

A ROMANCE OF THE WEST
INDIES

BY
EUGÈNE SUE

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PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE PASSENGER.

TOWARD the latter part of May, 1690, the three-masted schooner the Unicorn sailed from Rochelle for the island of Martinique.

A Captain Daniel commanded this vessel, which was armed with a dozen pieces of medium-sized ordnance, a defensive precaution necessary at that period. France was at that time at war with England, and the Spanish pirates would often cross to the windward of the Antilles, in spite of the frequent pursuit of filibusters.

Among the passengers of the Unicorn, few in number, was the Reverend Father Griffen, of the Order of the Preaching Brothers. He was returning to Martinique to resume his parish duties at Macouba, where he had occupied the curacy for some years to the satisfaction of the inhabitants and the slaves of that locality.

The exceptional life of the colonies, then almost continually in a state of open hostility against the English, the Spanish, and the natives of the Antilles, placed the priests of the latter in a peculiar position. They were called upon not only to preach, to hear confessions, to administer the sacraments to their flocks, but also to aid in defending themselves during the frequent inroads of their enemies of all nations and all colors.

The priest's house was, as other habitations, alike isolated and exposed to deadly surprises. More than once had Father Griffen, assisted by his two slaves, intrenched himself securely behind a large gateway of mahogany, after having repulsed their assailants by a lively fire.

Formerly a professor of geometry and mathematics, and possessed of considerable theoretical knowledge of military architecture, Father Griffen had given most excellent advice to the successive governors of Martinique on the construction of works of defense.

This priest knew thoroughly the stonecutter's and carpenter's trades; learned in agriculture, an excellent gardener, of an inventive spirit, full of resources, of rare energy, a determined courage, he was a valuable man to the colony, and, above all, to the quarter he inhabited.

The word of the gospel had not, perhaps, in his mouth all the unction to be desired; his voice was rough, his exhortations were unpolished; but their moral quality was excellent; they abounded in charity. He said the mass as rapidly and as forcibly as if he were a buccaneer. One could pardon him

when one knew that this holy office was often interrupted by a raid of the heretical English or the idolatrous Caribbeans; and that then Father Griffen, leaping from the pulpit from which he had preached "peace and concord," was always one of the first to put himself at the head of his flock in order to defend it.

As to the wounded and prisoners, once the engagement was ended, the worthy priest ameliorated their situation as far as he could, and with the greatest care dressed the wounds which he had himself made.

We will not undertake to prove that the conduct of Father Griffen was in all points canonical, nor to solve the question so often debated, "Under what circumstances may the clergy go to war?" We do not claim for this subject either the authority of Saint Gregory nor that of Leo IV. We simply say that this worthy priest did good and combated evil with all his might.

Of a loyal and generous character, frank and gay, Father Griffen was mischievously hostile and mocking where women were concerned. He was continually making jests upon the daughters of Eve; these temptresses, these diabolical allies of the Serpent. In justice to Father Griffen, we must say that he showed in his railleries, otherwise without malice, a little rancor and contempt; he jested lightly on the subject of a happiness that he regretted not being able to desire; for, in spite of the extreme license of Creole customs, the purity of Father Griffen's life was never questioned.

He might have been accused of loving the pleasures of the table; not that he abused them (he observed bounds in enjoying the good gifts which God bestowed), but he was singularly fond of indulging himself with marvelous recipes for dressing game, seasoning fish, or preserving in sugar the fragrant fruits of the tropics; at times, even the description of his epicurean tastes became contagious, when he would enlarge upon certain repasts after the manner of buccaneers, prepared in the depths of the forests or on the shore of the island. Between you and me, Father Griffen possessed, among others, the secret of cooking a turtle, buccaneer-fashion, of which the mere recital was enough to excite ravenous hunger on the part of his hearers. In spite of his usually formidable appetite, Father Griffen scrupulously observed his fasts, which an edict of the pope's decreed should be much less strict at the Antilles and in the Indies than in Europe.

It is unnecessary to say here that the worthy priest would abandon the most delicate repast in order to fulfill his duties as a priest to a poor slave; no one was more pitiful than he—a more charitable or prudent manager, regarding the little he possessed as the property of the unfortunate.

Never was his consolation or succor lacking to those who suffered; but once his Christian task fulfilled, he worked gayly and vigorously in his garden,

watered his plants, hoed his paths, pruned his trees, and when night came he loved to rest after his salutary and rustic labor, and enjoy, with an intelligent keenness of palate, the gastronomic riches of the country.

His flock never allowed his cellar or his larder to become empty. The finest fruit, the best portion from the chase or the rod, was always faithfully sent to him. He was beloved—he was blessed. They came to him to settle all points of dispute, and his judgment was finally accepted on all questions.

The physique of Father Griffen accorded perfectly with the impression perhaps formed of him after what has just been said of his character.

He was a man of not more than fifty years, robust, active, though perhaps rather too stout; his long robe of white wool and his black cape set off his broad shoulders; a felt cap covered his bald crown. His red face, his triple chin, his lips thick and crimson, his nose long and flat at the end, his small and lively gray eyes, gave him a certain resemblance to Rabelais; but what specially characterized Father Griffen's physiognomy was a rare mixture of frankness, goodness, strength and innocent raillery.

At the commencement of this story, the Preaching Brother stood on the stern of the vessel, in conversation with Captain Daniel. The ease with which he maintained his equilibrium, in spite of the violent rolling of the vessel, proved that Father Griffen had long since found his sea-legs.

Captain Daniel was an old sea-dog; once at sea, he left the management of his vessel to his mates and pilot, and became intoxicated regularly every night. Frequently making the trip from Martinique to Rochelle, he had already brought Father Griffen from America. The latter, accustomed to the inebriety of the worthy captain, attentively studied the ship's management; for without possessing the nautical science of Father Fournier, and other of his religious colleagues, he had a sufficiently theoretical and practical knowledge of navigation. Often had the priest made the passage from Martinique to San Domingo and beyond, on board the privateer vessels, which always yielded a tithe of their prizes to the churches of the Antilles.

Night approached. Father Griffen inhaled with pleasure the odor of supper which was being prepared. The captain's boy came to announce to the passengers that the repast was ready; two or three among them, who had successfully resisted seasickness, entered the cabin.

Father Griffen said grace; they had hardly seated themselves when the door of the cabin opened suddenly, and the following words were pronounced with a strong Gascon accent:

"There is, I hope, noble captain, a small place for the Chevalier de Croustillac?"

All the guests made a movement of surprise, then strove to read in the features of the captain an explanation of this singular apparition. The captain remained stupefied, regarding his new guest with an air almost of affright.

"Eh, there, who are you? I do not know you. Where the devil did you come from, sir?" he finally said.

"If I came from the devil, this good priest," and he kissed the hand of Father Griffen, "this good priest would send me back there very quickly, by saying, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.'"

"But where do you come from, sir?" cried the captain, stupefied by the confident and smiling air of this unexpected guest.

"One does not come thus on board. You are not on my list of passengers. You have fallen from the sky, perhaps?"

"A few minutes since it was from the infernal regions; now it is from the heavens that I come. Faith! I do not lay claim to an origin so divine nor so infernal, worthy captain; I——"

"It matters not as to that," replied the captain. "Tell me, how came you here?"

The chevalier assumed a majestic air. "I should be unworthy of belonging to the noble house of de Croustillac, one of the oldest in Guienne, if I had the slightest hesitation in satisfying the legitimate curiosity of the illustrious captain."

"So—this is very lucky," cried the latter.

"Do not say it is lucky, rather say it is right. I fall upon your vessel like a bomb; you are astonished; nothing is more natural; you ask me how I came on board. This is your right. I explain it to you—that is my duty. Completely satisfied by my explanation, you extend to me your hand and say, 'This is well, chevalier, place yourself at table with us.' I respond to you, 'Captain, I cannot refuse, for I am dying for lack of sustenance. Blessed be your benevolent offer.' So saying I slip in between these two estimable gentlemen. I make myself small; very small; in order not to incommode them; on the contrary, the motion is so violent that I wedge——"

So saying, the chevalier put his words into execution; profiting by the general surprise, he insinuated himself between two guests and provided himself with the glass of one, the plate of another, and the napkin of a third. Profound amazement made his neighbors oblivious to the things of this world. All this was accomplished with so much quickness, dexterity, confidence and boldness that the guests of the illustrious captain of the Unicorn and the illustrious captain himself did not dream of more than

looking with the greatest curiosity and astonishment at the Chevalier de Croustillac. The adventurer proudly wore an old waistcoat of rateen, once green, but now of a yellowish blue; his frayed breeches were of the same shade; his stockings, at one time scarlet, were now a faded pink, and seemed in places to be fairly embroidered with white thread; a badly worn gray felt hat, an old sword-belt trimmed with imitation gold lace, now tarnished, supported a long sword upon which the chevalier, on entering, leaned with the air of a grandee. Croustillac was a very tall and excessively thin man. He appeared to be from thirty-six to forty years of age. His hair, mustache, and eyebrows were jet black, his face bony, brown and tanned. He had a long nose, small hazel eyes, which were extraordinarily lively, and his mouth was very large; his physiognomy betrayed at the same time an imperturbable assurance and an excessive vanity.

Croustillac had that overweening belief in himself which one finds only among the Gascons. He so exaggerated his merits and natural graces to himself that he believed no woman was able to resist him; the list of his conquests of every kind had been interminable. In spite of the most amazing falsehoods, which cost him little, it cannot be denied that he possessed true courage and a certain nobility of character. This natural valor, joined to his blind confidence in himself, sometimes precipitated him into almost inextricable situations, into which he threw himself headlong, and from which he never emerged without hard blows—for if he was as adventurous and boastful as a Gascon, he was as obstinate and opinionated as a Breton.

Heretofore his life had been very similar to that of his Bohemian companions. The younger son of a poor Gascon family of doubtful nobility, he had come to seek his fortune at Paris; by turns petty officer of a forlorn hope; provost of an academy, bath-keeper, horse jockey, peddler of satirical news and Holland gazettes; he had more than once pretended to be a Protestant, feigning conversion to the Catholic faith in order to secure the fifty crowns that M. Pelisson paid each neophyte as the price of conversion. This cheat discovered, the chevalier was condemned to the lash and to prison. He suffered the lash, escaped from prison, disguised himself by means of an immense shade over his eye, girded himself with a formidable sword with which he ambled about, then embraced the profession of wheedling country folk for the benefit of gambling houses, into which he led those innocent lambs, who did not come forth again until completely shorn. It must be said—to the chevalier's credit that he took no part himself in these rascalities; as he said to himself—if he did bait the hook, he at least did not eat the fish.

The laws regarding duels were at that time very severe. One day the chevalier encountered a well-known brave named Fontenay-Coup-d'Epée. The latter roughly elbowed our adventurer, saying, "Take care! I am

Fontenay Sword-Thrust." "And I," said the Gascon, "Croustillac Cannon-Ball," whipping out his sword.

Fontenay was killed, and Croustillac obliged to flee in order to escape capture.

The chevalier had often heard of the wonderful fortunes to be realized in the colonies. Journeying sometimes on foot, sometimes on horse, sometimes in a wagon, he went to Rochelle hoping to embark for America. Once there, Croustillac found that he not only must pay his passage on board a vessel, but must also obtain from the intendant of marine, permission to embark for the Antilles.

These two things were equally difficult of accomplishment; the emigration of Protestants, which Louis XIV. wished to prevent, made the officers of the ports extremely severe, and the voyage to Martinique cost no less than eight or nine hundred livres. In all his life the adventurer had never been possessed of a tithe of this amount. Arriving at Rochelle with ten crowns in his pocket, dressed in a smock frock and carrying his clothing on the end of his scabbard, the chevalier went, like a journeyman, to lodge at a poor tavern, ordinarily frequented by sailors.

There he inquired as to outgoing vessels, and learned that the Unicorn would set sail in a few days. Two of the crew of this vessel frequented the tavern which the chevalier had selected for the center of his operations. It would take too long to tell by what prodigies of astuteness and address; by what impudent and fabulous lies; by what mad promises Croustillac succeeded in interesting in his behalf the master cooper charged with the stowage of the casks of fresh water in the hold; it is enough to know that this man consented to hide Croustillac in an empty cask and to carry him on board the Unicorn.

According to custom, the intendant's assistants and the admiralty clerks carefully examined the vessel at the moment of its departure, in order to see that no one had fraudulently embarked. The chevalier kept quiet at the bottom of his cask and escaped the careful search of the king's servants. His heart bounded freely when he felt the vessel under way; he waited some hours before daring to show himself, knowing well that, once on the high seas, the captain of the Unicorn would not return to port to bring back a contraband passenger.

It had been arranged between the master cooper and the chevalier that the latter should never disclose the means whereby he had been smuggled on board.

A man less impudent than our adventurer would have timidly kept his place among the sailors, waiting with uneasiness the moment when Captain

Daniel should discover the stowaway. Croustillac, on the contrary, went boldly to his end; preferring the captain's table to the mess of the crew, he was not a moment in doubt that he would be seated at that table—if not rightfully, at least in fact.

We have seen how his audacity served his purpose.

Such was the unexpected visitor at whom the guests of the Unicorn looked curiously.

CHAPTER II.

BLUE BEARD.

"NOW, sir, explain how you came here!" cried the captain of the Unicorn, too impatient to learn the Gascon's secret to send him from the table.

The Chevalier de Croustillac poured out a large glass of wine, stood up, and said in a loud tone, "I will first propose to the illustrious company to drink the health of one who is dear to us all—that of our glorious king, that of Louis the Great, the most adored of princes!"

In that troublous time, it would have been unwise and even dangerous for the captain to receive the chevalier's proposition with coolness. Captain Daniel and the passengers following his example, responding to the toast, repeated in chorus, "To the king's health! to the health of Louis the Great!" One person alone remained silent; this was the chevalier's neighbor. Croustillac looked at him frowningly.

"By the gods, sir, are you not one of us?" said he; "are you, then, an enemy of our beloved king?"

"Not at all, sir; not at all. I love and venerate this great king, but how can I drink. You have taken my glass," replied the passenger timidly.

"What! gods! Is it for such a trifle as this that you expose yourself to passing for a bad Frenchman?" exclaimed the chevalier, shrugging his shoulders. "Are there not enough glasses here? Waiter! bring this gentleman a glass. My dear friend, good luck. Now stand and let us say, 'To the king's health—our great king!'"

After this toast all reseated themselves. The chevalier profited by the confusion to give a napkin and plate to his neighbor. Then, uncovering a dish placed before him, he said boldly to Father Griffen, "Father, may I offer you some of this potted pigeon?"

"Zounds, sir," cried the captain, struck by the liberties taken by the chevalier, "you put yourself very much at your ease."

The adventurer interrupted the captain and said to him with a solemn air, "Captain, I know how to render to each what is due. The clergy is the first order of the state; I conduct myself then as a Christian in serving at once this reverend father. I shall do more—I shall seize this occasion to render homage, in his respectable and holy person, to the evangelical virtues which distinguish and always will distinguish our church."

So saying, the chevalier served Father Griffen. From this moment it became very difficult for the captain to oust the adventurer. He had not refused the chevalier's toast, nor prevented him from doing the honors of the table. Meanwhile he continued to question him. "Come, sir, you are a gentleman,

so be it! you are a good Christian, you love the king as we all love him—this is very well, but tell me, how the devil came you here to eat supper with us?"

"Father," said the chevalier, "I call upon you to bear witness, in the presence of this honorable company——"

"To bear witness to what, my son?" replied the priest.

"To bear witness to what the captain has said."

"How? What have I said," exclaimed the captain.

"Captain, you have said, you will remember, in the presence of this company, that I am a gentleman."

"I have said so, no doubt, but——"

"That I am a good Christian."

"Yes, but——"

"That I love the king."

"Yes, because——"

"Very well," replied the chevalier. "I again call this illustrious company to bear witness that when one is a good Christian, when one is a gentleman, when one loves his king, what more can be asked? Father, shall I help you to some of this roast?"

"I will take some, my son, for my seasickness takes the form of a robust appetite; once on shipboard, my hunger redoubles."

"I am delighted, Father, at this similarity in constitution. I, too, have a ravenous appetite."

"Very well, my son; as our good captain has given you the means wherewith to satisfy your appetite, I would say, to make use of your own words, that it is just because you are a gentleman, a good Christian, and well-disposed toward our beloved sovereign, that you ought to answer the questions of Captain Daniel as to your extraordinary appearance on board his ship."

"Unhappily, that is just what I cannot do, Father."

"How? cannot do?" cried the irritated captain.

The chevalier assumed a solemn air, and replied, as he turned toward the priest, "This reverend father can alone hear my confession and my vows; this secret is not mine alone; this secret is grave, very grave," he added, raising his eyes in contrition to heaven.

"And I—I can force you to speak," cried the captain, "when I cause a cannon ball to be tied to each of your feet and ride you on a rail until you disclose the truth."

"Captain," answered the chevalier, with imperturbable calm, "I never permit any one to threaten me. The motion of an eyelid, a sneer, a gesture, a nothing, which seems insulting—but you are king on your own ship, and therefore I am in your kingdom and recognize myself to be your subject. You have admitted me to your table—I shall continue to be worthy of this favor always—but there is no reason to arbitrarily inflict upon me such bad treatment. Nevertheless, I shall know how to resign myself to it, to support it, unless this good priest, the refuge of the feeble against the strong, deigns to intercede with you in my behalf," replied the chevalier humbly.

The captain was very much embarrassed, for Father Griffen did not hesitate to speak a few words in behalf of the adventurer who had so suddenly sought his protection, and who had promised to reveal, under the seal of the confessional, the secret of his presence on the Unicorn. The anger of the captain was somewhat appeased; the chevalier, at first flattering, insinuating, became jovial and comical; for the amusement of the passengers he performed all kinds of tricks; he balanced knives on his nose; he built up a pyramid of glasses and bottles with wonderful ingenuity; he sang new songs; he imitated the cries of various animals. In fact, Croustillac knew so well how to amuse the captain of the Unicorn, who was not very hard to please, that when supper was concluded the latter clapped the Gascon on the shoulder, saying:

"After all, chevalier, you are here on board, there is no way to undo that. You are good company, and there will always be a plate for you at my table, and we will manage to find some corner in which to swing a hammock for you."

The chevalier overwhelmed the captain with thanks and protestations of gratitude, and betook himself quickly to the place assigned to him, and soon was profoundly sleeping, perfectly satisfied as to his well-being during the voyage, although a little humiliated from having had to suffer the captain's threats, and from having had to descend to tricks to win the good will of one whom he mentally designated a brute and a seabear.

The chevalier saw in the colonies a veritable Eldorado. He had heard of the magnificent hospitality of the colonists, who were only too happy, he had been told, to keep the Europeans who came to see them as guests, for months, and he drew this very simple deduction: there are about fifty or sixty rich plantations at Martinique and Guadeloupe; their proprietors, bored to death, are delighted to keep with them men of wit; of gay humor, and of resources. I am essentially one of these; I have only, then, to appear to be petted, fêted, spoiled; admitting that I spend six months at each plantation, one after another—there are fully in the neighborhood of sixty—this will give me from twenty-five to thirty years of enjoyment and perfectly

assured comfortable existence, and I count only on the least favorable chances. I am in the full maturity of my gifts; I am amiable, witty, I have all kinds of society talents; how can one believe that the rich owners of these colonies, will be so blind, so stupid, as not to profit by the occasion and secure to themselves in this way the most charming husband that a young girl or a fascinating widow has ever pictured in sleepless nights.

Such were the hopes of the chevalier; we shall see if they were realized.

The following morning Croustillac kept his promise and made his confession to Father Griffen.

Although sincere enough, the avowal revealed nothing new as to the position of the penitent, which he had very nearly divined. This was, in effect the chevalier's confession: He had dissipated his fortune; killed a man in a duel; pursued by justice and finding himself without resources, he had adopted the dangerous part of going to the West Indies to seek his fortune; not having the means of paying for his passage, he had had recourse to the compassion of a cooper, who had carried him on board and hidden him in an empty cask.

This apparent sincerity caused Father Griffen to look upon the adventurer with leniency; but he did not hide from the Gascon that any hope of finding a fortune in the colonies was an error; he must bring quite an amount of capital with him to obtain even the smallest establishment; the climate was deadly; the inhabitants, as a general thing, were suspicious of strangers, and all the traditions of generous hospitality of the first colonists completely forgotten, as much through the egotism of the inhabitants as because of the discomforts following a war with England—which had gravely affected their interests. In a word, Father Griffen counseled the chevalier to accept the offer which the captain made, of taking him back to Rochelle after having touched at Martinique. In the priest's opinion, Croustillac could find a thousand resources in France, which he could not hope to find in a half-civilized country; the condition of the Europeans being such in the colonies that never, in consideration of their dignity as whites, could they perform menial employment. Father Griffen was ignorant of the fact that the chevalier had exhausted the resources of France, and therefore had expatriated himself. Under certain circumstances, no one was more easily hoodwinked than the good priest; his pity for the unhappy blinding his usual penetration. The past life of the chevalier did not appear to have been one of immaculate purity; but this man was so careless in his distress, so indifferent to the future which menaced him, that Father Griffen ended by taking more interest in the adventurer than he merited, and he proposed that the latter should stay in his parsonage at Macouba, while the Unicorn

remained at Martinique; an invitation that Croustillac took care not to refuse.

Time went on. Captain Daniel was never tired of praising the wonderful talents of the chevalier, in whom he discovered new treasures of sleight-of-hand each day. Croustillac had finished by putting into his mouth the ends of burning candles, and by swallowing forks. This last feat had carried the captain beyond bounds of enthusiasm; he formally offered the Gascon a situation for life on board ship if the chevalier would promise to charm thus agreeably the tedium of the voyages of the Unicorn.

We would say here, in order to explain the success of Croustillac, that at sea the hours seem very long; the slightest distractions are precious, and one is very glad to have always at one's beck and call a species of buffoon endowed with imperturbable good humor. As to the chevalier, he hid under a laughing and careless mask, a sad preoccupation; the end of his journey drew near; the words of Father Griffen had been too sensible, too sincere, too just not to strongly impress our adventurer, who had counted upon passing a joyous life at the expense of the colonists. The coldness with which many of the passengers, returning to Martinique, treated him, completed the ruin of his hopes. In spite of the talents which he developed and which amused them, none of these colonists made the slightest advance to the chevalier, although he repeatedly declared he would be delighted to make a long exploration into the interior of the island.

The end of the voyage came; the last illusions of Croustillac were destroyed; he saw himself reduced to the deplorable alternative of forever traversing the ocean with Captain Daniel, or of returning to France to encounter the rigors of the law. Chance suddenly offered to the chevalier the most dazzling mirage, and awakened in him the maddest hopes.

The Unicorn was not more than two hundred leagues from Martinique when they met a French trading vessel coming from that island and sailing for France. This vessel lay to and sent a boat to the Unicorn for news from Europe. In the colonies all was well for some weeks past; not a single English man-of-war had been seen. After exchanging other news, the two vessels separated.

"For a vessel of such value (the passengers had estimated her worth at about four hundred thousand francs) she is not very well armed," said the chevalier, "and would be a good prize for the English."

"Bah!" returned a passenger with an envious air, "Blue Beard can afford to lose such a vessel as that."

"Yes, truly; there would still remain enough money to buy and arm others."

"Twenty such, if she desired," said the captain.

"Oh, twenty, that is a good many," said another.

"Faith, without counting her magnificent plantation at Anse aux Sables, and her mysterious house at Devil's Cliff," returned a third, "do they not say she has five or six millions of gold and precious stones hidden somewhere?"

"Ah, there it is! hidden no one knows where!" exclaimed Captain Daniel; "but one thing sure, she has them, for I have it from old father 'Wide-awake,' who had once seen Blue Beard's first husband at Devil's Cliff (which husband, they say, was young and handsome as an angel). I have it from Wide-awake that Blue Beard on this day amused herself by measuring in a bowl, diamonds, pearls and emeralds; now, all these riches are still in her possession, without counting that her third and last husband, as they say, was very rich, and that all his fortune was in gold dust."

"People say she is so avaricious that she expends for herself and household only ten thousand francs a year," continued a passenger.

"As to that, it is not certain," said Captain Daniel; "no one knows how she lives, because she is a stranger in the colony, and not four persons have ever put their feet inside Devil's Cliff."

"Truly; and lucky it is so; I am not the one who would have the curiosity to go there," said another; "Devil's Cliff does not enjoy a very good reputation; they do say that strange things take place there."

"It is certain that it has been struck by lightning three times."

"That does not surprise me; and strange cries, they say, are heard round the house."

"It is said that it is built like a fortress, inaccessible, among the rocks of the Cabesterre."

"That is natural if Blue Beard has so great a treasure to guard."

Croustillac heard this conversation with great curiosity. These treasures, these diamonds, were pictured in his imagination.

"Of whom do you speak, gentlemen?" he said.

"We are speaking of Blue Beard."

"Who is this Blue Beard?"

"Blue Beard? Well, it is—Blue Beard."

"But is this a man or a woman?" said the chevalier.

"Blue Beard?"

"Yes, yes," said Croustillac impatiently.

"'Tis a woman."

"How, a woman? and why, then, call her Blue Beard?"

"Because she gets rid of her husbands as easily as Blue Beard of the old story got rid of his wives."

"And she is a widow? She is a widow! Oh," cried the chevalier, clapping his hands while his heart beat rapidly, "a widow! rich beyond belief; rich enough to make one dizzy only to try to estimate her wealth—a widow!"

"A widow; so much of a widow that she is such for a third time in three years," said the captain.

"And is she as rich as they say?"

"Yes, that is conceded; all the world knows it," replied the captain.

"Worth millions; rich enough to fit out vessels worth four hundred thousand livres; rich enough to have sacks of diamonds and emeralds and fine pearls!" cried the Gascon, whose eyes sparkled and nostrils dilated, while his hands clinched.

"But I tell you that she is rich enough to buy Martinique and Guadeloupe if she were so pleased," said the captain.

"And old? very old?" asked the Gascon, uneasily.

His informer looked at the other passengers with a questioning air. "What age should you say Blue Beard was?"

"Faith, I do not know," said one.

"All I know," said another, "is that when I came to the colony two years ago she had already had her second husband, and had a third in view, who only lived a year."

"As to her third husband, it is said that he is not dead, but has disappeared," said a third.

"He is certainly dead, however, because Blue Beard has been seen wearing a widow's garb," said a passenger.

"No doubt, no doubt," continued another; "the proof that he is dead is that the parish priest of Macouba was instructed, in the absence of Father Griffen, to say the mass for the dead, for him."

"And it would not be surprising if he had been assassinated," said another.

"Assassinated? by his wife, no doubt?" said still another voice with an emphasis that spoke little in favor of Blue Beard.

"Not by his wife!"

"Ah, ah, that is something new!"

"Not by his wife? and by whom, then?"

"By his enemies in the Barbadoes."

"By the English colonists?"

"Yes, by the English, because he was himself English."

"Is it so, then, sir; the third husband is dead, really dead?" asked the chevalier anxiously.

"Oh, as to being dead—he is that," exclaimed several in chorus.

Croustillac drew a long breath; a moment's thought, and his hopes resumed their audacious flight.

"But the age of Blue Beard?" he persisted.

"Her age—as to that I can satisfy you; she must be anywhere from twenty, yes, that is about it, from twenty to sixty years," said Captain Daniel.

"Then you have not seen her?" said the Gascon, impatient under this raillery.

"Seen her? I? And why the devil should you suppose I had seen Blue Beard?" asked the captain. "Are you mad?"

"Why?"

"Listen, my friends," said the captain to his passengers; "he asks me if I have seen Blue Beard."

The passengers shrugged their shoulders.

"But," continued Croustillac, "what is there astonishing in my question?"

"What is there astonishing?" said the captain.

"Yes."

"Hold; you come from Paris, do you not? and is Paris not much smaller than Martinique?"

"Without doubt."

"Very well; have you seen the executioner at Paris?"

"The executioner? No, but why such a question?"

"Very well; once for all, understand that no one is any more curious to see Blue Beard than to see the executioner, sir. Beside, the house in which she lives is situated in the midst of the wilds of Devil's Cliff, where one does not care to venture. Then an assassin is not an agreeable companion, and Blue Beard has too bad associates."

"Bad associates?" said the chevalier.

"Yes, friends; friends of the heart; not to go into the matter any further, it is a saying that it is not well to encounter them by night on the plain; by night in the woods; or after sunset under the lee of the island," said the captain.

"'Whirlwind'—the filibuster first," said one of the passengers with an affrighted air.

"Or 'Rend the Soul'—the buccaneer of Marie-Galande," said another.

"Or 'Youmäale,' the Caribbean cannibal of the lake of the Caimans," continued a third.

"What?" cried the chevalier, "does Blue Beard coquette at the same time with a filibusterer, a buccaneer, and a cannibal? Bah! what a woman!"

"So they say, sir."

CHAPTER III.

THE ARRIVAL.

THESE singular revelations concerning the morals of Blue Beard made a great impression upon the chevalier. After some moments of silence he asked the captain, "Who is this man, this filibuster whom they term the Whirlwind?"

"A mulatto from San Domingo, they say," replied Captain Daniel, "one of the most determined filibusters of the Antilles; he has dwelt in Martinique for the past two years, in a solitary house, where he lives now like an alderman."

"And you think that this bully is favored by Blue Beard?"

"They say that all the time that he does not pass at his own house, he is at Devil's Cliff."

"This proves at least that Blue Beard has never loved sentimental swains!" said the chevalier. "Well, but the buccaneer?"

"Faith," cried one of the passengers, "I do not know if I would not rather have the Whirlwind for an enemy than the buccaneer 'Rend-your-soul!'"

"Zounds! there is at least a name which holds possibilities," said Croustillac.

"And which fulfills them," said the passenger, "for him I have seen."

"And is he so terrible?"

"He is certainly as ferocious as the wild boars or the bulls which he hunts. I will tell you about him. It is now about a year since I was going to his ranch in the Great Tari, in the northern part of Martinique, to purchase of him some skins of wild cattle. He was alone with his pack of twenty hounds who looked as wicked and savage as himself. When I arrived he was anointing his face with palm oil, for there was not a portion of it that was not blue, yellow, violet or purple."

"I have had these iridescent shades from a blow on the eye, but——"

"Exactly, sir. I asked him what had caused this, and this is what he told me: 'My hounds, led by my assistant, had flung themselves upon a two-year-old bull; he had passed me, and I had sent a ball into his shoulder; he bounded into a thicket; the dogs followed. While I was reloading, my assistant came up, fired, and missed the bull. My boy, seeing himself disarmed, sought to cut at the bull's legs, but it gored him and stamped him underfoot. Placed as I was, I could not fire at the animal for fear of finishing my man. I took my large buccaneer's knife and threw myself between them. I received a blow of its horn which ripped up my thigh, a second broke this arm (showing me his left arm, which was suspended in a sling); the bull

continued to attack me; as there remained but the right hand that was of any use, I watched my opportunity, and at the instant when the animal lowered his head to rip me up, I seized him by the horns and drew him within reach, and seized his lip with my teeth, and would no more let go than an English bulldog, while my dogs worried his sides."

"But this man is a blockhead," said Croustillac, contemptuously. "If he has no other means of pleasing—faith, I pity his mistress."

"I have told you that he was a species of savage animal," replied the narrator, "but to continue my story. 'Once wounded on the lips,' said the buccaneer, 'a bull falls. At the end of five minutes, blinded by the loss of blood (for my bullets had done their work), the bull fell on his knees and rolled over; my dogs sprang upon him, seized him by the throat, and finished him. The struggle had weakened me; I had lost a great deal of blood; for the first time in my life I fainted just like a girl. And what do you suppose my dogs had been at during my swoon? They had amused themselves by devouring my servant! They were so sharp and well-trained.' 'How,' said I to Rend-your-soul, terrified, 'because your dogs have devoured your servant, does that prove that they are well-trained?' I declare, sir," continued the passenger who had related this story of the buccaneer to the Gascon, "I looked with considerable alarm upon these ferocious animals who walked round and round me and smelt at me in a manner far from reassuring."

"The fact is, such customs as these are brutal," said Croustillac, "and it would be a mistake to address such a man of the woods in the beautiful language of gallantry. But what the devil can he indulge in in the way of conversation with Blue Beard?"

"God forbid I should act as eavesdropper," exclaimed the passenger.

"When Rend-your-Soul has said to Blue Beard, 'I have seized a bull on the lips, and my dogs have devoured my servants,'" replied the Gascon, "the conversation would languish; and zounds! one cannot always be feeding a man to the dogs in order to furnish entertainment."

"In faith, one cannot tell," said a listener; "these men are capable of anything."

"But," said Croustillac, "such an animal can know nothing about small courtesies; flowery language always takes the ladies."

"No, certainly," replied the narrator, whom we suspect of a slight exaggeration of the facts, "for he swears enough to sink the island; and he has a voice like the bellowing of a bull."

"That is easily accounted for; from frequenting their society he has acquired their accent," said the chevalier; "but let us hear the end of your story, I beg."

"Here it is. I demanded then of the buccaneer how he dared assert that dogs who would devour a man were well trained. 'Doubtless,' replied he, 'my dogs are trained never to insert a tooth in a bull when he is down, for I sell the skins, and they must be intact. Once the bull is dead these poor brutes, hungry though they be, have the sense to respect it, and to await its being skinned. Now this morning their hunger was infernal; my servant was half dead and covered with blood. He was very inhuman toward them; they began, no doubt, by licking his wounds; then, as it is said the appetite increases with what it is fed on, this made the mouths of the poor brutes water. Finally, they did not leave a bone of my servant. Had it not been for the bite of a serpent which nipped sharply but which was not venomous, I might have remained in my swoon. I recovered consciousness; I wrenched the snake from my right leg, round which it had coiled itself, I took it by the tail, I whirled it like a sling and I crushed its head on the trunk of a guava tree. I examined myself; I had a thigh ripped open and an arm broken; I bound the wound in my thigh with fresh leaves and secured them by a vine. As to my left arm, it was broken between the elbow and the wrist. I cut three little sticks and a long creeper and I tied it up like a roll of tobacco. Once my wounds dressed, I sought for my servant, for I could not see him. I called him, there was no answer. My dogs were crouched at my feet; they appeared so innocent, the cunning creatures! and looked at me as they wagged their tails as if nothing was wrong. Finally I arose, and what should I see at twenty paces distance but the remains of my servant. I recognized his powder-horn and the sheath of his knife. That was all that remained of him, I tell you this to prove to you that my dogs are very snappish and well-trained; for they will not injure a hair on the bull's skin.'"

"There, there! the buccaneer exceeds the filibuster," said Croustillac. "I can only say that Blue Beard is greatly to be pitied for not having had, up to this time, but an alternative of two such brutes." And the Gascon continued compassionately, "It is very easy to understand, this poor woman has not an idea of what constitutes a gentleman; when one has all one's life fed on lard and beans, one cannot conceive of anything as fine, as delicate as a pheasant or an ortolan. Zounds! I see it has been reserved to me to enlighten Blue Beard on a variety of things, and to discover to her a new world. As to the Caribbean, is he worthy of figuring at the side of his ferocious rivals?"

"Oh, as to the Caribbean," said one of the passengers, "I can speak from knowledge. I made this winter in his canoe the journey from Anse aux Sables to Marie-Galante. I was pressed to reach this latter place. The Rivière des

Saints had overflowed, and I was compelled to make a great circuit in order to find a place which could be forded. At the moment when I embarked, I saw at the prow of the boat of Youmääle a kind of brown figure. I drew near; what did I see? My God! the head and arms dried to that of a mummy, forming the figurehead as an ornament for his canoe! We started on our voyage, the Caribbean silent, like the savage that he was, paddled without uttering a word. Arriving off the Caribbean Island, where a Spanish brigantine had stranded some months previous, I asked him, 'Is it not here that the Spanish vessel was wrecked?' The Caribbean nodded an assent. It would be as well to say here that on board this vessel was the reverend Father Simon of Foreign Missions. His reputation for sanctity was such that it had reached even the Caribbeans; the brigantine had been wrecked, passengers and cargo—at least such was believed to be the case. I said then to the Caribbean, 'Is it there that Father Simon perished—you have heard of it?' He made me another affirmative sign with his head, for these people never speak an unnecessary word. 'He was an excellent man,' I continued. 'I have eaten him,' replied this wretched idolater, with a kind of ferocious and satisfied pride.

"That was one method of enjoying a person," said Croustillac, "and of sharing his qualities."

"For a moment," replied the passenger, "I did not understand what this horrible cannibal was saying, but when I had compelled him to explain himself, I learned that in accordance with I know not what savage ceremony, the missionary and two sailors who had escaped to a desert island had been surprised by the cannibals and eaten at once! When I reproached Youmääle for this barbarous atrocity, saying that it was frightful to have sacrificed these three unhappy Frenchmen to their ferocity, he replied, sententiously, and in a tone of approbation, as if he would prove to me that he understood the force of my arguments in classing, if not to their value, at least according to the flavor of three different nationalities. 'You are right: a Spaniard never, a Frenchman often, an Englishman always!'"

"This would prove that an Englishman is incomparably more delicate than a Frenchman, and that a Spaniard is as tough as the devil," said Croustillac; "but this gourmand will finish some day by devouring Blue Beard when caressing her. If all this be true——"

"It is true, sir."

"It follows then positively that this young or old widow is not insensible to the ferocious attractions of Rend-your-soul and of the cannibal?"

"Public opinion accuses her thus."

"Are they often with her?"

"All the time Whirlwind is not engaged in privateering, that Rend-your-soul is not hunting, and Youmääle is not in the woods, they pass with Blue Beard."

"Without becoming jealous of each other?"

"It is said that Blue Beard is as despotic as the Sultan of Turkey, and she forbids their being jealous."

"Faith! what a seraglio she has! But listen, gentlemen: you know that I am a Gascon; that they accuse us of exaggerating and you would ridicule——"

But Captain Daniel interposed, with a serious air, which could not be feigned, "When we arrive at Martinique ask the first creole whom you meet as to this Blue Beard; and may St. John, my patron saint, curse me if you will not hear concerning Blue Beard and her three friends the same thing."

"And as to her immense wealth, will they also speak to me of that?" asked the chevalier.

"They will tell you that the plantation where Devil's Cliff is situated is one of the most beautiful in the island, and that Blue Beard possesses a counting house at Fort St. Pierre, and that this counting house, managed by a man in her employ, sends out each year five or six vessels like the one we have just passed."

"I see how it is, then," said the chevalier in raillery. "Blue Beard is a woman who is weary of riches and the pleasures of this world; in order to distract her thoughts, she is capable of entertaining a buccaneer, a filibuster, and even a cannibal, if her heart so dictates."

"That it pleases her is evident in that she is never bored," replied the captain.

At this moment Father Griffen mounted to the deck. Croustillac said to him, "Father, I have told these gentlemen that we are accused, we Gascons, of telling fibs, but is what they say of Blue Beard the truth?"

The face of Father Griffen, ordinarily placid and joyful, took on a darker hue at once, and he replied gravely to the adventurer, "My son, never breathe the name of this woman."

"But, Father, is it true? She replaces her deceased husbands by a filibuster, a buccaneer and a cannibal?"

"Enough, enough, my son," returned the priest, "I pray you do not speak of Devil's Cliff and what goes on there."

"But, Father, is this woman as rich as they say?" pursued the Gascon, whose eyes were snapping with covetousness; "has she such immense treasures? Is she beautiful? Is she young?"

"May heaven defend me from ascertaining!"

"Is it true that her three husbands have been murdered by her, father? If this be true, how is it that the law has not punished such crimes?"

"There are crimes that may escape the justice of men, my son, but they never escape the justice of God. I do not know, however, if this woman is as culpable as they say, but still I say, do not speak of her, my son, I implore you," said Father Griffen, whom this interview seemed to affect most painfully.

Suddenly the chevalier assumed a resolute attitude, pulled his hat down over his forehead, caressed his mustache, balanced himself on his toes like a barnyard fowl preparing for combat, and cried with an audacity of which a Gascon alone is capable, "Gentlemen, tell me the day of the month."

"The 13th of July," replied the captain.

"Well, gentlemen," continued our adventurer, "may I lose the name of De Croustillac, may my coat of arms be forever smirched with disgrace, if in one month from this very day, in spite of all the buccaneers, filibusters or cannibals in Martinique or in the world, Blue Beard is not the wife of Polyphème de Croustillac!"

That evening when they went down to the saloon the adventurer was taken aside by Father Griffen; he sought by every possible means to ascertain if the Gascon knew more than he appeared to, concerning the surroundings of Blue Beard. The extraordinary persistence with which Croustillac occupied himself with her and the men about her had aroused the suspicions of the good priest. After speaking at some length on the subject with the chevalier, the priest was almost certain that Croustillac had not spoken other than by presumption and vanity.

"It matters not," said Father Griffen, "I'll not lose sight of this adventurer; he has the appearance of an empty-headed fool, but traitors know how to assume all guises. Alas!" continued he sadly, "this last voyage imposes upon me great obligations toward those who dwell at Devil's Cliff. Meantime, their secret is, so to speak, mine, but I have done what I could; my conscience approves. May they long enjoy the happiness they deserve, of escaping from the snares set for them. Ah! what dangerous enemies kings are, and one often pays dearly for the doubtful honor of being born on the steps of a throne. Alas!" went on the priest with a profound sigh, "poor angelic woman, it rends my heart to hear her thus spoken of, but it would be impolitic to defend her. These rumors are the preservation of the noble creatures in whom I am so deeply interested."

After considering awhile Father Griffen said to himself, "I at first took this adventurer to be a secret emissary from England, but I am doubtless

deceived. Nevertheless, I will watch this man. In fact, I will offer him the hospitality of my house; thus his movements will not escape me. In any case, I will warn my friends at Devil's Cliff to redouble their prudence, for, I know not why, the presence of this Gascon disturbs me."

We will here hasten to inform the reader that the suspicions of Father Griffen, so far as Croustillac was concerned, were without foundation. The chevalier was nothing more than the poor devil of an adventurer which we have shown him to be. The excellent opinion he held of himself was the sole cause of his impertinent wager of espousing Blue Beard before the end of the month.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIEST'S HOUSE.

THE Unicorn had anchored at Martinique three days. Father Griffen, having some matters requiring his attention before his return to his parish of Macouba, had not as yet quitted Fort St. Pierre.

The Chevalier de Croustillac found himself landed in the colonies with but very little money in his pocket. The captain and passengers had considered the adventurer's declaration that before a month had passed he would be the husband of Blue Beard, as an idle boast. Far from having given up the idea, the chevalier persisted in it more and more since his arrival in Martinique; he had carefully informed himself as to the riches of Blue Beard, and was convinced that, if the life of this strange woman was surrounded with the profoundest mystery, and she the subject of the wildest exaggeration, it was at least true that she was enormously wealthy.

As to her face, age and origin, as no one had on this point as much knowledge as Father Griffen, nothing could be affirmed. She was a stranger in the colony. Her man of business had come in advance to the island in order to purchase a magnificent estate and to build the mansion at Devil's Cliff, situated in the northern and most inaccessible and wildest portion of Martinique. At the end of several months it became known that the new proprietor and his wife had arrived. One or two of the colonists, impelled by their curiosity, had penetrated into the solitude of Devil's Cliff; they were received with a royal hospitality, but they did not see the owners of the place. Six months after this visit, news was received of the death of the first husband, which occurred during a short visit taken by the couple to Terre-Ferme.

At the end of one year of absence and widowhood, Blue Beard returned to Martinique with a second husband. It was said that this latter was killed, accidentally, while taking a walk with his wife; his foot slipped and he fell into one of those bottomless abysses which are so common in the volcanic soil of the Antilles. Such was, at least, the explanation that his wife gave concerning his mysterious death.

No one knew anything positive concerning the third husband of Blue Beard and his death.

These three deaths, so close together, so mysterious, caused strange stories to be circulated regarding this woman, and reached the ears of the Governor of Martinique, who was then Chevalier de Crussol; he started with an escort for Devil's Cliff; arriving at the foot of the thickly-wooded ascent, on the summit of which towered the mansion, he found a mulatto who gave him a

letter. After reading this letter, the governor showed great surprise, and ordering his escort to await his return, he followed the slave, alone.

At the expiration of four hours the governor returned with his guide, and immediately retraced his steps to St. Pierre. Some of those who formed his escort remarked that he was very pale and very much agitated. From that moment until the day of his death, which occurred thirteen months to the very day after his visit to Devil's Cliff, no one ever heard him pronounce the name of Blue Beard. The governor made a long confession to Father Griffen, who came to him from Macouba. It was observed that in leaving the penitent, Father Griffen appeared to have received a great shock.

From that time the kind of fatal and mysterious reputation which had attached itself to the name of Blue Beard increased day by day. Superstition mingled with the terror which she inspired, until her name was never mentioned without terror; it was firmly believed that she had assassinated her three husbands, and that she had escaped punishment by law only through the power of her wealth, thus purchasing the support of the different governors who succeeded each other in turn. No one, then, was tempted to trouble Blue Beard with visits to the wild and solitary place in which she dwelt, above all since the cannibal, the buccaneer and the privateer had come, as they said, to be companions or consolers to the widow.

