louis. "It is my wish that you should remain here. What is it, Louvois?"

"A messenger arrived from England with despatches, your Majesty," answered the minister, his ponderous figure balanced upon the three-legged stool. "There is very ill feeling there, and there is some talk of a rising. The letter from Lord Sunderland wished to know whether, in case the Dutch took the side of the malcontents, the king might look to France for help. Of course, knowing your Majesty's mind, I answered unhesitatingly that he might."

"You did what?"

"I answered, sire, that he might."

King Louis flushed with anger, and he caught up the tongs from the grate with a motion as though he would have struck his minister with them. Madame sprang from her chair, and laid her hand upon his arm with a soothing gesture. He threw down the tongs again, but his eyes still flashed with passion as he turned them upon Louvois.

"How dared you?" he cried.

"But, sire – "

"How dared you, I say? What! You venture to answer such a message without consulting me! How often am I to tell you that I am the state – I alone; that all is to come from me; and that I am answerable to God only? What are you? My instrument! my tool! And you venture to act without my authority!"

"I thought that I knew your wishes, sire," stammered Louvois, whose haughty manner had quite deserted him, and whose face was as white as the ruffles of his shirt.

"You are not there to think about my wishes, sir. You are there to consult them and to obey them. Why is it that I have turned away from my old nobility, and have committed the affairs of my kingdom to men whose names have never been heard of in the history of France, such men as Colbert and yourself? I have been blamed for it. There was the Duc de St. Simon, who said, the last time that he was at the court, that it was a bourgeois government. So it is. But I wished it to be so, because I knew that the nobles have a way of thinking for themselves, and I ask for no thought but mine in the governing of France. But if my bourgeois are to receive messages and give answers to embassies, then indeed I am to be pitied. I have marked you of late, Louvois. You have grown beyond your station. You take too much upon yourself. See to it that I have not again to complain to you upon this matter."

The humiliated minister sat as one crushed, with his chin sunk upon his breast. The king muttered and frowned for a few minutes, but the cloud cleared gradually from his face, for his fits of anger were usually as short as they were fierce and sudden.

"You will detain that messenger, Louvois," he said at last, in a calm voice.

"Yes, sire."

"And we shall see at the council meeting to-morrow that a fitting reply be sent to Lord Sunderland. It would be best perhaps not to be too free with our promises in the matter. These English

have ever been a thorn in our sides. If we could leave them among their own fogs with such a quarrel as would keep them busy for a few years, then indeed we might crush this Dutch prince at our leisure. Their last civil war lasted ten years, and their next may do as much. We could carry our frontier to the Rhine long ere that. Eh, Louvois?"

"Your armies are ready, sire, on the day that you give the word."

"But war is a costly business. I do not wish to have to sell the court plate, as we did the other day. How are the public funds?"

"We are not very rich, sire. But there is one way in which money may very readily be gained. There was some talk this morning about the Huguenots, and whether they should dwell any longer in this Catholic kingdom. Now, if they are driven out, and if their property were taken by the state, then indeed your Majesty would at once become the richest monarch in Christendom."

"But you were against it this morning, Louvois?"

"I had not had time to think of it, sire."

"You mean that Father la Chaise and the bishop had not had time to get at you," said Louis sharply. "Ah, Louvois, I have not lived with a court round me all these years without learning how things are done. It is a word to him, and so on to another, and so to a third, and so to the king. When my good fathers of the Church have set themselves to bring anything to pass, I see traces of them at every turn, as one traces a mole by the dirt which it has thrown up. But I will not be moved against my own reason to do wrong to those who, however mistaken they may be, are still the subjects whom God has given me."

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