Whether or not these men had ever legally rendered themselves liable for any crime, it was asserted that they pursued with an implacable hatred and vengeance all who attempted to come near Blue Beard. By reason of being repeated and exaggerated, these threats bore their fruit. The islanders care little to go, perhaps at the peril of their lives, to penetrate into the mysteries of Devil's Cliff. It required the desperate audacity of a Gascon in extremity, to attempt to surprise the secret of Blue Beard and undertake to espouse her. Such was possibly the fixed design of the Chevalier de Croustillac; he was not a man to renounce so easily the hope, insane as it was, of marrying a woman worth millions; beautiful or plain, young or old, it mattered little to him.

As a means to success, he counted upon his good carriage, his spirit, his amiability, and his manner, at the same time gallant and proud—for the chevalier had an excellent opinion of himself—but he counted still more on his wit, his cunning, and his courage. In fine, a man alert and determined, who had nothing to lose and feared nothing, who believed implicitly in himself and his star; who could say to himself as did Croustillac, "In risking death during a moment—for death can be but a moment's agony—I may live in luxury and opulence"—such a man can perform miracles above all when

he undertakes a project with such a grand object and as stimulating as that proposed by Croustillac.

According to his resolve, Father Griffen, after he had brought to a close the affairs which detained him at St. Pierre, invited the chevalier to accompany him to Macouba, to remain there until the Unicorn should sail again for France. Macouba being distant not more than four or five leagues from Devil's Cliff, the chevalier, who had spent his three crowns and who found himself without resources, accepted the offer of the worthy priest, without further enlightening him as to his resolve concerning Blue Beard; this he would not reveal until the moment arrived to put it into execution.

After taking leave of Captain Daniel, the chevalier and the priest embarked in a small boat. Favored by a good wind from the south, they set sail for Macouba. Croustillac appeared indifferent to the magnificent and novel scenes which were afforded by the coast of Martinique, seen from the water; the tropical vegetation whose verdure, of a tone almost metallic, outlined on a glowing sky, affected him very little.

The adventurer, with his eyes fixed on the scintillating wake which the boat left behind her, seemed to see flashing the living rays of Blue Beard's diamonds; the little green herbs, standing in relief from the submerged meadows which edged the winding shores, pictured to the Gascon the emeralds of the widow; while some drops of water sparkled in the sun in the fall of the oars made him dream of the sacks of pearls which the terrible resident at Devil's Cliff possessed.

Father Griffen was also deeply absorbed; after thinking of his friends at Devil's Cliff, he turned his thoughts, with a mixture of disquietude and joy, to his little flock at home, his garden, his poor and unpretentious church, his house, his favorite horse, his dog, and his two slaves who had always given him the most devoted service. And then—shall we say it?—he thought of certain preserves which he had made some days before his departure, and as to the condition of which he was ignorant.

In three hours our travelers arrived at Macouba. Father Griffen had not long to wait; the canoe was moored in a little bay, not far from the river which watered this section, one of the most fertile of Martinique.

Father Griffen leaned upon the chevalier's arm. After having for a time followed the shore where the high and powerful waves of the Caribbean Sea rolled on, they reached the village of Macouba, composed of some hundred houses built of wood and covered with roses and palms.

The village was built on a semicircular plan which followed the outline of the Bay of Macouba, a little port where many canoes and fishing boats were built. The church was a long wooden edifice from the center of which four

beams arose, surmounted by a little belfry in which was hung a bell; the church overlooked the village, and was in turn overshadowed by immense cliffs, covered by rich vegetation, which made an amphitheatre of living green.

The sun was rapidly setting. The priest trod the only street that crossed Macouba, and which led to the church. Some small negroes, absolutely nude, were rolling in the dust; uttering loud cries; they fled at the approach of the priest. A number of creole women, white or of mixed blood, dressed in long robes of Indian and madras cloth, in striking colors, ran to the doors; recognizing Father Griffen, they testified to their surprise and joy; young and old hastened to respectfully kiss his hand, and to say in creole, "Blessed is your return, good Father; you have been missed in Macouba." Numbers of men came out at once and surrounded Father Griffen, with the same tokens of attachment and respect.

While the priest talked with the villagers of the events which had taken place at Macouba during his absence, and in turn gave them news of France, the housewives, fearing that the good father would not find sufficient provision at the parsonage, had retired to select, one a fine fish, another a beautiful pullet; this one the quarter of a fine fat buck, that one some fruits or vegetables, and a number of little negroes were ordered to carry to the parsonage these voluntary tithes.

The priest reached his house, situated on one side, at some distance from the village, overlooking the sea. Nothing could be more simple than this modest wooden house, covered with roses, and of one story. Curtains of clear linen dressed the windows and took the place of blinds, which were a great luxury in the colonies.

A large room, comprising at the same time parlor and dining room, communicated with the kitchen built at the rear; at the left of this principal room were the bedroom of Father Griffen, and two other small rooms opening into the garden and set apart for strangers or the other priests of Martinique who might, at times, ask the hospitality of their brother priest.

A henhouse, a stable for the horse, lodgings for two negroes, and several sheds, completed this establishment, furnished with a rustic simplicity. The garden had been carefully laid out. Four broad paths were divided by many beds bordered by thyme, lavender, wild thyme, hyssop and other fragrant plants. The four principal beds were subdivided into numerous little ones set apart for vegetables or fruits, but surrounded by wide borders of fragrant flowers. Between two little walls of verdure, covered with Arabian jasmine and odorous creepers, could be seen, in the horizon, the sea and the hills of the other islands.

No fresher or more charming spot than this garden, in which the most beautiful flowers mingled with fruits and magnificent vegetables, could be found. Here a bed of melons, of an amber color, was bordered by dwarf pomegranates, shaped like a small box and covered at the same time with purple blossoms and fruit so heavy and so abundant that it touched the earth. A little further on, a branch of Angola wood with its long, green husks, and its blue flowers, was surrounded by a line of white and pink almonds, sweet with perfume; the carrot plant, sorrel, ginghambo and leek, were hidden in a fourfold rank of tuberose of the richest tints; finally, came a square of pineapples which perfumed the air, having a row of magnificent cacti for a border, with yellow calix and long silver pistils. Behind the house extended an orchard composed of cocoanuts, bananas, guava, tamarind, and orange trees, whose branches were weighted down to the earth with flowers and fruit.

Father Griffen followed the paths of his garden with unspeakable happiness, observing each flower, plant and tree. His two slaves attended him; one was called Monsieur, the other Jean. These two good creatures, weeping with joy at the sight of their master, could not reply to his questions, so much affected were they, and could only say one to the other, with hands raised to heaven, "God be praised—he is here! he is here!"

The chevalier, indifferent to the joy of the natives, followed the priest mechanically; he was consumed with the desire to inquire of his host if, through the woods which rose in an amphitheatre, one could see the road to Devil's Cliff.

After examining his garden, the good priest went out to inspect his horse which he had named Grenadille, and his large English mastiff called Snog; as soon as he opened the stable door Snog threw himself upon his master and bounded around him. He not only jumped upon him but barked with joy, with such evidence of affection that the negro, Monsieur, was obliged to take the dog by his collar and could with difficulty restrain him, while the priest caressed Grenadille, whose glossy coat and well-covered ribs bore testimony to the good care of Monsieur, who had charge of the stable.

After this thorough visit through his little domain, Father Griffen conducted the chevalier into the bedroom which he had intended for him. A bed draped with a mosquito-netting under a linen canopy, a large bureau of mahogany wood, and a table, was the furnishing of this room, which opened upon the garden. Its only ornament was a crucifix suspended from the center of the slightly roughened wainscot.

"You will find here a poor and modest hospitality," said Father Griffen to the chevalier, "but it is offered you with a good heart."

"And I accept it with gratitude, Father," said Croustillac.

At this moment Monsieur came to announce that supper was ready, and Father Griffen led the way to the dining room.

CHAPTER V.

THE SURPRISE.

A large glass wherein burned a candle of yellow wax, lighted the table; the dishes were placed on a table cloth of coarse but very white linen. There was no silver; the steel knives, and spoons of maple wood, were of great neatness. A bottle of blue glass contained about a pint of canary; in a large pewter pot bubbled the oagou, a fermented beverage made from the grain of sugar cane; a sealed earthen vessel held water, as fresh as if it were iced.

A fine dorado grilled in its scales (a Caribbean dish), a roasted paroquet of the size of a pheasant, two dishes of sea crabs cooked in the shell and served with sauce of the citron juice, and a salad of green peas, had been symmetrically placed on the table by the negro Jean, around a centerpiece composed of a large basket containing a pyramid of fruit, which had at its base a European melon, a watermelon, and at its summit a pineapple; there was a side dish of sliced palm-cabbage dressed with vinegar, and little whitefish preserved in spiced pickle, which would tempt the appetite of the guests or excite their thirst.

"You are treating me with royal magnificence, Father," said the chevalier to the priest. "This island is the 'promised land,' surely."

"With the exception of the canary wine, which was a gift, my son, all this is the product of the garden which I cultivate, or the fishing and hunting of my two slaves, for the offerings of my parish are superfluous, thanks to the foresight of Monsieur and Jean, who were advised of my arrival by a sailor at Fort St. Pierre. Help yourself to this paroquet, my son," said the priest to the chevalier, who appeared to find the fish very much to his taste.

Croustillac hesitated a moment and looked at the priest in an uncertain manner. "I do not know why, but it seems strange to eat a paroquet," said the chevalier.

"Try it, try it," responded the priest, and he placed a wing on his plate. "Is a pheasant's flesh more plump or more golden? It is cooked to a marvel; and then, did you ever smell anything more appetizing?"

"I should say four spices are employed," said the chevalier, inhaling the odor.

"It is claimed that these birds are very fond of the berry of the Indian trees which they find in the forest; these trees have at once the taste of cinnamon, clove and pepper, and the flesh of the game partakes of the scent of this aromatic tree. How this juice is flavored. Add a little of the orange sugar, and then tell me if the Lord has not blessed his creatures in bestowing such gifts upon them?"

"In all my life I have never eaten anything more tender, more delicate or more savory than this," replied the chevalier, with full mouth, and half shutting his eyes in sensual enjoyment.

"Is it not good?" said the good priest, who, knife and fork in hand, looked at his guest with satisfied pride.

The repast ended, Monsieur placed a pot of tobacco and pipes at the side of the bottle of canary, and Father Griffen and Croustillac were then left alone.

After filling a glass of wine and passing it to the chevalier, the priest said to him, "Your health, my son."

"Thanks, father," said the chevalier, lifting his glass. "Drink also to the health of my future bride; it will be a good omen for me."

"How? your future bride?" replied the priest; "what do you mean?"

"I allude to Blue Beard, father."

"Ah—always jesting! Frankly, I believe the men of your province are most inventive, my son," said Father Griffen, smiling mischievously, and emptying his glass in small doses.

"I never spoke more seriously, father. You heard the vow which I made on board the Unicorn?"

"Impossibility nullifies a vow, my son; because you should swear to measure the ocean, would you engage to fulfill this oath?"

"How, Father—is the heart of Blue Beard as bottomless as the ocean?" gayly exclaimed the chevalier.

"An English poet has said of woman, 'Perfidious as the waves,' my son."

"However perfidious women may be, my worthy host," said the chevalier with a self-sufficient air, "we men know how to disarm them, and I shall exercise afresh that power in dealing with Blue Beard."

"You will not attempt anything of the kind, my son; I am easy on that point."

"Allow me to say, father, that you deceive yourself. To-morrow, at daybreak, I shall ask of you a guide to conduct me to Devil's Cliff, and I shall confide the course of this adventure to my Star."

The chevalier spoke with so serious an air that Father Griffen hastily placed upon the table the glass which he was raising to his lips, and regarded the chevalier with as much astonishment as distrust. Until then he had really believed the matter to be only a pleasantry or idle boast. "Are you sincere in this resolve? This is absolute madness, but——"

"Excuse me, Father, for interrupting you," said the chevalier, "but you see before you the younger son of my family, who has tempted every fortune,

wasted all his resources, and with whom nothing has succeeded. Blue Beard is rich, very rich. I have everything to gain, nothing to lose."

"Nothing to lose?"

"Life, perhaps, you will say. I make a good bargain; and then, barbarous though this country may be, helpless as justice may prove, I do not think that Blue Beard will dare treat me, on my arrival, as she treated her three husbands; if so, you will know that I have fallen a victim; you will demand an account of my death. I risk nothing more than seeing my homage rejected. Ah! well, if such be the case, if she repulses me, I shall continue to delight Captain Daniel during his trips by swallowing lighted candles and balancing bottles on the end of my nose. Certainly such an occupation is honorable and amusing, but I prefer another life. So, then, no matter what you say, Father, I am resolved to attempt the adventure and to go to Devil's Cliff. I cannot tell you what secret presentiment tells me I shall succeed, that I am upon the eve of seeing my destiny fulfill itself in a most wonderful manner. The future seems tinted with rose and gold; I dream only of magnificent palaces, wealth, and beauty; it seems to me (excuse the pagan comparison) that Love and Fortune have come and taken me by the hands and are saying to me, 'Polyphème de Croustillac, happiness awaits thee.' You will say, perhaps, Father," continued the chevalier, throwing a mocking glance at his faded coat, "that I am poorly dressed to present myself in this beautiful and brave company of fortune and happiness; but Blue Beard, who must be intelligent, will comprehend at once that under this outside, the heart of an Amadis, the spirit of a Gascon, and the courage of a Cæsar dwells."

After a moment's silence the priest, instead of smiling at the pleasantries of the chevalier, said to him in a tone that was most solemn, "Is your resolve finally taken?"

"Unwaveringly and absolutely taken, Father."

"Hear me then; I heard the confessions of the Chevalier de Crussol, the former governor of this island; he who, when the third husband of this woman disappeared, went to Devil's Cliff."

"Well, father?"

"While I must respect the secrets of the confessional, I can, I must, tell you that if you persist in your insane project, you expose yourself to great and unavoidable peril. Without doubt, if you lose your life, your death will not remain unpunished; but there will be no means of preventing the fatal end upon which you would rush. Who obliges you to go to Devil's Cliff? The resident of that place wishes to live in solitude; the barriers of that abode are such that you cannot break them down without violence; for in every

country, and above all in this one, he who trespasses upon the property of another exposes himself to grave danger—danger the greater that all idea of a union with this widow is impossible, even if you were of a princely house."

These words hurt immeasurably the self-esteem of the Gascon, who exclaimed, "Father, this woman is but a woman, and I am Croustillac."

"What do you say, my son?"

"That this woman is free; that she has not seen me; that but one look, one only, will change entirely her resolve."

"I do not think it."

"Reverend Father, I have the greatest, the blindest confidence in your word; I know all its authority; but this concerns the fair sex, and you cannot understand the heart of woman as I understand it, you do not know what inexplicable caprices they are capable of; you do not know that what pleases them to-day displeases them to-morrow; and that they wish for to-day, that which they disdained yesterday. With women, my reverend sir, one must dare in order to succeed. If it were not for your cloth, I would tell you some curious adventures and audacious undertakings by which I have been recompensed amorously!"

"My son!"

"I understand your sensitiveness, Father, and to return to Blue Beard: once in her presence, I shall treat her not only with effrontery, with haughtiness, but as a victor—I dare say it, as a lion who comes proudly to carry off his prey."

These remarks of the chevalier were interrupted by an unforeseen accident. It was very warm; the door of the dining room which looked on the garden was half open. The chevalier, with back turned to this door, was seated in an arm chair with a wooden back which was not very high. A sharp hissing sound was heard and a quick blow vibrated in the middle of the chevalier's chair.

At this sound Father Griffen bounded from his chair, rushed and took his gun down from a rack placed in his bedroom, and precipitated himself out of doors, crying, "Jean! Monsieur! Take your guns! Follow me, my children! follow me! The Caribbeans are upon us!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE WARNING.

ALL this took place so rapidly that the chevalier was dumfounded. "Get up! get up!" cried the priest. "The Caribbeans! Look at the back of your chair—get out of the light!"

The chevalier rose quickly, and saw an arrow three feet in length fixed in the back of his chair. Two inches higher and the chevalier would have been pierced through the shoulders. Croustillac seized his sword, which he had left on a chair, and hurried after the priest.

Father Griffen, at the head of his two negroes, armed with their guns, and preceded by his mastiff, sought for the enemy; unfortunately, the door of the dining room opened upon a trellised orchard; the night was dark; doubtless the person who had sped the arrow was already far away, or well hidden in the top of some thick tree.

Snog bounded hither and thither in the eagerness of his search. Father Griffen recalled his two slaves who were too venturesome and would have penetrated into the orchard.

"Well, father, where are they?" said the chevalier, brandishing his sword: "shall we charge upon them? A lantern—give me a lantern; we will visit the orchard and the neighborhood of the house."

"No, no, not a lantern, my son, it would serve to point us out to the assailants if there are a number, and you would be too much exposed; you would receive an arrow in you. Come, come," said the priest, lowering his gun after some moments of attentive scrutiny; "it is but an alarm; let us return and thank the Lord for the clumsiness of this cannibal, for if he had not blundered, you would not be here, my son. What astonishes me, and for which I thank God, is that you have escaped; a native so bold as to make such an attempt should have a true eye and a sure hand."

"But what harm have you ever done these savages, Father?"

"None! I have often been in their settlement at the Isle des Saintes, and have always been properly received; thus I cannot understand the object of this attack. But let us look at this arrow—I shall know from the feather if it is a native arrow."

"We must keep a good watch, to-night, Father, and to this end confide in me," said the Gascon. "You see that it is not only in a love affair that I have firmness."

"I do not doubt you, my son, and I accept your offer. I will fasten the windows securely against the assassins, and bar the door strongly. Snog will act as picket. It will not be the first time this house has stood a siege; a

dozen English pirates attacked it two years ago, but with my slaves and the aid of an official from Cabesterre, who was accidentally at my house, we punished the heretics severely."

So saying, Father Griffen entered the dining room, withdrawing with some effort the iron-barbed arrow which stuck in the back of the chair, he exclaimed with surprise, "There is a paper attached to the feather of this arrow!" Then, unfolding it, he read these words, written in a large and bold hand: "Warning number one, to the Chevalier de Croustillac."

"To the Rev. Father Griffen, respect and affection."

The priest looked at the chevalier without saying a word. He, in turn, took the bit of paper and read it.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"It means that I have not been deceived in speaking of the sure aim of the Caribbeans. The person who shot the arrow could have killed you had he so willed. See! this arrow tip is poisoned, doubtless; it entered an inch into the back of this chair of hard wood; if it had struck you, you would be dead. What skill was displayed in thus guiding this arrow!"

"Zounds, Father! I find it rather more marvelous that I am not touched," said the Gascon. "But what the devil have I done to this savage?"

Father Griffen struck his forehead with his hand. "When I have read you this?" he exclaimed.

"Read what, Father?"

"Warning number one, to the Chevalier de Croustillac."

"Well?"

"Well! this warning comes from Devil's Cliff."

"You believe it to be so?"

"I am sure of it. They have learned of your project and they desire to force you to give it up."

"How can they have learned it?"

"You did not hide it on board the Unicorn. Some of the passengers, disembarking three days ago at St. Pierre, have spoken of it; this rumor has reached the counting house of Blue Beard and her business manager has informed his employer."

"I am forced to confess," replied the chevalier, after a moment's reflection, "that Blue Beard has singular means of corresponding with one. This is a queer little mail."

"Ah, well, my son, I hope the lesson will profit you," said the priest. Then he continued, addressing the two slaves who were carrying in the blinds and were about to raise them into place, "It is unnecessary, my children, I see there is nothing to fear."

The slaves, accustomed to a blind obedience, took away the impromptu defenses.

The chevalier looked at the priest with astonishment.

"Without doubt," said the good father, "the word of the dwellers at Devil's Cliff is sacred; I have nothing at present to fear from them, nor you either, my son, because you are warned, and you will necessarily give up your mad plan."

"I, Father?"

"How——"

"May I become blacker this moment than your two negroes if I renounce it."

"What do you say—after such a warning?"

"Well, who is to tell me that this warning comes from Blue Beard? It may come from a rival—from the buccaneer, the filibuster, or the cannibal. For I have quite a selection among the gallant admirers of the beauty of Devil's Cliff."

"Ah, well, what does it signify——"

"How? What does it signify, Father? But I intend to show these would-be wits what the blood of a De Croustillac is! Ah! they think to intimidate me! They do not know this sword which, look you, would move in its scabbard! whose steel would blush with indignation if I were to renounce my undertaking!"

"My son, this is madness, sheer madness——"

"And what a coward, what a sheep, would the Chevalier de Croustillac appear in the eyes of Blue Beard if he were so pusillanimous as to be daunted by so little!"

"By so little! but two inches higher and you would have been killed!"

"But as it was two inches lower, and I was not killed, I will consecrate my life to taming the willful heart of Blue Beard and to vanquishing my rivals, be they ten, twenty, thirty, one hundred or ten thousand," replied the Gascon, with growing enthusiasm.

"But if this act was the order of the mistress of Devil's Cliff?"

"If it was done by her order, she shall see, the cruel one, that I will brave the death to which she would send me, in order to reach her heart. She is a

woman; she will appreciate such valor. I do not know if she is a Venus but I know that without wronging the god Mars I Polyphème Amador de Croustillac am terribly martial; and from beauty to courage there is but a step."

One must imagine the exaggeration and Gascon accent of the chevalier to have an idea of this scene.

Father Griffen hardly knew whether to laugh or to be appalled at the opinionated resolve of the chevalier. The secret of the confessional forbade his speaking, from entering into any details concerning Devil's Cliff; he knew not how to induce the chevalier to renounce his fatal intention. He had endeavored to do so, but in vain.

"If nothing can withhold you, my son, it cannot be said that I have been, even indirectly, an accomplice in your mad enterprise. You are ignorant of the position of Devil's Cliff; neither myself, nor my slaves, nor, I assure you, any of my parishioners will be your guide. I have instructed them to refuse. Beside the reputation of Blue Beard is such that no one would care to infringe my orders."

This declaration of the priest's seemed to make the chevalier reflect. He bent his head in silence then he began again resolutely: "I know that Devil's Cliff is some four leagues from this spot; it is situated in the northern part of the island. My heart will serve as a compass to guide me to the lady of my thoughts, with the assistance of the sun and the moon."

"But, madman," cried the priest, "there is no path through the forests which you would traverse; the trees are so thick that they would hide from you the position of the sun—you would be lost."

"I shall go right ahead; I shall arrive somewhere. Your island is not so large (be it said without disparaging Martinique), Father; then I shall retrace my steps, and I shall seek until I find Devil's Cliff."

"But the soil of the forest is often impassable; it is infested with serpents of the most dangerous species; I say to you that in what you propose, you are courting a thousand deaths."

"Ah, well, Father, 'nothing venture, nothing have.' If there are serpents I will get upon stilts after the manner of the natives of my country."

"Going to walk on stilts in the midst of creepers, brambles, rocks, trees overturned by storms? I tell you, you do not know our forests."

"If one always considered the perils of an undertaking one would never accomplish any good. Did you think of the deadly fevers when you tended those of your parishioners who were attacked with it?"

"But my object was a pious one; I risked death in the observance of my duty; while you rush upon yours out of vanity."

"Vanity, Father! A companion who has sacks filled with diamonds and fine pearls, and probably five or six millions more in gold! Zounds! what a 'vanity!'"

Having seen the futility of overcoming such unparalleled opinionativeness, the good priest said no more.

He conducted his guest to the room assigned to him, fully resolved to put every difficulty possible in the way of the chevalier the next day.

Inflexible in his resolve, Croustillac slept profoundly. A lively curiosity had come to the aid of a natural obstinacy and an imperturbable confidence in his destiny; the more this confidence had been, till then, disappointed, the more our adventurer believed that the promised hour was about to come to him. The following morning, at break of day, he arose and went on tiptoe to the door of Father Griffen's room. The priest still slept, not thinking for a moment that the chevalier would dream of starting off on a journey through an unknown country without a guide. He deceived himself.

Croustillac, in order to escape the solicitation and reproaches of his host, started at once. He girded on his formidable sword, a weapon very inconvenient to travel with through a forest; he jammed his hat well down on his head, took a staff in his hand with which to frighten the serpents, and with firm tread and nose in the air, though with a heart beating rather rapidly, he quitted the hospitable house of the priest of Macouba, and directed his steps toward the north, for some time following the extremely thick vegetation of the forest. He shortly afterward made a circuit of this dense vegetation, which formed an angle toward the east, and stretched indefinitely in that direction.

From the moment that the chevalier entered the forest, he did not hesitate in the slightest degree. He recalled the wise counsels of Father Griffen; he thought of the dangers which he was going to encounter; but he also invoked the thought of Blue Beard's treasures; he was dazzled by the heaps of gold, pearls, rubies and diamonds which he believed he saw sparkling and quivering before his eyes. He pictured to himself the owner of Devil's Cliff, a being of perfect beauty. Led on by this vision, he entered resolutely the forest, and pushed aside the heavy screen of creepers which were suspended from the limbs of the trees which they draped.

The chevalier did not forget to beat the bushes with his staff, crying out in a loud voice, "Out, ye serpents, out!"

With the exception of the voice of the Gascon, there was not a sound.

The sun rose; the air, freshened by the plenteous dew of the night, and by the sea breeze, was impregnated with the aromatic odors of the forest, and its tropical flowers. The rest was still plunged in the shadow when the chevalier entered it.

For some time the profound silence reigning in this imposing solitude was only broken by the blows of the chevalier's staff on the bushes, and by his repeated cries, "Out, ye serpents, out!"

Little by little these sounds grew fainter and then ceased all at once.

The gloomy and profound silence which reigned was suddenly broken in upon by a kind of savage howl which had in it nothing human. This sound, and the first rays of the sun trembling on the horizon, like a sheaf of light, appeared to rouse the inhabitants of the great forest. They responded one after another until the uproar became infernal. The chattering of monkeys; the cry of wildcats; the hissing of serpents; the grunts of wild boars; the bellowing of cattle, broke from every direction with a frightful chorus; the echoes of the forest and the cliffs repeated these discordant sounds; one would have supposed a band of demons was responding to a superior demon's call.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAVERN.

WHILE the chevalier sought a road to Devil's Cliff by which to traverse the forest, we will conduct our readers toward the most southern portion of the coast of Martinique.

The sea rolled with slow majesty at the foot of large rocks near a peak which formed a natural defense to this part of the island, and which rose in a perpendicular wall some two hundred feet in height. The continued beating of the waves rendered this coast so dangerous that a vessel could not touch at this place without being, inevitably, broken to pieces.

The site of which we speak had a wild and grand simplicity; a wall of barren rocks, of a dull red, was outlined on a sky of sapphire blue; their base was swallowed up in a whirl of snowy foam, hidden by the incessant shock of enormous mountains of water which broke upon these reefs in tones of thunder. The sun with all its strength threw a brilliant, torrid light on this mass of granite; there was not a cloud in the brazen heavens. On the horizon there appeared through a burning vapor the high land of the other Antilles.

At some distance from the coast, where the waves broke, the sea was of a somber blue, and as calm as a mirror. An object scarcely perceptible, because it offered little surface above the water, approached rapidly the portion of this island called Cabesterre.

Little by little, a long, light canoe was to be distinguished, whose stern and bow cut the sea evenly; this vessel, without sails, was impelled forward by the strength of the waves. On each seat was clearly seen a man vigorously rowing. Whether or not the coast was as unapproachable at three leagues as at this place, it was evident that the canoe was directed toward these rocks.

The object of those who were approaching seemed to be hard to understand. Presently the canoe was caught in the midst of the surf beating upon these reefs. Had it not been for the marvelous ability of its pilot, who avoided these masses of water following the frail bark and incessantly menacing it, she would very soon have been swallowed up.

At two gunshots from the rocks, the canoe reversed and rested, and took advantage of an interval in the succession of waves, at a moment of calm, which occurred periodically after seven or eight waves had broken into foam.

The two men, who by their clothing were easily seen to be European sailors, pressing their caps more securely on their heads, sprang overboard and boldly struck out for the shore while their companions turned at the edge of

this calm, regained the open, and disappeared after having braved anew the fury of the mountainous waves with wonderful skill.

During this time the two intrepid swimmers, by turn submerged or cast up from the midst of the enormous waves which they adroitly traversed, arrived at the foot of the rocks in the center of a sea of foam. They appeared to be rushing upon certain death, and it looked as if they would be dashed to pieces upon the reefs. Nothing of the sort occurred, however. These two men seemed to perfectly understand the coast; they directed their course toward a place where the violence of the waves had hollowed out a natural grotto.

The waves, engulfing themselves under this roof with a horrible din fell back from it in a cataract into a smaller basin, hollow and deep. After some heavy undulations, the waves grew feebler; in the center of a gigantic cavern formed a little subterranean lake which, when full, returned to the sea by some hidden channel.

It required great temerity to so abandon themselves to the impulse of these furious waves which precipitated them into the abyss; but this momentary submersion was more frightful than dangerous; the mouth of the cave was so large that there was no danger of being bruised by the rocks, and the cloud of foam threw them into the midst of a peaceful pond, surrounded by a fine, sandy beach.

Sifting through the fall of water which bubbled at the entrance of this enormous roof, the light was feeble, soft, and bluish like that of the moon.

The two swimmers, breathless, deafened and wounded by the shock of the waves, emerged from the little lake and stretched themselves on the sand, where they rested for some time.

The larger of these two men, though he was dressed like a common sailor, was Colonel Rutler, a staunch partisan of the new King of England, William of Orange, under whose orders he had served when the son-in-law of the unfortunate James II. was only a stadtholder of Holland. Colonel Rutler was robust and tall; his face wore an expression of audacity, bordering on cruelty; his hair, lying in close, damp meshes, was of a deep red; his mustache of the same color hid a large mouth overshadowed by a hooked nose, resembling the beak of a bird of prey.

Rutler, a faithful and resolute man, served his master with blind devotion. William of Orange had testified his confidence in him by intrusting to him a mission as difficult as it was dangerous, the nature of which we shall know later on. The sailor who accompanied the colonel was slight but vigorous, active and determined.

The colonel said to him in English, after a moment's silence, "Are you sure, John, that there is a passage leading from here?"

"The passage exists, colonel, be easy on that score."

"But I do not perceive any——"

"By and by, colonel, when your view shall have become accustomed to this half light, like that of the moon, you will lay yourself down flat on your stomach, and there, at the right, at the end of a long natural passage in which one cannot advance except by crawling, you will perceive the light of day which penetrates through a crevasse in the rock."

"If the road is sure, it certainly is not easy."

"So far from easy, colonel, that I defy the captain of the brigantine who brought you to the Barbadoes, with his great stomach, to enter the passage which remains for us to travel. It is as much as I could do heretofore to glide through; it is the size of the tunnel of a chimney."

"And it leads?"

"To the bottom of a precipice which forms a defense for Devil's Cliff; three sides of this precipice are a peak, and it is as impossible to descend as to ascend it; but as to the fourth side, it is not inaccessible, and with the help of the jutting rocks one can reach by this road the limits of the park of Blue Beard."

"I understand—this subterranean passage will conduct us to the bottom of the abyss above which towers Devil's Cliff?"

"Exactly, colonel; it is as if we were at the bottom of a moat, one of whose sides is perpendicular and the other sloping. When I say sloping, that is simply a figure of speech, for in order to reach the summit of the peak, one must more than once hang suspended by some vine between heaven and earth. But when there, we find ourselves at the edge of the park of Devil's Cliff—once there, we can hide ourselves in some place and wait our opportunity——"

"And this opportunity is not far distant; come, come, you, who know so much, must, at one time, have been in the service of Blue Beard!"

"I told you, colonel, I came from the coast with her and her first husband; at the end of three months, they sent me back; then I left for San Domingo. I have heard no further word of them."

"And she—would you know her well?"

"Yes, as to her height and general air, but not her face; for we reached the coast at night, and once on shore she was carried in a litter to Devil's Cliff. When by chance she walked in the daytime, she wore a mask. Some say she is as beautiful as an angel; others, that she is ugly as a monster. I cannot say which are in the right, for neither I nor my mates ever put foot in the

interior of the mansion. Those who perform the special attendance and service are mulattresses as mute as fish."

"And he?"

"He is handsome, tall and slender, about thirty-six years old, brown, with black hair and mustache, and has an aquiline nose."

"It is certainly he," said the colonel, when John had thus described him. "It is thus that he was always described; and it is not positively known that he is dead?"

"It is said he died on the voyage, but no one has ever really known."

"And no one doubts that he died?"

"Faith! no, colonel, because Blue Beard has been married twice since then."

"And have you seen these two husbands?"

"No, colonel, for when I arrived from San Domingo, only eight days since, you engaged me for this expedition, knowing that I could serve you. You have promised me fifty guineas if I will introduce you into this island, in spite of the French cruisers, which, since the war, do not allow any vessels to approach the coast, which is accessible, be it understood. Our canoe, however, was not interfered with, for, thanks to the sharp rocks of Cabesterre, no one could conceive that we could land on this coast of the island, and they have not watched that."

"And then, beside, no one would suspect our presence on the island, though, according to what you tell me, Blue Beard has a kind of police who keep her informed of the arrival of all strangers."

"At least, colonel, they say that the men who are so employed, at St. Pierre and Fort Royal, were on the watch and that a stranger who landed at Martinique did not escape their vigilance."

"All that is for the best; you shall have your fifty guineas. But, once more, you are very sure about this subterranean passage?"

"Be easy as to that, colonel; I have passed through it, I tell you, with a negro who was a pearl-fisher, and he it was who first took me through it."

"But you were obliged to climb the precipice in order to reach the park of Devil's Cliff?"

"Doubtless, colonel; since it was from curiosity to see this park, in which no one was permitted to enter, that I accepted the pearl-fisher's offer; being of the household, I knew Blue Beard and her husband were absent; I was then sure that I could pass through the garden after climbing the precipice; that was what we did, not without the risk of breaking our necks, however, a thousand times, but what would you have? I was dying with curiosity to see

the interior of this place, which had been forbidden. It was a perfect paradise. What was most amusing was the surprise of the mulattress who guarded the entrance; when she saw us, myself and the negro, she could not conceive how we had been able to enter. We told her we had escaped her notice. She believed us; she put us out as quickly as possible, and she committed suicide rather than be punished by her employers."

After a few minutes' silence the colonel said abruptly, "This is not all; now there is no retreat, I must tell you everything."

"What then, colonel?"

"Once introduced into Devil's Cliff, we have a man to surprise and overcome; whatever he does to defend himself, a hair of his head must not be harmed, at least, unless he absolutely forces us to protect our lives; then," continued the colonel, with a sinister smile, "then two hundred guineas for you, whether we succeed or not."

"A thousand devils! you have waited rather long to say this to me, colonel. But, as the wine is drawn, it must be quaffed."

"Come, I did not deceive myself, you are a brave man."

"Ah, as to that, is the man whom you seek also strong and brave?"

"Well," said Rutler, after some minutes of reflection, "consider a little the first husband of the widow—a man tall and slender."

"The devil! he was slender, 'tis true; a rod of steel is, also, slender, but that does not prevent its being furiously strong. See here, colonel, that man was made of iron. He was so strong that I have seen him take an insolent negro by the middle and throw him ten feet from him, as if he were an infant, though the black was larger and more robust than you. So, colonel, if the man you seek resembles that one, we would be unwise to bait him—as you say——"

"Less than you believe. I will explain to you——"

"And then," continued John, "if by chance the filibuster, the buccanneer or the cannibal who they say frequently visit the widow, should also be there, it would become somewhat embarrassing."

"Hear me; after what you have told me is there at the end of the park a tree where one could hide?"

"Yes, colonel."

"With the exception of the buccanneer, the filibuster or the cannibal no one enters the private habitation of Blue Beard?"

"No one colonel except the mulattresses who wait upon her."

"And except also the man whom I seek, be it remembered; I have my reasons for believing we shall find him there."

"Well, colonel?"

"Then nothing is simpler; we will hide ourselves in the thickest tree until our man comes to our side."

"That cannot fail to occur colonel because the park is not large and when one walks in it he is forced to pass near a marble basin not very far from the place where we shall be hidden."

"If our man does not take a walk after night comes, we will wait until he has gone to bed, and we will surprise him there."

"This will be easy, colonel, unless he calls one of Blue Beard's comforters to his succor."

"Be easy about that; for with your assistance I can place my hand on him and then though he were surrounded by a hundred men armed to the teeth he is mine; I have a sure means of obliging him to obey me; this concerns me. All that I require of you is to conduct me into the ambush from which I can spring upon him suddenly."

"This shall be done, colonel."

"Then let us be going," said Rutler, rising from the ground.

"At your orders, colonel; but instead of walking, we must creep. But let us see," continued John, bending down, "if we can perceive the daylight. Yes, it is there—but how distant it seems. Speaking of that, colonel, if, since I came by this road, it should have been stopped up by a landslide, we should cut, in such a case, a sorry figure! condemned to remain here, and to die of hunger or to eat each other! Impossible to get out by the gulf, seeing that one cannot remount a sheet of water as a trout ascends a cascade."

"That is true," said Rutler, "you appal me; happily, there is no likelihood of this. You have the sack?"

"Yes, colonel; the straps are strong and the skin impervious. We shall find our knives, our pistols and our cartridges in it as dry as though they came from an armory."

"Then, John, let us be starting; go ahead," said the colonel. "We must have time to dry our clothes."

"That will not take long, colonel; once at the foot of the precipice we shall be as in an oven; the sun shines full upon it."

John lay down on his face and commenced to glide into the passage, so small that he could scarcely enter. The darkness was profound; in the

distance only, one could distinguish a faint light. The colonel followed, dragging himself over a damp and dirty soil.

For some time the two Englishmen advanced in this manner, crawling on their knees, on their hands, and on their stomachs, in total darkness. All at once John paused suddenly and cried in a frightened voice, "Colonel!"

"What is it?"

"Do you not notice a strong odor?"

"Yes, a fetid odor."

"Do not move; it is the serpent—'Fer de lance'—we are lost."

"A serpent!" exclaimed the colonel, with horror.

"We are dead. I dare not advance; the odor is growing stronger and stronger," murmured John.

"Be quiet—listen."

In mortal terror the two men held their breath. All at once at some little distance they heard a continuous, rapid sound, as if something was beating the earth with a flail. The nauseating and penetrating odor which exhales from these large serpents became stronger and stronger. "The serpent is furious; it is his tail which is beating the earth thus," said John in a feeble voice. "Colonel, let us commend our souls to God!"

"Let us cry out and terrify the serpent," said Rutler.

"No, no, it would but precipitate itself at once upon us," replied John.

The two men remained for some moments a prey to the most horrible suspense. They could neither retreat nor change their position. Their chests rested upon the earth; their backs touched the rocks. They dared not make a movement of recoil for fear of drawing the reptile in pursuit of them. The air, more and more impregnated by the infectious odor of the serpent, became suffocating.

"Can you not find a stone at hand in order to throw at it," said the colonel in a low tone.

Hardly had he said these words when John uttered the most piercing cries and struggled violently, exclaiming, "Help! help! I die!"

Paralyzed with terror, Rutler strove to turn about, but he struck himself violently on the head against the side of the passage. Then, retreating as rapidly as he could with the assistance of his knees and hands, he sought flight by backing out, while John, in extremity with the serpent, made the most terrible and pitiful cries of terror and suffering. All at once these cries became fainter and inarticulate, as if the sailor was strangling. In fact, the

enraged serpent, after having, in the obscurity, stung John in the hand, the throat and face, attempted to introduce its flat and lance-like head into the open mouth of the unfortunate man, and stung his lips and tongue; but this last assault finished the sailor.

The serpent, having satisfied his rage, withdrew his horrible fangs and took to flight. The colonel felt a damp, icy body touch his cheek; he remained motionless. The serpent glided rapidly along the side of the subterranean passage and escaped.

The danger past, the colonel remained some moments petrified with terror; he heard the last struggle of John; his agony was short. Rutler heard him make several convulsive shudders and that was all. His companion was dead. Then Rutler advanced and seized the sailor's leg. The leg was already cold and stiff; for the venom of the serpent works rapidly.

A new cause for fear assailed the colonel. The serpent, not finding an egress in the cavern, might return the same way it had gone. Rutler seemed already to hear a slight noise behind him. He could not proceed in advance, because the body of the sailor completely blocked the passage; flight by the rear was only to expose himself to an encounter with the serpent. In his terror the colonel seized the corpse by the two legs, to the end that he might drag it to the entrance of the subterranean passage and thus clear the only outlet to the cavern. His efforts were in vain. Whether his strength was paralyzed, he being in such a cramped position, or whether the poison had already distended the body, Rutler could not extricate it.

Not wishing to think that this only and last chance for salvation was taken from him, he found a means of detaching his belt and of fastening it to the feet of the dead man; he took it between his teeth, and, aiding himself by his two hands, pulled with all the energy of despair. He could scarcely cause even the slightest movement of the corpse. His terror increased; he sought his knife, in the mad idea of cutting up the body of the sailor. He saw soon the uselessness of this attempt.

The pistols and ammunition of the colonel were in the sack of skin swung over the shoulders of the dead man. He set himself to work to remove the sack from his companion; he did so after great difficulty. He then set himself anew to retreat to the entrance of the passage.

Once again in the cavern he felt faint, but the air revived him; he plunged his head into the cold water and seated himself on the sand. He had almost forgotten the serpent. A long hiss caused him to raise his head; he saw the reptile balancing itself a few paces above him, half coiled up on the rocks which formed the roof of the cavern.

The colonel recovered his coolness at the sight of this danger; remaining almost immovable, and using his hands only, he unfastened his pouch and drew from it a pistol and cocked it. Happily the charge and priming were intact.

At the moment that the serpent, irritated by the movement of Rutler, precipitated itself upon him, the latter aimed and fired. The serpent fell at his feet with his head crushed. It was of a blue-black, spotted with yellow, and some eight or nine feet in length.

Delivered from this enemy, and encouraged by his success the colonel made a final effort to clear out the only path by which he could pass. He glided anew into the passage, but, in spite of his strength, his efforts were in vain—he he could not move the corpse of the sailor.

Returning to the cave, he examined it in every direction but could find no outlet. He could not hope for help outside; his shouts could not be heard. At this terrible thought his eyes fell upon the serpent. Here was a momentary resource; he knew that sometimes the famished negroes ate this flesh, which, though repulsive, was not poisonous.

Night came, and he found himself in profound darkness. The waves murmured and broke at the entrance of the cave; the waterspout precipitated itself with a crash into the lower basin.

A new fear took possession of Rutler. He knew that the serpents went in pairs and often rejoined each other at night; drawn by the tracks, the male or female of the reptile which he had killed would come in search of its mate.

The colonel's vigil became frightful. The slightest sound made him tremble, in spite of his courageous nature; he asked himself whether, in case he came through this horrible situation by a miracle, he should continue the enterprise he had commenced. At first he believed that he saw, in this adventure, a warning from heaven; then he accused himself of cowardice, and attributed his mad fears to the feeble condition in which he found himself.

Leaving the colonel in this difficult strait, we will transport our reader to Devil's Cliff.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEVIL'S CLIFF.

THE moon, brilliant and pure, shed a light almost as strong as the European sun, and enabled one to distinguish perfectly the top of a very high rock, and surrounded by woods on all sides of a dwelling built of brick, and of peculiar architecture.

One could reach it only by a narrow path, forming a spiral around this species of cone. The path was bounded on one side by a mass of perpendicular granite; on the other by a precipice of which in the broad daylight one could not discover the bottom.

This dangerous road terminated in a platform crossed by a brick wall, of great thickness and edged with spikes.

Back of this species of glacis arose the walls surrounding the dwelling, into which one entered by a very low oak door. This door communicated with a large, square court, occupied by the outbuildings and other buildings. This court passed, one discovered a vaulted passageway leading to the sanctuary; that is to say, to the pavilion occupied by Blue Beard. None of the blacks or mulattoes who formed the large force of servants of the house had ever passed the limits of this passageway. The serving of Blue Beard was done through the intermediary of a number of mulattresses, who alone communicated with their mistress.

The house was built on a slope opposite the one by which access was had from the cliff. This slope, much less steep, and laid out in a number of natural terraces, was composed of five or six immense steps which, on all sides, commanded the precipice.

By a phenomenon frequent in these volcanic islands, a pond of about two acres' circumference covered almost all the length of one of the upper terraces. Its waters were limpid and pure. Blue Beard's residence was separated from this small lake by a narrow path of smooth sand, shining like silver. This house was of one story. At the first glance it seems to be constructed entirely of trees from which the bark had been removed. Its bamboo roof was steeply inclined and overlapped by some five or six feet the outer wall, which rested upon the trunks of palm trees driven into the ground, and formed a kind of gallery around the house.

A little above the level of the lake, in gentle declivity, was a lawn of turf as fresh and green as that of the most beautiful English fields; this was a rare thing at the Antilles, and was due to underground irrigation which flowed from the lake and gave to this park a delightful freshness. From this lawn, ornamented by baskets of tropical flowers, opened a garden composed of large variegated shrubs, the slope of the ground being such that one did not

see their trunks, but only their enameled tops of the freshest color; then, beyond these trees, on a terrace lower still, was a large orange and citron grove covered with fruit and flowers. In the daytime, seen thus from above, one would have said it was a carpet of perfumed snow strewn with golden balls. At the extreme horizon the slender stems of the banana and cocoanut trees, formed a splendid retreat and overlooked the precipice at the bottom of which was the subterranean passage of which we have spoken, and in which Colonel Rutler was then imprisoned.

Meantime, let us enter one of the most remote portions of this mansion. There we will find a young woman of from twenty to twenty-three years; but her features are so infantile, her figure is so tiny, her freshness so youthful, she would easily pass for sixteen. Robed in a muslin gown with flowing sleeves, she is reclining on a sofa covered with Indian silk, brown in color, embroidered with golden flowers; she leans her white forehead on one hand, half-hidden by a wilderness of loose curls of reddish blond tint, for the young woman's hair is dressed à la Titus, a profusion of silky curls falls on her neck, her snowy shoulders, and frames her charming little face, rounded, firm and rosy as that of a child.

A large book, bound in red morocco, lies at the side of the divan on which she is stretched, and is open before her. The young woman reads attentively, by the light of three perfumed candles, which rest in a little silver gilt candelabra, enriched by exquisite chasing.

The eyelashes of the pretty reader are so long that they throw a slight shadow on her cheeks, where are to be seen two charming dimples. Her nose is of a rare delicacy; her mouth curved and crimson, and her beautiful blue eyes large and expressive; her whole face presents a ravishing expression of innocence and candor. From the edge of her muslin gown appear two feet like Cinderella's, shod in white silk hose and Moorish slippers of cherry satin embroidered with silver, which one could hold in the palm of one's hand. The attitude of this young woman leaves to the imagination an exquisite whole, in spite of her slight figure. Thanks to the width of her sleeve, which has fallen back, one can admire the ravishing outline of a rounded arm, polished like ivory, and having at the elbow a charming dimple. Her hand which turns the leaves of her book is worthy of such an arm; the nails, very long and of the transparency of agate. The tips of the fingers shade to a deep rose color, such as is imparted by the henna of the Orientals.

The figure of this charming creature recalls the ideal Psyche, the lovely realization of a beauty so fleeting that it passes with the first flower of youth. Certain organizations retains their first youth a long time, and as we have

said, in spite of her twenty-three years, Blue Beard is of the number of these privileged persons.

For this is Blue Beard. We will no longer hide the name of the inmate of Devil's Cliff from our readers, but will say she is called Angela. Unfortunately, this celestial name, this candid face, contrasts singularly with the diabolical reputation which this widow of three husbands possesses; and who it is said has as many consolers as she has had husbands. The course of this story will enable us to condemn or vindicate Blue Beard.

At a slight sound which she hears in the adjoining room, Angela lifts her head suddenly, like a gazelle on the alert, and seats herself on the edge of the sofa, throwing back her locks by a graceful movement.

At the moment she rises, exclaiming, "It is he!" a man raises the portière of the room. Not sooner does the iron fly to the magnet than does Angela to the newcomer. She throws herself into his arms, and twining them about him in a kind of tender fury, covered him with caresses and passionate kisses, and joyfully cries, "My tender friend—my dear James!"

This first ebullition over, the newcomer takes Angela into his arms as if she were a child, and carries his precious burden over to the sofa. Then Angela, seated on his knee, takes one of his hands in hers, passes her beautiful arm about his neck, draws his head to her, and looked at him with eager delight.

Alas! were the scandal-mongers right in suspecting Blue Beard's morality?

The man whom she receives with such familiar ardor is of the copper color of a mulatto; he is tall and supple, active and robust; his noble and fine features show nothing of the negro type; a profusion of jet black curls frame his forehead; his eyes are large and of velvety blackness; under his thin lips, red and moist, shine the most beautifully enameled teeth. This beauty, at once charming and manly, this appearance of strength and elegance, resembles the noble proportions of an Indian Bacchus or of an Antinous.

The mulatto's costume is such as certain filibusters then generally adopt when on shore. He wears a waistcoat of rich maroon velvet, with buttons of filigree gold; large Flemish boots of like material and ornamented with the same style of button, which extend the length of the thigh, being met by a belt of orange silk, in which is stuck a poignard richly chased; and, finally, long leggings of white kid embroidered in many colored silks after the Mexican style, show a leg of the finest outline.

Nothing could be more striking or pretty than the contrast between James and Angela thus grouped. On the one hand, blond tresses, alabaster tints, rosy cheeks, infantile grace and elegance; on the other, the bronze tint, ebony locks, and manner at once assured and manly.

Angela's white dress is outlined on the somber colors of James' vestments; and thus the fine and supple figure of Blue Beard is accentuated.

Fixing her great blue eyes on the black eyes of the mulatto, the young woman amuses herself by turning back the embroidered collar of James' shirt, in order to admire the better his sunburned neck, which in color and shape rivals the most beautiful Florentine bronze.

After prolonging this unconventional performance, Angela gives the mulatto a noisy kiss under his ear, takes his head between her two hands, mischievously rumples up his black locks, gives him a little blow on the cheek, and says, "That is how I love you, Monsieur Hurricane."

A slight sound is heard behind the tapestry forming the portière, and Angela calls, "Is it you, Mirette? what do you wish?"

"Madame, I am coming with the flowers and will arrange them in the stand."

"She hears us!" said Angela, making a mysterious signal to the mulatto; then she amuses herself laughing madly at and rumpling her lover's hair. He takes her little caprices with complaisance, and contemplates her with love. Then he says, smilingly,

"Child! because you look only sixteen, you think everything is permitted you." Then he adds in a tone of gentle raillery, "and who would think, seeing this little rosy, ingenuous face that I hold on my knees the most notable scamp of the Antilles?"

"And who would think that this man, who speaks in so sweet a voice, is the ferocious Captain Hurricane, the terror of England and Spain?" cried Angela, breaking into a laugh. The mulatto and the widow express themselves in the purest French, and without the slightest foreign accent.

"What matters it," she cries, smilingly, "it is not I whom they call Blue Beard."

At these words which appear to call up sad memories, the little widow, with a coquettish pout, gave a hardly perceptible tap to the end of Captain Hurricane's nose, indicating by a movement of her hand that in the neighboring room one can hear him, and says with a mischievous air, "That will teach you to speak of trespassing."

"Fie! the monster!" says the captain, breaking into a laugh; "and what of remorse, then, madame?"

"Give me a kiss of remorse, then, and I shall——"

"May Lucifer assist me! It takes a woman to be chief of criminals! Ah, my dear, you are well named; you make me tremble! Suppose we have supper."

Angela touches a bell. The young mulattress who had overheard the above conversation enters. She wears a dress of white linen with bright stripes, and has silver rings on arms and ankles.

"Mirette, have you arranged the flowers," said Blue Beard.

"Yes, madame."

"You have been listening?"

"No, madame."

"However, it does not matter; when I speak it is that I may be heard. Make ready the supper, Mirette."

Then, addressing herself to the captain, "What wine do you prefer?"

"Sherry, but let it be iced; this is a notion of mine."

Mirette goes out for a moment, and shortly reappears and begins to prepare the table.

"By the way, I forgot to tell you of a great event," says Blue Beard's companion.

"What then? has one of my deceased husbands returned to life?"

"Faith, almost."

"Now? Ah, Master James, Master James, no more of your wicked pleasantries," cries Angela, with a frightened air.

"No, it is not a dead man, a ghost, but a very living pretender who demands your hand in marriage."

"He wishes to marry me?"

"He wishes to marry you."

"Oh, the unhappy wretch! is he then weary of life?" cried Angela, laughing.

Mirette, at these words, makes the sign of the cross while superintending the spreading of the board by two other mulattresses who are carrying bottles of Bohemian glass, engraved with golden arabesques, and plates of the most magnificent Japanese porcelain.

Blue Beard continues, "This lover of mine is not a countryman, then?"

"By no means! for in spite of your wealth, my dear, I defy you to find a fourth husband, thanks to your diabolical reputation."

"Where does he come from, this would-be husband, my dear James?"

"From France."

"France! he comes from France to espouse me, the deuce!"

"Angela, you know that I do not like to hear you swear," says the mulatto, with pretended seriousness.

"Pardon, Captain Hurricane," replies the young woman, dropping her eyes with a hypocritical air. "I only meant to signify that I find your news very astonishing. It appears that my reputation has reached Europe."

"Do not be so vain, my dear. It was on board the Unicorn that this worthy paladin heard you spoken of, and by the mere mention of your riches he has become enamored, yes, madly enamored of you. This, I trust, will take down your pride."

"The impertinent fellow! and who is this man, James?"

"The Chevalier de Croustillac."

"Who?"

"The Chevalier de Croustillac."

"This is the name of the pretender to my hand?" And Angela breaks into a merry peal of laughter which nothing can arrest, and the mulatto finally joins in her merriment.

The two have scarcely subsided when Mirette enters preceded by two other mulattresses who carry a table sumptuously set out in gilded dishes. The two slaves place the table near the divan; the captain arises to take a chair, while Angela, kneeling on the edge of the sofa, uncovers the dishes one after another, and examines the table with the air of an epicurean kitten.

"Are you hungry, James? As for me, I am famished," says Angela. And as if to prove without doubt this assertion, she opens her coral lips and shows two rows of ravishing little pearly teeth which she clinches twice.

"Angela, my dear, you were certainly badly brought up," said the captain, helping her to a portion of dorado, served with ham and an appetizing sauce.

"Captain Hurricane, if I receive you at my table, it is not that you may scold," said Angela, making an almost imperceptible grimace to the mulattress. Then she continues, attacking her fish bravely, and pecking at her bread like a bird, "If he scolds me, Mirette, I will not receive him again?"

"No, mistress," said Mirette.

"And I will give his place to Rend-your-soul, the buccaneer?"

"Yes, mistress."

"Or to Youmääle, the cannibal?"

"Yes, mistress."

"You hear that, sir?" said Angela.

"Never mind, my dear, I am not jealous, you know that; beauty is as the sun, it shines for all the world."

"Because you are not jealous, then, I will pardon you. Help yourself to what is before you. What is that, Mirette?"

"Madame, the roe of fish fried in pigeon's fat."

"Which is not equal to the fat of quail," says the captain, "but it must have the juice of a lemon while it is warm."

"See what a glutton! Ah! but my future spouse, I had forgotten him. Pour me some wine, Mirette."

The filibuster, corsair as he is, forestalls the mulattress and pours out some iced sherry for Angela.

"It must be that I love you, to drink this, I who prefer the wines of France." And Blue Beard drinks resolutely three drops of the sherry, which puts fresh life into her lips and blue eyes and tinged her cheeks a carmine hue.

"But to return to my future spouse. How is he? Is he agreeable? Is he worthy to join the others?"

Mirette, in spite of her passive submission, cannot prevent a tremor in hearing her mistress speak thus, although the poor slave must be accustomed to these atrocious pleasantries, and doubtless many greater enormities.

"What ails you, Mirette?"

"Nothing, mistress."

"If you are unwell——"

"No, mistress."

"You would be sorry to see me marry again? I shall not do so for a long time. Go, child." Then, addressing Captain Hurricane, "And the Chevalier de—de—what did you say was his name?"

"Chevalier de Croustillac."

"Have you seen him?"

"No; but knowing his plans and that he intends, at all hazards, and in spite of the efforts of the good Father Griffen, to come here, I begged Youmääle, the cannibal," says the captain, looking at Angela in a singular way, "to address a little warning in order to induce him to renounce his projects."

"And you did this without letting me know, sir? What if I do not wish to rebuff him, this pretender; for, after all, this Croustillac is a Gascon, and I never married a Gascon."

"Oh, he is the most famous Gascon that has ever gasconaded on the earth; with that, a figure indescribable and assurance unbounded; and as to the rest, sufficient courage."

"And Youmääle's warning?"

"Has accomplished nothing. It glided off the undaunted soul of this man as a ball from the scales of a crocodile; he started out this morning bravely, at break of day, to traverse the forest, with his pink silk hose, his rapier at his side, and a staff to frighten the serpents. He is still there, without doubt, at this hour, for the road to Devil's Cliff is not known to all the world."

"James, I have an idea!" cries the widow joyfully; "let him come here and amuse us; that we may torment him. So, he is in love with my riches and not myself! So, he would espouse me, this fine knight errant. We will see as to that! Well? You do not laugh at my idea, James. What ails you? But moreover, you know, sir, that I will not be thwarted; I will make a feast for this Gascon. If he is not devoured by the wildcats or killed by the serpents I will have him here to-morrow. You go to sea to-morrow; tell the cannibal and Rend-your-soul to bring him to me."

The captain, instead of joining in the gayety of Blue Beard, according to his custom, is serious, pensive, and seems to reflect deeply.

"James! James! do you not hear me?" cries Angela, impatiently, tapping her foot. "I want this Gascon. I want him."

The mulatto makes no reply; he draws with the forefinger of his right hand a circle about his throat, and looks significantly at the young woman. She understands this mysterious sign; her face all at once expresses both sorrow and distress; she rises suddenly, runs to the mulatto, falls on her knees before him and cries in a touching voice, "You are right. My God! you are right! I am insane to entertain such a thought. I understand you."

"Rise, Angela, calm yourself," says the mulatto. "I do not know if this man is to be feared, but he is a stranger, he may come from England or France, and——"

"I tell you I was mad! that I was jesting, my dear James! I forgot that which I never ought to forget—it is frightful."

The beautiful eyes of the young woman fill with tears; she bends her head, and takes the hand of the mulatto, over which she weeps silently for some minutes.

Hurricane kisses tenderly the forehead and tresses of Angela, and says gently, "I never wish to recall these cruel memories. I should have said nothing to you, assured myself that there is no danger in bringing this imbecile to you as a plaything, and then——"

"James, my friend," cries Angela sadly, interrupting the mulatto, "my love, what do you think then? for a childish caprice that I would expose you, you whom I love most dearly in the world?"

"There! there! be calm," replies the mulatto, lifting her up and seating her near him; "do not be frightened; Father Griffen has informed himself as to the Gascon, he is only ridiculous. In order to be more certain, I will go to-morrow and speak with him at Macouba, and then I will tell Rend-your-soul, who is fortunately hunting on the coast, to discover this poor devil in the forest, where he has, no doubt, lost himself. If he is dangerous," says the mulatto, making a sign to Angela (for the slaves were still present awaiting the conclusion of supper), "the buccaneer will relieve us of him and cure him of the desire to know you; if not, as you never have any amusement here, he shall bring him to you."

"No, no, I do not wish it," says Angela. "All the thoughts which come to me, now are of mortal sadness—my disquietude returns."

Angela, seeing that the mulatto would not eat any more, arose; the filibuster imitated her, and says, "Reassure yourself, my Angela, there is nothing to fear. Come into the garden, the night is fine, the moon magnificent. Tell Mirette to bring my lute; in order to make you forget these painful thoughts I will sing you the Scotch ballads you love so."

So saying, the mulatto passes one arm around the figure of Angela, and clasping her thus, he descends the few steps leading to the garden. On leaving the apartment Blue Beard says to her slave, "Mirette, bring the lute into the garden, light the alabaster lamp in my bed-chamber. You can go, I shall not need you again to-night. Do not forget to say to Cora and to the other mulattresses that to-morrow begins their service." Then she disappears, leaning on the arm of the mulatto. This last order of Angela was occasioned by a habit she has had, since her last widowhood, of alternating every three days the service of her women.

Mirette carries a very beautiful ebony lute incrustated with gold and mother of pearl, into the garden. After an interval of some moments, the filibuster's voice is heard singing with infinite grace and pathos the Scotch ballads which the chief of royalist clans always sang in preference during the protectorate of Cromwell. The voice of the mulatto is at once sweet, vibrant and melancholy.

Mirette and the two slaves listen with delight during some moments. At the last lines, the voice of the filibuster becomes moved, tears seem to mingle in it—then the songs cease.

Mirette enters Blue Beard's chamber in order to light the alabaster lamp, which throws a soft and veiled light on the surrounding objects. This room is splendidly furnished in Indian stuff with white ground embroidered with flowers; a mosquito net of muslin, fine as a spider's web, envelopes an immense bed of gilded wood with a headboard of plate-glass, which appears thus in a slight mist.

After executing the orders of her mistress, Mirette withdraws discreetly, and says to the two slaves with a malicious smile, "Mirette lights the lamp for the captain, Cora for the buccanneer, and Noun for the Caribbean."

The two slaves nod their heads with an intelligent air, and the three go out, after carefully closing and locking the door which leads to the outbuilding of this special domain of Blue Beard.

CHAPTER IX.

NIGHT.

WE had left the chevalier when he had penetrated into the forest, which was alive with the cries of all the animals which peopled it. For a moment stunned by the tumult, the Gascon bravely pursued his course, turning his steps ever toward the north, at least toward what he believed to be so, thanks to his astronomical knowledge. As the priest had foretold, he could not find any path through the forest; decayed vegetation, tall shrubs, vines, trunks of trees, an inextricable undergrowth, covered the ground; the trees were so thick that the air, light and sun, penetrated with difficulty through this veil of foliage, among which exhaled a warm moisture almost suffocating produced by the fermentation of vegetable matter which to a great extent thickly covered the earth.

The heavy perfume of tropical flowers so saturated this suffocating atmosphere that the chevalier experienced a kind of intoxication, of faintness. He walked with a slower step, he felt his head become heavy, exterior objects became indifferent to him. He no longer admired the leafy colonades stretching out as far as the eye could see, into the shadows of the forest. He cast a careless glance at the sparkling and varied plumage of the parrots, birds of paradise and other birds joyfully crying out and pursuing the golden-winged insects or snapping in their beaks the aromatic woods of the Indies. The gambols of the monkeys, balancing themselves on the garlands of passion vines, or springing from tree to tree, did not even bring a smile to his lips. Completely absorbed, he had strength only to contemplate the end of his perilous journey. He thought only of Blue Beard and her treasures.

After some hours' walk, he began to observe that his silk stockings were inconvenient for traversing a forest. A large branch of thorny wood had made a great hole in his coat; his breeches were not irreproachable by any means; and more than once, feeling his long sword embarrass him by catching in some plants which obstructed his path, he involuntarily turned to chastise the importunate object which took the liberty of interfering with his progress.

Either by chance, or thanks to the frequent use of his staff, with which he beat the bushes continually, the chevalier had the good fortune not to encounter any serpents. Toward noon, worried and fatigued, he paused in order to pick some bananas, and climbed a tree in order to breakfast at his ease. To his joy and surprise he found that the leaves of this tree, rolled into cornucopias, held clear water, fresh and delicious to the taste; the chevalier drank several of those, put his remaining bananas into his pocket, and continued his journey.

According to his calculation, he must have traveled nearly four leagues, and could not be very far from Devil's Cliff. Unhappily the chevalier's calculation was not exact, at least, as to the direction in which he believed himself to have gone; for he had estimated the distance traversed correctly enough, but he was, at midday, a little further from Devil's Cliff than he had been when he entered the forest. In order not to lose sight of the sun (which he could with difficulty discern through the treetops), he had necessarily been obliged to lift his eyes frequently to the heavens. Now, the road was almost impenetrable, and he was also obliged to be on the watch for serpents; thus, divided between the sky and the earth, the attention of the chevalier went somewhat astray. However, as it was impossible to believe that he could a second time be deceived in his calculations, he took fresh courage, certain of reaching the end of his journey.

About three o'clock in the afternoon he commenced to suspect that Devil's Cliff receded in proportion to his approach. Croustillac became harassed; but the fear of passing the night in the forest spurred him on; by means of walking forward steadily he finally reached a kind of indentation between two large rocks. The chevalier drew his breath, expanding his lungs.

"Faith!" cried he, removing his hat and fanning himself with it, "I am then at Devil's Cliff. I seem to recognize it, though I have never seen it. I cannot, however, lose myself. I have love for a compass; one can follow this in the antipodes without deviating a hair's breadth. It is very simple; my heart turns toward wealth and beauty, as the needle to the pole! for if Blue Beard is rich, she must be beautiful; and, further, a woman who can rid herself so quickly of three husbands must love change. I shall prove a new fruit to her—and what a fruit! After all, the three men who are dead got what they deserved, because they were in my path. What assures me of the physique of Blue Beard is that only a very pretty woman could permit herself such irregularities, such methods—a little offhand to be sure—of breaking the conjugal chain. Zounds! I shall see her, please her, seduce her. Poor woman! She does not dream that her conqueror is at hand! If—if—I wager that her little heart beats strongly this very moment. She feels my approach, she divines it, her presentiment does not deceive her. She will be overcome—happiness will arrive on the wings of love!"

Thus saying, the chevalier threw a glance on his toilet. It did not escape his notice that it was slightly disordered; his stockings, originally purple, then pale pink, had become striped, zebra-fashion, with a number of green rays, since his journey in the forest; his coat was ornamented with various holes fancifully arranged, but the Gascon made this reflection aloud, if not very modest, at least very consoling: "Faith! Venus arose from the sea without any covering; Truth had no more on when she emerged from the well; and if

beauty and truth appeared without a veil, I see not why—love—Beside, Blue Beard must be a woman who will understand me!"

Completely reassured, the chevalier hastened his steps, climbed the face of the rocks, and found himself in an inclosure of the forest, even more somber and impenetrable than that which he had quitted. Others would have lost courage. Croustillac said to himself, on the contrary "Zounds! this is very clever. Hiding her habitation in the most dense forest is a woman's idea. I am sure the more I push on into these thickets the nearer I approach the house. I consider I have already arrived. Blue Beard, Blue Beard, finally I behold thee."

The chevalier cherished this precious illusion while the daylight lasted, which was not long; there is little twilight in the tropics. Soon the chevalier saw, with astonishment, the summits of the trees little by little obscure themselves, and assume a fantastic appearance in the great mass of the forest. For some moments there remained a half-shade, here and there lighted by the bright reflection of the sun, which seemed as red as the fire of a furnace, for he was "making his couch in the wind," as they say in the Antilles.

For a moment the vegetation, so brilliantly green, took on a purple tint; the chevalier believed that nature was painted a living red, what was perceived being a mingling with the tints of the heavens. "Zounds!" exclaimed the chevalier, "I did not deceive myself; I am near this infernal place, this illumination proves it. Lucifer is without doubt making a visit to Blue Beard, who, in order to receive him, is lighting the furnaces of her kitchen."

Little by little these warm tints disappeared, they became pale red, then violet, and were swallowed up in the amethyst of the evening skies. As soon as the shadows wrapped the forest in their arms, the plaintive cries of the jackals, the sinister hooting of the owls, proclaimed the return of night. The sea breeze, which always rises after the setting of the sun, passed like a great sigh over the tops of the trees; the leaves shivered. The thousand nameless, vague and distant cries which one hears only at night, began to resound from all quarters.

"Of a truth," said the chevalier, "this is a pretty figure to cut! To think I am not a hundred steps, perhaps, from Devil's Cliff, and that I am compelled to sleep under the stars!"

Croustillac, fearing the serpents, directed himself toward an enormous mahogany tree which he had observed; by the aid of the vines which enveloped this tree on all sides, he succeeded in reaching a kind of fork, formed by two large branches; here he installed himself, comfortably, placed his sword between his knees, and commenced a supper of the bananas,

which fortunately, he had kept in his pockets. He did not experience any of the fears which would have assailed many men, even the bravest, placed in such a critical situation. Beside, in extreme cases the chevalier had all kinds of reasoning for his use; he said: "Fate is implacable against me, it chooses well—it cannot mistake—instead of addressing itself to some rascal; to some wretch, what does it do? It bethinks itself of the Chevalier de Croustillac thus: 'Here is my man—he is worthy of struggling with me.'"

In the situation in which he found himself the chevalier saw another providential circumstance no less flattering to him. "My good fortune is assured," he said: "the treasures of Blue Beard are mine; this is the final trial to which the aforesaid Fate subjects me; it would be bad grace in me to revolt. A brave man does not complain. I could not merit the inestimable recompense which awaits me."

By means of these reflections the chevalier combated sleep with success; he feared if he yielded to it he would fall from the tree; he ended by being enchanted by the obstacles which he had surmounted in his course to Blue Beard. She would know how to value his courage, he thought, and be alive to his devotion. In this excess of chivalrous feeling, the chevalier regretted even that he has not had a serious enemy to combat and not to have had to struggle alone against pitfalls, thorns and the trunks of trees. At this moment a strange cry drew the adventurer's attention; he listened, and said, "What is that? One would think that the cats were holding their Sabbath. I know, now, because of these cats, that the house cannot be far distant." But Croustillac deceived himself. These were not domestic cats but wildcats, and never were tigers fiercer; they continued to make an infernal uproar. In order to quiet them, the chevalier took his staff and struck on the tree. The wildcats, instead of flying, approached him with furious and redoubled cries. For a long time these woods had been infested by these animals, who were not inferior to jaguars in size, strength and ferocity; they attacked and devoured young kids, goats, and even young mules.

In order to explain the hostile assault of these carnivorous beasts which surrounded the chevalier, who had been discovered by their powerful sense of scent, we must return to the cavern in which Colonel Rutler was immured. We know that the corpse of the sailor John, dead from the sting of the serpent, completely obstructed the subterranean passage by which Rutler could alone leave the cavern. The wildcats had descended the precipice, scented the corpse of John, approached it first timidly, then, emboldened, had devoured it. The colonel heard and knew not what to think of these ferocious cries. At daybreak, thanks to the gluttony of these animals, the obstacle which prevented Rutler from leaving the cavern had entirely disappeared. There remained in the subterranean passage only the bones of the sailor, and these the colonel could easily remove.

After this horrible feast, the wildcats, fed but not appeased by this new repast to them, felt a taste for human flesh; they abandoned the foot of the precipice, regained the wood, scented the chevalier, and their carnivorous ferocity was increased.

For some time fear withheld them, but, encouraged by the immobility of Croustillac, one of the boldest and most famished slowly climbed the tree, and the Gascon saw, all at once, near him two large, brilliant, green eyes, which shone out of the midst of the obscurity. At the same instant he felt a vigorous bite at the calf of his leg. He drew back his leg abruptly, but the wildcat held on and fastened its claws in his flesh, and gave a deep, furious growl which was the signal of attack. The assailants climbed up from all sides and the chevalier saw about him flaming eyes and felt himself bitten in many places at once.

This attack was so unexpected, the assailants were of such a singular kind, that Croustillac, in spite of his courage, remained for a moment stupefied; but the bites of the wildcats and, above all, his deep indignation at having to combat with such ignoble enemies, aroused his fury. He seized the most venturesome by the skin of his back, and in spite of several blows from his claws, threw him heavily against the trunk of the tree and broke his back. The cat gave some frightful cries. The chevalier treated in like manner another of these creatures which had leaped upon his back, and had undertaken to devour his cheek.

The band hesitated. Croustillac seized his sword, and using it as a poignard, pierced several others, and thus put an end to this attack in a novel manner, saying, "Zounds! to think Blue Beard does not know that the brave Croustillac has been nearly devoured by wildcats, even as if he were but a chicken hanging on a hook of a larder!"

The remainder of the night passed peacefully, the chevalier sleeping but little. At daybreak he descended from his tree, and saw extended at his feet five of his adversaries of the night. He hastened to quit the scene of his exploits, at which he blushed, and, convinced that Devil's Cliff could not be far off, he resumed his journey.

After having walked thus vainly, after his vigil, the gnawing of his stomach, occasioned by a famished feeling, warned him that it was in the neighborhood of noon. His delight may be imagined when the breeze bore to him the delicious odor of roasted meat, so fine, so penetrating, and so appetizing that the chevalier could not prevent himself from passing his tongue across his lips. He redoubled his speed, not doubting, this time, that he had arrived at the end of his troubles. However, he saw no sign of habitation, and knew not how to reconcile this apparent solitude with the exquisite odor which grew more and more tantalizing.

Unobserved himself, and without being heard, and walking rapidly, he arrived at a kind of clearing, where he stopped a moment. The sight which greeted his eyes was worthy his notice.

CHAPTER X.

A BUCCANEER.

IN the midst of a close thicket appeared a cleared space forming a long square; at one of its extremities was an ajoupa, a kind of hut made of branches attached to the trunk of a palm tree, covered with long polished leaves of balisier and of cachibou. Under this shelter, which guaranteed protection from the rays of the sun to whoever might retire therein, a man was stretched upon a bed of leaves; at his feet some twenty dogs lay sleeping. These dogs would have been white and orange if their original color had not disappeared, owing to the blood which covered them. Their heads and breasts were completely stained by reason of copious eating.

The chevalier could but indistinctly see the face of the man, half hidden in his bed of fresh leaves. Not far from the hut was a covered fire where, cooking slowly, after the fashion of buccaneers, was a year-old boar. The stove or gridiron was formed by four forks driven into the earth, on which were hung cross-pieces, and on these were laid small poles, all of green wood.

The boar, still with its hide on, was stretched on its back, the belly open and empty; strings attached to its four feet held it in this position, which the heat would otherwise have disturbed.

This gridiron was raised above a hole four feet in length, three wide, and of great depth, filled with broken charcoal; the boar cooked by the equal heat of this steady and concentrated brazier. The cavity of the animal was half filled with lemon juice and cut spices, which, combined with the fat, which the heat caused to slowly ooze out, formed a kind of interior sauce which smelled very appetizing.

This immense roast was nearly cooked; its skin began to frizzle and crack; what was visible of the flesh through the gravy was red and tempting. Finally, a dozen large yams, of yellow and savory pulp, were cooking in the ashes, and exhaled a fine odor.

The chevalier could restrain himself no longer; carried away by his appetite, he entered the inclosure, and in so doing broke down some branches. One or two of the dogs awoke and ran at him with a menacing air. The man, who was dozing, arose abruptly, looked about him with an amazed air, while the entire pack of hounds manifested the most hostile objection to the entrance of the chevalier, bristling and showing their formidable teeth. Croustillac recalled the history of the assistant of Rend-your-Soul being devoured by his dogs, but he was not intimidated; he raised his staff with a menacing air, and said, "To heel, varlets; to heel, varlets!"

This term, imported from the kennels of Europe, made no impression on the dogs; they assumed an attitude so menacing that the chevalier struck some blows at them with his staff. Their eyes burned with ferocity; they would have precipitated themselves upon Croustillac had not the buccaneer, coming out of the hut with a gun in his hand, cried in a species of dialect, part negro, part French, "Who touches my dogs? Who are you that come hither?"

The chavalier bravely put his hand on his sword and replied, "Your dogs would devour me, my good fellow, and I foil them. They would employ their teeth upon me as I would mine if I had before me a morsel of that appetizing boar, for I am lost in the forest since yesterday morning and have a most infernal hunger."

The buccaneer, instead of replying to the chevalier, remained stupefied at the odd appearance of this man, who, staff in hand, had traversed a forest in pink stockings and coat of taffeta and embroidered vest. On his side, Croustillac, in spite of his hunger, contemplated the buccaneer with no less curiosity. This hunter was of middle height, but agile and vigorous; his only clothing, short drawers and a shirt which was loose like a blouse. His clothing was so much stained with the blood of bulls or boars which the buccaneers skin in order to sell the hide and smoke the flesh (the principal branch of their traffic) that the linen appeared tarred, it was so black and stiff. A belt of bull's hide embellished with its hair confined the shirt about the buccaneer; from this belt hung, on one side, a sheath of compartments, revealing five or six knives of various lengths and divers shapes; from the other, a pouch. The hunter's legs were bare to the knees; his shoes were without fastening, and of a single piece, according to a custom there, and in use among buccaneers.

After skinning a bull or some large boar, they carefully loosen the skin of one of the front extremities, from the breast to the knee, and turn it back like a stocking which one pulls off; after having completely detached it from the bones, they then put their feet into this supple and fresh skin, placing the large toe a little more toward the place which covered the knee of the animal. Once shod in this manner they tie up with a sinew that portion which extends beyond the end of the foot, and cut off the surplus. Then they raise and pull up the remainder of the skin halfway up their legs, where they fasten it with a leather strap. In drying, this species of boot assumes the shape of the foot, remaining perfectly soft, supple, and wearing a long time, it being impervious, and proof against the sting of serpents.

The buccaneer looked curiously at Croustillac, leaning on his gun, a kind especially used by buccaneers; these guns were made at Dieppe and St.

Malo. The figure of the hunter was rough and common; he wore a cap of boar's skin; his beard was long and bristling; his look ferocious.

Croustillac said resolutely, "Ah, comrade, would you refuse a morsel of this roast to a gentleman who is famished?"

"The roast is not mine," said the buccaneer.

"How? to whom, then, does it belong?"

"To Master Rend-your-Soul, who has his depot of skins and buccaneer supplies at Caiman's Point."

"This roast belongs to Master Rend-your-Soul," cried the chevalier, surprised at the chance which had brought him in contact with one of the happy lovers of Blue Beard, if these slanderous stories were true. "This roast belongs to Rend-your-Soul," repeated Croustillac.

"It belongs to him," said the man with the long gun, laconically.

At this moment was heard a shot which echoed through the forest. "That is the master," said the man.

The dogs recognized, doubtless, the approach of the hunter; for they began to bark joyfully, and dashed off through the undergrowth in order to reach the buccaneer.

Warned of the return of the master, the man, whom we will call Peter, took out one of his largest knives, approached the wild boar, and in order the better to moisten the venison, stabbed the flesh several times, without injuring the skin, for the plentiful mixture of lemon juice, spice and fat which filled the belly of the boar was running out. Each of these incisions caused such appetizing odors to rise that the chevalier, inhaling this exquisite odor, almost forgot the approach of Rend-your-Soul. However, the latter appeared, followed by his dogs, jumping and pressing about him.

Master Rend-your-Soul was large and robust. His skin, naturally white, was browned by the sun and by the wild life which he led; his thick black beard fell on his breast; his features were regular, but severe and hard. Although not so poor as that of his servant, his clothing was of much the same fashion. Like him, he wore at his waist a case filled with a number of knives; his legs, however, in place of being half naked, were incased, as far as the knee, by bands of boar-skins tied with sinews, and he wore large shoes of untanned leather. His large Spanish hat was ornamented with two or three red feathers; and the mountings of his buccaneer gun were of silver. Such was the difference between the costume and arms of Master Rend-your-Soul and that of his servant.

When he entered the clearing, he held his gun under his arm and plucked carelessly a wood-pigeon which he had killed; three others were hung at his

belt by a snare; he threw them to Peter, who immediately began to pluck and clean them with wonderful dexterity. These wood-pigeons, of the size of a partridge, were plump, fine and round as quails. As fast as Peter had one ready, he cut off its head and feet and put it to cook in the thick and abundant sauce which filled the boar's belly. When Master Rend-your-Soul had finished plucking his, he threw it in also.

Peter said, "Master, shall I close the roast?"

"Close it," replied the master.

Then Peter cut the strings which held the boar; the cavity of the belly almost closed and the pigeons began to boil in this novel fashion.

During all these culinary preparations the buccaneer had not appeared to perceive the chevalier, who, with foot advanced, nose in the air, and hand on the hilt of his sword, was prepared to answer proudly any interrogatories which might be made, and even to question in return Master Rend-your-Soul. The latter, having cut off the head and feet of the pigeon which he was plucking, wiped his knife quietly and replaced it in his case.

To explain the indifference of the buccaneer, we must say to the reader that nothing was more common than that people should visit the buccaneers out of curiosity. The buccaneers were, in their customs, very like the Caribbeans. Like them they were proud to accord hospitality; like them they allowed any one to come who was hungry and thirsty and partake of their repasts; but, like the Caribbeans also, they regarded an invitation as a superfluous formality. The feast ready, let eat it who would.

After disembarassing himself of his belt and gun, Rend-your-Soul extended himself on the ground, drew a gourd hidden under the fresh leaves, and drank some brandy as a preparation for dinner.

Croustillac was still in the same attitude, nose in the air, foot advanced, hand on his sword; the color rose to his forehead; nothing could have insulted him more than the absolute indifference of Rend-your-Soul to his presence.

Had Blue Beard, by the intermediation of the filibustering captain, instructed the buccaneer to act in this manner if he should encounter the chevalier? Was this hunter's carelessness genuine or feigned? This is what we cannot yet tell the reader. The situation of Croustillac was none the less delicate and difficult; in spite of his audacity he did not know how to begin the conversation. Finally recovering himself, he said to the buccaneer, advancing toward him, "Are you blind, comrade?"

"Answer, Peter, some one speaks to you," said Rend-your-Soul, carelessly.

"No, it is to you I speak," said the Gascon impatiently.

"No," said the buccaneer.

"How so?" replied the chevalier.

"You said 'comrade;' I am not your comrade; my servant is, perhaps."

"Zounds!"

"I am a master buccaneer; you are not; it is only my brother-hunters who are my comrades," said Rend-your-Soul, interrupting Croustillac.

"And how is one to address you in order to have the honor of a reply?" said the chevalier, angrily.

"If you come to purchase skins or buccaneer supplies, address me as you will; if you come to see the station, look about you; if you are hungry, when the boar is cooked, eat."

"They are regular brutes, true savages," thought the chevalier; "it would be folly in me to resent their stupidities; I am dying with hunger, I am lost; the animal can give me a dinner, and if I carry myself wisely will point out to me the road to Devil's Cliff. Let us eat." Then, looking at the man, half barbarian that he was, with his garments stained with blood, Croustillac said to himself, shrugging his shoulders, "And it is to such a boor that they give the beautiful, the adorable Blue Beard. Zounds! she must be like him herself."

Peter, finding the boar cooked to a turn, busied himself in removing the cover; he placed on the earth, under the trees, a number of large leaves, fresh and green, to serve as a tablecloth. He then picked a large leaf, made four holes at its edge, and passed a creeper through them, and thus formed a species of cup in which he squeezed the juice of a number of lemons which he had picked, and with which he mixed salt and spices crushed between two stones. The sauce was called pimentade, was extremely strong, and was used generally by buccaneers and filibusters. Opposite this sauce and in another leaf, he put yams cooked in the ashes; their skins, a little burned, had split open and showed a pulp yellow as amber.

The chevalier was disturbed as to how he was to drink, for he had a burning thirst, but he quickly saw the servant returning with a large gourd filled with a pink and limpid liquor. It was the sugar of the maple tree, which flowed in abundance from the tree when it was pierced deeply. This was a fresh and healthy beverage and tasted like Bordeaux wine mixed with sugar and water.

Finally, after placing this gourd on the leaves which served as a tablecloth, the servant broke off a large branch of apricots, covered with flowers and fruit, and stuck it into the earth in the midst of the leaves. These natives are not so stupid as they appear, thought the chevalier. Here is a repast which Dame Nature pays for and which would satisfy, I am sure, the greatest

gourmand. Croustillac waited impatiently for the moment to begin. Finally the servant, having examined the boar with a critical eye, said to the buccaneer, "Master, it is cooked."

"Let us eat," said the master.

By means of a fork cut out of oak, the servant took one of the pigeons, put it on a fresh leaf, and offered it to the buccaneer; then, helping himself in turn, he left the fork in the venison. The chevalier, seeing that no one occupied himself with him, took a pigeon, a yam, seated himself near the master and servant buccaneers, and, like them, began to eat with the best of appetites.

The pigeon was cooked so deliciously, the yams were perfect, and like the most delicious potatoes. The pigeons disposed of, Peter cut long and thick slices of the venison for his master. The chevalier followed his example and found the flesh exquisite, fat and succulent, of fine flavor enhanced the more by the pimentade.

Croustillac frequently quenched his thirst, as did his companions, from the gourd of maple sugar, and he finished his repast by eating half a dozen apricots of wonderful fragrance and very superior to the European species.

Peter brought, then, a gourd of brandy; the master drank and then passed it to his servant, who did likewise, then closed it carefully, to the great disappointment of the chevalier who had extended his hand for it. This was not stupidity on the part of the buccaneers; there is among the Caribbeans a great distinction between the natural gifts which cost nothing, belonging, so to speak, to everyone, and the articles purchased with money, which belong exclusively to those who possess them—brandy, powder, bullets, arms, skins, venison prepared after the fashion of the buccaneers for sale, being of this number; fruits, game, fish, were held, on the contrary, in common.

Nevertheless, the chevalier frowned, rather from pride than gluttony. He was on the point of complaining of this lack of respect to the servant, but reflecting that, after all, he owed his excellent repast to Rend-your-Soul, and that the latter could alone put him on the road to Devil's Cliff, he restrained his ill humor, and said to the buccaneer with a jovial air, "Faith! sir, do you know you give great and good cheer?"

"One eats what he finds; boars and bulls are not wanting in this island, and the sale of their skins is good," said the buccaneer, filling his pipe.

CHAPTER XI.

MASTER REND-YOUR-SOUL.

THE more closely the chevalier studied Master Rend-your-Soul, the less he was able to believe that this half barbarian was in the good graces of Blue Beard. The buccaneer, having lighted his pipe, lay down on his back, put his two hands under his head, and smoked, with his eyes fixed on the hut, with an appearance of profound beatitude, and said to the chevalier, "You have come here in a litter, with your pink stockings?"

"No, my good friend, I have come on foot, and I would have come on my head in order to see the most famous buccaneer in all the Antilles, whose fame has even reached Europe."

"If you are in need of skins," said the buccaneer in answer, "I have a dozen bulls' skins so fine and beautiful that you would suppose them to be buffalo. I have also a string of boar's hams such as are not cured in any station."

"No, no, my brave friend, I tell you admiration, nothing but admiration has guided me. I arrived from France five days since in the Unicorn, and my first visit is to you, whose merit I am well aware of."

"Truly?"

"As true as I call myself the Chevalier de Croustillac, for you will not be displeased, perhaps, to know with whom you talk. My name is Croustillac."

"All names are a matter of indifference to me, except that of purchaser."

"And admirer, my brave friend, admirer, is that nothing? I, who have come from Europe expressly to see you?"

"You knew, then, that you would find me here?"

"Not exactly; but Providence has arranged it; and, thanks to Providence, I have met the famous Rend-your-Soul."

"Decidedly he is stupid," thought the chevalier. "I have nothing to contend with in such a rival; if the others are no more dangerous, it will be very easy for me to make Blue Beard adore me; but I must find the road to Devil's Cliff. It will be truly racy to be conducted thither by this bear." He spoke: "But, my brave hunter, alas! all glory is bought; I wished to see you, I have seen you."

"Very well, go your way, then," said the buccaneer, expelling a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"I like your brusque frankness, worthy Nimrod; but in order to go, I must learn a road thence, and I know none."

"From whence came you?"

"From Macouba, where I lodged at the house of the Reverend Father Griffen."

"You are only two leagues from Macouba; my servant will guide you there."

"How! only two leagues!" cried the chevalier. "It is impossible! I have walked since daybreak yesterday, until night, and since early morn until noon, and have I gone but two leagues?"

"One sometimes sees boars and above all young bulls deceived thus, and make many steps almost without changing the inclosure," said the buccaneer.

"Your comparison smacks of the art of hunting, and, noble following as it is, cannot shock a gentleman; then, admit that I have dodged about, even like a young bull, as you say; it does not follow that I wish to return to Macouba; and I depend upon you to show me the road I should follow."

"Where do you wish to go?"

For a moment the chevalier hesitated, and knew not what reply to make. Should he avow frankly his intention of going to Devil's Cliff? Croustillac sought refuge in a subterfuge—"I wish to go by the road to Devil's Cliff."

"The road to Devil's Cliff only leads to Devil's Cliff, and——"

The buccaneer did not finish his sentence, but his face became menacing.

"And—where does the road to Devil's Cliff lead?"

"It leads sinners to hell, and saints to paradise."

"So, a stranger, a traveler, who has a whim to visit Devil's Cliff——"

"Would never return from thence."

"At least, in that case, one does not risk getting lost on the return," said the chevalier coolly. "'Tis well, my good friend, then show me the way."

"We have eaten under the same roof, we have drunk from the same cup; I would not willingly cause your death."

"So, in conducting me to Devil's Cliff, you kill me?"

"It will come to the same thing."

"Although your dinner was perfect, and your company very agreeable, my brave Nimrod, you almost make me regret it, as this prevents you from satisfying my wish. But what danger threatens me, then?"

"All the dangers of death that a man can brave."

"All these dangers—make but one, seeing that one can but die once," said the Gascon carelessly.

The buccaneer scanned the chevalier closely, and appeared impressed by his courage as much as by the air of frankness and good humor which showed through all his extravagance.

The chevalier continued: "The Chevalier de Croustillac never knows fear while he has his sister at his side."

"What sister?"

"This, which, by heavens, is not virgin," cried the Gascon, drawing his sword and brandishing it. "The kisses she gives are sharp, and the bravest have regretted making her acquaintance."

"Miaow! miaow!" said the servant, who was a witness of this scene. This cry made the Gascon start, and recalled to him the exploits of the preceding night. He colored with rage, advanced upon the servant with the sword's point, in order to chastise him with the flat of his steel; but Peter withdrew dexterously and got out of reach, while the buccaneer burst into laughter.

This hilarity exasperated the chevalier, who said to Rend-your-Soul, "Zounds! if you dare attack a man as you would a bull, beware."

"Look at your sword; the steel is stained with blood and covered with the hair of wildcats; it is that which made Peter cry out 'Miaow!'"

"Defend yourself," repeated the chevalier furiously.

"When I have four feet, claws and a tail, I will fight with you," said the buccaneer quietly.

"I will mark your face, then," said the chevalier, advancing toward Rend-your-Soul.

"Softly, velvet claws, pussy velvet claws," said the buccaneer, laughing, and parrying with the muzzle of his gun the furious thrusts which the exasperated chevalier bestowed upon him.

The servant would have come to the rescue of his master, but the latter forbade.

"Do not stir; I will answer for this redoubtable fellow. 'The burned cat dreads cold water,' as they say. I am going to give him a good lesson."

These sarcasms increased the chevalier's rage; he forgot his adversary was defending himself with a gun, and he showered some desperate blows upon him, while the buccaneer, showing a marvelous address and a rare vigor, used his heavy gun like a stick.

During this unequal combat, the buccaneer added to his insolence by imitating the cry which cats make when they are angry, when they disagree. This last outrage capped the climax; but against his attack he found, in the buccaneer, a gladiator of the greatest strength in fencing; and he had

shortly the chagrin of seeing himself disarmed; his sword was struck off some ten paces. The buccaneer threw himself upon the Gascon; raised his gun like a club; he seized the chevalier by the collar and cried, "Your life is mine; I am going to break your head like an eggshell."

Croustillac, looking at him without flinching, said, coldly, "And you are trebly right, for I am a triple traitor." The buccaneer recoiled a step. "I was hungry—you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; you were unarmed and I attacked you. Break my head—Zounds! break it, you are right. Croustillac is dishonored."

This was not the language of an assassin or a spy; then, holding out his hand to the chevalier, the buccaneer said, with a rough voice, "Come, clasp hands; we have been seated under the same roof, we have fought together—we are brothers."

The chevalier was about to put his hand in that of the buccaneer, but he paused and said gravely, "Frankness for frankness; before giving you my hand I must tell you one thing."

"What?"

"I am your rival."

"Rival! how is that?"

"I love Blue Beard, and I am resolved at all hazards to go to her and to please her."

"Clasp hands, brother."

"A moment—I must say to you that when Polyphème Croustillac wishes to please, he pleases; when he pleases, one loves him; and when one loves him, one loves him madly and unto death."

"Clasp hands, brother."

"I will not touch your hand until you tell me if you will accept me openly for your rival?"

"And if not?"

"If not, break my head; you will be right in so doing. We are alone; your servant will not betray you; but I will never renounce the hope, the certainty, of pleasing Blue Beard."

"Ah, this is another matter."

"A last question," continued the chevalier; "You go often to Devil's Cliff?"

"I go often to Devil's Cliff."

"You see Blue Beard?"

"I see her."

"You love her?"

"I love her."

"She loves you?"

"She loves me."

"You?"

"Me."

"She loves you?"

"To madness——"

"She has told you so?"

"And—Blue Beard——"

"Is my mistress."

"On the word of a buccaneer?"

"On the word of a buccaneer."

"Then," said the chevalier to himself, "there is no more discretion among barbarians than among civilized people. Who would say at the sight of such a stupid fellow, that he was a coxcomb?" Then he said aloud, "Ah, well, then, I repeat to you, break my head, for if you spare my life I shall reach Devil's Cliff; I shall do all I can to please Blue Beard, and I shall please her, I warn you. So, then, once more, break my head, or resign yourself to seeing in me a rival, shortly a happy rival!"

"I say to you, clasp hands, brother."

"How? in spite of what I say?"

"Yes."

"It does not alarm you?"

"No."

"It is all the same to you if I go to Devil's Cliff?"

"I will conduct you there, myself."

"Yourself?"

"To-day."

"And I shall see Blue Beard?"

"You shall see her as often as you wish."

The chevalier, moved by the confidence in him which the buccaneer testified, did not wish to abuse it; he said in a solemn tone, "Listen, buccaneer, you are as generous as a savage; this is not by way of offense; but, my worthy friend, my loyal enemy, you are as ignorant as a savage. Reared in the midst of the forest, you have no idea what a man is who has passed his life in pleasing, seducing; you do not know the marvelous resources which such a man finds in his natural attractions; you do not know the irresistible influence of a word, a gesture, a smile, a look! This poor Blue Beard does not know either; to judge from what they say of her three husbands. They were three worthless fellows, three vagabonds; she rid herself of them, rightly. Why has she rid herself of them? Because she sought an ideal, an unknown being, the dream of her dreams. Now, my brave friend, always be it said without offense, you cannot deceive yourself to such a degree as to think that you realize this dream of Blue Beard; you cannot really take yourself for a Celadon—for an Adonis——"

The buccaneer looked at Croustillac with a stupid air and did not appear to understand him; he said, pointing to the sun, "The sun is setting; we have four leagues to make before we arrive at Devil's Cliff; let us start."

"This unhappy man," thought the chevalier, "has not the slightest idea of the danger he runs; it is a pity to disabuse his blindness; it is like striking a child; it is snaring a sitting pheasant; it is killing a sleeping man; on the honor of De Croustillac, it gives me scruples." Then aloud, "You do not understand, then, my brave friend, that this man as seductive as irresistible of whom I speak is none other than myself?"

"Ah, bah! it is impossible."

"Your surprise is not flattering, brave hunter, but if I speak thus to you of myself, it is that honor compels me to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. You do not understand that, once having seen me, Blue Beard will love me; and she will not love you any more, my poor Rend-your-Soul. Understand, then, that it would be cowardly and treasonable on my part not to warn you in advance as to the position you hold with Blue Beard. I repeat, from the moment when I put foot in Devil's Cliff, from the moment she sees me, when she hears me, her love for you is at an end. Meantime, I have warned you, loyally warned you; consider if you are willing to risk it."

"Clasp hands, brother," said the buccaneer, seemingly insensible to the danger that the chevalier pointed out to him. "Let us be going. We will arrive at night at Devil's Cliff; a fall from the precipice would not be pleasant at this hour."

"Come on—you are mad—so be it, but I have warned you; it will be open war," said the chevalier.

The buccaneer, without making any reply to the chevalier, said to his servant, "Shut up the dogs in the house, and have ready two dozen bulls' skins, which will be needed to-morrow at Basse-Terre; I shall not return to-night."

"It falls aright," said the servant to himself, and with a shrewd air; "he sleeps away from the hut one night in every three."

While the buccaneer attached his belt, the chevalier said to himself, looking at the hunter with a feeling of pity, "Faith! but he puts the rope gayly about his own throat; since he will not heed my warning, let him look out for himself. It appears that lovers are, in such cases, no wiser than husbands. But as regards Blue Beard—if she is pretty—it must be that she is—can she receive such a savage? Poor little thing. It is very simple. She does not know the compensation that is reserved for her. Hail to the gods. Croustillac, thy star has arisen!" continued the chevalier, after some minutes of reflection.

"Come, brother, let us start," said the buccaneer; "but before doing so, Peter shall envelop your legs in a piece of skin which he has, for we are going to traverse a bad quarter for serpents."

The chevalier thanked the buccaneer, not without shrugging his shoulders in pity for him, and said, "Unhappy man! he is shoeing me, but I shall put a cap on him!"

This stupid joke was to be fatally punished in Croustillac, who followed his guide with renewed ardor, for was he not going to see Blue Beard?

CHAPTER XII.

THE MARRIAGE.

AFTER four hours' walk the chevalier and the buccaneer arrived close to Devil's Cliff. The road was so difficult and so much incumbered that the two companions could scarcely converse. Croustillac became more thoughtful the nearer his approach to the dwelling of Blue Beard; in spite of the good opinion he had of himself, in spite of his consoling reflections regarding the allegorical nudity of Venus and Truth, he regretted that his natural advantages were not set off by costly garments. He ventured, then, after some hesitation, to tell a falsehood to the buccaneer. "I assure you, my true and worthy rival, that my servants and trunks are at St. Pierre and I find myself, as you see, hardly clothed in a proper fashion to present myself before the queen of my thoughts."

"What do you mean?" said the buccaneer.

"What I would say, brave Nimrod, is that I have the appearance of a beggar, in that my coat and shoes, which yesterday were almost new, are to-day abominably tattered and appear at least six months old."

"Six months? Oh! they are devilishly older than that to all appearances, my brother."

"All which proves how torrid your devilish sun is; in one day it has faded my clothing which yesterday was the freshest sea-green, the most tender and coquettish of colors, until now——"

"They are almost mould-green," said the buccaneer. "It is like your shoulder-strap—our devouring sun eats gold until he leave but a red thread."

"What signifies the shoulder-strap if the sword is free and strong from the scabbard?" said Croustillac proudly. Then softening his tones, he continued, "It is just because I am momentarily in an outfit unworthy my rank, that I would inquire if I can find garments more suitable at Devil's Cliff?"

"Ah, do you think that Blue Beard keeps a second-hand clothing establishment?" said the buccaneer.

"Heaven forbid that I should accuse her of such an ignoble traffic! But, in fine, it would not be surprising if, as I say, by chance, there had been overlooked in some corner of a clothes-press some garments belonging to one of the deceased husbands of our charming friend?"

"Ah!" said the buccaneer.

"Well?" replied the chevalier imperturbably, "although it would cost me an effort to appear in what did not belong to me, and above all, in what could not fit me very well, I would reconcile myself to so doing, in default of my

fine clothing now at St. Pierre, even at the risk of being abominably disfigured, perhaps, by the chance garments," continued he disdainfully.

The buccaneer broke into peals of laughter at the singular notion of his companion. Croustillac colored with annoyance and said, "Zounds! you are very facetious, my friend."

"I laugh because I see I am not alone in the traffic of skins," said Rend-your-Soul. "Truly we are brothers! If I despoil the bulls of their skins, you are not too proud to despoil one of the husbands of the widow. But we are now at the foot of the cliff. Take care, friend, one must have a sure foot and a true eye to climb this ascent unharmed! If you find it too rough, you need go no further; I will send you a guide to conduct you back to Macouba."

"Remain here! at my journey's end, almost! after a thousand difficulties! at the moment when I shall see and captivate this enchantress, Blue Beard," cried the chevalier. "You have lost your wits. Come on, comrade, what you do, I will do," said the chevalier.

Truth to say, thanks to his long legs, his natural agility and his coolness, Croustillac followed the buccaneer over the perilous road that led to the mansion, across the terrible precipice of Devil's Cliff. A signal from the buccaneer and the wall of the platform was scaled, and, with his companion, he entered the outer buildings.

Reaching the covered passage which led to the widow's especial suite, the buccaneer whispered a word in the ear of the mulattress. She took the chevalier's hand and led him to a stairway in the passage. Croustillac hesitated a moment to follow the slave. The buccaneer said, "Go on, brother, you do not wish to present yourself thus before the widow; I have said a word to old Jennette, and she is going to provide you with the means to shine like the sun. As for me, I go to announce your arrival to Blue Beard."

So saying, the buccaneer disappeared in the covered passage. Croustillac, guided by the mulattress, came to a room very elegantly and comfortably furnished.

"Zounds!" cried the adventurer, rubbing his hands and taking long strides, "this begins well. Provided I can appear to advantage, provided that the deceased husbands of the widow had decent figures and that their clothes will not disfigure me too much, I shall please—I shall captivate the widow; and this animal of a buccaneer, ousted by me from the heart of Blue Beard, will return to-morrow—perhaps even to-night, to his forest."

Croustillac soon saw a number of negroes enter the room. One of them staggered under an enormous parcel; the other carried on a chased silver tray a silver gilt dish, wherein smoked a soup of the most appetizing odor; two glass carafes, one filled with old Bordeaux, the color of rubies, the other

with Madeira wine, color of topaz, flanked the dish and completed this light refreshment sent to the chevalier by the widow. While one of the slaves placed before him a little table of ebony inlaid with ivory, the negro bearing the parcel laid upon the bed a costume of black velvet ornamented by rich flowers embroidered in gold. What was singular about the coat was that the left sleeve was of cherry-colored satin; this sleeve closed above the wrist with a broad facing of buffalo skin.

For the rest, with the exception of this peculiarity, the coat was elegantly cut; stockings of very fine silk, a rhinegrave, or cravat, of magnificent lace, a large felt hat adorned with beautiful white plumes and a heavy gold cord were to complete the transformation of the adventurer.

While the chevalier endeavored to divine why the left sleeve of this black velvet coat was of cherry-colored silk, the two negroes prepared a bath in a neighboring dressing-room; another slave asked Croustillac in quite pure French if he would be shaved and have his hair dressed; Croustillac assented. Entirely refreshed and invigorated by an aromatic bath, wrapped in a dressing-gown of fine Holland linen which exhaled the most exquisite odors, the adventurer lounged on a soft divan while the slaves waved enormous fans.

The chevalier, in spite of his blind faith in his destiny, which, according to him, was to become as beautiful as it had heretofore been miserable, believed himself at times in a dream.

His wildest hopes were surpassed; in casting a complacent glance on the rich costume with which he was clothed, and which was to render him fatally irresistible, he was seized with a feeling akin to remorse, on account of the buccaneer, who had so unwisely given ingress to the wolf into this fold in which dwelt his love. The thought of this good fellow made Croustillac smile; he was prepared to bewilder Blue Beard by language in which he would be victorious over her barbarous adorers.

Suddenly a horrible fear obscured the smiling prospect for the Gascon. He began to fear for the first time that Blue Beard might be repulsively plain; he had also the modesty to think that perhaps it would be too much of him to require of fate that Blue Beard be of an ideal beauty.

Croustillac possessed good qualities. He said to himself with the conviction of a man who knew perfectly how to moderate and set bounds to his ambition—"Providing the widow be not more than from forty to fifty years; that she be not blind or outrageously lame; that she has some teeth and hair—faith! her wine is so good, her service so fine, her servants so attentive—if she is worth three or four millions, I consent to take the risk my predecessors did, and to make the widow happy, on the honor of De

Croustillac! seeing that I prefer to take the consequences of my rôle as a husband rather than return on board the Unicorn and swallow lighted candles for the amusement of that amphibious animal, Captain Daniel. Well, then, should Blue Beard be plain, and of overripe age, she is still a millionaire, and I will take care of this good lady, and will be so very agreeable to her that, far from sending me to join the other dead husbands, she will have no desire but that of cherishing me dearly, and embellishing my life by all kinds of delicious cares. Come, come, Croustillac," said the adventurer, with increased exaltation, "I say truly, your star is in the ascendent, and shall shine more than in the past it has been overcast! Yes, it is in the ascendent."

So saying, the chevalier called one of the blacks who was awaiting his orders in a neighboring room, and with his assistance put on the velvet dress with the cherry colored sleeve. The Gascon was tall, but bony and thin; the garment which he donned was made for a man of the same height, but broad-chested and small in the waist; so the vest formed some large folds about the body of Croustillac; and his cherry-colored stockings draped themselves no less majestically about his long, thin, and nervous legs.

The chevalier did not concern himself about these slight imperfections of his costume; he threw a final glance at his reflection in the Venetian mirror which the slave held up to him, arranged his rough, black hair, caressed his long mustache, hung his formidable sword to a rich strap of buffalo skin which had been brought to him, proudly put on the felt hat with golden cord and white plumes, and, strutting up and down the room with a triumphant air, impatiently awaited the moment of presentation to the widow. This moment arrived shortly. The aged mulattress who had received the adventurer came to seek him, and begging him to follow her, ushered him into the retired building which we have already seen.

The room in which Croustillac waited some moments was furnished with a luxury of which he had heretofore had no idea; superb old paintings, magnificent porcelains, curiosities in goldsmith's work, of the most costly nature, incumbered the furniture, as valuable on account of its material as for its workmanship; a lute and a theorbo, whose ornaments of ivory and gold were of a finish most uncommon in carving, attracted the attention of Croustillac, who was delighted to think that his future wife was a musician.

"Zounds!" cried the chevalier, "is it possible that the mistress of so much wealth is as beautiful as the day? No, no, I should be too fortunate; although I deserve this happiness."

We may judge of the surprise, not to say the shock, to the Gascon when Angela entered. The little widow was radiant in youth, grace, beauty and dress; robed in a costume of the fashion of Louis the Fourteenth, she wore a

dress of sky blue, the long waist of which seemed to be embroidered with diamonds, pearls and rubies, though this profusion of gems was arranged with taste.

Croustillac, in spite of his audacity, recoiled before such a vision. In all his life he had never encountered a woman so ravishingly pretty, so royally dressed; he could not believe his eyes; he looked at her with bewilderment. We must say, to the chevalier's credit, that he had a laudable attack of modesty, but unhappily as fleeting as sincere. He thought that so charming a creature might perhaps hesitate to marry an adventurer like himself; but he recalled his impertinent and vainglorious confidences to the buccaneer; he said to himself that, after all, one man was as good as another, and he recovered very rapidly his imperturbable assurance.

Croustillac made, one after another, three of the most respectful bows; in order to resume his upright attitude and at the same time display the nobility of his figure, advancing on one of his long legs, and drawing the other a little behind it, he assumed a conquering air, holding his hat in the right hand and resting his left hand upon the handle of his sword. Doubtless he was about to make some gallant compliment to Blue Beard, for he had already placed his hand on his heart, and opened his large mouth, when the little widow, who could no longer repress an irresistible desire to laugh at the absurd appearance of the chevalier, gave free vent to her hilarity. This explosion of gayety shut Croustillac's mouth and he endeavored to smile, hoping thus to humor Blue Beard.

This polite effort took the form of so grotesque a grimace that Angela fell on the sofa, forgetting all rules of politeness, all dignity, and abandoned herself to a mad fit of laughter; her beautiful blue eyes, always so brilliant, were veiled in tears of amusement; her cheeks became crimson and her charming dimples deepened to such an extent that the widow could have hidden in their depths the entire end of her rosy little finger.

Croustillac, much embarrassed, remained motionless before the pretty widow, first contracting his eyebrows with an angry air, then, on the contrary, he endeavored to relax his thin long face into a forced smile. While these successive expressions did not tend to put an end to Blue Beard's mirth, the chevalier said to himself that for a murderess, the widow did not have such a gloomy and terrible appearance after all. Nevertheless, the vanity of our adventurer could not easily brook the singular effect which he had produced. For want of better conclusion he ended by saying to himself that above all things he always struck the imagination of women keenly; it was necessary at first to astonish them, upset them, and that, in this respect, his first interview with Blue Beard left nothing to be desired.

When he saw that the widow had become a little calmer, he said resolutely, and with superbly bombastic manner, "I am sure you laugh, madame, at all the despairing efforts that I make to prevent my poor stolen heart from flying quickly to your feet. It is that which has brought me here; I could not but follow, in spite of myself; yes, madame, in spite of myself. I said to it, 'there, there, softly, softly, my heart, it does not suffice, in order to please a divine beauty, to be passionately loving,' but my little, or rather my great and rash, heart replied ever by drawing me to you with all its strength; as if it had been the steel and Devil's Cliff the magnet; my heart, I say, replied to me, 'Reassure yourself, master; tender and valiant as you are, the love that you feel shall cause the birth of a love which you shall share.' But pardon me madame, the language of my heart makes me outrageously impertinent—it is doubtless this impertinence which makes you laugh anew."

"No, sir, no; your appearance diverts me to this great extent because you resemble—ha! ha! ha!—in a strange way, my second husband. You have positively the very same nose—ha! ha! ha!—and in seeing you enter, I believed I saw his spirit—ha! ha! ha!—coming to reproach me—ha! ha! ha!—with his cruel end—ha! ha!"

The laughter of Angela redoubled. The chevalier was not ignorant of the antecedents with which Blue Beard might be reproached, but he could not conceal his great surprise at hearing this charming little creature acknowledge the crime of murder with such incredible audacity. Nevertheless, the chevalier recovered his customary coolness and replied gallantly, "I am too happy, madame, to recall to you one of your deceased husbands; and of reviving by my presence one of your memories, whatever it may be. But," continued Croustillac with a gallant manner, "there are other resemblances that I would wish to have to the deceased—whose memory diverts you so much."

"That is to say, you desire to marry me?" said Blue Beard to him.

The chevalier was stupefied for a moment by this abrupt question.

Angela went on: "I expected it; Rend-your-Soul, whom I call by an abbreviation, my little Rendsoul, has informed me of your desires; perhaps he wishes to raise false hopes," added the widow, looking coquettishly at the chevalier.

Croustillac experienced surprise after surprise. "How," he cried, "the buccaneer has told you, madame——"

"That you have come from France for the express purpose of marrying me—is it true? See, speak frankly—do not deceive me. Oh, I do not like to be thwarted. I warn you, if I have taken it into my head that you shall be my husband, you shall be."

"Madame, I beg of you, do not take me for a fool, for a jackanapes, for a stupid; if I am dumb, it is with emotion, surprise." And Croustillac looked about him uneasily, as if to assure himself he was not the sport of a dream. "May I be shot if I expected such a reception."

"Well, there is no need to make so many words over it," replied the widow. "I have been told you wish to marry me—is it true?"

"As true as that you are the most dazzling beauty that I have ever met," said the chevalier impetuously, placing his hand on his heart.

"Truly? Truly? You have really decided to marry me?" cried the little widow, clapping her hands joyfully.

"I am so decided, adorable widow, that my only fear now is of not seeing this desire realized; it is, I avow, an excessive desire, a great dream, and——"

"Be quiet, then," said Blue Beard, interrupting the chevalier with childlike frankness. "What is the use of these big words? You ask my hand—why should I not give it to you?"

"How, madame, can I believe it! Ah, wait, beautiful Islander. I have had many triumphs in my life; princesses have avowed their passion for me; queens have sighed when looking at me, but never, madame, never have I found such a one! Yes, madame, you can congratulate yourself, you can boast of having brought to its height my surprise, my joy and my gratitude. Repeat, then, I implore you, repeat those charming words—you consent to take me for your husband, me, Polyphème de Croustillac?"

"I will repeat it as much as you desire; nothing is simpler; you can well understand that I have too much trouble in finding husbands not to seize eagerly the offer which you make me."

"Ah, madame," replied the chevalier courteously, "at the risk of passing for an impertinent man, I must allow myself to contradict you. Never can I believe that you could find it difficult to find a husband. I will say more—I am convinced that you have had, since your widowhood only embarrassment of choice, but you have simply not wished to select. You have too good taste, madame," said Croustillac audaciously, "you waited——"

"

"I might deceive you and allow you to think this, chevalier, but you are too brave and gallant a man to be abused—at present," continued Angela, with a gracious and confidential manner, "I will tell you all. Listen to me. The first time I married, I had but to choose, it is true. O, heavens! suitors presented themselves in swarms, and I chose—very well, too. Then my second marriage: it was even then not the same thing. People had commented on the singular death of my first husband, and suitors had already begun to

reflect before declaring themselves. However, as I am not stupid, thanks to determination, cajolery and coquetry, I succeeded in getting a second husband. Alas! it was not without trouble. But the third. Oh, you have no idea all the trouble I had; truly I was in despair!"

"Ah, madame, why was I not there!"

"Doubtless, but, unhappily, you were not. If they talked about the death of my first husband; you can judge what they said about that of my second. People began to distrust me," said the widow, shaking her pretty little head with an expression of ingenuous melancholy. "What would you have? the world is so meddling, so slanderous; men are so strange!"

"The world is stupid and egotistical, foolish," cried Croustillac, filled with pity for this victim of calumny. "Men are cowards and fools who believe all the gossip which is told them."

"What you say is very true. You are not so, my friend?"

"She calls me her friend," cried Croustillac, in a transport; and he answered, "No, certainly not, and I am not so."

"Doubtless," said the widow, "you are very different; you spoil me by accepting my proposition so quickly."

"Say, rather, that I am beyond bounds overjoyed at it, madame."

"You spoil me," continued the widow, with an enchanting smile, and throwing a tender glance at the chevalier. "I assure you you spoil me; you are so easy, so accommodating. Ah! how shall I replace you?"

"Replace me?"

"Yes, after you, friend."

"After me?"

"Yes, certainly, after you."

"Madame, I do not understand you. I do not wish to understand."

"It is very simple; how can I hope to find another like you, who will marry me so willingly? Ah, no, such men are rare!"

"How, madame, after me?" cried Croustillac, overcome by this idea. "You dream, then, of a successor to me?"

"Yes, friend," replied the widow, with the most touchingly sentimental air imaginable; "yes, for when you are no more I must renew my quest, seek, ask, and find a fifth husband. Think, then, of the difficulties and obstacles to overcome. Perhaps I shall not succeed. Think, then, a widow for the fourth time. You forget that; it is a fact, however; my friend, after you, I shall be a widow for the fourth time."

"I do not forget it at all, madame," said Croustillac, whose ardor became somewhat chilled, and began to ask himself if this affair was not madness. "I shall not forget, certainly, in case I have the honor of marrying you, that you will be for the fourth time a widow if you lose me; but it appears you place a rather short period to my love."

"Alas! yes, my friend," said the widow, in a tender voice, "one year, and a year is very short. A year! it passes so quickly when one loves," continued she, casting the glance of a perfect assassin at him.

"A year, madame," cried the chevalier. But then, believing that the words of Blue Beard hid perhaps a test, that she wished possibly to judge of his courage, he added in a chivalrous tone, "Ah, well, so be it, madame; whether my happiness last but a year, a day, an hour, a minute—it matters not; I will brave all, if only I can say that I have been fortunate enough to obtain your hand."

"You are a true knight," said the widow, charmed. "I expected no less of you. That is agreed; only I must forewarn my little Rendsoul, for form's sake, understand, for married or not I shall always be to him what I have been."

"But, madame," said Croustillac, "is it permitted me, will it be indiscreet to ask you what you are to this hunter of wild beasts, and what are his relations with you? Or, rather, will you explain to me what intimacy it is that you feel obliges you to speak to him of your plans?"

"Certainly; and to whom would I make this statement if not to you, my friend? I will confess to you that Rendsoul is one of my lovers."

Here Croustillac made such a singular grimace and coughed two or three times in such a manner, that Angela broke into a peal of laughter.

Croustillac, for a moment dumfounded, came to this reflection full of wisdom: "I am a fool! Nothing is simpler. She had a kind of fancy for this stupid fellow. The sight of me has decided her to sacrifice him; unlucky buccaneer that he is! But why the devil does she tell me that at the end of a year she must find a successor to me?"

"Wait—here comes my Rendsoul," said the widow. "We will tell him our plans, and we will sup together like three friends."

"It matters not to me," said Croustillac, seeing the buccaneer enter. "Here is a little woman who wishes to show that she is an original."

CHAPTER XIII

THE SUPPER.

WHEN the buccaneer entered the chevalier hardly knew him. Rend-your-Soul had put off his hunter's costume; he wore a coat and nether garment of guinea cloth, thickly embroidered with alternate rays of white and deep red; his black beard fell upon a shirt of dazzling whiteness, which was close like a doublet by a row of small coral buttons; a scarf of red silk, hose of the same color, and shoes of doeskin with large ribbon-bows, completed a costume most elegant for a buccaneer, and showing to advantage his tall and robust figure; in the brilliant light of the candles his complexion seemed less brown than in the daytime; his black hair, curling naturally, fell carelessly on his shoulders; and finally, his hands were beautiful, in spite of his rough following as a hunter.

At the sight of the buccaneer, so transformed and almost unrecognizable, in spite of the hard character which his thick beard always gave to his face, the chevalier said to himself, "I should prefer that this person had at least a civilized appearance; it would be too humiliating for Polyphème de Croustillac to triumph over a rival so plain as the one which he at first sight appeared to be. But, while I do not doubt this Nimrod, I must say that Blue Beard has a singular manner of acting. Could she not have given him his dismissal in some other way than in my presence? I hate to so cruelly use my advantage in crushing a poor rival; for, after all, a man is a man! This poor buccaneer is going to find himself in a pitiable position. But let me hold firm; and show Blue Beard that I am not the dupe of her confidence concerning her deceased husbands, and that I am not afraid to die like them."

Croustillac ended this reflection when the pretty widow, indicating the adventurer by a triumphant nod of the head, said ingenuously to the buccaneer, "This gentleman asks for my hand in marriage. You see you were wrong in persisting to me that I would not find a fourth husband. So you can imagine I have very quickly accepted the chevalier's proposal; it was too good an opportunity to let slip."

The buccaneer did not reply at once. Croustillac mechanically put his hand on the hilt of his sword, in order not to be without means of defense in case the hunter, exasperated by jealousy, should wish to do him an injury. What was his surprise when he heard Rend-your-Soul say, after seating himself in a large chair, "I have always said to you, my beautiful one, just what that comrade Hurricane said, 'Marry, a thousand devils marry! if you desire to, for husbands are rare, for one never knows what you will do; but one thing is certain, they never live long.' As for me, I do not approve your little

proceedings. I have more than once seen your little white hands prepare certain beverages——"

"Oh, fie! fie! bad man!" said Angela, shaking her finger at him.

"Nevertheless, it is true," said the buccaneer. "What is the secret of that gray powder of which I had only given a pinch to my servant who was devoured by my dogs. What infernal concoction was it?"

"Yes, madame, this gray powder—tell us its compounds," said Croustillac.

"Oh, you indiscreet man!" said Angela, looking at the buccaneer, with an air of annoyance. "The chevalier will take me for a child; how shall I appear in his eyes if he thinks I occupy myself with such trifles?"

"Have no fears on that score, madame," said Croustillac; "I am delighted, I assure you, to have these new evidences of your youthful candor! Well, worthy Nimrod, this gray powder?"

"Truly, I am very much ashamed!" said Angela, hanging her head and lowering her eyes, and at the same time making a charming little grimace.

"Imagine, then," said the buccaneer, "that I gave my servant just a little pinch of powder in a glass of brandy."

"Well?" said Croustillac, with interest.

"Well, for two days he was so gay that he laughed from night till morning and morning till night."

"I do not see anything bad in that," said Croustillac.

"But wait!" continued the hunter. "My servant did not do this from amusement, he suffered the torments of the damned; his eyes were bursting from their sockets, and he said, between his paroxysms of laughter, that such torture as he endured was beyond belief. The third day he suffered so that he fell as if in a fit, and remained thus a long time; all due to the pinch of madame's gray powder. It may not surprise you to learn that madame's second husband was as gay as a lark, and that he died very joyfully."

"Oh! heavens, as if one could not commit a little mischief without being reproached by you," said Angela, like a capricious child.

"Listen, comrade! she calls that a little mischief," said the hunter. "Just imagine! her second husband laughed so hard that the blood burst from his nose, eyes and ears. But whatever he laughed about, he did so as if he had seen the most amusing thing in the world. But that did not prevent him from saying, like my servant, that he would rather have been burned at a slow fire than suffer such gayety; he also died, laughing to the last, and swearing like a devil."

"There! you go too fast," said Blue Beard, shrugging her shoulders. Then, whispering to the Gascon, "Friend, do not be afraid—I have lost the secret of the gray powder!"

The chevalier, in an attempt to smile, made quite a grimace. He had left France at a time when the fearful practice in poisons was at its height, and people talked only of the heir's powder, the powder of the aged, and the widow's powder. The names, even, of certain poisons were cited with fear. Now Blue Beard's laughing powder could not but give rise to the most doleful reflections on the part of the chevalier. "So," he said to himself, glancing defiantly at Angela, "does this creature deal in chemistry and draughts—is this story true?"

"What ails you, brother?" said the buccaneer, struck by Croustillac's silence.

"You have made him afraid of me," said the widow.

"No, my beautiful lady, no," said Croustillac, "I was thinking that it must be very pleasant to die thus of laughter!"

"Faith, you are right, brother, one had better die so than as the last husband died." And the buccaneer shuddered with horror.

"It appears that the death of the latter must have been more terrible than the former," said Croustillac, with affected carelessness.

"As to that story, comrade, I will not tell you that, you would be afraid."

"I? afraid?" and the Gascon shrugged his shoulders.

Blue Beard leaned over and whispered again to the Gascon, "Let him tell it, friend; this tale, at least, is worth the trouble. I am going to trap Rendsoul."

Then, addressing herself to the buccaneer, "Well, go on; speak! Why do you not speak? Do not pause in the middle of the road. You see the chevalier is listening with all his ears—go on, speak. I do not wish him to buy, as they say, a 'a cat in a bag.'"

"You should say a tigress in a bag," replied, laughingly, the buccaneer. "Ah, well, sir," addressing Croustillac, "Fancy this third husband a man, handsome, of dark complexion, thirty-six years of age, a Spaniard by birth. We came across him at Havana."

"Heavens! tell it quickly," said the widow, "the chevalier is impatient to hear."

"It was not a gray powder that he tasted, this one," replied the buccaneer, "but a drop, one drop only, of a pretty green liquid contained in the smallest flask I ever saw in my life, for it was made of a single hollow ruby."

"That is simple enough," said Angela, "the strength of this liquid was such that it would dissolve or break any flask which was not made of a ruby or a diamond."

"You can judge, after that, chevalier," said the hunter, "of the pleasure which this liquid must have given our third husband. Certainly I am neither over-tender nor timid, but, after all, it is difficult to become accustomed to seeing a man who looks at you with green eyes, luminous, and set so deep in their orbit that they have the effect of a glowworm in the depths of a subterranean cave."

"The fact is," said Croustillac, who could not prevent a slight shudder, "the fact is that at first this would appear strange."

"That is not all; listen to the rest," said the widow with an air of perfect self-satisfaction.

The buccaneer continued: "That was only his usual condition, poor man, having eyes like a glowworm, but what was most frightful was when madame gave a supper to Hurricane, myself and Youmääle. She dipped a camel's hair brush into the little ruby flask and compelled the unhappy Spaniard to approach, and passed this brush over his eyelashes. Then one would have said that from the eyelashes of this unhappy man there issued a thousand rays; his green eyes, sunken in his head, protruded and rolled in their orbit like two globes of fire, and threw such varied and continual light that they sufficed to light up our feast, while the wretched man stood immovable as a marble statue, saying in a piteous voice, 'My head furnishes fuel for the lamps of my eyes!' It was well that the poor man could not see the fire," said the buccaneer, bursting into laughter at this cruel jest. "And when the supply of oil in the lamp failed, the madame's husband went to join his predecessors, in order to leave his place open to you."

"What Rendsoul tells you is correct," said Blue Beard. "He is very indiscreet, as you see, but he is truthful. And so am I. I have singular ideas and caprices, I know; my God! I do not wish to represent myself as better than I am. Above all, I would be frank with you and conceal nothing. You would ask why my husbands are the only victims of my playfulness? I have no power over others. And I always warn them what will be their fate. It is that which makes it so difficult for me to find a husband. It is on these conditions alone that Satan signs my contract, and then this contract, signed by him, acquires a virtue as wonderful as mysterious. Alas! my friend, may he soon sign ours. I have thought of two preparations which are entirely different from the others, and the effects of which are truly magical."

All this time Croustillac experienced a strange sensation, which he attributed to the fatigue of the day and the evening; it was as if a lethargy

possessed his brain and almost took from him the power of resisting by use of his reason the impression made by these strange tales of the widow and the buccaneer. Without believing these fabulous inventions, he was nevertheless frightened by them as one is by a bad dream. The chevalier hardly knew whether he was awake or asleep; he looked at the buccaneer and the widow by turn, with a stupefied air, almost terrified. Finally, being ashamed to show his credulity, he rose abruptly and paced up and down a few minutes in the hope that movement would dispel the torpor which he felt overwhelming him.

Croustillac did not wish to be a butt for these two persons, and he almost regretted having embarked so imprudently in this mad adventure. He said to Blue Beard resolutely, "Come, come, you are jesting, madame; do not trouble yourself; I comprehend the joke. I do not believe you as ferocious or as much of a magician as you wish to appear; to-morrow, I am sure I shall learn the secret of this comedy, which to-night, I avow, gives me a kind of nightmare."

These words of the chevalier, spoken from no motive but to show the dwellers of Devil's Cliff that he did not intend to be their dupe, produced on Blue Beard a singular effect. She cast a terrified glance at the buccaneer, and said haughtily to Croustillac, "I do not jest, sir; you came here with the intention of marrying me; I offer you my hand, and I will tell you upon what conditions; if these are agreeable to you, we will be married in eight days; there is a chapel here; the reverend Father Griffen, of the parish of Macouba, will come hither in order to unite us; if my conditions do not meet with your approval, you can quit this house, where you never ought to have come."

As Blue Beard proceeded her face lost its look of wicked cajolery; she became sad, almost menacing. "A comedy!" she said; "if I thought you took all that has been said as such, you should not remain a moment longer in this house, sir," she continued, in a changed voice, betraying her deep feeling.

"No, the chevalier must not take it all as a jest," said the buccaneer, looking steadily at the Gascon.

Croustillac, naturally impatient and vivacious, experienced vexation at not being able to discover what was true and what feigned in this singular adventure. He cried then, "Well, zounds! madame, what do you wish me to think? I encounter a buccaneer in the forest; I impart to him my desire to meet you; he informs me abruptly that you will yourself tell me that he has the good fortune to be in your good graces."

"And then, sir?"

"Then, madame, though I have warned him, the buccaneer has brought me to you, by whom I have been received with the greatest hospitality, I must acknowledge; I am introduced to you; informed of my desires, you yourself offer me your hand, you inform your friend the bull-hunter of my wishes."

"Well, sir?"

"Madame, up to that time all went well; but now the buccaneer wishes to inform me, with your consent, that I am reserved for a fourth deceased husband, and to succeed a man who laughed himself to death, and one whose eyes served as lights for one of your orgies!"

"It is the truth," said the buccaneer.

"How, the truth?" continued Croustillac, recovering his lost vivacity. "Are we in the land of dreams? Do you take the Chevalier de Croustillac for a simpleton? Do you think I am one of those weak-minded creatures who believe in the devil? I am not a goose, and I also ask twenty-four hours in which to demolish all these ridiculous stories."

Angela became very pale, and threw a look of agony and indescribable fear on the buccaneer, and replied to the chevalier with ill-concealed anger, "Ah, who told you, sir, that all that has taken place is natural? Do you know why I, young and rich, offer you my hand the first moment I see you? Do you know what this union will cost you? You believe yourself to have a strong mind; who told you that certain phenomena would not go beyond your comprehension? Do you know who I am? Do you know where you are? Do you know in consequence of what strange mystery I offer you my hand? A comedy?" repeated Blue Beard bitterly, regarding the buccaneer with an appearance almost of fear; "can you not be made to understand that all this is not a play, sir? It is hardly to be believed that your good angel brought you here, at least."

"And then, after all, who told you that you would ever go out of this place?" said the buccaneer coldly.

The chevalier recoiled a step, trembling, and said:

"Zounds! no violence, at least—or if so——"

"If so, what can you do?" said Blue Beard, with a smile which appeared to the Gascon implacably cruel.

Croustillac thought, too late, of the doors he had shut behind him, of the difficult road he had had to traverse in order to reach this diabolical house; he saw himself at the mercy of the widow, of the buccaneer, and of their numerous slaves. He repented heartily and most earnestly of having so blindly entered upon such an enterprise. On the other hand, Croustillac, in contemplating the enchanting figure of Blue Beard, could not believe her

capable of such bloodthirsty perfidy. Nevertheless, the strange avowals she had made him, the terrible reports concerning her, the threats of the buccaneer, began to make some impression upon the chevalier. Just then a mulattress came in to announce supper.

During the gloomy reflections of the adventurer, Angela had a few minutes' conversation with the buccaneer, carried on in a low voice; she was, as a result, apparently satisfied and reassured, for, little by little, her brow cleared, and the smile again came to her lips. "Come, brave knight," said she gayly to the chevalier, "do not be afraid of me any more; do not take me for the devil; and do honor to the modest supper that a poor widow is only too happy to offer you."

So saying, she graciously offered her hand to Croustillac. The supper was served with a sumptuousness, a refinement, which left no doubt in the chevalier's mind as to the enormous fortune of the widow. Only, we would say to the reader that the silver-gilt service was not engraved with the royal arms of England, as were the objects which were placed only before Blue Beard.

In spite of the sprightliness and ideal grace of the widow, in spite of the witty sallies of the buccaneer, the supper was a gloomy one for Croustillac. His habitual assurance had given place to a kind of vague inquietude. The more charming Angela seemed to him, the more she exercised her fascinations, the greater the luxury which surrounded her, the more the adventurer found his distrust increased. In spite of their absurdity, the strange tales of the buccaneer kept returning to the remembrance of the chevalier—both the tale of the gray powder which caused one to die of laughter, and the liquid in the ruby flask which changed the eyes into brilliant lamps. While these recitals might not be more real than a bad dream past—the Gascon, from dread of some infernal dish, could not prevent himself from distrust of the viands and wines with which he was served. He observed the widow and the buccaneer closely; their manners were perfectly correct. Rendsoul bore himself toward Blue Beard with the proper degree of familiarity which a husband displays toward his wife before a stranger. "But then," the chevalier asked himself, "how does this reserve accord with the cynicism of the widow, who declared so cavalierly that the Caribbean and the filibuster shared her good graces with the buccaneer, without the latter being jealous in the slightest degree?" The Gascon asked himself still further what could be the object of Blue Beard in offering her hand to him, and what price she would put upon this union. He was too clear-sighted not to have noticed the lively emotion, sincere on the part of the widow, when she showed such indignation that the adventurer should believe her capable of playing a comedy in offering her hand. On this point Croustillac had not deceived himself. Blue Beard had been deeply moved; she had been in despair on

seeing that the Gascon took for a jest or a comedy all that had passed at Devil's Cliff. She had been reassured on seeing the vague disquietude which the face of the chevalier showed in spite of himself. He was lost in vain conjectures. Never had he found himself in a situation so strange that the idea of a supernatural influence or power should present itself to his mind. In spite of himself, he asked himself if there was nothing unnatural in what he had seen and heard. The fact that he felt the first heavy agony of a superstitious terror struck him most disagreeably. He did not dare to acknowledge to himself that more determined men, wiser and more learned men than he, had, within the century, and even the latter part of it, testified a belief in the existence of a veritable devil. And then, finally, the adventurer had been until then much too indifferent in the matter of religion not to believe in the devil, sooner or later.

This fear passed rapidly through the mind of the chevalier, but it would leave, for the future, an indelible mark; however, he reassured himself, little by little, at seeing the pretty widow do honor to the supper; she showed herself too fond of the pleasures of the table to be a spirit of darkness.

The supper at an end, the three entered the drawing room, and Blue Beard said to the chevalier in a solemn voice, "To-morrow I will inform you on what conditions I will give you my hand; if you refuse them, you must leave Devil's Cliff. In order to give you a proof of my confidence in you I consent that you shall pass this night in the interior of this house, although I never accord this favor to strangers. Rendsoul will show you the rooms reserved for you." Saying this, the widow entered her own apartment. Croustillac remained absorbed in thought.

"Ah, well, brother, how do you feel?" said the buccaneer.

"What is your motive in addressing such a question to me? Is it sarcasm?" said the chevalier.

"My motive is simply to know how you like our hostess."

"Hum, hum—without wishing to detract from her, you must confess that she is a woman very difficult to estimate, at first sight," said Croustillac, with some bitterness. "You cannot be surprised if I consider the subject before I answer your question. To-morrow I will tell you my opinion, if I am able to answer, myself."

"In your place I should not consider the subject," said the buccaneer. "I would accept, with eyes closed, all that she offered me, and I would wed her; for, by my faith, one cannot tell who will live or who die; tastes change with years. The days which succeed each other are dissimilar."

"Ah, well, have done with your proverbs and parables," said the Gascon, exasperated. "Why do you not marry her yourself?"

"I?"

"Yes, you!"

"Because I do not wish to die of laughter or have my eyes converted into lamps."

"And do you think that I wish to do so?"

"You?"

"Yes; why should I more than you wish to see the devil sign my contract, as this woman playfully says?"

"Then do not marry her; you are your own master; that is your lookout."

"Certainly, it is my affair, and I will marry her if I choose! Pestel!" exclaimed the chevalier, who began to fear that he was losing his wits by reason of this chaos of strange ideas.

"Come, brother, be calm!" said the buccaneer; "do not worry yourself. Do you doubt I will keep my word? I have brought you to Devil's Cliff; the prettiest woman in the world offers you her hand, her heart and her treasures; what more would you have?"

"I would understand all that has taken place, everything that has happened to me for the past two days, all that I have seen and heard to-night!" cried Croustillac, exasperated beyond bounds. "I would know if I am awake or dreaming."

"You must not be too exacting, brother. Perhaps this night will bring you a dream which will explain and enlighten you upon these subjects. Come—it is late, the day has been hard; follow me." And, saying these words, the buccaneer took up a candle and made a sign to the chevalier to follow him.

They passed through a number of sumptuously furnished rooms, and a little gallery, at the end of which they reached a very elegant bed-chamber, whose windows opened on the beautiful garden of which we have already spoken.

"You have been a soldier or a sportsman, brother," said the buccaneer, "you will know, then, how to get along without a servant. No man, except myself, Hurricane, and the Caribbean has ever passed the first door of this place; our beautiful hostess has made an exception in your favor, but this exception must be the only one. Knowing this, brother, may God or the devil keep you in his care." The buccaneer went out, shutting Croustillac in by means of a double lock.

The chevalier, much disturbed, opened a window which looked out on the little park. It was guarded by a trellis of steel netting which it was impossible to break, but which did not hide a view of the beautiful garden which the moon illumined with its soft light.

Croustillac, ill at ease, examined the wainscoting and floor of his chamber, in order to assure himself that they did not cover any trap; he looked under his bed, sounded the ceiling with his sword, but failed to discover anything suspicious. Nevertheless, by way of further prudence and to make sure, the chevalier laid down in his clothing, after having placed his faithful sword at his side, within reach. In spite of his resolve not to go to sleep, the fatigue and emotions of his journey plunged him quickly into a profound slumber.

Angela, seated in the room of which we have spoken before, said to the buccaneer: "Unfortunately, this man is not so stupid and credulous as we had thought. Heaven grant he may not be dangerous!"

"No, no; reassure yourself," said the buccaneer. "He has shown good stuff, but our two narratives have struck him; he will remember this night for a long time, and, what is better, he will talk about it. Believe me, all the exaggerations which he will use to embellish his recitals will only add to the strange stories afloat concerning Devil's Cliff."

"Ah!" cried the widow, still alarmed at the remembrance of the adventurer saying that all was a comedy and that he would investigate it, "in spite of myself I am terrified."

"There is nothing to be afraid of, I tell you, Madame Blue Beard," said the buccaneer gayly, kneeling before Angela, and looking at her tenderly. "Your diabolical reputation is too well established to suffer the slightest diminution; but acknowledge that I have an imagination, and that my gray powder and my green liquid accomplished wonders."

"And my devil who witnesses my contract," said Angela, laughing merrily.

"That is well; I love thus to see you laughing and merry," said the buccaneer. "When I see you sad and dreamy I am always afraid our retreat bores you."

"Will you please hold your tongue, Monsieur Rendsoul? Have I the appearance of wearying near you? Are you jealous of your rivals? Ask them if I love them better than I do you. Have you not procured me this distraction and the sight of this Gascon, to whom I owe the most delightful amusement? I was unreasonable. Except for my stupid fears, this evening was charming, because you were here, your eyes on mine, my lover. Ah! the moonlight is superb, let us go for a walk in it outdoors."

"Beyond the house?"

"Yes; we will walk on the great cliff, you know, where one sees in the distance the ocean. On such a beautiful night it will be delicious."

"Come, then, capricious child, take your mantle," said the buccaneer, rising.

"Come, Sir Black Beard, take your Spanish sombrero and be ready to carry me in your arms, out of reach of stumbling, for I am lazy."

"Come, Madame Blue Beard; but you do not wish to visit our guest?"

"I am sure the poor devil has some horrible dream. Ah, well, to-morrow we will give him a guide and send him away."

"No, keep him here another day. I will tell you what Father Griffen thinks of it; amusements are rare, he will amuse you."

"Heavens! what a beautiful night," said Angela, opening the blinds of the window. "It will make me so happy to take a walk."

Opening the outer doors of Devil's Cliff, the buccaneer and the widow left the house.

Contrary to his expectation, Croustillac passed an excellent night. When he awoke the following morning the sun was already high in the heavens; the blinds which were on his chamber windows had been lowered, fortunately, which softened the light. The chevalier had lain down with all his clothing on. He arose and went over to the window, and opened the blinds partially. What was his astonishment to see, at the end of a long walk bordered with tamarinds, that formed a screen almost impenetrable to the light, Blue Beard walking, negligently, leaning on the arm of a Caribbean of vigorous stature. This Caribbean was entirely dyed, according to custom, that is to say, painted with a kind of luminous composition of a reddish brown; his hair, black and glossy, parted in the center, fell on either side of his cheeks; his beard seemed carefully trimmed; his perfectly regular features partook of the character of calm severity peculiar to the savage; on his neck shone large crescents of carracolis (a kind of metal of which the West Indians alone knew the secret, and composed of gold, brass and silver).

These ornaments, of a brilliant red, were curiously chased and incrustated with green stones, the color of malachite, and to these the Indians attribute all kinds of marvelous virtues. The Caribbean was clad in a loose white garment having a border of blue fringe; the large and sweeping folds of this costume would have served as a model for the drapery of a statue. With the exception of the neck, right arm naked to the shoulder, and the left leg, this cotton garment enveloped the Caribbean completely; on his wrist he had bracelets of carracolis also incrustated with green stones; his leg was half hidden by a kind of sandal made of bands of cotton stuff of a vivid color and very picturesque.

Angela and Youmāale, for this was he, were walking slowly, and came directly toward the window from the shadow of which the Gascon watched them. A pink girdle about the beautiful figure of the widow confined a long robe of white muslin; her blond curls fell around her fresh and youthful face, which the adventurer had not seen before by day. He could not refrain

from admiring her white and clear complexion, her rosy and transparent cheeks, her eyes so limpid and blue.

The evening before, Angela had appeared to Croustillac in brilliant apparel, and disturbed by the strange confidences of Blue Beard and the buccaneer, the admiration of the chevalier was mixed with distrust, impatience and fear, and he had been more alarmed than touched by the beauty of Angela; but when he saw her in the morning so simply pretty, he experienced a profound emotion; he was moved; he forgot Devil's Cliff and the cannibal, and thought only of the beautiful creature before him. Love, yes, true love took possession suddenly of the chevalier's heart just before so little in love. Though the growth of this sudden passion was so rapid and instantaneous, it was none the less sincere.

Doubtless the evening before, Croustillac had suffered from too much agitation, too sudden astonishment, too strange preoccupations, to really appreciate Blue Beard; refreshed by a night's sleep, the past seemed like a dream and Angela appeared as if for the first time to him; admiring the supple figure outlined by the perfect fit of her white muslin robe, he forgot the brocaded dress studded with precious stones with which he was so impressed the preceding evening. He sought vainly to discover, in the ingenuous and charming features which he now beheld the diabolical smiles of the singular woman who had made such sinister pleasantries concerning her three deceased husbands. In fact, poor Croustillac was in love. Perhaps it was he and not Blue Beard who had changed; but with his new love came all kinds of cruel jealousy.

Seeing Angela and Youmääle walking together so familiarly, the adventurer experienced agony and new disquietude increased by an intense curiosity. Alas! what a sight for him. At times, Angela dropped the Caribbean's arm in order to pursue, with the ardent enjoyment of a child, the beautiful gold and blue insects, or to pick some lovely fragrant flower; then she would suddenly return to Youmääle, always calm, almost solemn, who seemed to have a feeling of grave and tender protection for the young woman.

At times the Caribbean gave his hand to the widow to kiss. Angela, happy and proud at this favor, carried the hand to her lips with an air at once respectful and passionate; she seemed a Caribbean woman accustomed to live a submissive and devoted slave to her master. Youmääle held a magnificent flower which the widow had given him. He let it fall to the earth. Angela bent quickly, and picking it up, handed it to him, while the savage made no gesture to prevent her, or to thank her for this attention.

"Stupid and gross animal!" cried Croustillac indignantly; "would one not think he was a sultan? How can that adorable creature bring herself to kiss the hand of a cannibal, who had no other way of sounding the praises of the

good priest Simon than that he had eaten him! Yesterday a buccaneer, to-day a cannibal, to-morrow, without doubt, a filibuster. But she is a veritable Messalina!" continued Croustillac, at once despairing and feeling within himself a victim to a real passion.

The widow and the Caribbean approached nearer and nearer the window where Croustillac stood watching them, and he could hear their conversation. Youmäale spoke French with the slight guttural accent natural to his race; his words were few and brief. Croustillac overheard these words of the conversation:

"Youmäale," said the little widow, leaning on the arm of the Caribbean and looking tenderly at him, "Youmäale, you are my master, I will obey you; is it not my duty, my sweet duty, to obey you?"

"It is thy duty," said the Caribbean, who used that form, but which Angela did not. His dignity as the man demanded this.

"Youmäale, my life is your life, my thoughts are yours," returned Angela; "if you should tell me to put to my lips the deadly juice of this poisonous apple, I should do it, to show you that I belong to you, as your bow, your cabin, your canoe, belong to you."

Saying these words Angela showed the silent Caribbean a yellow fruit which she held in her hand, and which contained the most deadly and subtle poison. Youmäale, after subjecting Angela to the most piercing scrutiny, made an imperative gesture holding up the forefinger of his right hand. At this sign, the widow quickly raised the deadly fruit to her lips, and, had it not been for a movement still more rapid on the part of the Caribbean she would perhaps have given this fatal proof of passive obedience to the slightest caprice of her master. A movement of affright as fugitive as lightning, contracted the impassive features of the Caribbean as the widow lifted the apple to her lips; but he quickly recovered his coolness, lowering the hand of Angela, kissing the young woman gravely on the forehead, and saying to her in a sweet and sonorous tone, "It is well."

At this moment the two pedestrians were so close to the window of Croustillac that the latter, fearing to be discovered eavesdropping, withdrew suddenly into his chamber, and said "How she frightened me with her poison. And this savage animal, who looks like a lobster, as much from the color of his skin as from his movements, says to her, 'It is well,' when this adorable woman, at a sign from him, would have poisoned herself; for once in love, women are capable of anything." Then, after some moments of cruel reflection, the Gascon exclaimed, "It is inexplicable that a woman should be in love with a man such as this one appears to be; with two, for this is evident; although it is an enormity! But it is impossible that she should love

three at the same time; this descends to monstrosity—it is worthy of the lower regions. How! Blue Beard, linked to a buccaneer, and a filibuster, also has a frightful fancy for this cannibal who eats missionaries, without taking into account in addition that she proposes to me to marry her! Zounds! this is enough to make one lose his head. Decidedly I will not remain here; no, no, a thousand times, no! What I have seen has made me ill. I will not become so stupid as to take this woman; I should lose all my advantages. Real love makes one as stupid as a goose; during this last hour I have already lost more resolution than since my arrival here. My heart has melted; I feel myself inclined to do the most ridiculous things. Fly, fly; this is madness, a dream. I was born poor; I have always been poor; I will die poor. I will leave this house, I will seek out the worthy captain of the Unicorn. After all," said Croustillac, with a discouragement singular in a man of his character, "there are worse things than swallowing lighted candles to amuse Captain Daniel."

These sad reflections were interrupted by the entrance of the old mulattress, who knocked at his door and informed him that the negro who had waited upon him in the capacity of valet the previous day was waiting for him in the outer building.

Croustillac followed the slave, was dressed, shaved and thus went to wait upon Blue Beard in the same room where he had waited the preceding night.

The widow shortly appeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

TRUE LOVE.

AT sight of Blue Beard, in spite of himself, Croustillac blushed like a schoolboy.

"I was very disagreeable yesterday, was I not?" said Angela to the chevalier, with an enchanting smile. "I gave you a bad opinion of me when I permitted Rendsoul to tell all kinds of tricks; but do not let us speak of them any more. By the way, Youmäale, the Caribbean, is here."

"I saw you from my window, madame," said the chevalier bitterly, while he thought, "She has not the slightest shame. What a pity, with such an adorable face. There, Croustillac, be firm!"

"Is Youmäale not very handsome?" asked the widow with a triumphant air.

"Humph! he is handsome for a savage," returned the chevalier, unwillingly; "but, now that we are alone, madame, explain to me how you can in one day (do not be shocked by this question which circumstances compel me to ask you), how you can in one day change your lover?"

"Oh, it is simple enough; one comes, the other goes; it is very simple."

"One comes, the other goes—it is very simple from this standpoint, but, madame, nature and morality have laws!"

"All three love me truly, why should I not love all three?"

This answer was made with such perfect candor that the chevalier said to himself, "It seems as if this unhappy woman must have been raised in some desert or cavern. She has not the slightest idea of good and evil; one would have to absolutely educate her." He said aloud, with some embarrassment, "At the risk of being taken for an indiscreet and wearisome person, madame, I would say that this morning, during your walk with the Caribbean, I both saw and heard you. How is it that at a sign from him you would dare, at the risk of poisoning yourself, lift to your lips the deadly fruit of the poisonous apple?"

"If Youmäale should say to me 'die' I should die," replied the widow.

"But the buccaneer, the filibuster—what would they say if you should die for the Caribbean?"

"They would say I had done right."

"And if they demanded that you should die for them?"

"I would die for them."

"As you would for Youmäale?"

"As for Youmäale."

"Then you love the three equally?"

"Yes, because all three love me equally."

"She has a rooted idea and no one can dislodge it," thought the Gascon; "I lose my trouble. Her accent is too frank to be assumed. It may be that evil tongues have slandered a fraternal affection that this young woman bears for these three bandits. Though the buccaneer gave me to understand—after all, perhaps I misunderstood him and, as I am going to leave her, I would much rather believe her more innocent than culpable; although she does appear very hard to me to acquit." He went on: "A last question, madame. What was the object of the atrocious tales that you and the buccaneer related last night concerning two of your deceased husbands—that one had died of laughter and the other been used as a lamp, thanks to the intervention of Satan who always, according to the same story, signs your marriage contract? You must feel, madame, that, however polite I may be, it is extremely difficult for me to appear to believe such follies as these."

"They are not follies."

"How—you wish me to believe——"

"Oh, you must believe them, and many other things, after you have evidence of them," said the widow, with a peculiar tone.

"And when will you explain this mystery to me, madame?"

"When I tell you the price I place upon my hand."

"Ah, she is beginning to jest again," thought the Gascon. "I will appear to be duped, in order to see what she will do; I wish she was far away—that my stupid fancy were completely extinguished." Then aloud, "Was it not to-day that you were to say what price you place upon your hand, madame?"

"Yes."

"At what hour?"

"This evening, when the moon rises."

"Why not now, madame?"

"That is a secret you will know like others."

"And if I marry you, you will give me but one year to live?"

"Alas! only a year."

"Let me appear duped," said the Gascon to himself; and aloud, "Is it your desire that my days should be so few?"

"No, no!" cried the widow.

"Then, personally, you do not dislike me?" said Croustillac.

At this question the face of Blue Beard changed entirely and her expression became grave and thoughtful; she raised her head proudly, and the chevalier was struck with the air of nobility and goodness which overspread her face. "Listen to me," she said, with an affectionate and protecting voice. "Because certain circumstances in my life oblige me to a conduct often strange; because I perhaps abuse my liberty you must not think I have a contempt for men of heart."

Croustillac looked at the widow with surprise. She was not the same woman. She appeared like a woman of the world. He was so taken aback that he could not speak.

Blue Beard continued: "You ask me if I hate you; we have not yet reached the point where such sentiments, good or bad, can attain such extremity; but I am far from hating you; you are certainly very vain, very boastful, very arrogant——"

"Madame!"

"But you are good, brave, and you would be capable, I am sure, of a generous devotion; you are poor, of obscure birth——"

"Madame, the name of Croustillac is as good as any other," cried the chevalier, unable to vanquish the demon of pride.

The widow continued as if she had not heard the chevalier. "If you had been born rich and powerful, you would have made a noble use of your power and your wealth. Want has counseled you to more evil than she has made you perform, for you have suffered and endured many privations——"

"But, madame——"

"Poverty finds you careless and resigned; fortune would have found you prodigal and generous; in a word, what is of rare occurrence, you have not been more hurt by poverty than you would have been by prosperity. If the amount of your good qualities has not brought you much more than the heedlessness of youth, this house would not have been open to you, be certain of that, sir. If the proposition that I shall make you to-night is not agreeable to you, I am sure, at least, that you will not carry away a disagreeable remembrance of Blue Beard. Will you await me here?" she said, smiling, "I am going to take a look at Youmääle's breakfast, for it is customary with the Caribbeans that the women alone take care of this, and I wish, in that respect at least, that Youmääle should feel as if in his own cabin."

So saying, the widow left. This interview was, so to speak, a finishing touch to the unhappy chevalier. Although the widow had shrewdly summed up the

character of Croustillac, she had expressed it in a manner full of kindness, grace and dignity. She had, in fact, shown herself in a new light, which overthrew all the Gascon's suppositions. The simple and affectionate words of Angela, the sweet and noble look which accompanied them, rendered Croustillac prouder and happier than he would have been at the most extravagant compliments. He felt, with a mixture of joy and fear, so completely and hopelessly in love with the widow that had she been poor and friendless he would have been truly and generously devoted to her—the most unmistakable symptom of true love.

The astounding presumption of the chevalier deserted him. He understood how ridiculous the part he had played must appear; and, as the property of true sentiment is always to make us better, more intelligent and more sensible, in spite of the chaos of contradictions which surrounded Angela's conduct, the chevalier discerned that these appearances must hide a grave mystery; he also said to himself that the intimacy of Blue Beard with her lovers, as she called them, covered, without doubt, another secret, and that this young woman was, as a consequence, slandered in a most unjust manner. He said, further, that the apparent ease with which Angela assumed a frightful cynicism before a stranger was not without some very pressing reason. In consequence of this rehabilitation of Blue Beard in the mind of Croustillac, she became in his eyes, completely innocent of the murder of her three husbands. Finally, the adventurer began to believe, so much had love metamorphosed him, that the solitary inmate of Devil's Cliff wished to mock him; and he proposed to clear up his suspicions that same night, when the widow should tell him the price she placed upon her hand.

One thing embarrassed Croustillac—how could the widow have informed herself of his life so completely? But he remembered, with some exceptions, that he had not made any mystery of the greater part of the antecedents of his life on board the Unicorn, and that the business manager of Blue Beard's affairs at St. Pierre might have discussed the passengers with Captain Daniel. Finally, with a wisdom and good sense which did credit to the new feeling which animated him, Croustillac put these two cases to himself: Either Blue Beard wished to amuse herself, and that night would say to him frankly, "Sir, you have been an impertinent meddler; blinded by vanity, urged on by cupidity, you have made a wager that you would become my husband in a month's time; I have wished to torment you a little, and to play the ferocious part accredited to me; the buccaneer, the filibuster, and the Caribbean are my three servants in whom I have entire confidence; and as I live alone in a very isolated locality, each of them comes by turn to watch at night. Knowing the absurd stories afloat, I wished to amuse myself at the expense of your credulity; this morning, even, I saw from the end of the walk that you were spying upon me, and the comedy of the poisonous

apple was arranged with Youmääle; as for the kiss he placed upon my forehead"—here the chevalier was embarrassed for a moment as to how to excuse this part of the rôle which he supposed played by the widow; but he solved the question by saying to himself that, according to Caribbean customs, this familiarity was, doubtless, not considered strange.

The chevalier felt that he must be satisfied with this explanation; and to do him justice (a little late, in truth) he would renounce his mad hopes, beg the widow to forget the conduct of which he had been guilty, kiss her hand and ask her to furnish him with a guide, resume his poor old garments, of faded green, and pink stockings, and return to a happier fate which awaited him in the cabin of the Unicorn's worthy captain.

If, on the contrary, the widow had serious views in regard to the chevalier (which he found some difficulty in admitting to himself, although he was not blind to his own merit), he would repay her with the happiness of his life; he would charge himself personally with protecting his wife, and banish the buccaneer to his trading-station, the Caribbean to his hut, and the filibuster to his occupation; at least, if the widow did not prefer to return with him to France to live there.

We must say to the honor of poor Croustillac that he hardly dwelt upon this last hope; he considered his first interpretation of the conduct of the widow as much more probable. Finally, by a natural reaction, of mind over matter, the triumphant boasting of the chevalier ceased at the same time with his conceit. His face was no longer distorted by grotesque vanity; for it expressed the better qualities of the chevalier—resolution, courage—we would add loyalty, for it was impossible to add more frankness to his conceit than was to be found in the Gascon.

While the Chevalier de Croustillac waited with impatience the night of this day which promised to be so fertile in developments, because Blue Beard intended to signify her final intention, let us conduct the reader to Fort Royal, at Martinique, the principal port of the island, where the governor resided the greater portion of the time. There had transpired a new incident which demands our immediate notice.

The shipyard at St. Pierre, where the Unicorn had touched, was intended for the anchorage of merchant vessels, just as the shipyard at Fort Royal was for ships-of-war.

About the same time that Youmääle was walking with Blue Beard, the lookout above the governor's house (at Fort Royal) signaled a French frigate; the watch sent his assistant to inform the officer of artillery commanding the battery at the fort, in order that he might fire a salute (as was the custom) to the king's flag, (the custom being to fire a salute of ten guns from all the

ships-of-war when they came to anchor). To the great surprise of the lookout who repented then of having dispatched his assistant to the sergeant, he saw the frigate heave to, outside the roadstead, and lower a boat; this boat was propelled through the waves to the entrance of the port, while the frigate rode at anchor and waited for it.

This proceeding was so strange that the lookout reported to the captain of the Governor's Guards, and related to him what had occurred, to the end that he could countermand the salute from the fort. This order given, the captain went at once to inform the governor of this singular evolution on the frigate's part.

An hour later, the boat belonging to the French ship arrived at Fort Royal, and landed a person dressed like a man of some rank, who was accompanied by the lieutenant of the frigate. They went at once to the house of the governor, Baron de Rupinelle.

The officer gave a letter from the captain commanding the *Fulminante* to the baron. His vessel was under orders to wait the result of the mission with which Monsieur de Chemerant was charged, and to depart at once. They had hastily taken on some fresh victuals and fresh water for the men on board. The lieutenant went out to attend to matters pertaining to reprovisioning the frigate, and Monsieur de Chemerant and the governor were alone.

Monsieur de Chemerant was a man of from forty-five to fifty years, of a dark olive complexion which gave to his sea-green eyes an added charm; he wore a black peruke and a brown coat trimmed with gold braid. His features were intellectual, his words few, his eye piercing; his mouth, or rather his lips, were altogether too thin and compressed to ever smile; if he occasionally gave vent to sarcasm upon what had happened, his face became still more serious than usual. He had also very polished manners and showed his familiarity with the best society. His courage, discretion and coolness were such that Monsieur de Louvois had already frequently employed him in missions of the greatest difficulty and danger.

Monsieur de Chemerant afforded a striking contrast to the governor, Baron de Rupinelle, a large and indolent man, having but one care, that of keeping cool; his face was gross, purple and full; his eyes, unusually round, gave him a look of perpetual surprise. The baron, honest and brave, but a perfect nonentity, owed his position to the powerful influence of the Colbert family to which he was related through his mother.

In order to receive the lieutenant of the frigate, and Monsieur de Chemerant with proper courtesy, the baron had removed, much to his regret, a white cotton coat and a hat of Caribbean straw to put on an enormous blond wig,

squeeze into a coat of a kind of blue uniform embroidered with gold braid, and buckled on a heavy shoulder-belt and sword. The heat was intense, and the governor anathematized the etiquette of which he was the victim.

"Sir," said De Chemerant, who seemed perfectly indifferent to this tropical temperature, "can we speak without fear of being overheard?"

"There is no danger on that score, sir; this door opens into my study where there is no one, and that one into the gallery which is also unoccupied."

Monsieur de Chemerant arose, looked into the two places, and carefully shut both doors.

"Pardon, sir," said the governor, "if we remain here with only two windows open——"

"You are right, baron," said De Chemerant, interrupting the governor and shutting the windows with equal care, "that is more prudent; we might be heard from the outside."

"But, sir, if we remain without a current of air we shall suffocate here. It will become a perfect oven."

"That which I have the honor to say to you, sir, will not take long; but it concerns a state secret of the greatest importance, and the slightest indiscretion may jeopardize the success of the mission which has been confided to me by the king's command. You must accord me, then, the privilege of shutting ourselves in here until the close of our interview."

"If it is the king's orders, I must submit, sir," said De Rupinelle, with a heavy sigh and wiping his forehead. "I am entirely at your service."

"Be so good as to cast your eye upon my credentials from his majesty," said De Chemerant; and he took a paper from a little box which he bore with great care and never intrusted to any one.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ENVOY FROM FRANCE.

WHILE the governor read his dispatch De Chemerant looked with a satisfied air at an object within his box and said to himself, "If I have occasion to use it, this will be perfect; my idea is excellent."

"This order, sir, is regular; I must execute all the commands you give me," said the governor, looking at his visitor with profound astonishment. Then he continued, "It is so very warm, sir, that I must ask your permission to remove my wig, in spite of proprieties."

"Make yourself comfortable, sir, make yourself comfortable, I beg of you."

The governor threw his wig on the table and seemed to breathe more easily.

"And now, baron, be so good as to reply to a number of questions which I have the honor to put to you." And De Chemerant took from his little box some notes wherein was stated, doubtless, what he wished to ask the governor.

"There is, not far from the parish of Macouba, in the midst of woods and rocks, a kind of fortified mansion called Devil's Cliff?"

"Yes, sir, and this same house does not bear a very good name. Chevalier de Crussol, my predecessor, made a visit to the place to learn what foundation there was for these rumors, but I have searched in vain for papers bearing upon this subject among his correspondence."

Monsieur de Chemerant continued: "This house is occupied by a woman—a widow, baron?"

"So thoroughly a widow, sir, that she has been surnamed in the country Blue Beard, because of the rapidity with which she has successively made way with the three husbands she has had. Might I venture to say that this cravat is stifling me, sir?" added the unhappy governor; "we do not usually wear them here, and if you will permit me——"

"Take it off, sir, the service of the king will not suffer thereby. Chevalier de Crussol, your predecessor, you say, began an investigation on the subject of the disappearance of the three husbands of this Blue Beard?"

"So they told me, sir, but I have never found any trace of this investigation."

"Commander de Saint-Simon, who fulfilled the duties of governor after the death of De Crussol, and before your arrival here, did not deliver to you, baron, a confidential letter written by De Crussol?"

"Yes—yes, sir," said the governor, looking at De Chemerant with profound astonishment.

"This letter was written by De Crussol a short time previous to his death?"

"Yes, sir."

"This letter relates to the inhabitant of Devil's Cliff; is this not true, baron?"

"Yes, sir," said the governor, more and more surprised to find De Chemerant so well informed.

"Monsieur de Crussol assured you in this letter, upon his honor, that this woman called Blue Beard was innocent of the crimes imputed to her?"

"Yes, sir, but how can you know?"

Monsieur de Chemerant interrupted the governor and said, "Allow me to say, sir, that the king ordered me to make inquiries of you, and not replies. I have the honor to ask of you if, in this letter, the deceased, De Crussol, did not vouch for the entire innocence of the widow surnamed Blue Beard?"

"Yes, sir."

"He affirmed to you, on the faith of a Christian, and at the moment when he was about to appear before his God, also on his word as a gentleman, that you could, without prejudice to the service of the king, leave this woman at liberty and in peace?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that, finally, the Reverend Father Griffen, a man of well-known piety and the most honorable character, would be further surety for this woman, if you demanded it of him?"

"Yes, sir, and, in truth, in a confidential interview, very special and very secret——"

"Which you had with Father Griffen, baron, this religious man confirmed to you what De Crussol had stated in his last letter, and you made him, in form, a promise not to disturb the aforesaid widow?"

The governor, unable to fathom his being so well informed, gazed at De Chemerant in bewilderment. The kind of emotion which this examination, joined to the oppressiveness of the air, occasioned, was choking the baron. After a short pause he said resolutely to De Chemerant, "Faith, sir, one must accommodate oneself to one's situation. I must ask permission to take off my coat. This trimming of gold and silver weighs a hundred pounds, I believe."

"Take it off, take it off, baron; the coat does not make the governor," he said gravely, with a bow; then he continued: "Thanks to the advice of De Crussol and the Reverend Father Griffen, the dweller at Devil's Cliff has not been disturbed, baron? You have not visited the place, in spite of the strange stories about it?"

"No, sir, I assure you, the recommendation of the persons so respectable as Father Griffen and the deceased De Crussol were sufficient. And then the road to Devil's Cliff is impassable; the rocks bare and rent; it takes two or three hours to climb them; and faith, I assure you, sir, to make such a journey under the sun of the tropics," said the baron, wiping his forehead, which was perspiring at the mere thought of such a climb, "appears to me entirely inadvisable, because, morally, I am convinced that the aforesaid stories have no foundation, and I think in that I am not wrong."

"Allow me, baron, to ask you some further questions."

"At your service, sir."

"The woman called Blue Beard has a counting house at St. Pierre?"

"Yes, sir."

"Her business man is empowered to send out her vessels which are always destined for France?"

"That, sir, is very easily verified in the clearing books of the captains."

"And these registers?"

"Are there in that case."

"Will you take the trouble to look them over, baron, and to select from them some dates which I was going to ask of you?"

The governor arose, mounted painfully on a chair, and took down a large volume bound in green leather, placing it on his desk; then, as if this exertion had redoubled the heat he was suffering from and exhausted his strength, he said to De Chemerant: "Sir, you have been, doubtless, a soldier; you can understand that we live a little carelessly; for, without further parley and asking pardon for the great liberty, I will remove my vest, if you please; it is embroidered in cloth and as heavy as a cuirass."

"Take it off—take off everything that you wish to," replied De Chemerant with impervious gravity; "there is so little left for me to say to you that I trust you will not need to remove more of your apparel. Can you feel assured, other than from these facts, that the vessels loaded with cargoes by our widow have always been sent to France?"

"Yes, sir," replied the governor, opening his register; then, following with the end of his finger the tables, he read, "'For Rochelle, for Rochelle, for Bordeaux, for Bordeaux, for Rochelle, for Rochelle, for Havre de Grace.' You see, sir, the vessels have always sailed for France."

"That is well, baron. According to the direction, frequent enough, of vessels of commerce, which leave the counting-house wharves, it follows that Blue

Beard (we will adopt the popular surname) can put a vessel to sea very quickly."

"Doubtless, sir."

"Has she not a brigantine always ready to put to sea, and which can in two hours be at the Creek of Caymans, not far from Devil's Cliff, where there is a little harbor," said De Chemerant, consulting his notes once more.

"Yes, sir; this brigantine is called the Chameleon; Blue Beard recently placed it, very generously, at my service (through the mediation of Monsieur Morris, her man of business), to give chase to a Spanish pirate, and there is an old filibuster of a captain called Hurricane, who commands the vessel——"

"We will speak of this filibuster later, sir, but this pirate——"

"Was sunk in the Rivière des Saints."

"To return to this filibuster, baron; he frequents the house of Blue Beard?"

"Yes, sir."

"As much so as another bad fellow, a buccaneer by trade?"

"Yes, sir," said the baron in a dry tone, resolved to confine himself to the secondary rôle which De Chemerant imposed upon him.

"A Caribbean also is often there?"

"Yes, sir."

"The presence of these men in the island is of how recent date?"

"That I do not know, sir; they were established here at my arrival in Martinique. They say that the filibuster formerly pursued his calling on the north of the Antilles and the seas of the south. Like many captains who have made something by filibustering, he has bought here a little dwelling at the point of the island, where he lives alone."

"And the buccaneer, baron?"

"This kind of person is here to-day, gone to-morrow, according to whether the hunt is more or less abundant; sometimes he remains away a month, and it is the same with the Caribbean."

"This information accords perfectly with that which was given me; beside, I do not speak of men of this sort other than by hearsay. They are far too unimportant, and too foreign to the mission which I am in charge of, to merit their occupying my attention for any length of time. They are, at most, passive instruments," continued De Chemerant to himself, "and they are probably very indirectly connected with this grave matter." Then, after a few minutes' reflection, he said aloud, "Now, baron, one more question: have not

your secret police notified you that the English have tried to introduce themselves into this island since the war?"

"Twice, lately, sir, our cruisers have given chase to a suspicious vessel coming from the Barbadoes seeking to approach from the windward, the only places where one can land in the island; elsewhere the coast is too rugged to permit landing."

"Very good," said De Chemerant. After a moment's silence he said, "Tell me, baron, how long would it take to go to Devil's Cliff?"

"About eleven hours; the roads are difficult, one could not reach there before nightfall."

"Well, then, baron," said De Chemerant, taking out his watch, "in two hours from now, that is to say, at one o'clock in the afternoon, you will have the goodness to order thirty of your most reliable guards to arm themselves, to provide themselves with scaling ladders, one or two bombs, and to hold themselves in readiness to follow and obey me as they would yourself."

"But, sir, if you wish to go to Devil's Cliff, you must start at once in order to arrive by daylight."

"Doubtless baron; but as I desire to arrive in the middle of the night, you will see the wisdom of my not starting for two hours."

"That is another thing, sir."

"Can you procure for me a covered litter?"

"Yes, sir, there is mine."

"And can this go to Devil's Cliff?"

"To the foot of the mountain only, not a step further, for they say it is impossible for a horse to climb the heaped-up and yawning rocks."

"Very good; will you, then, be so good, baron, as to have this litter prepared, as well as a mount for me; I will leave it at the foot of the cliff."

"Yes, sir."

"I warn you, baron, that it is of the greatest importance that the object of this enterprise be perfectly concealed; all will be lost if they are warned of my visit to Devil's Cliff; we shall not inform the escort of our destination until outside Fort Royal, and we shall make, I hope, as much haste as the roads will permit. In a word, baron," continued the envoy, with a confidential air, which he had not assumed until then, "mystery is so much the more indispensable that it concerns a state secret and the future of two great nations."

"Because of Blue Beard?" said the governor, questioning with a curious glance the cold and grave face of De Chemerant.

"Because of Blue Beard."

"How?" replied the baron. "Blue Beard, then, counts for something in a state secret, in the peace of two great nations?"

Monsieur de Chemerant, who did not like repetition, made an affirmative sign and continued, "I also beg of you, baron, that you will see that the frigate's boat does not leave the wharf, so that I may return on board and put to sea without remaining here a second, if, as I hope, my mission be successful. Ah! I forgot; the litter must be such that it can be entirely closed."

"But, sir, is it, then, a prisoner that you are in search of?"

"Sir," said De Chemerant, rising, "a thousand pardons for repeating to you that the king ordered me to make inquiries of you instead of——"

"Good, very good, sir," said the governor. "Then I may open the windows?" asked the baron, who was suffocated in this apartment.

"I see nothing to prevent, baron."

The governor arose.

"So, baron," said De Chemerant, "it is understood that you do not inform the guide who is to conduct me of my destination, until the moment of our departure?"

"But in the meantime, sir, if I send for him, what shall I say to him?"

The visitor seemed astonished at the simplicity of the governor, and said to him, "Who is this guide, sir?"

"One of my blacks, who works at the king's house, a good league from here. He is an oddity who has run away himself so often that he is more familiar with the inaccessible spots of the island than with the open roads."

"Is this slave reliable, sir?"

"Entirely, sir; he would have no object in leading you astray; beside, I will warn him that if he does, I will have his nose and ears cut off."

"It is impossible that he should resist such a consideration, baron. But to reply to your objection—how will this negro occupy himself until the moment of our departure?"

"An idea!" cried the baron triumphantly; "he can be flogged; that will mislead him; he believes that no one summons him here other than for that reason."

"That would be, certainly, an excellent means, baron, of working a diversion in his ideas, but it will suffice, I think, to keep him shut up until the moment of our departure. Ah! I had forgotten another thing, baron; I beg you will see that, during my absence, everything that can be found in the way of delicacies in fruit, vegetables, game, fine wines, confections, etc., etc., be sent on board ship. You need not consider expense, I will meet that."

"I understand you, sir; I must collect, in the way of refreshments, all that it is possible to keep on board during the first days of the voyage, as much so as if it were for the entertainment of a person of the greatest distinction," said the governor curiously.

"You understand me marvelously well, baron. But I fancy this black, our guide, has viewed, at least from the outside, the habitation at Devil's Cliff."

"Yes, sir; and he tells very strange stories about that house and the solitudes where it is builded."

"Ah, well, baron; here is a task for this slave; give orders that he be brought to me pending the time of our departure, and I will question him concerning what I wish to discover."

"I will send in search of him at once," said the governor, going out.

"May God or the devil convey this affair into safe harbor," said De Chemerant, when he was alone. "Fortunately, I have no need of the aid of this stupid governor; the greatest difficulty is still to be surmounted; but no matter, I have faith in my star. The affair of Fabrio-Chigi was a much more difficult matter, and then the hope, if not of a crown, at least almost of a throne, the ambition to direct the course of a great nation, the desire of recovering the good graces of the king, his relative, would not there be reasons sufficient to determine the most rebellious will? and, moreover, if these reasons were not enough," said De Chemerant, after some moments of silence, striking his little box, "here is another argument which will be, perhaps, more effectual."

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Two hours later De Chemerant started for Devil's Cliff at the head of thirty of the Governor's Guards, armed to the teeth. A litter, drawn by two mules, followed this little detachment, preceded by the guide. This slave had had a long interview with De Chemerant, and, as a consequence, he had taken two scaling ladders and petards carried on a pack horse, a bundle of stout ropes with grapples of iron, and two axes. Moreover, De Chemerant had given orders to the lieutenant of the frigate to send him two good sailors chosen from among the fifteen sailors forming the crew of the boat which awaited, at the landing at Fort Royal, the result of the expedition.

This little company set out, preceded by the guide, who, flanked by the two sailors, marched a little in advance of De Chemerant. After having followed the coast for a long time, the troop climbed a very high hill, and pressed on into the interior of the island.

We will leave De Chemerant advancing slowly toward Devil's Cliff, and will rejoin Father Griffen at Macouba, and Colonel Rutler at the bottom of the precipice, where he had arrived by way of the subterranean passage, after the wildcats, by devouring the corpse of John, had removed the obstacle which before had held the English envoy in the cavern of the Caraibe.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORM.

MONSIEUR DE CHERMERANT had scarcely left Fort Royal at the head of his escort when a young mulatto of about fifteen, after having followed for some time, hiding in the ravines or the swamps, on seeing the troop take the road to Devil's Cliff, started with all haste for Macouba.

Thanks to his perfect knowledge of the country and of certain roads not open, this slave reached Father Griffen's parish very soon. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon; the good priest was taking his afternoon nap, comfortably extended in one of the hammocks so ingeniously made of rushes by the Caribbeans. The young mulatto had the greatest difficulty in persuading one of the priest's two slaves to awaken his master; finally Monsieur concluded, after long hesitation, because of the deep and peaceful sleep of the priest, to do so.

"What do you want?" said the priest.

"Master, a young mulatto has come in haste from Fort Royal and wishes to speak to you at once."

"A mulatto from Fort Royal," said Father Griffen, springing from his hammock. "Let him come in quickly. What do you want, my child?" continued he, addressing the young slave; "have you come by direction of Monsieur Morris?"

"Yes, Father. Here is a letter from him. He told me to follow an escort of troops leaving Fort Royal this morning, and directed me, if they took the road to Devil's Cliff, to come and tell you, Father. His letter will explain the rest."

"Very well, my child, the troop——"

"Plunged into the Goyaviers valley, and took the road to the Black Rocks; that leads only to Devil's Cliff."

Father Griffen, much disturbed, broke the seal of the letter and seemed overcome at its contents. He re-read it with evidence of the greatest surprise, and then said to the mulatto, "Go quickly and find Monsieur."

The mulatto went at once.

"An envoy from France has arrived; he had a long interview with the governor, and I fear he has started with armed men for Devil's Cliff, as Monsieur Morris believes," said the priest, walking up and down agitatedly. "Monsieur Morris does not know, cannot know more. But I—I—I tremble to think of the consequences of this visit. Doubtless the mystery has been unveiled. And how, how? Who can have put them on the scent? Did not the

secret die with De Crussol? His letter is my guarantee. Did they not quiet the governor and cause him to give up all pursuit of this unhappy woman?" Then, referring to Monsieur Morris' letter, the priest continued: "A French frigate which remains at anchor outside the roadstead, an envoy who confers for two hours with the governor, and who, after this interview, leaves for Devil's Cliff with an escort'—there is more than suspicion, there is certainty? They have come to carry her off. My God! can it be true? But, the secret—who but myself knew it? for I only knew it, oh, yes, I alone, at least unless a frightful sacrilege—but no, no!" said the priest, clasping his hands with terror. "Such a thought on my part is a crime. No, it is impossible. I would rather believe it was indiscretion on the part of the only person who has an interest for life or death in the mystery, than that it should be the most impious treachery. No, a thousand times no; it is impossible! but I must start at once for Devil's Cliff. Perhaps I can get the advance of this man who has left Fort Royal with an escort. Yes, by hurrying, I may do it. I will find that unlucky Gascon; they have nothing to fear there. His extraordinary appearance on board made me believe the poor devil, for a time, to be an emissary from London or Saint-Germain; but I have, as they say, turned him inside out, in every way. I mentioned before him abruptly certain names which, had he been in the secret, he would have found it impossible not to betray it, however guarded he might be, and he remained impassible. I understand men too well to have been deceived by him; the chevalier is nothing but a crazy adventurer, a spoiled child, in whom, after all, good qualities triumph over the bad ones."

At this moment Monsieur appeared.

"Saddle Grenadille at once."

"Yes, master."

"Unchain Colas."

"Yes, master."

"Do not forget to put my large traveling cloak behind my saddle."

"Yes, master."

The black went out, then returned almost immediately, saying, "Master, shall I arm Colas?"

"Certainly, we go through the forest."

While his mare was being saddled, the priest continued to pace up and down restlessly. All at once he cried, with fright, as if struck by a sudden thought, "But if I have been deceived; if this adventurer, under a guise of frivolity, concealed some plan coolly resolved upon—some sinister design? But no! no! cunning and dissimulation could not attain to such an odious

perfection. But what if his errand coincides with that of this man who has started out with an escort? And I, I who have answered for this adventurer, I who in my letter of yesterday have almost approved their decision concerning him, thinking, as they did, that this Gascon by repeating the mysterious stories connected with Devil's Cliff, would only advance the ends of those who live there. But what if I have been deceived? if I have helped introduce a dangerous enemy there? But no! he would have taken action before this if he had known the secret. And still—no! no! perhaps he waited the arrival of this frigate and this emissary before acting? Perhaps he is working with him? Oh! I am in terrible uncertainty."

So saying, Father Griffen went out quickly to hasten the preparations for his departure. Monsieur was saddling Grenadille and Jean was arming Colas.

Some explanation is necessary in order to instruct the reader in regard to a new actor of which we have thus far had no occasion to speak. Colas was a boar, possessed of marvelous intelligence; this boar always accompanied him and went ahead on these excursions. Thanks to their long, rough hair, and to their thick coat of fat, which impedes and congeals, so to speak, the sting of serpents, boars and even domesticated pigs carry on in the colonies a desperate war with these reptiles; Colas was one of their most intrepid enemies. His armor consisted of a kind of muzzle of iron pierced with little holes, and ending in a kind of very sharp crescent. This protected the end of the boar's head, its only vulnerable part, and furnished him with a formidable weapon against serpents. Colas always preceded Grenadille some steps, clearing the road and putting to flight the serpents which would have stung the mare.

Father Griffen, if he had known of the abrupt departure of Croustillac (the adventurer had, as we know, left the parsonage without any farewell to his host), would have offered Colas to the chevalier, when he became assured that Croustillac was absolutely determined to penetrate the forest. The priest thought that the boar would protect Croustillac from some of the dangers to which he would be exposed; but the early flight of the latter rendered the thoughtfulness of Father Griffen futile.

After placing the house in charge of the two blacks, on whose faithfulness he knew he could count, the priest spurred Grenadille, whistled to Colas, who responded with a joyful grunt, and like another St. Antony, the good father took the road which would lead him to Devil's Cliff, fearful of arriving too late, and also of encountering on the way De Chemerant, whom he could with difficulty hope to head off.

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The reader will remember that, thanks to the voracity of the wildcats which had devoured the corpse of the sailor John, Colonel Rutler had been enabled to emerge from the pearl-fisher's cave by way of the underground passage. In order to understand the extreme importance and difficulty of the expedition which Colonel Rutler had undertaken, we must recall to the reader that the park contiguous to Blue Beard's mansion ran from north to south, like a kind of isthmus surrounded by abysses. On the east and west these abysses were almost without bottom, for on these sides the furthestmost trees of the garden overhung a peak of tremendous height, whose granite face was washed by the deep and rapid waters of two torrents. But on the north, the park jutted on a steep incline, accessible, though dangerous in the extreme. Nevertheless, this side of the garden was sheltered from attack, for in order to climb these rocks, less perpendicular than those on the east and west, it was necessary to first descend to the bottom of the abyss by the opposite side, an undertaking physically impossible to attempt, even with the aid of a rope of sufficient length, the face of the rock sometimes jutting out and sometimes broken by the angles of the rocks projecting or receding.

Colonel Rutler, on the contrary, having passed through the underground passage, had at once reached the foot of the precipice; there remained for him only to essay the perilous ascent in order that he might gain entrance into Devil's Cliff. It would take about an hour to climb these rocks; he did not wish to enter the park surrounding the mansion until night had fallen; he waited before starting on his road, until the sun should be setting. The colonel had thrust the skeleton of John out of the passage. It was thus, near these human remains, in a profound and wild solitude, in the midst of a veritable chaos of enormous masses of granite thrown up by the convulsions of nature, that the emissary of William of Orange passed some hours, reclining in a cleft in the rocks in order to escape the heat of a tropical sun.

The oppressive silence of this solitary place was now and then interrupted by the roar of the sea as it fell upon the beach. Soon the golden light of the sun became more rosy; great angles of light outlined the face of the rocks where one could discern the further trees of Blue Beard's park, becoming fainter, little by little; and dull mists began to envelop the bottom of the abyss where Rutler waited. The colonel judged it time to depart.

Notwithstanding his rare energy, this man of iron felt himself seized, in spite of himself, with a kind of superstitious fear; the horrible death of his companion had affected him keenly, the enforced fast to which he had been subjected since the preceding evening (he could not bring himself to eat the serpent), mounted to his head, causing singular and sinister ideas; but, surmounting this weakness, he commenced the ascent.

At first Rutler found the points of support allowed him to rapidly climb a third of the face of the cliff. Then serious obstacles began to present themselves; but with dogged courage he surmounted them. At the moment when the sun disappeared suddenly below the horizon, the colonel reached the summit of the cliff; broken by fatigue and pain, he fell half-fainting at the foot of the further trees of the park at Devil's Cliff; happily among these were several cocoanut trees; a large quantity of ripe nuts lay on the ground. Rutler opened one with the point of his dagger; the fresh liquid inclosed within appeased his thirst, and its nourishing pulp his hunger. This unexpected refreshment renewed his strength, and the colonel penetrated resolutely into the park; he walked with extreme caution, guiding himself by the instructions John had given him, in order that he might reach the white marble fountain not far from which he wished to conceal himself. After walking some time in this obscurity, under a tall forest of orange trees, Rutler heard in the distance a slight sound as of a stream of water falling into a basin; soon after he reached the border of the orange grove, and by the faint light of the stars—for the moon would not rise until later—he saw a large vase of white marble, situated in the midst of a circular space, on all sides surrounded with trees. The colonel, pushing aside some thick shrubs of Indian plants, enormous reeds which grow abundantly in that humid soil, hid himself some steps away from the fountain and quietly awaited events.

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In order to sum up the chances of the safety or danger to which the mysterious dwellers at Devil's Cliff were exposed, we must remind the reader that De Chemerant had started from Fort Royal in the afternoon, and was advancing with all haste; that Father Griffen had hastily left Macouba in order to head off the French envoy; and that Colonel Rutler had secreted himself in the center of the garden.

We must now relate all that since the morning had passed over the heads of Youmäale, Blue Beard and the Chevalier de Croustillac.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SURPRISE.

WE left the adventurer under the unexpected attack of a passion as sudden as it was sincere, and waiting impatiently the explanation, possibly the hope, which Blue Beard was about to give him.

After partaking of a repast respectfully served him by Angela, to the despair of the chevalier, the Caribbean gravely withdrew and seated himself on the border of a small lake, under the shadow of a mangrove tree which grew on its bank; then resting his elbows on his knees and his chin in the palms of his hands Youmäale gazed into space, and motionless maintained for a long time the contemplative idleness so dear to savage races.

Angela had re-entered the house. The chevalier walked up and down in the park, throwing, at intervals, a jealous and angry glance at the Caribbean. Impatient at the silence and immobility of his rival, and hoping, perhaps, to draw from him some information, Croustillac placed himself near Youmäale, who, however, did not appear to notice him. Croustillac moved and coughed; no change on the part of the Caribbean. Finally the chevalier, with whom patience was not a favorite virtue, touched him lightly on the shoulder and said, "What the devil have you been looking at for the past two hours? The sun is nearly setting, and you have not moved."

The Caribbean turned his head slowly toward the chevalier, looked fixedly at him, still resting his chin on his palms, and then resumed his former attitude, without replying.

The adventurer colored angrily, and said, "Zounds! when I speak, I wish to be answered."

The Caribbean maintained silence.

"These grand airs do not impress me," cried Croustillac. "I am not one of those to be eaten alive!"

No answer.

"Zounds!" continued the chevalier; "do you not know, stupid cannibal that you are, I can make you take an involuntary bath in the lake as a means to teach you manners, and in order to civilize you, you savage?"

Youmäale arose gravely, threw a disdainful glance at the chevalier, then pointed at an enormous trunk of a mahogany tree with gnarled roots which formed the rustic bench upon which he had been sitting.

"Well, what of it?" said the chevalier. "I see that trunk, but I do not understand your gesture, unless it signifies that you are as deaf and dumb and as stupid as that tree."

Without responding to this, the Caribbean stooped, took the trunk of the tree in his muscular arms, and threw it into the lake with a significant gesture, which seemed to say, "That is how I could treat you." Then he slowly withdrew, without having revealed in his features the slightest emotion.

The chevalier was stupefied by this proof of extraordinary strength; for the block of mahogany tree appeared to him, and in fact was, so heavy that two men could with difficulty have accomplished what the Caribbean unaided had done. His surprise having passed, the chevalier hastened after the savage, exclaiming, "Do you mean to say that you would have thrown me into the lake as you threw that trunk?"

The Caribbean, without pausing in his passage, bent his head affirmatively.

"After all," thought Croustillac, halting, "this eater of missionaries is not lacking in good sense; I threatened him first with throwing him into the water, and after what I have seen I am obliged to confess that I should have found it hard to do so, and then it would have been rather a dishonorable way in which to dispose of a rival! Ah, the evening is slow in coming. Thank God! the sun is setting, the night will soon fall; the moon will rise and I shall know my fate; the widow will tell me everything, I shall unravel all the profound mystery which is hidden from me now. Let me think over the sonnet which I have reserved for a grand effect—it is intended to describe the beauty of her eyes. Perhaps she has never heard a sonnet—possibly she will be sensible of its beauty and spirit; but no, I cannot hope for that happiness."

Pacing the path with long strides, Croustillac began to declaim his verses:

"They are not eyes, they are two gods,

Which are robed in power complete.

Gods? nay, they are the heavens——"

The adventurer was not to finish his verse, for Mirette came to inform him that her mistress was awaiting him at supper. The Caribbean never partook of this meal, and Croustillac was to be alone with the widow. She seemed dreamy and said little; she started involuntarily and frequently.

"What troubles you, madame?" said Croustillac, also preoccupied.

"I do not know; strange presentiments, but I am foolish. It is your gloomy face that gives me the blues," she added, with a forced smile. "Come, amuse me a little, chevalier. Youmäale is doubtless at this moment worshipping certain stars, and I am surprised at not seeing him; but it rests with you to make me forget his absence."

"Here is an excellent opportunity to produce my sonnet," said the Gascon to himself. "If I dared, madame, I would recite some little verses which might, perhaps, interest you."

"Verses—how? are you a poet, chevalier?"

"All lovers are, madame."

"That is an admission—you are in love, in order to be entitled to be a poet?"

"No, madame," said Croustillac sadly. "I am in love by right of suffering."

"And to chant your sad martyrdom—let us hear the verses."

"The verses, madame, do all in their power to picture two blue eyes, blue and beautiful, like yours; it is a sonnet."

"Let us have this sonnet."

And Croustillac recited the following lines in a languorous and impassioned tone:

"They are not eyes, rather gods are they,

They are above kings in power true.

Gods, no! they are the heavens of tender blue,

And their radiant glance makes kings obey."

"One must choose, chevalier," said Blue Beard; "are they eyes, or gods, or the heavens?"

Croustillac's reply was a happy one:

"The heavens, no! each a radiant sun

Whose burning rays but blind the view.

Suns? not so, but light so strong, so true,

They predict the love but just begun!"

"Really, chevalier, I am curious to know where you will stop. Suns, I own, please me; gods also."

Croustillac continued with a languorous softness:

"Ah! if gods, would they work me ill?

If the heavens, would add more sorrow still?

Two suns? 'tis false—that orb is one——"

"Ah, heavens, chevalier, you delight me; among all these charming comparisons there remains nothing more for me but lightening——"

Croustillac bowed his head:

"Stars! no, the stars are too many, too clear,
Always my meaning shineth still,
Eyes, gods, suns, and stars appear."

"How charming; at least, chevalier," said Angela, laughing, "you have given me a choice of comparisons, and I have but to select; therefore I shall keep them all—gods, heavens, suns and stars."

The adventurer looked at Blue Beard a moment in silence; then he said, in a tone the sadness of which was so sincere that the little widow was struck by it, "You are right, madame; this sonnet is absurd; you do well to mock at it, but what would you have? I am unhappy, I am justly punished for my mad presumption, my stupidity."

"Ah, chevalier, chevalier, you forget my request; I told you to divert me, to amuse me——"

"And if, in so doing, I suffer? if, in spite of my absurd situation, I experience a cruel mortification; how can I play the buffoon?"

The adventurer uttered these words quietly but in a penetrating tone, and with considerable emotion. Angela looked at him in astonishment, and was almost touched by the expression of the chevalier's face. She reproached herself for having played with this man's feelings; after all, he lacked neither heart, courage nor goodness; these reflections plunged the young woman into the midst of melancholy thoughts. In spite of the passing effort which she had made to be gay and to laugh at the sonnet of the Gascon, she was a prey to inexplicable forebodings, oppressed by vague fears, as if she felt instinctively the dangers that were gathering about her.

Croustillac had fallen into a sad reverie. Angela's eyes fell upon him and she felt sorry for him; she would no longer prolong the mystery of which he was a victim. She rose abruptly from the table and said to him, with a serious air, "Come, we will walk in the garden and rejoin Youmäale. His absence worries me. I do not know why, but I am oppressed as if a violent tempest were about to break upon this house."

The widow left the room, the chevalier offered her his arm, and they descended into the garden, where they sauntered through the different paths. The adventurer was so impressed by the anxious frame of mind in which he saw Angela that he retained little hope, and hardly dared to recall to her the promise which she had made him. Finally he said with some embarrassment, "You promised me, madame, to explain the mystery of——"

Blue Beard interrupted the chevalier by saying, "Listen to me, sir; whether it is owing to timidity or to premonition, I grow more and more agitated—it seems to me that misfortune menaces us; on no account would I at this

time, and in the condition of my spirits, prolong any further a jest which has already lasted too long."

"A jest, madame?"

"Yes, sir; but I beg of you, let us descend to the lower terrace. Do you see Youmääle there?"

"No, madame; the night is very clear, but I see no one. You say, then, a jest only——"

"Yes, sir; I learned through our friend, Father Griffen, that you intended to offer yourself to me; I sent the buccaneer to meet you, charging him to bring you here. I received you with the intention, I confess, and I beg your pardon, of amusing myself a little at your expense."

"But, madame, this evening, even, you intended to explain to me the mystery of your triple widowhood—the death of your husbands and the presence successively, of the filibuster, the——"

Angela interrupted the Gascon by saying, "Do you not hear a footfall? Is it Youmääle?"

"I hear nothing," said Croustillac, overwhelmed in the view of his ruined hopes, though he held himself in readiness for anything, now that a true love had extinguished his stupid and foolish vanity.

"Let us go further," said Blue Beard; "the Caribbean is among the orange trees by the fountain, perhaps."

"But, madame, this mystery?"

"The mystery," replied Angela, "if it is one, cannot, must not be solved by you. My promise to reveal this secret to you to-night was a jest of which I am now heartily ashamed, I tell you; and if I kept this foolish promise it would be to make you the object of another mystery more culpable still."

"Ah, madame," said the chevalier quickly, "this is very cruel."

"What more would you ask, sir? I accuse myself and beg your pardon," said Angela, in a sweet and sad voice. "Forget the folly of what I have said; think no longer of my hand, which can belong to no one; but sometimes remember the recluse of Devil's Cliff, who is, perhaps, at once very culpable and very innocent. And then," she continued hesitatingly, "as a remembrance of Blue Beard, you will permit me, will you not, to offer you some of the diamonds of which you were so enamored before you had seen me."

The chevalier blushed with shame and anger; the pure feeling which he felt for Angela made him feel as derogatory an offer which at one time would, doubtless, have been accepted without the slightest scruple. "Madame," said he, with as much pride as bitterness, "you have accorded me hospitality for

two days; to-morrow I shall leave; the only request I make of you is to give me a guide. As to your offer, it wounds me doubly——"

"Sir!"

"Yes, madame, that you should believe me low enough to accept payment for the humiliating circumstances——"

"Sir, such was not my idea."

"Madame, I am poor, I am ridiculous and vain; I am what is termed a man of expedencies; but even I have my point of honor."

"But, sir——"

"But, madame, that I should barter my pride and will as an exchange for the hospitality offered me, would be a bargain like another, worse than another, perhaps; so be it; when one places oneself in dependence upon another more fortunate than oneself, one must be content with anything. I entertained the captain of the Unicorn in exchange for my passage, which he gave me on board his vessel. We are quits. I have cut a contemptible figure, madame; I know it more fully than any one else, for I have known misfortune more fully."

"Poor man!" said the widow, touched by his avowal.

"I do not say this to be pitied, madame," said Croustillac proudly. "I only desire to make you understand that if, from necessity, I have been compelled to accept the part of a complacent guest, I have never received money as a compensation for an insult." Then he continued, in a tone of profound emotion, "Can you, madame, be ignorant of the wrong which has been done me by this proposition, not so much because it is humiliating, as because it was made by you? My God! you wished to amuse yourself with me: that I would have endured without complaint; but to offer me money to compensate for your raillery—ah! madame, you have made me acquainted with a misery of which I was heretofore ignorant." After a moment's silence he continued, with added bitterness, "After all, why should you have treated me otherwise? Who am I? Under what auspices did I come here? Even the clothes I wear are not my own! Why concern yourself with me?"

These last words of the poor man had an accent of such sincere grief and mortification that the young woman, touched by them, regretted deeply the indiscreet proffer she had made him. With bent head she walked beside Croustillac. They arrived, thus, near the fountain of white marble of which they had spoken.

The young widow still leaned on the adventurer's arm. After a few minutes of reflection she said, "You are right; I was wrong. I judged you wrongly. The compensation I offered you was almost an insult; but do not for a moment

think that I wished to humiliate you. Recall what I said to you this morning of your courage and the generosity of your heart. Well, all this I still think. You say you love me; if this love is sincere it cannot offend me; it would be wrong in me to receive so flattering a feeling with contempt. So," she continued, with a charming air, "is peace declared? Are you still angry with me? Say no, that I may ask you to remain here some days as a friend, without fear of your refusal."

"Ah, madame," cried Croustillac, with transport "order, dispose of me—I am your servant, your slave, your dog. These kind words which you have spoken will make me forget all! Your friend! you have called me your friend! Ah, madame, why am I only the poor younger son of a Gascon? I should be so happy to have it in my power to prove my devotion."

"Who knows but that I have a reparation to make you? Await me here; I must go and look for Youmääle and find something, a present, yes, chevalier, a present which I defy you to refuse this time."

"But, madame——"

"You refuse? Ah, heavens! when I think that you desired to be my husband! Wait here, I will return." And so saying, Angela, who had reached the marble fountain, turned quickly into the path in the park on the side of the house.

"What does she wish to say—to do?" asked Croustillac of himself, looking mechanically into the fountain. Then he exclaimed, with fervor, "It is all the same, I am hers for life and death; she has called me her friend. I shall perhaps never see her again, but all the same, I worship her; that cannot hurt any one; and I do not know but that it will make me a better man. Two days ago I would have accepted the diamonds; to-day I would be ashamed to do so. It is wonderful how love changes one."

Croustillac was suddenly interrupted in the midst of his philosophical reflections. Colonel Rutler, by the uncertain light of the moon, had seen the adventurer walking arm in arm with Blue Beard; he had heard her last words—"my husband; wait for me here." Rutler had no doubt that the Gascon was the man for whom he was looking; he sprang suddenly from his hiding-place, hurled himself upon the chevalier threw a cloak over his face, and, profiting by Croustillac's surprise, felled him to the ground. Then he passed a rope around his hands and had quickly mastered his captive's resistance, thanks to great strength. The chevalier was thus overpowered, garroted and captured in less time than it has taken to write these words.

This accomplished, the colonel held a dagger at Croustillac's throat, and said, "My lord duke, you are dead if you make a movement, or if you call Madame the Duchess to your aid. In the name of William of Orange, King of England, I arrest you for high treason, and you will follow me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MY LORD DUKE.

SUDDENLY attacked by an adversary of extraordinary strength, Croustillac did not even attempt to resist. The cloak which enveloped his head almost deprived him of breath. He could hardly utter a few inarticulate cries. Rutler leaned over him and said in English, with a strong Dutch accent, "My lord duke, I can remove this cloak, but beware, if you call for aid you are a dead man; can you feel the point of my dagger?"

The unfortunate Croustillac did not understand English, but he understood the dagger's point, and exclaimed, "Speak French!"

"I can understand that your grace, having been brought up in France, should prefer that language," replied Rutler, who believed that his Dutch accent made his words a little obscure, and he continued, "You must pardon me, my lord, if I do not express myself very well in French. I have the honor to inform your grace that at the slightest sound from you I shall be compelled to kill you. It depends upon you, my lord, to preserve your life or not, by preventing madame the duchess, your wife, from calling for aid if she returns."

"It is evident that he takes me for some one else," thought the chevalier. "In what devil of a network am I entangled? What is this new mystery? and who is this brutal Dutchman with his eternal dagger and his 'my lord duke?' After all, it is gratifying not to be taken for an insignificant man. And Blue Beard is a duchess and passes for my wife!"

"Listen, my lord," said Rutler after some moments of silence, "for your grace's greater convenience, I can free you from the cloak which enwraps you; but, I repeat, at the slightest cry from madame the duchess, the slightest indication of a rescue by your slaves, I shall be compelled to kill you. I have promised the king, my master, to bring you to him, dead or alive."

"I stifle! take off the cloak at once, I will not make any outcry," murmured Croustillac, believing that the colonel would discover his error.

Rutler removed the cloak which enveloped the face of the adventurer, who saw a man kneeling beside him and threatening him with a dagger. The night was clear; the chevalier could distinguish perfectly the features of the colonel; they were absolutely unknown to him.

"My lord! remember your promise," said Rutler, who did not evince the slightest surprise when the face of the adventurer was seen.

"How! he does not perceive his mistake," thought the astonished chevalier.

"Meanwhile, my lord," replied the colonel, assisting Croustillac to seat himself as comfortably as he could near the fountain, "meanwhile, my lord, pardon the rudeness of my attack, but I was forced to this."

Croustillac made no reply. Divided between fear and curiosity, he was burning to know to whom these words were addressed: 'My lord duke.' Naturally of an adventurous turn, he could not but be the gainer, doubtless by being taken for another, above all, for the husband of Blue Beard; and the chevalier resolved to play, as far as he could, the rôle which he had involuntarily assumed, hoping, possibly, to thus learn the secret of the dwellers of Devil's Cliff. He answered, however, "Are you sure, sir, that it is I whom you are seeking?"

"Your grace need not attempt to deceive me," said Rutler. "It is true that I have not had the honor of seeing you before to-day, my lord; but I heard your conversation with madame the duchess. Who but you, my lord, would be walking with her at this hour? Who but you would be dressed in this coat with the red sleeve, as shown by James Syllon, who painted you in this costume?"

"And I thought this costume so fantastic," reflected Croustillac.

"It is not for me to express surprise at finding you wearing these garments which must often recall memories so cruel," continued Rutler, with a gloomy air.

"Cruel memories!" repeated Croustillac.

"My lord," said the colonel, "two years before the fatal day of Bridgewater, dressed in this coat, did you not render homage to your royal father, when hunting at Lancaster?"

"To my royal father? a falcon?" said the chevalier, astounded.

"I understand your grace's embarrassment, and that you do not wish to recall these sad disputes for which you have been so severely and, permit me to say it, my lord, so justly punished."

"I will permit you to say anything to me, sir, in fact, I earnestly insist upon it without delay," replied the Gascon; and, aside, "perhaps I shall learn something in this way."

"Time is precious," said Rutler. "I must hasten to inform your grace that I only await your submission to the commands of my master, William of Orange, King of England."

"Speak, sir, and do not hesitate to enter into the most minute details."

"In order to make you understand, your grace, what remains for me to exact from you, it is very necessary to establish clearly your position, my lord, however painful the duty may be."

"Establish it, sir, speak frankly; hold back nothing. We are men and soldiers; we should know how to hear all things."

"You acknowledge, then, that from this moment you cannot escape."

"That is true."

"That your life is in my hands."

"That is also true."

"But that, which must be a very great consideration, my lord, is that, in attempting to escape, or in refusing to obey the orders which I bear, you put me to the hard necessity of killing you."

"A hard necessity for both of us, sir."

"Then your grace will give strict attention to what I have to say," said the colonel, emphasizing the following words: "I can with the more impunity kill you, my lord, because you are already dead—and therefore it would not be necessary to render an account for shedding your blood."

The chevalier looked at Rutler with a stupefied air, thinking he must have heard him wrong. "You say, sir, that you could with the more impunity kill me?"

"Since your grace is already dead," said Rutler, with a sinister smile.

Croustillac looked at him more closely, believing he was dealing with a madman; then he said, after a moment's silence, "If I understand you aright, sir, you wish to make me believe that you could kill me with impunity, under the pretext, specious enough, that I am already dead!"

"Exactly, my lord; that is very simple."

"You think that very simple, sir?"

"I do not think you wish to deny, my lord, what is known to all the world," said Rutler impatiently.

"It seems to me that, without wishing to pass for a man who has lost his head, and who is dominated with a desire to contradict the whole world, I must still to a certain extent deny that I am dead."

"I would not have believed, my lord, that you could jest at such a moment, you who always carry with you such frightful memories," said the colonel, with gloomy surprise.

"Certainly, sir, at such a moment one cannot forget himself. That which is more difficult is to retain memory," said Croustillac, smiling.

The colonel could not prevent a gesture of indignation, and cried, "You smile! when it is at the price of the noblest blood that you are here! Ah, such then will always be the gratitude of princes!"

"I must say to you, sir," impatiently replied Croustillac, "that it is not of gratitude or ingratitude that we speak in this matter, and that—but," he continued, fearing to make some blunder, "but it seems to me that we wander strangely from the question at issue. I prefer to speak of something else."

"I can imagine that such a subject would be disagreeable to your grace."

"It is not a lively one, sir, certainly; but return to the motive which has brought you hither—what do you wish of me?"

"I am ordered, my lord, to conduct you to the Barbadoes; from there you will be transported and incarcerated in the Tower of London, of which your grace has retained remembrance."

"Zounds! to prison!" said the Gascon to himself, to whom this prospect was not inviting; "to prison—in the Tower of London! I must inform this Dutch animal of his mistake; this mistaken identity no longer pleases me. The devil! to the Tower of London! this is paying for 'your grace' and 'my lord' rather too dearly!"

"It is unnecessary for me to say to you, my lord, that you will be treated with the respect due to your misfortunes and your rank. Except for liberty, which can never be accorded you, you will be surrounded by care and consideration."

"After all," thought Croustillac, "why should I hasten to dissuade this northern bear? I have no hope, alas, of interesting Blue Beard in my martyrdom. It seems to me that I perceive vaguely that the mistake of this Dutchman in my person may serve this adorable little creature. If that is so, I shall be delighted. Once having reached England, the mistake will be discovered and I set free; and, as it is best, after all, that I return to Europe, I should like better if it were possible, to return in the character of a great prince, a lord, than as a free passenger of Captain Daniel's. I shall not at least be compelled to balance forks on the end of my nose nor be reduced to swallowing lighted candles."

The colonel, taking the Gascon's silence for despair, said to him, in a gentler tone, "I suppose your grace perceives with pain the future before you. There is enough occasion for it, it seems to me."

"To be a prisoner always in the Tower of London?"

"Yes, my lord; but you cannot enjoy much liberty here; perhaps this life of agony and continual unrest is not so much to be regretted?"

"You wish to gild the pill, as they say, sir; your motive is praiseworthy; but you appear very certain of carrying me to Barbadoes, and from there to the Tower of London?"

"To accomplish this, my lord, I had brought with me a most determined man. He is dead, however—a most frightful death." And Rutler trembled in spite of himself at the remembrance of John's death.

"And so, sir, you were reduced to accomplish this expedition yourself?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And you flatter yourself that you can carry me off, unaided?"

"Yes, my lord."

"You are sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure."

"And by means of what miracle?"

"There is no need of a miracle; the thing is very simple, my lord."

"May I know it?"

"You must be informed of it, my lord, because I count principally upon your assistance."

"To enable you to carry me off?"

"Yes, my lord."

"The fact is, that, without vanity, I can, under these circumstances, if I mix myself in the matter, be of some help to you?"

After a moment's reflection, Rutler said, "Your firmness has not been exaggerated, your grace; it would be impossible to show a more resolute spirit or more coolness under ill fortune."

"I assure you, sir, that it would be difficult for me to bear it otherwise."

"If I have spoken thus my lord, it is because you, being a man of coolness and resolution, can understand better than any one what must be accepted with coolness and resolution, for I have no choice but to carry you away from here."

"Listen, sir; if the expedient is good, I will be the first to acknowledge it. One moment, however; you seem to forget that I am not here alone."

"I know that, my lord; madame the duchess has but just quitted you, she may return any moment."

"And not alone, I warn you of that."

"Were she accompanied by a hundred armed men I should not fear."

"Truly?"

"No, my lord, I will go further; I rather count upon the return of the duchess to decide you to follow me in case you still hesitate."

"Sir you speak in riddles."

"I will tell you the word very soon my lord, but first I must inform you that almost all is known concerning you since your flight from London."

"In denying this to him I shall force him to speak; and I shall perhaps learn something more," said the chevalier to himself. "As to that, sir I, cannot believe it; it is not possible."

"Listen to me, my lord; it is now four years since you espoused in France the mistress of this house. Whether the marriage be legal or not, having been contracted after your execution, and consequently during the widowhood of your first wife, does not concern me—that is a matter for your conscience and the church."

"Decidedly my friend the duke has placed himself in an exceptional position," said Croustillac to himself, "he can be murdered because he is dead; and he can remarry because his wife is his widow! I begin to have my ideas singularly mixed, for since yesterday very strange things have come to my knowledge."

"You see, my lord, that my information is exact."

"Exact—exact—to a certain point. You believe me capable of having remarried after my execution; that is rather risky. The devil! sir, one must be very sure of his facts, at least, to attribute to men such original proceedings."

"Hold, my lord, you doubtless do not believe in my authority, and you jest; but your gayety does not surprise me; your grace has kept his freedom of spirit in circumstances more serious than this."

"What would you wish, sir? gayety is the wealth of the poor."

"My lord," cried the colonel, in a severe tone, "the king, my master, does not merit this reproach."

"What reproach?" said the Gascon, stupefied.

"Your grace said that gayety is the wealth of the poor."

"Well, sir, I do not see what there is to insult your master, the king, in that."

"Is it not equivalent to saying, my lord, that because you see yourself in the power of my master that you look upon yourself as despoiled of everything?"

"You are sensitive, sir. Be assured this reflection was purely philosophical and did not have reference to my particular position."

"That is different, my lord; but I am astonished to hear you speak of your poverty."

"Zounds! that has often made me bitterly lament," said Croustillac, laughing.

"Few fortunes equal yours, sir. The enormous sum you received from the sale of a portion of your precious stones will be secured to you and yours. William of Orange, my master, is not one of those who enrich themselves by confiscating the goods of their political enemies."

"I did not know thou wast so rich, poor Croustillac," said the Gascon to himself. "If I had known this, how little would I have swallowed candles for the amusement of that brute of a sea captain." Then he continued, aloud, "I am aware of the generosity of your master, sir; also of my goods and treasures." And the Gascon said to himself, "It does me good to say this for once in my life—my goods, my treasures."

"The king, my master, my lord, has directed me to say to you that you can charter a vessel to carry your wealth to England."

"Oh, my old pink hose, my old green coat, my felt hat and my old sword!" said Croustillac to himself; "those are my real possessions, my real and personal estate! It would not take a merchant ship to transport them." Then he continued aloud, "But let us return to the motive, sir, which brought you here, and to the discoveries which you have made as to my past life."

"For the past three years, my lord, you have lived on this island, remaining hidden to every one, and causing to be spread by a filibuster and others in your pay the strangest stories concerning your house, in order to keep the curious away."

"I do not understand this at all," thought Croustillac. "Blue Beard—no, the widow, that is to say—no, the duchess or rather the wife of the man who is dead, who is a widower—in fact, the wife of no matter whom, is not, then, behind the best of them with her three oddities. For I have seen with my own eyes her strange familiarity with them. I have heard—come, come, if this lasts but a little longer I shall become mad; I am beginning to feel stupid and to see an endless succession of Roman candles in my head!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SURPRISE.

RUTLER continued: "The maneuvers of your emissaries were crowned with perfect success, my lord, and it was due to the merest chance that your existence was revealed to my master, some two months since, and in order to inform him that without your knowledge, or without your full consent, they would make, my lord, a dangerous instrument of you."

"Of me? an instrument of me? and what kind of an instrument, sir?"

"Your grace knows that as well as I do; the policy of the cabinet at Versailles and of the papal court at Saint-Germain recoils before no means; it matters little to them that civil war shall lay waste an unhappy country provided their plans succeed. I have no need to say more, my lord."

"Yes, sir, yes. I desire that you tell me everything; I would see to what point your credulity has been abused. Explain, sir."

"The proof that my credulity has not been abused, my lord, is that my mission has for its end the ruin of the projects of an emissary from France, who, with or without the co-operation of your grace, may arrive at any moment at this island."

"I give you my word of honor, sir, that I am ignorant of the arrival of this French emissary."

"I must believe you, my lord. However, certain rumors have caused the king to think that your grace, forgetting his old resentment against James Stuart, your uncle, had written to this dethroned king to offer him his services."

"James Stuart, being dethroned," said Croustillac, with an accent full of dignity, "changes entirely the face of things, and I should have been able to condescend in regard to my uncle to proceedings which my pride would never have permitted me before."

"Then, my lord, from your point of view, your resolve would not have lacked generosity."

"Doubtless I could perfectly well, without compromising myself, have been reconciled to a dethroned king," replied Croustillac courageously; "but I have not done so; I swear it on the honor of a gentleman."

"I believe you, your grace."

"Well, then, your mission has no further object."

"You understand, my lord, that, in spite of this guarantee, circumstances may change, and your resolve change with circumstances. The hope of ascending the throne of England causes one to forget many promises and to evade many agreements. Far be it from me to wish to reproach you for the

past, but your grace knows what must be sacrificed when one lays audacious hands upon the crown of three kingdoms."

"Zounds!" said Croustillac to himself; "it seems that my hand is not dead, and that I am, clearly, a courageous fellow to be well caged. If I only knew how all this would end I should be very much amused."

"The king can never forget, my lord, that you have your own aspirations to the throne."

"Ah, well, that is true," cried Croustillac, with an expression of frankness—"it is true, I do not deny. But what would you have? ambition, glory, the vigor of youth! But believe me, sir," continued he with a sigh and speaking in a melancholy tone, "age robs us of all that and makes us wise; with added years, ambition is extinguished and one becomes content with very little in one's retreat. Once safely in port, we can cast a philosophical glance on the storms of passion and cultivate the paternal lands, if one has such, or at least look upon the tide of life placidly when about to be swallowed up in the ocean of eternity. In a word, you understand, sir, that if in our first youth we have let ourselves go at an audacious pace it does not follow that in our ripe age we should not realize that all is vanity. I live obscurely and peacefully in the bosom of my retreat, with a young and lovely wife; loved by those about me and doing some good. Ah, sir, this is the only life that I desire; I do not hesitate, then, in confirmation of these words, to swear to you that I will never raise the slightest pretension to the throne of England; on the word of a gentleman, I have not the slightest desire to."

"Unhappily, my lord, I am not at liberty to take your oath; the king, alone, could receive it, and accept it if it seemed well to him, as a sufficient guarantee against fresh troubles. As for me, I have been ordered to conduct your grace to London, and I must fulfill my orders."

"You are very persistent, sir. When you have an idea, you keep to it."

"At whatever cost, my lord, I must carry out the orders given me. You can see by the perfectly calm interview between us that I do not doubt the success of my undertaking; your grace fully understands the motives that influence me; and I do not doubt that you will follow me without the slightest resistance."

Croustillac had prolonged this interview as far as he could; he had decided either to follow the colonel or to tell him the whole truth. He then said to Rutler, "And suppose, sir, that I consent to follow you willingly, what will be the order of our march, as they say?"

"Your grace, though your hands are tied, permit me to offer you my left arm; I shall hold my dagger in my right hand, ready at any moment to plunge it into you, in case of a surprise, and we will proceed to your house."

"And then, sir?"

"Once having reached your house, my lord, you will order one of your slaves at once to direct your negro fishermen to get their boat in readiness; it will suffice to transport us to Barbadoes. In that place we will find a man-of-war which awaits us, and on board which, my lord, you will be transported to London, and placed in the custody of the governor of the Tower."

"And you seriously believe, sir, that I will myself give the order to prepare for my own abduction?"

"Yes, my lord, and for a very simple reason; your grace will feel the point of this dagger."

"Yes, doubtless; you always go back to that, you repeat it often, sir."

"We Dutchmen have little imagination; what would you have? There is nothing more churlish than our manner of acting; but to resume, what is more to the point, this blade of steel will suffice, for if you refuse to obey my slightest injunction, my lord, I have already said by way of warning that I shall kill you without mercy."

"I have also said to you, sir, that your manner of proceeding does not lack originality; but I have slaves—friends, sir—and you see that, in spite of your bravery——"

"My God! your grace, if I kill you it is evident that I shall be killed in turn, either by your slaves or your familiars, the filibuster or the buccaneer, or by the French authorities, who would do perfectly right in shooting me because I come from England, and I have come to this island, which is considered as a stronghold in time of war."

"You perceive, then, sir, that my death will not go unpunished?"

"In accepting this charge I made, in advance, the offering of my life. All that I desire, my lord, is that you shall no longer be the source of fear to my master, a source of trouble for England. King William does not love bloodshed, but he hates civil war. Your perpetual imprisonment or your death alone can reassure him; choose, then, my lord, between the dagger or prison; it must be one; you must become my prisoner or my victim. Moreover, if you were not absolutely in my power I would not say to you, at the price of my life, what I will now say."

"Speak, sir."

"This confidence, while showing you the evil which you can do to England, my lord, also will show you what interest King William has that an enemy like yourself should be rendered powerless to act; the companions of your rebellion, who saw you beheaded before their own eyes, cherish still for you the dearest memories."

"Truly? This does not surprise me in them, and it is the more disinterested in that they all believe that I can never thank them for it." Then Croustillac said to himself, "It must be that this Dutchman, who otherwise is reasonable enough, has a craze on this point—a fixed idea concerning my execution."

The colonel continued, "Ah, my lord, you pay dearly for your influence."

"Very dearly, too dearly, sir, if this be so."

"Why do you wish to deny it, when your enemies remember? when it is known that your followers cherish portions of your clothing, stained with your blood, as if holy relics, and each day lament your death? What would be the result if you should suddenly appear before their eyes? What enthusiasm would you not arouse? I repeat to you, my lord, it is because your influence might be fatal in these troublous times, that it must be neutralized at any cost."

"To stab a man or imprison him for life is what you call neutralizing his influence," said Croustillac. "Ah, well, this is probably a political view of it. After all, I understand the distrust that I inspire you with, for I am an incorrigible conspirator. They cut off my head before my partisans, believing that thus I will be reformed. Not at all! instead of taking warning by this paternal admonition, I conspire still further. It is evident that this ends by making your master impatient. Ah, well, sir, he is unnecessarily moved; for the last time, I solemnly declare, before heaven, that I shall conspire no more; he can rest in peace on his throne, and his crown does not excite in me the slightest covetousness. Is this plain enough, sir?"

"Very plain, and well put, my lord; but I must carry out the commands of the king. When we shall have arrived at your house, I shall have the honor to transmit to you an autograph letter of His Majesty King William, which will leave you in no doubt as to the purpose and authority of the mission with which I am intrusted. Come, my lord, resign yourself; it is the fortune of war. Beside, if you hesitate, I can count upon a powerful ally."

"And that is——"

"Informed by me of the fate which menaces you, you proceed under the touch of my dagger."

"Always his eternal dagger! he is insufferable with his dagger," thought Croustillac. "He has but one word on his tongue."

"The duchess," continued Rutler, "would far rather see you a prisoner than killed; it is well known how she loves you, how devoted she is to you. She would give her life for you. She will aid, then, I am sure, in making you face your position wisely. Meanwhile, my lord, choose; either summon some of

your people, if they can hear you, or show me to your house yourself, for your departure must be hastened."

It must be said to Croustillac's credit, that, learning that Blue Beard was the wife of an invisible lord whom she loved passionately, and that he had been taken for this grand lord, he generously resolved to be of some use to this young wife by prolonging as far as possible the mistaken identity of which he was the victim, and to allow himself to be carried off in place of the unknown duke. Happy at the thought that Angela would be under a great obligation, the Gascon resigned himself courageously to submit to all the consequences of the position which he had accepted, only he did not know in what manner he could leave Devil's Cliff without the discovery of his stratagem.

"My lord, I am at your service; it is absolutely imperative that we depart at once," said the colonel impatiently.

"It is I who am at your service," replied the chevalier, who viewed with some disquiet the approach of the critical moment of this interview.

A brilliant idea struck Croustillac; he saw a means of escaping from this danger and of saving the mysterious husband of Blue Beard. "Listen, sir," said the adventurer, assuming an impressive manner. "I give you my word as a gentleman that I will follow you willingly wherever you lead me, but I desire that my wife, the duchess, shall not be informed of my arrest until I have gone."

"How, my lord, you are willing to thus abandon your wife without telling her of your sad situation?"

"Yes, because of reasons known to me alone, and then I would spare myself farewells, which must always be distressing."

"My orders concern you alone, my lord," said the colonel; "you are free to act as seems best to yourself, as far as the duchess is concerned. Nothing could be easier, it seems to me, than to do what you propose. If your wife is astonished at your departure, you can plead the imperative necessity of a journey of some days' duration to St. Pierre. As to my presence here, you can easily explain that. We will go, and your boat will take us to the Barbadoes."

"Doubtless, doubtless," said the embarrassed Gascon, for he saw a number of dangers in the proposition which the colonel made. "Doubtless my departure might be easily explained so, but to give my orders to the negroes, to cause a commotion in the house, would attract my wife's attention. She is extremely timid and is alarmed at everything. Your presence here would arouse her suspicions, and they would necessarily lead up to the painful scene which I would avoid at all cost."

"But, then, my lord, what shall we do?"

"There is a sure way, sir; however dangerous may have been the road by which you have arrived, let us follow it; we will leave the island by the same method by which you reached it. Once at the Barbadoes I will inform my wife of my abduction—the cruel abduction which separates me forever from her; and you will swear to me that she shall not be disturbed after my departure."

"Unfortunately, my lord, what you propose is impossible."

"How is that?"

"I came by way of the pearl diver's cavern, my lord."

"Well, can we not leave by the pearl diver's cavern?"

"Is it possible that you are ignorant, my lord, of the secret communication which exists between this cavern and the abyss which surrounds your park?"

"I am entirely ignorant as to it, but if this communication exists, can we not use it to leave by?"

"That is impossible, my lord; no one can enter the cavern except by allowing the waves to precipitate him to the bottom of a subterranean lake, after having descended a cataract."

"And in order to get out of this cavern?"

"You must ascend a waterfall twenty feet in height."

"That is too much for me. So, the vessel that brought you to the outside of this cavern——"

"Has already left for the Barbadoes, my lord. It could approach this island in spite of the French cruisers only because this coast is inaccessible."

"I thought that this road was impenetrable," said the chevalier, overcome.

"If you will believe me, my lord, you will limit yourself to announcing to madame the duchess that you will be absent for several days only. I have faith in your word as a gentleman that you will make no attempt to escape from my hands."

"I have given you my word, sir."

"I believe you, my lord, and my dagger answers to me for its fulfillment."

"I should have been very much astonished if the dagger had not reappeared," thought Croustillac. "He trusts implicitly in my word; that does not prevent his trusting as much to his dagger. Zounds! what distrust! But that is not what concerns me. What shall I do? The duchess is not prepared;

the slaves will not obey me if I give them orders. It is no use; behold me at the end of my falsehoods."

Croustillac had forced himself to become resigned to his assumption. He regretted sincerely that he was not to be permitted to devote himself more efficaciously to the service of Blue Beard; for he did not doubt that his ruse would be discovered the moment he put foot in the house. He had shortly another apprehension. The Caribbean, seeing Croustillac return accompanied by a stranger armed to the teeth, would attack the colonel. Now, the latter had assured the adventurer that at the first attack he would be compelled to kill him without mercy.

The chevalier began to find his rôle less diverting and to curse the stupid curiosity, the imprudent heedlessness which had thrown him into a position as complicated as it was dangerous.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DEPARTURE.

THE spirit of Croustillac was too mercurial and too adventurous to remain long under the weight of fear or sadness. He reasoned as follows: To-day, as heretofore, I have little or nothing to lose; if I decide to go out from this house, I continue to pass for the duke, and I am treated like a prince until some one discovers the imposition; then I shall become big John as heretofore, and I shall have rendered a great service to this pretty little Blue Beard, who has mocked at me, but who enchants me, for she interests me more than I wish, more than she merits perhaps, for, in spite of her love for this invisible husband, she appears to me madly tender with the buccaneer and that other brute, the cannibal. Well, what does it matter if it is my caprice to devote myself to this little woman? I am surely my own master; yes! but if, on the other hand, I do not leave this place? Suppose the Caribbean mixes himself in the affair, this would spoil all; it is clear that I shall be killed like a dog by this thick-headed Belgian. How, then, can I escape such a catastrophe? Say at once to the man with the dagger that I am not the duke? This might save me, perhaps, but no! this would be cowardice, and useless cowardice; for, to prevent my alarming the house, this beer-drinker would dispatch me at once. Yes, yes, in spite of my word as a gentleman not to seek to escape, he presses near me. Zounds! this man with his dagger is absurd! Bah! his dagger! he can only kill me once, after all. Come, then, courage! courage! Croustillac! and above all do not deliberate—this brings you sorrow; you never commit greater stupidities or more tremendous mistakes than when you deliberate. Commend yourself to your lucky star, shut your eyes, as usual, and go ahead.

Reassured by this excellent logic, the chevalier said aloud, "Well, sir, as we must absolutely pass the house in order to get out of this, let us go on."

"Sir," said the colonel, after a moment's reflection, "you have given me your word as a gentleman not to escape."

"Yes, sir."

"But your people will wish to free you?"

"My life is in your hands, sir; you have my word; I can do no more."

"That is true, my lord; but then, in your interest, warn your slaves that the slightest act against me, on their part, will cost your life, for I have sworn, also, that I will carry you away, dead or living."

"It will not be my fault, sir, if you do not keep your word; come on." And the chevalier and the colonel advanced toward the house.

Rutler held the arm of Croustillac under his left arm, and had his hand constantly on his dagger; not that he doubted the word of his prisoner, but the slaves at Devil's Cliff might wish to rescue their master.

Croustillac and Rutler were not more than a few steps from the house when from an obscure path a woman advanced dressed in white. The colonel stopped, pressed firmly the arm of his prisoner, and said aloud, "Who is this? My lord, warn this woman not to cry out."

"It is Blue Beard! I am lost; she will scream like a peacock, and all will be discovered," thought Croustillac. To his great astonishment the woman paused and did not speak. The Gascon said, "Who is it, then?"

"Is it so dark that my lord cannot recognize Mirette?" said the well-known voice of Blue Beard.

Croustillac was speechless with astonishment. Blue Beard also called him my lord, and assumed the name of Mirette! "Zounds!" he said to himself, "I understand nothing, nothing at all; all becomes more and more obscure; all the same, hold steady and play out the game."

"Who is this woman?" said the colonel, in a low tone.

"She is the confidential maid of my wife," responded the chevalier.

Angela spoke: "My lord, I come to say to your grace that my lady retired not feeling very well; but she is asleep now."

"All is in our favor, sir," said the colonel, in a low voice to Croustillac. "Madame the duchess is asleep; you can depart without her knowing anything about it."

Angela, who had approached, said with a frightened manner, and retreating a few steps, "Heavens! your grace is not alone, then?"

"My lord," said the colonel, "if she gives a cry it is all over with you."

"Do not be afraid, Mirette," said the chevalier; "while you were with my wife this gentleman arrived; he came from Fort Royal on pressing business; it is necessary that I should accompany him back."

"So late, my lord, but you must not think of it! I will go and inform madame."

"No! no! I forbid it; but I shall have need at once of the negro fishermen and their canoe; go and notify them."

"But, my lord——"

"Obey."

"That is not hard; to-morrow morning they fish in the open sea; the negroes must be nearly ready to go; in order to be before dawn at the Creek of Caymans, where their boat is moored."

"My lord, all favors us; you see it; let us go," said the colonel in a low voice.

"It is astonishing how Blue Beard anticipates my demands; and how she facilitates my departure," said Croustillac to himself; "there is something very strange under this. I was not, perhaps, altogether wrong in accusing her of magic or necromancy." Then he continued aloud, "You will go and open the outer gates, Mirette, and tell the blacks to prepare themselves at once. Well," said Croustillac, seeing the woman remain motionless, "did you not hear me?"

"Certainly, my lord, but then your grace is determined——"

"My lord! your grace!" you have repeatedly called me this before a stranger," said the Gascon with a threatening manner, thinking thus to make a master stroke. "What would happen if this gentleman were not in the secret?"

"Oh, I know well that if this stranger is here at this time, it follows that one may speak before him as before your grace and before madame. But is it possible, my lord, that you intend to go away?"

"The little fox wishes to have the air of detaining me in order to better play her part," thought Croustillac. "But who has informed her? who has designed this rôle for her so well? Decidedly, there must be jugglery going on here."

"But, my lord," continued Mirette, "what shall I say to madame?"

"You may say to her," said poor Croustillac, with a tenderness which the colonel attributed to most natural regrets, "you may say to this dear and good woman not to be afraid, do you hear, Mirette? not to be afraid; assure her that the short journey I am going to take is absolutely in her interest; tell her to think sometimes of me."

"Sometimes, my lord! why madame thinks of you and will think of you always," replied she, in an agitated voice, for she understood the hidden sense of Croustillac's words. "Be easy, my lord, madame knows how you love her, and she never forgets. But you will be here to-morrow, before she awakens, will you not?"

"Yes," said Croustillac, "certainly, to-morrow morning. Come, Mirette, hurry and warn the negro fishermen and open the gates; it is necessary to leave without delay."

"Yes, my lord, and at the same time I will bring your sword and your mantle in the salon, because the night is cold in the mountains. Ah! I had forgotten; here is your bonbonnière which you carry always with you, and which you

left in madame's room." So saying, Angela gave Gascon the box, warmly pressed his hand and left.

"Heaven be praised, my lord duke, that things are turning out better than I hoped," said the colonel. "Is the house very far off?"

"No; after we have climbed this last terrace we shall arrive there."

At the end of several minutes, Rutler and his captive entered the drawing room; the chevalier found Angela, who had put on a large veil and a long cloak which hid her figure; the young woman offered the chevalier a cloak which she had placed on a sofa.

"Here are your cloak and sword, my lord," she said to Croustillac, giving him a magnificent sword. "Now I will go and see if the slaves are ready." So saying she left the room.

The sword of which we have spoken was as rich in workmanship as curious in shape; the hilt was of massive gold; the scabbard enameled with the coat of arms of England; the hilt bore on it a rampant lion whose head, surmounted by a royal crown, served as a handle; the belt of great richness, although worn by frequent use, was of red velvet embroidered with fine pearls, in the midst of which the letters "C. S." were reproduced repeatedly.

Before putting on his sword Croustillac said to the colonel, "I am your prisoner, sir; may I retain my sword? I repeat my word not to make any use of it against you."

Doubtless this historic weapon was known to the colonel, for he replied, "I knew that this royal sword was in the hands of your grace; I have been ordered to respect it in case you followed me willingly."

"I understand," said Croustillac to himself. "Blue Beard continues to act with consummate cunning. She has decorated me with a part of the outfit of this mysterious duke, in order to clinch the error of this Flemish bear. My only regret is not knowing my name. I know, it is true, that my head was cut off; that is something; but that is not sufficient to prove my identity, as the lawyers say. Finally this will last as long as God pleases; once I have turned my back, Blue Beard will, doubtless, put her husband in some safe place. That is the principal thing. Meanwhile, let me put on his cloak and my disguise will be complete."

The mantle was of peculiar cut and was of blue with a kind of cape of red cloth trimmed with gold lace; it was easy to see that it had been in use a long time.

The colonel said to the chevalier, "You are faithful to the memory of the day at Bridgewater, my lord!"

"Hum, hum—faithful—here or there; that depends on the disposition in which I find myself."

"Nevertheless, my lord," returned the colonel, "I recognize the mantle of the red troops who fought so gallantly under your orders on that fatal day."

"That is what I tell you; whether I am cold or warm, I wear this mantle, but it is always in commemoration of that battle, when the red troops, as you say, fought so valiantly under me." The chevalier had placed the snuff box on the table. He took it up and looked at it mechanically; on the cover he recognized a very characteristic face which he had several times seen reproduced in engravings or paintings. After having searched his memory he remembered that the features were those of Charles II. of England.

Rutler said, "My lord, may your grace pardon me for recalling you from thoughts it is easy to divine on seeing the portrait on that box—but time is precious."

Angela entered at this moment and said to Croustillac: "My lord, the negroes are waiting with torches to light the way."

"Let us go, sir," said the chevalier, taking his hat from the hands of the young woman, who said to him in a low voice, "Next to my husband, it is you whom I love most in the world, for you have saved him."

The massive doors of Devil's Cliff closed on the chevalier and the colonel, and they at once started on their road, preceded by four blacks carrying torches to light the way.

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While the adventurer left Devil's Cliff as Colonel Rutler's prisoner, we will introduce the reader into a secret apartment belonging to Blue Beard.

This was a large room very simply furnished; here and there, hung on the walls, were costly arms. Above a couch was a beautiful portrait of King Charles II. of England; beyond this was a miniature representing a woman of most enchanting beauty. In an ebony frame were many studies in crayon, well designed, and representing always the same people. It was easy to see that they were drawn as portraits from memory. The frame was supported by a kind of stand in chased silver, representing funeral symbols, in the midst of which one might read the date, "July 15, 1685."

This apartment was occupied by a young man in the prime of manhood—large, supple and robust. His noble proportions recalled vividly the height and figure of Captain Whirlwind, of the buccaneer Rend-your-Soul, or of the Caribbean Youmääle. By coloring the fine features of the man of whom we speak to the copper-colored tint of the mulatto, the ruddy color of the

Caribbean, or by half-concealing them under the thick black beard of the buccaneer, one could almost see the three individuals in the same person.

We will here say to the reader, who has doubtless penetrated this mystery, that the disguises of the buccaneer, the filibuster, and the Caribbean, had been successively assumed by the same man, who was none other than the natural son of Charles II., James, Duke of Monmouth, executed at London, July 15, 1685, as guilty of high treason. All historians agree in saying that this prince was very brave, very affable, and of a very generous nature and a face beautiful and noble. "Such was the end of a prince," says Hume, in (speaking of Monmouth) "whose great qualities would have made him an ornament to the court, and who was capable of serving well his country. The tenderness which his father, the king, bore for him; the praises of a large faction and the blind devotion of the populace, drew him into an enterprise beyond his strength. The love of the people followed him in all the vicissitudes of fortune; even after his execution, his followers cherished the belief that they would some day see him at their head."

We will explain later the cause of this singular hope of the prince's adherents, and how Monmouth had, in effect, survived his execution.

Having removed his disguise as the Caribbean, and the dye which stained his features, Monmouth wore an ample gown of light blue covered with orange flowers, and read attentively a large number of papers spread before him.

In order to explain the mistake of which the chevalier was the voluntary victim, we must explain that Croustillac, without really resembling Monmouth, was of the same age, the same height, brown as the other, as slender, and that the duke had, in common with the Gascon, a nose decidedly prominent, and a strong chin. Others beside Rutler, a Dutch officer arrived from the United Provinces in the suite of William of Orange, would have fallen into the same error, above all, seeing in the hands of Croustillac certain priceless objects known to have belonged to the son of Charles II.

As to the choice of Rutler, one must understand that in order to fulfill such a mission with all its consequences, it needed a man careful, fearless, blindly devoted, and capable of pushing that devotion even to assassination. The choice of William of Orange was necessarily circumscribed by such exigencies; it would have been probably impossible for him to have found a man who knew Monmouth personally who would not have recoiled before such terrible extremities as were entailed in this perilous and cruel undertaking.

Monmouth was deeply absorbed in reading several English journals. All at once the door of his room opened violently, and Angela threw herself on his neck, crying, "Saved! saved!"

Then, bursting into tears, laughing and sobbing by turn, kissing his hands, his forehead, his eyes, she repeated, in a stifled voice, "Saved! my beloved James! Saved! there is no longer any danger for thee, my lover, my husband. God be praised, the danger is past! But what terror has been mine! Alas! I tremble still!"

Startled by the transports of Angela, Monmouth said to her with infinite tenderness, "What is the matter, child? What do you say?"

Without replying to him, Angela cried, "But this is not all; we must fly, do you understand? King William of England is on our track; to-morrow we must quit this island. All will be ready; I have given the order to one of our negro fishermen to go and say to Captain Ralph to have the Chameleon ready to set sail; it is anchored at Cayman's Creek; and in two hours we shall have left Martinique."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BETRAYAL.

THE duke could hardly believe what he heard; he looked at his wife in agony. "What do you say?" cried he. "King William knows that I am on this island?"

"He knows it. One of his emissaries has obtained entrance here this night. But be calm; he has gone; there is no danger," cried Angela, seeing Monmouth run to arm himself.

"But this man—this man?"

"He has gone, I tell you; the danger is past. Should I be here if not so? No; you have nothing to fear, at present, at least. But do you know who has aided me in overcoming this threatening cloud?"

"No; for mercy's sake explain."

"It was the poor adventurer whom we have made our butt."

"Croustillac?"

"Yes, his presence of mind saved us; God be praised, the danger is past."

"Truly, Angela, I believe I am dreaming."

"Listen to me, then. It was an hour ago, when you left me to read the papers arrived from England. I went into the garden with the chevalier. I had a presentiment of our danger and I was sad and thoughtful. I wished to get rid of our guest as soon as possible, not caring to amuse myself with him longer. I said to him that I could not explain the mystery of my three widowhoods; that my hand could belong to no one, and that he must leave the house at break of day. Our object was thus accomplished. The Gascon, by his exaggerated tales of what he had seen, will give more credence still to the stories which have been circulated during the past three years on the island, absurd stories but useful, and which until now alas! have been our safeguards by so confusing events that it has been impossible to separate the true from the false."

"Doubtless, but through what fatality this mystery? Tell me!"

"Having informed the chevalier that he could no longer remain here, I told him that we wished, nevertheless, to give him a valuable token of his sojourn at Devil's Cliff. To my great surprise he refused with a manner so painfully humiliated that I pitied him. Knowing how poor he was, and wishing, for the very reason that he showed some delicacy, to oblige him to accept a present, I came here to seek a medallion surrounded by diamonds on which was my monogram, hoping that the chevalier would not refuse that. I returned carrying this token, when in approaching the inclosure

where I had left him, at the end of the park, near the fountain—Ah! my love, I tremble still!" And the young woman threw her two arms around James' neck, as if she would protect him against this past danger.

"Angela, I beg of you, calm yourself," said Monmouth tenderly. "Finish your story."

"Ah, well," she continued, "when I approached the fountain I heard voices; frightened, I listened."

"It was this emissary, I presume?"

"Yes, my beloved."

"But how had he effected an entrance? How did he leave? How did he confide his designs to the Gascon?"

"He mistook the chevalier for you!"

"He mistook the chevalier for me?" cried Monmouth.

"Yes, James. Doubtless he was deceived by the resemblance in figure, and by the suit that the Gascon wore, and which you had had made, in order to satisfy one of my caprices in dressing yourself like the portrait of which you have told me."

"Oh," said Monmouth, passing his hand across his forehead, "Oh! you do not realize the terrible memories that all this awakens in me."

Then, after having heaved a deep sigh and looking sadly at the ebony frame encrusted with silver containing the drawing of a portrait, the duke resumed: "But what was the result of this strange encounter? What did the chevalier say? What did you do? Truly, if your presence and your words did not assure me, I should go myself——"

Angela interrupted the duke. "Again, my beloved James, should I be so calm if there was anything to fear at this hour?"

"Very well. I hear you, but you can understand my impatience."

"You shall not be in doubt long. From the few words I overheard I divined that the chevalier, leaving our enemy in error, did not know how to get him out of the place, fearing he would not be obeyed by our servants. Counting, with reason, on the Gascon's intelligence, I presented myself to him at the moment when he approached the house, taking care to warn him, indirectly, that he must take me for Mirette. Having seen that the emissary of King William, believing he was addressing you, called him 'my lord duke' or 'my lord,' I called him so also; I caused the doors to be opened, and, in order to complete the illusion, I gave the Gascon your sword, your enameled snuff box, and the old cloak to which you are so attached."

"Ah! What have you done, Angela?" cried the duke, "my father's sword, the snuff box my mother gave me, and the cloak which belonged to the most saintly, the most admirable martyr who ever sacrificed himself to friendship."

"James, my love, pardon. I thought I was doing for the best," cried Angela, overcome by the expression of bitterness and chagrin which she read in the features of James.

"Poor beloved angel," replied Monmouth, taking her hands in his, "I do not reproach you, but I have so great a respect for these holy relics that it grieves me to see them profaned by a falsehood, even of a few moments' duration. I repeat, you do not know the terrible memories which are attached to the cloak. Alas! I have not told you all!"

"You have not told me all?" said Angela in surprise. "When you came to seek me in France in the name of my second father, my benefactor, dead on the field of battle," and Angela sighed sorrowfully, "did you not offer to share your life with me, poor orphan that I was, did you not say that you loved me? what matters the rest? If it did not concern your well-being, your life, should I ever have dreamed of speaking to you of your condition, of your birth? I married you proscribed, flying from the furious hate of your enemies. We have escaped many dangers, evaded many suspicions, thanks to my pretended marriages, and your various disguises. Then, what can you have hidden from me? If it is some new danger, James, my beloved husband, my lover, I will never forgive you, for I must partake all with you, good or bad fortune. Your life is my life; your enemies my enemies. Although this attempt happily failed, now that they know your retreat, they will continue to seek you with increased malignity. You must fly. In two hours the Chameleon will be ready to set sail."

Deeply occupied with his thoughts, Monmouth had not heard Angela. He walked up and down with long strides, repeating to himself, "There is no doubt, they know I am living; but how has William of Orange penetrated this secret which was known only to Father Griffen and myself, because the holy martyr who carried this secret to the tomb, and De Crussol, last governor of this island, are dead. When I think that for greater safety I have concealed my real name from my devoted and adored wife, who then can have betrayed me? Father Griffen is incapable of such sacrilege; for it is under the seal of the confessional that the governor made the revelation to him."

After some minutes of silent thought the duke said, "And what means did the chevalier employ to discover the designs of the emissary of William of Orange?"

"His designs, my love, were not concealed; I heard them; he wished to carry you away, dead or alive, to the Tower of London."

"Without doubt. Since the Revolution of 1688 they fear that I may become reconciled to the dethroned king; the public prints even announce that my old partisans are moving," said Monmouth, speaking to himself. "I recognize there the policy of my old friend William of Orange. But by what right does he suspect me capable of ambitious designs? Again, who has aroused in William these unjust suspicions, these ill-founded fears?"

After another silence he said to Angela, "God be praised, my child, the storm is past; thanks to thee; thanks to this brave adventurer! Nevertheless I am not sure if, in spite of the devotion which he has shown on this occasion, I can confide to him a part of the truth; perhaps it would be wiser to have him in ignorance and to persuade him that the emissary had been misled by false information. What do you think, Angela? Dare I appear to the chevalier under any other form than that of Youmääle, or shall I charge you to-night to see and thank this brave man? As to recompense, we will find a way to do that without wounding his delicacy."

Angela looked at her husband with growing astonishment. Monmouth had not understood her; he thought that the Gascon had succeeded in removing this emissary of William of Orange from Devil's Cliff; he did not know he had accompanied him as a prisoner.

"I do not know when the chevalier will return. He will doubtless make this mistake last as long as possible in order to give us time to escape."

"The chevalier is no longer here, then?" cried the duke.

"No, he has gone as a prisoner, under your name, with this man. Our negro fishermen accompany them to the Cayman's Creek, where the emissary will embark for the Barbadoes in one of our boats with the chevalier."

The duke could hardly believe what he heard. "Gone under my name!" cried he. "But this emissary, discovering his mistake, will be capable of killing the chevalier. By heavens! I cannot allow that! Too much blood, oh my God! has already been spilled for me."

"Blood! oh, do not fear that; the chevalier will run no danger. In spite of my desire to avert the danger that threatened from ourselves, I would never have exposed this generous man to certain destruction."

"But, unhappy woman," cried the duke, "you do not know the terrible importance of the secret of state which the chevalier is now possessed of?"

"My God! what do you mean?"

"They are capable of killing him."

"Oh, what have I done? Where are you going?" cried the young wife, seeing the duke preparing to leave the room.

"I am going to join them and save this unfortunate man. I will take some blacks with me. The Gascon has hardly an hour's advance of me."

"James, I implore you, do not expose yourself."

"What! cowardly abandon this man who has devoted himself to me? I give him up to the resentment of William's emissary? never! Ah, you do not know, unhappy child, that certain sacrifices impose on one gratitude as dolorous as remorse. Go, I pray you, tell Mirette to order some slaves to be in readiness to follow me at once. Thanks to the tide, the chevalier cannot put to sea before daybreak, I can then overtake him."

"But this emissary is capable of anything! if he sees you come to the aid of the chevalier, he will understand, perhaps, and then——"

"That it is not James of Monmouth, but the mulatto filibuster, who is on his track. Beside, I have faced other dangers than these, I believe."

So saying, the duke entered a small room connected with his apartments. There he found all that was necessary for his disguise. Left alone, Angela gave herself up to the most cruel regrets. She had not supposed that the consequences of the mistake into which the Gascon had led Rutler could be so fatal. She feared also that Monmouth would be recognized in spite of his disguise. In the midst of her distress she heard a sudden violent knock at the outer door of the apartment where she was, apparently rigorously closed to all the servants in the house.

Angela ran to this door and saw Mirette. The mulatress, with a frightened air, said to Angela that Father Griffen sent an imperative request to enter, having the most important matters to confide to her.

The order was given to admit him at once into the reception hall on the ground floor. At the same moment Monmouth came out of his room completely disguised as the mulatto filibuster.

"My love," said Angela, when the maid had gone, "Father Griffen has just arrived, he has things of the utmost importance to say to us. In the name of heaven, wait and speak to him."

"Father Griffen!" exclaimed the duke.

"You know he never comes here unless circumstances of the gravest importance brings him. I beg you see him," said Angela.

"I must; but each minute of delay may risk the life of this unhappy chevalier," said the duke.

He descended with Angela. Father Griffen, pale, agitated, broken with fatigue, was in the hall.

"In fifteen minutes they will be here," he cried.

"Who, then, Father," said Monmouth.

"That miserable Gascon," said the priest.

"Oh, James! everything is discovered; you are lost!" said Angela, uttering a cry of despair; and she threw herself into the arms of Monmouth. "Fly; there is still time."

"Fly, and where? there is but one road to Devil's Cliff, and from it. I tell you that they follow me," said the priest; "but be calm, nothing is hopeless."

"Explain yourself, Father, what is it? In mercy speak, speak!" said Angela.

"Father, you alone knew my secret; I would rather believe the impossible than doubt your sacred word," said the duke gravely.

"And you are right not to doubt it, my son. There is some unaccountable mystery, which will come to light some day, believe me; but the minutes are too precious to seek now for the cause of the misfortune which menaces you. I hurried to you, then I have not betrayed you. Let us think of what is most pressing. Under this disguise it is impossible that you should be recognized," said the priest. "But that is not all; your situation has become almost inextricable."

"What do you say?"

"This Gascon is a traitor; a scoundrel. May God pardon me for having been so deceived in him and having made you partake of my error. Cursed be the hypocrite."

"On the contrary," said Angela, "he is the most generous of men; he has voluntarily devoted himself for my husband."

"Yes, he has assumed your name," said the priest to the prince, "but do you know for what vile purpose?"

"Tell me, oh, tell me! I am dying of fear," cried Angela.

"Listen, then," said the priest, "for the moments fly and the danger approaches. This morning I received at Macouba a letter from Captain Morris, of Fort Royal, in compliance with the order he had received from you to warn me of all arrivals of vessels and of those whose appearance seemed unusual. He sent me a special message to inform me that a French frigate had dropped anchor in sight of the harbor, after having sent an unknown passenger ashore. This person, after a long conference with the governor, started at the head of an escort in the direction of Devil's Cliff. In fact, he comes here."

"An agent of France," said Monmouth; "what have I to fear at present, even if my secret was known at Versailles? Is not France at war with England?"

"My God! my God! have pity on us!" cried Angela.

"Listen! I started with all haste," continued the priest, "in order to warn you, hoping to arrive before this man and his escort, in case he was really coming here, and, unfortunately, or fortunately perhaps, joined him at the foot of the cliff. He recognized my robe; he said to me that he was sent by the King of France; that he came to fulfill a mission of state, and he begged me to be his guide and to introduce him, because I knew the dwellers in this house. I could not refuse to do this without arousing suspicions. I remained near him. He told me his name was De Chemerant. He began to ask me some very embarrassing questions as to you and your wife, my lord, when all at once, at some distance, we heard a loud voice cry, 'Who goes there?' 'An agent of France,' replied De Chemerant. 'Treason!' continued the voice, and a dull groan reached us with these words, 'I am killed!' 'To arms!' cried De Chemerant, taking his sword in hand, and running after two of our sailors who served as guides. I followed him. We found the Gascon stretched on the side of the road, four blacks kneeling, petrified with fear, while our two sailors had thrown on the ground, and held there with difficulty, a strong man clothed like a mariner."

"And the chevalier?" exclaimed Monmouth, "was he wounded?"

"No, sir; and although this is a very wicked man, we must return thanks to heaven for the wonderful chance which saved him. The man dressed as a mariner, hearing the noise of our escort, and the words of De Chemerant, who had responded 'Agent of the King of France,' believed himself betrayed, and led into ambush; he had then given the Gascon such a furious blow with his dagger that the unhappy adventurer would have been killed if the blade had not broken on his shoulder-belt. Nevertheless, thrown down by the violence of the shock, he fell to the ground, exclaiming, 'I am killed,' and remained motionless. It was at this moment we reached the group. Seeing us the assassin of the Gascon cried with a ferocious laugh as he kicked the body of what he supposed his victim, 'Mr. Agent of France, your designs have been unmasked, they are frustrated. You have come to seek James, Duke of Monmouth, in order to raise a standard for sedition; the standard is broken; take up the corpse, sir. It is I, Rutler, colonel in the service of King William, whom God preserve, who has committed this murder.'"

"'Unhappy man,' exclaimed De Chemerant.

"'I glory in this murder,' replied the colonel. 'Thus have I foiled the odious projects of the enemies of my master, the king; thanks to me, the sword of

Charles II., which James of Monmouth carried at his side, will no more be drawn against England.'

"Colonel, you will be shot in twenty-four hours,' said De Chemerant. 'I know my fate,' replied the colonel; 'a traitor is dead. Long live the King of England.'"

"But the chevalier?" asked the duke.

"When he heard these words of Rutler's he made a slight movement, and heaved a sigh; and while some of the escort held the colonel, who yelled with rage at seeing that his victim was not dead, De Chemerant hurried to reach the Gascon, to whom he said, 'My lord, are you dangerously wounded?' I understood at once, without knowing why, that the chevalier was playing a rôle and had assumed your name; this error would serve you—I held my tongue. 'The blow had struck the belt of my father's sword,' said the rascal, in a faint voice as they raised him. 'My lord duke, lean on me,' replied De Chemerant, 'I come to you in the name of the King of France, my master. Mystery is now unnecessary. In two words I will tell you, sir, the object of my mission, and you can then judge whether or not you will return as quickly as possible to Fort Royal to embark with us.' 'I hear you, sir,' said the chevalier, feigning a slight English accent, doubtless to better play his part. Then at the end of several moments of thought, the Gascon said in a loud voice, 'If this be so, sir, I cannot be separated from my wife, and I desire to go and seek her at Devil's Cliff. She will accompany me; such is the destiny which is reserved for me.'"

"The wretch!" exclaimed Angela.

"Then he continued," said the priest, "'I feel giddy from my fall; I will rest here a moment.' 'That shall be as you wish, my lord,' said De Chemerant. Then, turning to me, 'Will you be so good, Father, as to go and announce to Madame the Duchess of Monmouth that the duke will come to seek her to take her away; and request that she make hasty preparations, for we must be at Fort Royal at daybreak and set sail the same morning.' Now," said the priest to Monmouth, "do you understand the plan of this traitor? He abuses the name that he has taken in order to carry off your wife, and you will be compelled either to declare who you are, or to consent to the departure of madame the duchess."

"Rather a thousand times death!" cried Angela.

"Cursed be the Gascon!" said the priest; "I believed him but a sot and an adventurer, and he is a monster of hypocrisy."

"Do not let us despair," said Angela suddenly. "Father, will you return to the outer buildings and order Mirette to open the door to the Gascon and the French agent when they come. I will take care of the rest."

PART THIRD.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE VICEROY OF IRELAND AND SCOTLAND.

WHILE the Duke of Monmouth and his wife, informed by Father Griffen of the infamous treachery of Croustillac, were seeking to escape this new danger, we will return to the adventurer, who, carelessly leaning on the arm of De Chemerant, climbed the steep ascent of Devil's Cliff.

Colonel Rutler, furious at having been thwarted in his attempt, was led away by a guard of two soldiers.

Chemerant did not know Croustillac; not having the slightest doubt as to the identity of the Gascon with the Duke of Monmouth, the action and words of Rutler confirmed his error. In the colonel's possession was found an order from William of Orange for the capture of James, Duke of Monmouth. What doubt could he then have when the emissary of King William recognized Croustillac as the duke, so fully that he was ready to pay with his life for his attempt to assassinate this pretended prince.

Seeing the new aspect this adventure was taking, Croustillac felt the necessity of being more guarded, so as to complete the illusion which he desired in order to accomplish his own ends.

He at least knew, now, the name of the person whom he represented and to what country he belonged. These points, however, were not very useful to the adventurer as yet, for he was absolutely ignorant as to contemporaneous history; but at any rate, the knowledge that the man he personated was English led him to endeavor to modify his Gascon pronunciation, and he gave it an English accent so strange that De Chemerant was far from suspecting that he spoke with a Frenchman.

Croustillac, in order not to compromise the part he was playing, deemed it wisest to maintain an extreme reserve; De Chemerant was not surprised; he knew the reserved character of the English.

Some words which were exchanged by the two persons who walked at the head of the escort will give an idea of the new and embarrassing position of the chevalier.

"When we arrive at your house, sir," said De Chemerant, "I shall communicate to you the full powers which his majesty has charged me to place before the eyes of your highness."

"Highness—the devil!" thought Croustillac: "this man pleases me better than the other; beside subjecting me to the inconvenience of his everlasting

daggar, he called me only my lord or your grace, while this one calls me highness. This is progressive. I go on. I touch the throne."

Monsieur de Chemerant continued: "I shall also have the honor to hand to you, sir, a number of letters from England which will prove to you that the moment was never more favorable for an insurrection."

"I know it," said the Gascon, with effrontery, remembering that this was what Rutler had said to him; "I know it, sir; my partisans are acting, and bestirring themselves greatly."

"Your highness is better informed of affairs in Europe than I had thought."

"I have never lost sight of them, sir, never."

"Your highness fills me with joy in speaking thus. It depends on you to assure to yourself the brilliant position which is your due, and which you will acquire if you obtain a decisive advantage."

"And how, sir?"

"By putting yourself at the head of the partisans of your royal uncle, James Stuart; forgetting the dissensions which have heretofore separated you, for the king no longer desires to see in you other than his worthy nephew."

"And, between us, he is right; it is always necessary to turn to one's family. My God, if each one puts in a little of his own, it will end by arranging itself."

"Thus, your highness, King James gives you a mark of the highest confidence in intrusting to you the defense of his rights and those of his young son."

The Pretender, born in 1688.

"My uncle is dethroned; he is unhappy; this makes me overlook much," said Croustillac gravely. "I will not betray his hopes. I will devote myself to the defense of his rights and those of his young son, if the circumstances permit."

"Your highness need not have the slightest doubt as to the opportunity to do so when you will have heard, in this respect, the large number of your old companions at arms; of your most enthusiastic followers."

"In fact, they, better than any one, will be able to give certain information, but alas! before I can see them, these brave men, these loyal and faithful men, much time must, unhappily, elapse."

"I am going to give your highness a very delightful surprise."

"A surprise?"

"Yes, your highness. Several of your partisans, having learned by what happy occurrence the life of your highness has been preserved, have asked permission of the king to accompany me here."

"To accompany you?" cried the chevalier. "And where are they, then?"

"They are here, aboard the frigate which brought me, your highness."

"Aboard your frigate!" exclaimed Croustillac, with an expression of surprise that De Chemerant interpreted in a very favorable manner to affectionate memories of the chevalier.

"Yes, your highness. I understand your astonishment, your happiness, your joy in the prospect of shortly seeing your old companions-in-arms."

"You have not the slightest idea of the impatience with which I await the moment when I shall again see them, sir," said Croustillac.

"And their conduct justifies your eagerness, your highness; they will bring you the loyalty of all your English friends; and they will very soon put you in touch with the affairs of that country. Who can better inform you on these subjects than Dudley and Rothsay?"

"Ah! that dear Rothsay, has he also come?" said the Gascon with an easy manner.

"Yes, your highness, but he is suffering so from his old wounds that he can hardly walk, still he said, 'It is no matter if I die—if I die at the feet of our duke,' for it is thus they speak of you in the familiarity of their devotion."

"The poor Rothsay, always the same!" said Croustillac, passing his hand across his eyes, with a touching air. "The dear friends."

"And Lord Mortimer, then, your highness; he is as if mad. If it were not for the king's orders, which were of the strictest, it would have been impossible to have prevented his coming on shore with me."

"Mortimer also—brave Mortimer!"

"And Lord Dudley, your highness."

"Lord Dudley is as wild as the others, I wager?"

"He threatened to swim ashore as the captain had refused to give him a boat."

"Such a friend is a true spaniel for fidelity and love of the water!" thought Croustillac, very much embarrassed.

"Ah, your highness, and to-morrow?"

"Well, what of to-morrow?"

"What a great day it will be for your highness."

"Yes, superb."

"Ah, your highness, what a touching scene! what a moment for you and for those who are so devoted to you. Happy indeed are the princes who find such friends in adversity."

"Yes it will be a very touching interview," said Croustillac aloud; then he continued, inaudibly, "To the devil with this animal of a Mortimer and his companions! Peste! these are very stupid friends; what fly is stinging them? They will recognize me, and I shall be lost, now that I know De Chemerant's state secret."

"The presence of those valiant nobles," replied De Chemerant, "has yet another object. Your highness ought not to be ignorant of it?"

"Speak, sir; they seem to me to have excellent ideas, these dear friends."

"Knowing your courage, your resolution, sir, the king, my master, and the king, your uncle, have ordered me to make you an overture which you cannot fail to accept."

"What is it, sir? this begins excellently."

"Not only are your most courageous partisans on board the frigate, which is at anchor, sir, but the ship is filled with arms and ammunition. Sentinels have been stationed on the coast of Cornwall; the whole country awaits only a signal to rise in your favor. It but remains for your highness to disembark at the head of your partisans, and give the people the necessary arms. The movement will spread even to London, the usurper will be driven from the throne, and you will restore the crown to the king, your uncle."

"I will do it, by the gods! I am capable of that. Of a surety here is a magnificent project, but there must be contrary chances, and above all, I must be careful, very careful of the lives of my partisans and of the safety of my uncle's subjects."

"I recognize the habitual generosity of the character of your highness; but there are hardly any contrary chances to fear; all is ready, loyalty prevails. You will be received with enthusiasm. The remembrance of you is so lasting, they say, so ever present to the people of London, that they have never believed in your execution, sir, not even those who were present. Live, then, for this noble country which has so deeply mourned you, and which awaits your coming as they await the day of their deliverance."

"Come! he also," thought Croustillac; "he thinks that I have been executed; but this man is more reasonable than the other, who wished to kill me in the name of the regrets that my death had caused; at least, this one desires me to live in the name of these same regrets, and I prefer this."

"In a word, sir, set sail from Martinique for the coast of Cornwall, and if, as all believe, the English people rise at the sound of your name, my master, the king, will support this insurrection with his strong forces, and make the movement a success."

"Ah! ah! I see, my good fellow, I see. Although I am not a political end," said the Gascon to himself, "in my humble opinion I understand that the king, your master and mine, wishes to make use of me as a forlorn hope. If I succeed, he will support me; if I do not, he will leave me to be captured. All the same this tempts me; my ambition awakens. To the devil with the Mortimers, the Rothsays, and my other mad friends! Without these rogues I shall be curious to see Polyphème de Croustillac revolutionizing Cornwall, driving William of Orange from the throne of England, and generously restoring this same throne to King James. Without being tempted to seat myself upon it—hum, perhaps I shall seat myself a little, to see—there, there, Polyphème, no more of that! give the throne to the old man, Polyphème, restore him his throne. So be it, I will give it to him, but decidedly, for some time, very strange things have happened to me, and the Unicorn which brought me here must be an enchanted vessel." The chevalier then spoke, with a thoughtful air: "This is a very serious thing, at least, sir; there is much to be said for, and also much against it. I am far from wishing to temporize too long, but it would be, I think, wisdom to consider more fully before giving the signal for this uprising."

"Your highness, permit me to say to you that the conditions are pressing; action necessary; the secret projects of the king, my master, have been betrayed. William of Orange has deputed Colonel Rutler to carry you off, living or dead, so much does he fear to see you the leader of an insurrection. Sir, we must strike a quick, decisive blow, such as a sudden disembarkment on the coasts of Cornwall. I repeat, this expedition made in the name of King James will be received with enthusiasm and the all-powerful influence of Louis XIV., will consolidate the revolution you will have so gloriously begun; and, thanks to you, the rightful King of Great Britain will once more ascend his throne."

"This seems to me assured, if my side has the advantage."

"It will have, sir, it will have!"

"Yes, unless it is defeated, and then if I am killed, this time it will be without pardon. It is not through unworthy egotism that I make this reflection, sir; you can understand that, after the antecedents which they attribute to me, I must be thoroughly accustomed to being dead, but I would not leave my party orphaned; and then, consider, sir!—to plunge this country once more into the horrors of civil war! Ah!" and Croustillac heaved a sigh.

"Doubtless, sir, this is a sad thought; but to these passing troubles would succeed a most profound calm. Doubtless, war has fatal chances, but it has, also, happy ones; and then, what a future awaits you! The letters I bring you will show you that the viceroyship of Ireland and Scotland is reserved for you, without counting other favors which are likewise reserved for you and my master, and James Stuart, your uncle, when he is once more on the throne which he will owe to you."

"Peste! Viceroy of Scotland and Ireland!" said Croustillac to himself. "With this, husband of Blue Beard, and, in the bargain, son and nephew of a king, ah Croustillac, Croustillac, I have well said thy star is in the ascendent—it would be too bad that this should be for another. Come on, while it lasts!"

Monsieur de Chemerant, seeing the chevalier's hesitation, made use of a more powerful means of forcing him to act conformably to the wishes of the two kings, and said to him, "There remains, your highness, a last communication to make you, and, painful as it is, I must obey my master's orders."

"Speak, sir."

"It is almost out of the question to refuse to put yourself at the head of the uprising, your highness; your ships are burned!"

"My ships burned?"

"Yes, your highness, that is, figuratively."

"Very well, sir, I understand, the king would compel me to act as he desires?"

"Your habitual keensightedness does not allow you to be deceived, your highness. In case you do not believe it your duty to follow the pressing counsel of my master, the king, in case you thus show his majesty King James that you are unwilling to make him forget these sad and annoying memories, in devoting yourself to his cause, as he had hoped——"

"Well, sir," said the adventurer, becoming cautious, believing he was going to see, as is said, the reverse side of the medal.

"Well, your highness, the king, my master, for pressing reasons of state, in such a case would see himself, with much regret, obliged to possess himself of your person. That is why I have an escort with me."

"Sir! violence?"

"Unfortunately, your highness, my orders are explicit. But I am sure your highness will not put me to the hard necessity of carrying them out."

This menace caused Croustillac to reflect.

Monsieur de Chemerant continued: "I must add, sir, that prudence demands (seeing your execution has taken place) that your features should be henceforth concealed, and your face must be covered with a mask that will never be removed. In fact, in compliance with the orders of his majesty, I shall have the honor of conducting you, sir, at once to the Saint Margaret Islands, where you will remain henceforth a prisoner. I leave to you to imagine the regrets of your partisans, who have come so far in the hope of seeing you once more at their head."

After remaining for a long time in the attitude of a man who was thinking deeply and who struggled inwardly against many conflicting thoughts, Croustillac raised his head proudly, and said to De Chemerant, in a dignified manner, "Upon reflection, sir, I will accept the viceroyship of Ireland and Scotland, you have my word. However do not think that fear of a perpetual prison forces me thus to act. No, sir, no; but after mature reflection, I am convinced that I would be culpable not to yield to the wishes of an oppressed people, who are stretching out their arms to me, and not to draw my sword for their defense," said the adventurer with a heroic air.

"If that is so, your highness," cried De Chemerant, "long live King James and his Royal Highness the Duke of Monmouth. Long live the Viceroy of Scotland and Ireland."

"I accept the augury," gravely replied the chevalier, while he said to himself, "Devil of a man! with his sweet manner, I do not know if I do not like the other better in spite of his eternal dagger. This is a difficult choice. To go with the Dutchman a prisoner to London Tower, that was not difficult; while now my rôle is complicated and becomes diabolical, thanks to my mad friends who like vultures are awaiting me on board the frigate. To-morrow, I dare say, all will be discovered. And Blue Beard? But I who believed I had made a master stroke in coming to seek her at Devil's Cliff? What will happen from all this? Bah! after all, what can happen me? Taken prisoner? or hanged? Prisoner?—that gives me a future. Hanged?—it is a trifle, the dropping of an eyelid, a gasp. Come, come, Croustillac! no cowardice! console yourself by mocking at these men, and amuse yourself with the strange adventures the devil sends you! It is all the same, cursed be my partisans! except for them all would go well. Let us see if there is not some way of sending them to love me—elsewhere."

"Tell me, sir," said he, aloud, "are my followers on board many?"

"Your highness, there are eleven."

"That must incommode you; they must be uncomfortable themselves."

"They are soldiers, your highness, they are accustomed to the rough life of a camp; beside, the end which they propose to attain is so important, so

glorious, that they do not dream of privations which the sight of your highness will make them quickly forget."

"It is all the same—is there not a means of finding a place elsewhere? sending them to another vessel would be infinitely better, that I and my wife may accommodate ourselves on the frigate? And then, for reasons known to myself, I shall not discover myself to these dear and good friends until the moment arrives to disembark in England."

"That is impossible! to be on the same vessel with you, your friends will sleep on deck in their clothes."

"It is terrible to inspire such devotion," said Croustillac to himself. "Then think no more of it," said he aloud. "I shall be very sorry to thwart such faithful partisans. But what accommodations have you for myself and wife?"

"They will be very plain, sir, but your highness will deign to be indulgent in recognizing the imperative necessity of the case. Beside, the well-known attachment of your highness for the duchess," replied De Chemerant, smiling, "will make you, I am sure, excuse the smallness of the apartment, which is none other than the captain's cabin."

The adventurer could not prevent a smile in return, and answered, "The room, sir, will be sufficient."

"Then, your highness, you have fully decided that you will bring madame with you?"

"More than ever, sir; when I was the prisoner of Colonel Rutler, when I was destined to perish, perhaps, I left her ignorant of my peril, and abandoned her without warning her of the fate that awaited me."

"So the duchess is ignorant——"

"Of everything, sir; the poor woman is ignorant of everything. Surprised by Colonel Rutler, while she was asleep, I left word in quitting Devil's Cliff, that my absence would extend over but a day or two. But circumstances have suddenly changed. There are no more dangers that I am going to run. I know my wife, sir; glory and danger, she would partake all. In going to seek her, to carry her away with me, I am furthering her dearest wish."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ARREST.

MONSIEUR DE CHEMERANT and Croustillac walked on in silence for some little time toward Devil's Cliff. Meanwhile the guard reached the heights of the rocks. From this spot were discerned at a distance the platform and the wall of the park surrounding Blue Beard's home.

At the sight of this species of fortification De Chemerant said to the chevalier, "This retreat is well chosen, your highness, to keep at a distance curious persons; to say nothing of the fact that the reports that you have caused to be made by the three fellows in your service, are not such as to encourage many visitors."

"You allude, I presume, to the buccaneer, the filibuster and the Caribbean?"

"Yes, your highness, it is said that they are devoted to you, for life and death."

"They are singularly attached to me. Nevertheless," said Croustillac to himself, "I do not yet know what right these three miscreants have to an intimacy with the duchess, nor how, in fact, her husband, the Duke of Monmouth, can permit such bandits to be so very familiar with his wife—speaking tenderly to her and embracing her. The Caribbean, above all, with his grave air like a donkey that one has curried—he has above all the faculty of setting my nerves on edge. And then, how can the duke permit these familiarities? Doubtless it is to mislead people. It saves appearances. But, zounds! it seems to me that this misleads a little too much. Ah, Croustillac, Croustillac! you are becoming more and more in love, my friend; it is jealousy you feel for these bandits. Ah, well, I shall unravel this mystery shortly. Meanwhile, I must endeavor to learn how it was discovered that the prince was hidden at Devil's Cliff." "Sir," continued Croustillac aloud, "I desire to ask you a very important question."

"I am all attention, your highness."

"If you are permitted to answer this, tell me how it became known at Versailles that I was hidden in Martinique?"

After a moment's silence De Chemerant replied, "In telling you what you wish to know, your highness, I do not in any way betray a state secret. Neither the king nor his ministers have confided to me anything on this point. It is entirely due to a circumstance which it would take too long to tell you now, that I had discovered that of which they thought I was in ignorance. I can, however, count upon your silence on this subject, your highness."

"You may be sure of that, sir."

"Then, I believe, your highness, that the late Governor of Martinique, the late Chevalier de Crussol, had known you in Holland, where he owed his life to you. At the battle of Saint Denis, where you commanded a Scotch regiment in the army of the stadtholder, while the Chevalier de Crussol served in the army of the Marshal Luxembourg——"

"This is true in every particular," said Croustillac imperturbably. "Proceed."

"I believe, also, your highness, that the late Chevalier de Crussol having been, by a combination of events, chosen governor of this colony, and, having believed it his duty to inquire into the mysterious existence of a young widow called Blue Beard, went to Devil's Cliff, entirely ignorant of the fact that you had found refuge there."

"That also is true, sir; you see I am frank," said Croustillac, charmed at penetrating, little by little, this mystery.

"Finally, it appears certain that Chevalier de Crussol, recognizing in you the prince who had saved his life, swore to you that he would guard your secret——"

"He swore it, sir, and if anything surprises me on the part of so gallant a man, it is that he failed to keep his word," said the Gascon severely.

"Do not be too hasty in accusing Chevalier de Crussol, your highness."

"I will reserve my judgment, then."

"You know, your highness, there were few men more religiously inclined than De Crussol?"

"His piety was proverbial; it is that fact which so surprises me at his failure to keep his word."

"When dying, your highness, Chevalier de Crussol felt it a point of conscience that he had not made known to his master, the king, a state secret of such importance. He therefore confessed the truth to Father Griffen."

"I know all that, sir; go on," said Croustillac, who did not desire that the devouring curiosity with which he listened to De Chemerant should appear.

"As for that, your highness, I speak of what occurred then only from memory. I shall touch upon certain particulars unknown, I think, to your highness. At the point of death, Chevalier de Crussol, wishing so far as possible, to continue to you the protection which had surrounded you during his life, and, fearing that his successor would begin a search against the mysterious residents at Devil's Cliff, he wrote a letter to the governor who would succeed him. In this letter he affirmed on his guarantee and on that of Father Griffen that the conduct of Blue Beard was in no wise to be

suspected. It is believed, your highness, that the dying governor had warned you that scruples of conscience having compelled him to confess all to Father Griffen, under the seal of the confessional, he did not consider he had broken the promise that he had given you."

"If this is so, sir, this poor man remained until the close of his life the pious and loyal gentleman that I always knew him to be," said Croustillac, deeply affected; "but must one then, accuse the good Father Griffen of a sacrilege? This would be cruel. I can with difficulty reconcile myself to that, sir."

After a moment's silence, De Chemerant said to the adventurer:

"Do you know, your highness, the game of the poisoned shoulder-knot?" The Gascon looked at the envoy with surprise. "Is this a pleasantry, sir?"

"I would not take such a liberty, your highness," said De Chemerant, bending his head.

"Then, sir, what connection——"

"Permit me, your highness, to explain to you what this game is, and by the aid of this figure, I shall perhaps be able to also explain to your highness the fortunes of the state secret.

"Explain this figure, sir."

"Well, the game of the poisoned shoulder-knot consists in this: a circle of men and women is made; one man takes one of the shoulder-knots from his coat and seeks to slip it into his neighbor's pocket as secretly as possible, for the person who is found in possession of it is obliged to give a forfeit."

"Very well, sir," said the Gascon, "the skill of the play resolves itself into getting rid as soon as possible of the shoulder-knot, by passing it, adroitly, on to another."

"There you have it, your highness."

"But I do not see what connection there is between the state secret which concerns me and this game."

"Pardon me, sir, to some consciences, at once scrupulous and timid, certain confidences, or rather certain confessions, have the same effect as the poisoned shoulder-knot in the play of that name; the aforesaid consciences think only of getting rid of the secret to a neighboring conscience in order to protect themselves from all responsibility."

"Well, sir, I see the analogy; it seems that the game of the poisoned shoulder-knot has been played with the confessor of this unhappy Chevalier de Crussol."

"That is just what happened, your highness. Father Griffen, seeing himself the depository of such an important state secret, found himself terribly

embarrassed; he feared to commit a culpable action toward his sovereign in keeping silent; he feared by speaking to violate the seal of the confessional and to ruin you. In this quandary, and desiring to quiet his conscience, he resolved to go to France, to confess all to the general of his order, and to thus free himself of all responsibility."

"I understand, now, your comparison, sir; but as this secret has been noised abroad, it necessarily follows that, in order to carry out your comparison, some one has cheated."

"I can assure your highness that it is many months since Father Griffen, after his resolution had been taken, arrived in France and confided all to the general of the order; he, in turn, took all the responsibility upon himself, and completely absolved Father Griffen, recommending to him the greatest secrecy."

"And to whom the devil did the general of the order pass the shoulder-knot?" said the Gascon, who was much amused by this story.

"Before answering your highness, I must say that the general of the order concealed beneath an austere exterior a most unbridled ambition; that few men possessed to so high a degree the genius for intrigue; or played more audaciously with what the world reveres. Once master of the important secret that Father Griffen had confided to him, as his spiritual superior, in order to quiet his conscience, the general of the order desired to use this secret for his own personal advancement. Intimately linked with the confessor of his majesty, King James, Father Briars, a cunning Jesuit, who understood perfectly the condition of affairs in England, he led the conversation one day to the location of this island, and the general of the order asked Father Briars if, in case you had been still living, your highness, you would not have many opportunities for rallying about you the partisans of the Stuarts, and thus placing yourself at the head of a movement against the Prince of Orange. Father Briars replied that if you had lived your influence would have been immense, if you were sincerely devoted to the cause of King James; that this prince had often regretted your death, when thinking of the services you could have rendered to the cause of the Stuarts. You can imagine, your highness, the joy of the general of the order. The secret of the confessional was betrayed, your highness, and your existence revealed.

"But this is an abominable man, this general of the order," cried Croustillac.

"Doubtless, sir; but he was ambitious to wear the cardinal's hat; and as the prime mover of the enterprise, he would be a prince of the church if King James, your uncle, ascended the throne of England. It is unnecessary to tell you, sir, that once Father Briars was master of this secret, he availed

himself of it with his royal penitent, and that the remainder of the arrangements were converted between Louis XIV. and James Stuart."

"All is clear now," said Croustillac to himself. "I am not surprised at the uneasiness of Father Griffen when I persisted in going to Devil's Cliff. Knowing the secret of the place, he doubtless, believed me to be a spy. I can now understand the questions with which he overwhelmed me during our journey, and which seemed so absurd."

Monsieur de Chemerant attributed to astonishment the silence of Croustillac at this recital, and he said, "Now all should be clear to you. Without doubt, the preparations of this enterprise have not been so secret that William of Orange has not been kept posted by spies who gained entrance into the cabinet at Versailles, and even into the inner circle of the lesser court at Saint Germain. In order to baffle the projects which rest entirely upon your highness, the usurper has given to Colonel Rutler the mission which came so near being fatal to you, your highness. You see, then, in all this Father Griffen has been perfectly innocent. Some one has abused his confidence most sacrilegiously; but, after all, sir, you must exercise forbearance, for it is to this discovery that you will have the glory, some day, of re-establishing James Stuart upon the throne of England."

Although this confidence had satisfied the adventurer's curiosity, he regretted having provoked it; if he was discovered, he would, no doubt, be made to pay dearly for his knowledge of this state secret, which he had involuntarily surprised; but Croustillac could not retrace his steps; he was to become more and more involved in the dangerous way wherein he walked. The escort arrived on the plain at the foot of the wall of the house. It was agreed that Rutler, still bound, should remain outside, and that six soldiers and two sailors should accompany Chemerant and Croustillac. On reaching the foot of the wall, the Gascon called, resolutely, "Ho, slaves!"

After waiting some moments, the ladder was lowered. The adventurer and De Chemerant, followed by their men, entered the house; the arched door used exclusively by Blue Beard was opened by Mirette. Chemerant ordered the six soldiers to remain outside the arch.

Mirette, instructed by her mistress, as to what she should do and say in response to questions, appeared struck with surprise at the sight of the Gascon, and exclaimed, "Ah, my lord!"

"You did not expect me? and Father Griffen?"

"What, my lord is it you?"

"Certainly it is I; but where is Father Griffen?"

"Learning that you were going away for some days, madame had ordered me to allow no one to enter."

"But the reverend Father, who came here on my account—has he not seen your mistress?"

"No, my lord; madame told me to allow no one to enter, so the reverend priest has been shown to a room in the outer building."

"Then your mistress is not expecting my return?"

"No, my lord; but——"

"It is well; leave us."

"But, my lord, I will go and inform Madame de——"

"No, it is no matter; I will go myself," said the Gascon, passing before Mirette and walking toward the drawing room.

"Your highness, you are about to give a pleasant surprise to the duchess, who does not expect you for some days, and will thus change her regrets to a very tender joy, since Father Griffen has not yet been able to see your wife," said De Chemerant.

"She is always thus, poor dear child, she is very timid; when I am not here," said Croustillac, tenderly, "she will not see a human face, not even this good priest; my shortest absence causes her sadness, desolation and tears; this is what worries me; all this is very simple; since I have been condemned to this absolute retirement I have never left my wife, and this absence to-day, short as she believes it to be, is terribly hard for her, poor, dear soul."

"But then, your highness, what a delightful surprise! If your highness will permit me to advise, I will promise to persuade the duchess to leave this night, for you know, our enterprise cannot succeed except it be by a very rapid move."

"My wish also is to carry away my wife as soon as possible."

"This hasty journey will unfortunately cause the duchess some inconveniences."

"She will not think so, sir; it concerns following me," said Croustillac, with a triumphant manner.

Monsieur de Chemerant and the adventurer reached the little gallery which gave entrance to the drawing room of Blue Beard. As we have said, this room was separated from the drawing room only by portières; a thick Turkish carpet covered the floor.

Monsieur de Chemerant and Croustillac approached the inner room noiselessly, when they suddenly heard peals of laughter. The chevalier

recognized the voice of Angela, and, seizing the hand of De Chemerant, he said in a low voice, "It is my wife—listen."

"The duchess appears to me less overcome than your highness believed."

"Perhaps, sir; there are sobs, you know, which in their violence have something of the sound of convulsive laughter. Do not move; I wish to surprise her in the abandon of her grief," said the Gascon, making a sign to his companion to remain motionless and to keep silent.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE INTERVIEW.

IN order to explain the confidence of the Gascon, we must say that, having heard Mirette address him as master, he was fully persuaded that Blue Beard was on her guard, and that Monmouth was securely hidden. In spite of what the mulattress said, he was convinced, with reason, that Father Griffen had informed Angela that her supposed husband would come to see her. The situation was so grave that the priest, knowing all the mysteries of Devil's Cliff, could not but have insisted on warning Blue Beard of the fresh peril which menaced her.

If Mirette had stated that Father Griffen had not seen Blue Beard, it was because it was in accord with her wishes that it should appear that he had not communicated with the inhabitants of Devil's Cliff.

This explains at once what will seem contradictory in Croustillac's conduct, and will answer the question "if he wished to take advantage of the name he had assumed, to carry off Blue Beard, why had he warned Father Griffen of his intention?"

Croustillac, having warned De Chemerant to be silent, advanced on tiptoe, to the half-drawn portière, and looked into the room, for the peals of laughter still continued. He had scarcely cast a glance into the room when he quickly turned toward De Chemerant; and with a distorted face and outraged manner said, "See and listen, sir! this is the reward of surprises. I had a presentiment when I sent Father Griffen here. By heavens! prudent husbands should be preceded by an escort of cymbals to announce their return!"

In spite of these ironical words, the features of Croustillac were convulsed; his whole physiognomy expressed a singular mixture of sorrow, anger and hatred.

Rapidly glancing into the room, De Chemerant, in spite of his assurance, lowered his eyes, colored, and for some moments remained perfectly overwhelmed with confusion.

Let one judge of the spectacle which caused the confusion of De Chemerant, and the rage, not feigned but sincere, even cruel, of Croustillac, who, as we have said, passionately loved Blue Beard, devoted himself generously for her, and was not in the secret of the prince's different disguises.

Monmouth, in the disguise of the mulatto filibuster, Whirlwind, was negligently extended on a sofa; he was smoking a long pipe, the bowl of which rested on a low stand.

Angela, kneeling beside the latter, quickened the flame of the pipe with a long golden pin.

"Good! that is all right," said Monmouth, whom we will call Whirlwind, during this scene. "My pipe is lighted, now for something to drink."

Angela placed on a table a large Bohemian glass and a crystal carafe, and, going over to the divan, while the filibuster puffed several mouthfuls of tobacco, poured out a brimming glass of Muscatel wine and handed it to him with a charmingly graceful air.

The filibuster emptied it at a single draught, after which he kissed her roughly, saying, "Wine is good, and the woman is pretty; to the devil with the husband!"

Hearing these very significant words, De Chemerant wished to retire. Croustillac took hold of him and said, in a low tone, "Remain, sir, remain, I desire to surprise, to confound them, the miserable wretches!"

The face of Croustillac clouded more and more. The warning which he had given in begging Father Griffen to go and prepare Blue Beard that he was about to seek her, concealed a very praiseworthy and generous purpose, which we will explain later.

The sight of the filibuster exciting the adventurer's jealousy into rage quickly changed his good intentions. He could not understand the audacity of this young woman. He could not be blind to the evidence of these familiarities on the part of the mulatto whom he had not yet seen. He remembered those, no less shocking, of the Caribbean and the buccaneer. He believed himself to be the dupe of a frightfully depraved creature; he believed that Monmouth, her husband, no longer existed or no longer lived at Devil's Cliff; and if Angela had co-operated with himself (Croustillac) in his strategy, it was in order to rid herself of an awkward witness.

Furious at being thus deceived and played with, deeply wounded in a true love, Croustillac resolved to avenge himself without pity, and, this time, to really abuse the power his assumed name and the situation which he assumed with such honorable motives had given him. He said to De Chemerant, in a stifled voice, but with an expression of concentrated wrath, which entered admirably into the spirit of his rôle, "Not a word, sir; I wish to hear all, because I wish to punish both without mercy."

"But, your highness——"

An imperious gesture from Croustillac closed De Chemerant's mouth; both of them gave an attentive ear to the conversation of Angela, and the filibuster, who, we must say, knew perfectly that they were overheard.

"At last, my beautiful child," said Whirlwind, "you are free for a time at least."

"If not forever," said Blue Beard, smiling.

"Forever? what do you mean, you little demon," returned the filibuster.

Angela arose and seated herself near the mulatto. While talking to him she passed her hand through his hair with a cajoling coquetry which put the unhappy Croustillac beside himself.

"Your highness, one word, and my men shall rid you of this scoundrel," said De Chemerant, in an undertone, in pity for the Gascon.

"I shall know well how to avenge myself," said the adventurer sullenly, who no longer desired to prolong the scene; and so, turning to De Chemerant, continued, "Sir, leave me alone with these two wretches."

"But, your highness, this man appears strong and robust."

"Be easy, I will give a good account of him."

"If you will listen to me, your highness, we will leave at once; you will abandon to her remorse, a woman so unhappy as to thus forget her duty."

"Leave her? No, my heavens! Willingly or otherwise, she shall follow me—that will be my revenge."

"If your highness will permit me a remark: After a disclosure so scandalous, the sight of the duchess can only be forever odious to you. Let us go; forget such a guilty spouse; glory shall console you."

"Sir, I desire to speak to my wife," said Croustillac impatiently.

"But, your highness, this miserable——"

"Once more, am I a man without courage and without force, that such a rascal should intimidate me? Some domestic scenes must be secret. Will you await me in the next room? In a quarter of an hour I will be with you."

Croustillac said these words with an intonation so imperious, and with such an agonized manner, that De Chemerant bowed without persisting further. He went into a room the door of which the chevalier had opened, and which he immediately closed upon him.

Crossing the drawing room with quick steps, the adventurer entered suddenly into the room where the mulatto and Blue Beard were.

"Madame," said the Gascon with sorrowful indignation, "your conduct is abominable."

The mulatto, who was extended on the divan, arose quickly; he was about to speak; Angela with a glance begged him to do nothing. As much as

Monmouth had generously desired to prevent the sacrifice of the chevalier when he believed this sacrifice disinterested, he was as much resolved not to make himself known when he believed the adventurer capable of an unworthy betrayal.

"Sir," said Angela coldly, to the Gascon, "the French emissary may still overhear us; let us go into another room."

She opened the door of Monmouth's own room, and entered, followed by the filibuster and Croustillac. The door once closed, the adventurer cried: "I repeat that you have shamefully abused my trust in you."

"I demand an explanation of your disloyal conduct," said Angela proudly. "Explain yourself at once."

During this scene, Monmouth, gravely preoccupied, walked up and down the room with his arms folded, his eyes fixed on the carpet.

"You desire that I explain myself, madame? Oh, that will not take long! First know that, right or wrong, I love you," cried Croustillac, in a burst of tenderness and anger.

"That is to say, that you have boasted to your fellow-travelers that you would marry the rich widow of Devil's Cliff?"

"So be it, madame; on board the Unicorn my language was impertinent, my pretensions absurd, madame; covetous, I admit. But when I spoke thus, when I thought thus, I had not seen you."

"The sight of me, sir, has not inspired you with ideas much more honorable," said Angela severely, still convinced that Croustillac wished to cruelly abuse the position in which he found himself.

"Hear me, madame; I love you truly; that is to say, that I was capable of anything to prove to you my love, absurd and stupid as it appears to you. Yes, I loved you, because my heart told me I did well to love you; because I felt myself better for loving you. You may laugh at this love; I was sufficiently repaid by the happiness it gave me. When you have said, 'Sir, I mock at you, I use you for a plaything, you are a poor devil, I have bestowed charity upon you, and you should be content therewith——'"

"Sir!"

"When you have said all this, do not think that I was humiliated. No, that hurt me, hurt me much, but I quickly forgot this injury, when I saw that you understood that, poor as I am, I could be touched by something else than money. Then you said to me some kind words, you called me your friend—your friend! After this I would have thrown myself into the fire for you, and that for the sole pleasure of throwing myself into it, for I had nothing more to hope for from you; the time of my folly is past; I see too clearly into my

heart not to recognize that I was a kind of mendicant buffoon; I can never have anything in common with a woman as beautiful and as young as you. My only ambition—and this can offend no one—would have been to devote myself to you. But how to have such happiness? I, a vagabond, with nothing but my old sword, my old hat, and my pink hose! Ah! well, by a chance which I at first blessed, Colonel Rutler to-night mistook me for him they call your husband; this mistake might be useful to you. Judge of my joy—I could save the man whom you so passionately loved. I should have preferred to save something else, but I had no time to choose. I risked all, including the everlasting dagger of the colonel. I augmented, by every means possible, his double mistake. You came to my assistance; that is, you buried me in the mud up to the neck, by means of the bagatelles with which you loaded me. It is all the same—I go with all my heart; I am satisfied to do so, and I leave this house without hope of ever seeing you again, with the gallows or prison in prospect, not to count the everlasting dagger of the Dutchman. Ah, well, in spite of all, I repeat, I was content: I said to myself, I know not what awaits me, rope or dungeon; but I am sure Blue Beard will say, 'It is fortunate, very fortunate for us at least, that this eccentric Gascon came here. Poor devil! what has happened to him?' There! that was my ambition. But I did not ask even a regret, a memory—a memory," said the Gascon, moved in spite of himself.

"Sir," said Angela, "as long as I believed you really generous, my gratitude did not fail you."

These words increased the Gascon's wrath; he exclaimed, "Your gratitude, madame! Zounds! it is beautiful. But to proceed. We started from this place with the Belgian. In descending the hill we met the French emissary. Rutler at once believed himself betrayed, and made a furious lunge at me with his everlasting dagger. These are the fruits of devotion. If the blade had not broken, I should have been killed. Nothing is simpler; when one sacrifices oneself for others, it is hardly with the expectation of being crowned with roses, or caressed by nymphs of the woods. Well, the dagger broke; one of the men throttled Rutler; I found myself face to face with the French emissary. I did not lose my head. It was a matter touching you and the unhappy exile whom you loved passionately. I would rather it had been your father or your uncle, but I had no choice. Beside, the idea of being useful to two young and interesting people threw my egotism into the background. The greater the complications the more my pride incited me to save you. I redoubled my audacity and coolness. The great but honest falsehoods I have uttered for you should absolve me from those which I have spoken for an unworthy cause. The good God took up the cause; I was inspired to the greatest falsehoods you can imagine; they were swallowed up as eagerly by the French envoy as if it had been manna from on high. I played my rôle

with all my might. Monsieur De Chemerant told me in two words the object of his mission; an insurrection favored by the King of France was on foot in England; if the Duke of Monmouth were to put himself at the head of the affair its success was assured."

Monmouth made a movement and stealthily exchanged glances with Angela.

The Gascon continued: "When I was on the way to an English prison with the Belgian and his everlasting dagger I did not breathe a word. I was well protected from any wish to return here. But when De Chemerant confided to me a thing of possible advantage to the prince, I had no right to refuse it for him. I therefore accepted in his name all manner of viceroalties. But, if he really desired to take part in this uprising, how was I to let him know? Monsieur De Chemerant desired to set sail at once. By what means could I return here with the envoy of France without exposing the duke, who was ignorant of my last adventure and believed me still to be the Belgian's prisoner, thinking, doubtless, that he was secure here? An idea seized me. I said to De Chemerant, 'Things have changed their aspect; I desire to take my wife with me. Come, let us return to Devil's Cliff.' Faith, it was the only way in which I could manage an interview with you, madame—of warning the prince of this proposal. If he accepted it, I would throw off the prince; if he refused, I would refuse as before, and he would be saved."

"How, sir!" cried Angela. "Such was your generous intention? You would——"

"Oh, wait, madame, wait; do not think me either more stupid or more generous than I am," said the Gascon bitterly. "I begged Father Griffen to come and prepare you, madame, that I desired to take you with me. Chemerant heard me; I could say no more to the priest, but this sufficed. One of two things would result: either you would understand the situation or you would believe me guilty of infamous intentions; in either case, you would be on your guard, and the prince saved; for it was my fixed idea——"

"So, sir," cried Angela, looking at him with mingled surprise and gratitude, "you did not really intend to abuse——"

The Gascon interrupted her shortly. "No, madame, no. I had then no such wicked intentions, though certain particulars of your life appear to me inexplicable. I believed you sincerely attached to an unhappy prince, and at any cost I would have saved the duke."

"Ah! sir, how I have misjudged you? You are the most generous of men," cried Angela.

The adventurer burst into a sardonic laugh, which stupefied the young woman; then he continued with a somber air:

"Thank God, my eyes have been opened. I see now that generosity would be stupid, devotion foolish. I shall profit by this lesson. Polyphème de Croustillac rarely revenges himself, but when he does, he revenges himself well; above all, when the vengeance is as charming as that which awaits him."

"You would be revenged, sir," said Angela, "and on whom?"

"On whom, madame? You have the audacity to ask me that?"

"Why, certainly, what have I done; why this hatred?"

The adventurer stamped his foot so violently that the mulatto made a step toward him; but Croustillac curbed himself and said to Angela shortly, and with ironical bitterness, "Listen to me, madame. It seems to me, that without being possessed of colossal pride, I deserved something, when for you I threw myself into the midst of the most dangerous situations. It seems to me, madame," continued the Gascon, who could not contain his indignation, which increased in measure as he spoke, "It seems to me that it was not at the moment when, at the risk of my life, I was doing all I could to save the husband whom you love so passionately, as they say, that it was not at such a time that you should forget all modesty——"

"Sir!"

"Yes, madame, forget all modesty, all shame, by throwing yourself into the arms of this miserable mulatto, and go to the depth of lighting his pipe. Truly, I was very stupid," continued the Gascon with an increase of rage. "In my devotion to you I risked my skin for the husband of madame! while madame, outrageously mocking her husband and me, abandoned herself to orgies with a lot of scamps. I am beside myself! My mother's son does not merit having been born in my country and having played all manner of pranks, as they say, in the capital of the world, if he cannot find something, in his turn, to laugh at in this adventure. In a word, madame," he said, sullenly, "you can believe me to entertain the wickedest intention in the world, and you will not overstep the reality, for I am now as much your enemy as I was your friend. As for the rest, I am well pleased; nothing is more wearying than fine sentiments. I should have resumed my shepherd songs and my morning sonnets. I shall take good care not to do so. I prefer the fashion in which I love you now, rather than heretofore," said Croustillac, throwing a glittering look at Angela.

CHAPTER XXV.

REVELATIONS.

The poor Gascon, carried away by anger and jealousy, appeared more furious than he was in reality. Unhappily, the Duchess of Monmouth did not know him well enough to understand the exaggeration of this ferocious appearance.

Angela thought the adventurer seriously regretted having shown a generous spirit; in doubting him she naturally hesitated to calm the Gascon's jealousy by imparting the disguise of the duke; this avowal would ruin everything if the chevalier was not faithful. It was, then, prudent to hold this in reserve.

"Sir," said Angela, "you deceive yourself; there is a certain mystery in my conduct which I cannot yet explain to you."

These words redoubled Croustillac's irritation; for the past three days he had been surrounded by mysteries; therefore he exclaimed, "I have had enough mystery; I have had too many concerning yourself. I do not wish to be your dupe any longer, madame. I do not know what may await me; I do not know how all this will end, but I swear you shall follow me!"

"Sir!"

"Yes, madame, I have all the inconveniences of the rôle of your well-beloved husband; I will at least have its pleasures; as to this unworthy scoundrel of a mulatto, who says nothing, but thinks evil and would do it, I will deliver him over to De Chemerant, who will give me a good account of him. If it was not for soiling the sword of a gentleman by dipping it in his slave blood, I myself would take this vengeance."

Angela exchanged glances with Monmouth, whose imperturbability exasperated the Gascon. Both of them realized the necessity of calming the chevalier; his anger might prove dangerous; he must be quieted at once, without betraying the secret of the prince's disguise.

The young woman said to the adventurer, "All will be explained, sir; my greatest, my only wrong toward you has been in doubting the generosity of your character, and the loyalty of your devotion. Father Griffen, although he answered for you, has been, like myself, deceived as to the real motive of your intentions; we have believed, and we have been wrong in so believing, that you were capable of abusing the name which you have taken. In order to escape a fresh danger with which you seemed to threaten us, it became necessary to attempt a means, very uncertain, doubtless, but which might succeed. I could not escape—that would be only to meet you. I gave the necessary orders, then, that you should be introduced here with De

Chemerant, hoping that you would surprise me, suddenly, and thus become a witness of the tender intimacy which linked me with the captain——"

"How! did you arrange this agreeable scene for me?" cried the Gascon furiously, "and you dare say it to my face? But this is the last degree of degradation and shame, madame. And for what purpose, if you please, did you wish to prove to me the abominable intimacy which binds you to this bandit?"

"To the end that it should be impossible for you to take me with you. Monsieur De Chemerant being a witness to my culpable intimacy with Captain Whirlwind, you could not, you who are passing as the Duke of Monmouth, take with you a woman, who, in the eyes of the French envoy, is as culpable as I would appear to him—as culpable as I am."

"You acknowledge it, then, madame?"

"Yes, and again yes, sir! Do not be generous by halves; what does it matter to you whom I love—a slave, as you say?"

"How, madame? What does it matter to me? have you then sworn to drive me mad? And what does it serve that I play the part of your husband? Does he really exist? Is he here, and do you not avail yourself of the mistakes of which I am a victim to get rid of me? Is he not already safely at a distance, this husband of yours? This is enough to drive one mad!" cried the Gascon wildly. "I believe my head is turned; am I or am I not for the past two days the sport of an abominable nightmare? Who are you? Where am I? Who am I? Am I Croustillac? Am I my lord? Am I the prince, am I a viceroy, or even a king? Have I had my throat cut or not? How is this to be explained? This thing must stop! If there is a Duke of Monmouth, where is he? Show him to me," cried the unhappy adventurer, in a state of excitement impossible to describe, but easy to imagine.

Angela, frightened and less ready than ever to tell the Gascon everything, said hesitatingly, "Sir, certain mysterious circumstances——"

Croustillac did not give her time to go on, but cried, "Still more mysteries! I tell you I have had enough mystery. I do not believe my brain is weaker than any other, but one hour more of this and I shall be a lunatic!"

"Sir, if you could understand——"

"Madame, I do not wish to understand," cried the chevalier, stamping his foot in a rage. "It is just because I have wished to understand that my head is almost turned."

"Sir," said Angela, "I beg you to be calm and reflect——"

"I do not wish to reflect nor to comprehend," cried Croustillac, exasperated afresh. "Right or wrong, I have determined that you accompany me, and you

shall accompany me. I do not know where your husband is and I do not wish to know; what I do know is that you have not been obdurate either to Caribbeans, or buccaneers, or mulattoes; very well you shall not be obdurate to me. You see that clock—if in five minutes you do not consent to accompany me, I will tell De Chemerant everything, come of it what will. Decide, then; I shall speak no more; I shall be deaf, for my head will burst like a bombshell at the slightest word."

Croustillac threw himself into a chair, put his hands over his ears in order to hear nothing, and fixed his eyes on the clock.

Monmouth had walked up and down the room incessantly; he, as well as Angela, was in terrible perplexity.

"James, perhaps he is an honest man," said Angela in a low tone, "but his excitement terrifies me; see how wild his manner is."

"We must risk confiding to his loyalty, otherwise he will speak."

"But if he deceives us—if he tells all?"

"Angela! between two dangers we must choose the least."

"Yes, if he consents to pass for you, you are saved, at least this time."

"But in this case I cannot leave him in the power of De Chemerant."

"Oh! it is frightful!"

"Never will I consent to again plunge England into a civil war. I would a thousand times prefer prison and death; but to leave you, my God!"

"What shall we do, James? What danger does this man run?"

"Immense! the possessor of such a state secret."

"But then, I must lose you or follow him. Ah, what shall I do? Time presses."

After a moment's reflection, Monmouth said, "We must not hesitate. Tell him everything. If he then consents to play my rôle for some hours, I am safe, and will have the means to place him beyond the resentment of the French envoy."

"James! if this man should be a traitor? Heavens! take care."

At this moment the adventurer, seeing the hand of the clock reach the fifth minute, said to Angela, "Well, madame, what have you decided upon? Yes or no? For I am incapable of listening to or understanding anything beyond. Will you follow me or will you not? Speak."

Monmouth approached him with a grave and imposing air. "I am going, sir, to give you a proof of the highest esteem and of——"

"Your esteem, scoundrel," cried Croustillac indignantly, interrupting the duke. "Is it, indeed, to me that you dare speak thus? Your esteem——"

"But, sir——"

"Not another word," continued Croustillac, turning toward Angela. "Madame, will you follow me? Is it yes or no?"

"But listen——"

"Is it yes or no?" exclaimed he, walking toward the door; "answer, or I will call De Chemerant."

"But by St. George!" cried Monmouth.

The chevalier was about to open the door when the young woman seized him by the hands with such a beseeching air that he paused in spite of himself.

"Yes, yes, I will go with you," she said, in a frightened manner.

"At last!" said the Gascon, "so be it. Take my arm and let us go; De Chemerant has waited a long time."

"But just a moment—you must know all," said the poor woman hastily. "The Caribbean is in reality the filibuster, or rather the buccaneer and the Caribbean are——"

"Ah, there you go again; do you wish that I should retain my senses?" cried the Gascon, making a desperate effort and running toward the door in order to call De Chemerant.

The prince flung himself upon Croustillac, and, seizing his two wrists in one hand, placed the other over his mouth at the moment Croustillac called "Help, De Chemerant!" then he said, "I am the Duke of Monmouth!"

The prince thought the chevalier would understand everything the moment he spoke, but in the exasperation which Croustillac felt, he only saw in this statement a new artifice or a new provocation, and he redoubled his efforts to escape. Though much less strong than the duke, the chevalier was not without energy; he began to struggle violently, when Angela, terrified, ran and took up a flask, and, putting on her handkerchief a drop of the liquid, rubbed the hand of the prince, removing the stain upon it and showing the white skin.

"Do you understand now, sir, that the three persons are one?" said the prince, releasing Croustillac and showing him his white hand.

These words were a revelation to Croustillac, and he understood all.

Unfortunately, at the moment when the prince took his hand from the mouth of the Gascon, the latter had uttered the words, "Help! De Chemerant!"

The sound of the struggle had already attracted the attention of the French envoy, and, hearing the cry of Croustillac, he rushed into the room, sword in hand. It would be impossible to depict the stupefaction, the fright of the three when De Chemerant appeared. The duke put his hand upon his sword. Angela fell back into a chair and hid her face in her hands. Croustillac looked about him with an agonized air, regretting his imprudence, but too late.

Nevertheless, the adventurer's presence of mind returned to him little by little; as it needs but a ray of the sun to dispel the thick mist, so the moment that the good chevalier had the key to the three disguises of the prince, everything became clear to him. His mind, until then so sadly agitated, became calm; his unworthy doubt of Blue Beard ceased; there only remained his regret at having accused her, and the desire to devote himself to her and the prince.

With wonderful quickness of invention (we are familiar enough with the Gascon now to say with a marvelous facility for lying) Croustillac formed his plan of campaign against De Chemerant, who still, sword in hand, stood on the threshold and said for the second time, "What is it, your highness? what has happened? I thought I heard a cry and struggle, and an appeal for aid."

"You were not deceived, sir," said Croustillac gloomily.

Monmouth and his wife experienced a terrible anxiety. They were ignorant of the Gascon's intentions; knowing Monmouth's secret, he was now completely master of their fate.

If Angela and her husband had had enough presence of mind to scrutinize Croustillac's face, they would have seen a kind of triumphant and malignant joy, which betrayed itself in spite of him in the menacing frown of his forehead.

Monsieur De Chemerant asked him a third time why he had called.

"I called you, sir," said the chevalier in a dismal voice, and with the air of coming out of a deep study, "I called you to my aid——"

"Was it this wretch? your highness," said the envoy, pointing to Monmouth, who, standing with arms crossed, remained by the chair where Angela had seated herself, ready to defend her and to sell his life dearly, for, as we have said, he was ignorant of the adventurer's intention. "Speak the word, your highness," continued De Chemerant, "and I will hand him over to my guards."

The Gascon shook his head, and answered, "I charge myself with this man; this is my affair. It is not against such a creature as this that I called you to my assistance, sir, it is against myself."

"What do you say, your highness?"

"I mean that I was afraid that I would allow myself to be softened by the tears of his woman, as dangerously hypocritical as she is audaciously culpable."

"Your highness, it often takes courage—much courage—to be just."

"You are right, sir; that is why I feared my weakness. I called you in order that the sight of you might keep alive my indignation and rekindle my wrath, for you have been a witness of my dishonor, sir. So, tell me that if I pardon I would be a coward, that I should merit my fate. Is it not so, sir?"

"Your highness——"

"I understand you—you are right—yes, by St. George!" Croustillac remembered having heard the prince use this oath; "by St. George, I will be revenged."

Angela and the duke breathed again. They understood that the chevalier wished to save them.

"Your highness," said De Chemerant severely, "I do not hesitate to repeat to your highness, before madame, what I had the honor to say to you some short time ago, that an insurmountable barrier now separates you from a guilty spouse," continued the envoy, with an effort, while Angela hid her confusion by covering her face with her handkerchief.

Croustillac raised his head, and cried in a heartbroken tone, "Deceived by a mulatto; think of it, sir, a miserable mulatto, a mongrel, a copper-colored animal!"

"Your highness——"

"In a word, sir," said Croustillac, turning toward the envoy with an indignant and sorrowful manner, "you know why I returned, what my plans were; what I would have placed upon the brow of madame. Ah, well, is it not a frightful irony of fate that at this very moment a wife—a criminal——"

"Your highness," cried De Chemerant, interrupting the Gascon, "at present these projects must be a secret from madame."

"I know it; I know it! but then what a horrible surprise! I enter with a heart beating with joy, into the home circle, into my peaceful home, and what is it that I hear?"

"Your highness——"

"You have heard it as well as I. That is not all—what is it that I see?"

"Your highness, calm yourself."

"You have seen, as I have, a mulatto outlaw. But this shall not stop here, no, by St. George! Yes, I did well to call you. Now my anger boils; the most cruel plans crowd in upon my imagination. Yes, yes, that is it;" said Croustillac, with a meditative air. "I have it at last! I have found a revenge fitting the offence!"

"Your highness, the contempt——"

"The contempt—that is very easy for you to say, sir, contempt. No, sir, there remains another thing; I have found something better, and you shall assist me."

"Your highness, anything that depends upon my zeal, without prejudice to the orders which I have received, and the success of my mission."

"I renounce and cast off this unworthy woman. From this day, from this moment, all is forever at an end between her and me."

"Thank God!" cried De Chemerant, delighted with this resolve; "you could not act more wisely."

"To-morrow at daybreak," said the Gascon, in a curt tone, "she and her odious accomplice will embark on board of one of my vessels."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DEVOTION.

"YES, sir!" repeated the Gascon, "to-morrow my wife and this miserable wretch shall go aboard one of my vessels. That is all my vengeance," continued he, dwelling on these words with savage irony. "Oh, I know what I am doing. Yes, by heaven! She and her guilty accomplice, those two, as if they were really husband and wife, the miserable wretches! shall embark together. As to the destination of the vessel," said the chevalier, with a glance of such horrible ferocity that De Chemerant was struck by it, "as to the fate that awaits these guilty ones, I cannot tell you, sir; that concerns no one but myself."

Then, taking Angela roughly by the arm, Croustillac exclaimed, "Ah, you desire a mulatto for a lover, duchess? very well, you shall have him. And you, scoundrel, you must have a white woman, a duchess? very well you shall have her. You shall never separate, tender lovers that you are, never again; but you do not know at what a terrible price you will be reunited."

"Your highness, what do you intend to do?"

"That is my affair; your responsibility will be at an end; the rest will take place on neutral ground," returned the Gascon with a smile at once mysterious and ferocious; "yes, on a desert island; and since this tender couple love one another, love each other to death, there will be time for them to prove it—until death."

"I understand you, your highness; I see perfectly; but that will be terrible," said De Chemerant, who thought that Croustillac intended to starve his wife and the mulatto.

"Terrible! you have said it, sir. All that I ask of you, and as a witness of my injury you cannot refuse me, is to give me the necessary assistance in order to conduct this guilty pair on board one of my ships. I will, myself, place them with the captain and give him his orders; orders which, perhaps he would not dare to obey if I did not give them in person."

Monsieur de Chemerant, in spite of his cunning, was duped by the seeming rage of Croustillac; he said to him respectfully, "Your highness, justice is severe, but should not be cruel."

"What do you say, sir?" cried Croustillac proudly, "am I not the sole judge of the punishment due this guilty pair? Do you refuse me your assistance when it only requires you to take this man and his accomplice on board a vessel belonging to me?"

"No, sir, but I would say to your highness that it would be, perhaps, more generous——"

Angela, seeing that she must no longer remain inactive, threw herself at the feet of Croustillac, crying, "Have mercy!" while Monmouth seemed to be wrapped in a deep and sad silence; then, addressing De Chemerant, the young woman continued, "Oh, sir, you seem to be sensible and good; intercede for me with my dear lord, that he condemn me to less cruel pain. I have merited it all, I will suffer all, but that my dear lord——"

"I forbid your calling me your 'dear lord,' madame," said Croustillac. "I am no longer your dear lord."

"Ah well, your highness, do not send me on board the vessel of which you speak."

"And why not, madame?"

"My God! because that the brigantine is the Chameleon, commanded by Captain Ralph; your highness, this man is cruel; he succeeded the filibuster Whirlwind in this command."

"And that is just why I have chosen the Chameleon, madame; it is just because Captain Ralph is the most cruel enemy of your unworthy lover," said Croustillac, who understood perfectly Angela's meaning.

"But, your highness, you know very well that this vessel will be anchored to-morrow morning very near here, almost at the foot of the cliff in the alligators' cave."

"Yes, madame, I know it."

"Oh, your highness, would you compel me to embark there when nothing in the world would make me even approach its banks? My God! have you forgotten the frightful memories that this place is connected with in my mind?"

"Oh! the cunning creature," thought Croustillac; "she wishes to say, what I did not know, that there is a vessel of hers called the Chameleon, whose captain is devoted to her, and who will anchor to-morrow near here. I have it! This is just her own vessel she had prepared hastily to furnish her and the duke a means of escape, when she saw me carried off by Colonel Rutler; one of the negro fishermen was doubtless sent ahead to deliver her directions."

The Gascon, after some little reflection, said aloud, "Yes, those memories are terrible to you, I know it, madame."

"Then, your highness, have you the heart——"

"Yes, yes," cried the chevalier, in an explosion of rage, "yes, no pity for the infamous creature who has so unworthily outraged me! All the better, my

vengeance commences but the sooner. I will show you that you have no pity to look for from me; you shall see!" He struck a bell.

"What are you going to do, your highness."

"Your faithful Mirette will come; you shall yourself give her the order to send to Captain Ralph to prepare everything on board the Chameleon to set sail at daybreak."

"Ah, your highness, it is barbarous to make me give the order, myself."

"Obey, madame, obey."

Mirette appeared. Angela gave the order in a broken voice.

"I have obeyed you, and now your highness, in pity grant me a last favor in the name of our past love."

"Oh, yes, by St. George!" cried Croustillac, "past? oh, past, decidedly."

"Allow me one moment, your highness, the favor of an interview."

"No, no, never!"

"Do not refuse me; do not be so pitiless?"

"Out of my sight, faithless woman!"

"My lord!" said Angela, clasping her hands.

"Your highness," said De Chemerant, "at the moment of quitting madame forever, do not refuse her this last consolation."

"You also, De Chemerant, you also? and though you have been a witness?—Ah, well, I consent, madame, but upon one condition."

"You have but to order."

"That your paramour remain during our conversation."

"Really, this is not so bad, I think," said Croustillac to himself; "I hope the duchess will understand me and at first refuse."

"But, my dear lord," said Angela; "the last interview that you grant me should be between us alone."

"Marvelous! oh, she comprehends a half word," said Croustillac to himself; then aloud, "And why, then, should our interview be private? Have you something you desire to hide from your best beloved—from the lover of your choice?"

"But if I desire to beg your forgiveness, sir?"

"You can do so before your accomplice. The more you accuse yourself, the more you depict your conduct as disloyal, infamous, unworthy, the more

you affirm the lowness of your choice. This will be your punishment and this scoundrel's also."

"But, my lord?"

"That is my ultimatum," replied Croustillac.

"Do you not fear the despair of this man?" said De Chemerant in a low tone.

"No; traitors are always cowards. Behold this one—what a gloomy, downcast air. He does not dare as much as lift his eyes to me. In any case, sir, send, I beg, some men of yours to the gallery outside, instructed to enter at my first signal." Then, turning with an air of reconsidering, and desiring to make a master stroke, Croustillac said, "In fact, if you will be present at this interview, Monsieur De Chemerant, the punishment of this guilty couple will be complete."

"Oh, sir, in pity do not condemn me to such a depth of shame and humiliation," cried Angela, in despairing tones. "And you, sir, have the generosity not to consent to this," she said to De Chemerant.

Monsieur De Chemerant had the delicacy to excuse himself to the Gascon; he left the room, and left Monmouth, Angela, and the adventurer together.

The envoy had hardly left the room before Monmouth, after assuring himself that he could not be overheard, held out his hand cordially to Croustillac, and said to him, feelingly, "Sir, you are a man of spirit, courage, and resolution; accept our thanks, and pardon us for having suspected you even for a moment."

"Yes, yes, pardon our unjust suspicions," said Angela, on her part taking the Gascon's hand between her own. "We were so disturbed, and your manner was so furious, so wild!"

"We all had reason, madame;" said the adventurer, "you had reason to be disturbed, because my return was not very reassuring. I had reason to be furious, because I supposed the duke to be a bandit. As to my wild manner, by heavens! it may be said without offense, you will acknowledge that enough strange things have occurred during the last two days, and I may be excused for being a little astounded. Fortunately, I recovered my self-possession when I saw I had been a fool and had risked everything."

"Brave and excellent man," said Monmouth.

"Bravery is in the blood of the Croustillacs, sir; as to being excellent, I do not know about that; if such be the case, it is not my fault; it is your wife's work, who has aroused in me the desire to be better than I really am. Ah, well, prince, time is precious; everything is in train to raise a county of England in your favor; Louis the XIV. will support this insurrection. There is

offered you the viceroyship of Ireland and Scotland, and all kinds of other favors."

"Never will I consent to profit by these offers. Civil wars have cost me too dear," cried Monmouth; "and"—looking at Angela, "I no longer have ambitions."

"Your highness! reflect well! If your heart counsels remove the bronze color from your face, and say to De Chemerant that reasons known only to yourself obliged you to guard your secret until now. You will prove to him who you are; I will return your duchy to you, and ask your permission to go and fight at your side in Cornwall, or elsewhere, in order to serve you, as they say, as a living armor. I am sure this will please the duchess."

"And we have suspected him," said Angela, looking at her husband.

"He must forgive us," said the duke. "Men like him are so rare that it is not unnatural to doubt them when one encounters them."

"Hold on, my lord, you embarrass me. Let us speak of other matters. Do you, or do you not, accept the viceroyship? After that, do not think I shall press you to speak in order to relieve me from your rôle; it pleases me, it amuses me. I have become quite accustomed to it. Nevertheless, it will be somewhat unpleasant to no longer hear myself addressed as 'my lord duke,' to say nothing of my laughing in my sleeve when I think of all the absurdities which I have made that good De Chemerant, with his important air, swallow. If I persist, your highness, in praying that you resume your rank, as it seems they are terribly in need of you in England in order to secure the happiness of the people in general and that of Cornwall in particular; you must know that better than I do——"

"Ah! I know only too well the vain pretexts that one offers to ambition."

"But, your highness, all appears to be perfectly prepared. The frigate which has brought the good De Chemerant is filled with arms and ammunition; there is in it enough to arm and revolutionize all the Cornishmen in the world; moreover, you can count on a dozen of your partisans."

"Of my partisans! and where, then?" cried Monmouth.

"On board Chemerant's frigate. These brave men are waiting for me, that is to say, waiting for you, your highness, with great impatience. There is above all a madman named Mortimer, whom De Chemerant had the greatest difficulty in the world to keep on board, so much was he possessed with the desire to embrace me—I would say embrace you, for I confound us all the time."

Angela, seeing the troubled manner of her husband, said to him, "My God! what ails you?"

"I can no longer hesitate," replied Monmouth, "I must tell De Chemerant the whole truth."

"Heavens, James! what are you saying?"

"You wish to be viceroy, your highness?" interposed Croustillac.

"No, sir, I desire to prevent your ruining yourself on my account. My gratitude will be no less lasting for the service that you wished to do me."

"How, your highness? Is it not, then, to become viceroy that you would dispossess me of my principality?"

"My partisans are on board the frigate; if I should accept your generous offer, sir, to-morrow you would be known—lost."

"But, your highness——"

"Except for this circumstance which, I repeat, would cause your discovery in a moment, I would, perhaps, have excepted your generous devotion, the mistake of De Chemerant might have continued for a few days, and I could have put you beyond the reach of his resentment; but to accept your offer, sir, knowing the presence of my friends on board the frigate, would be to expose you to certain danger. I can never consent to do that."

"Your highness forgets that it means perpetual imprisonment for you if you do not place yourself at the head of this movement?"

"It is because it means for me the escape from a danger that I do not choose to sacrifice you, sir. When I learned that you were taken prisoner by Rutler I was going to rush to your assistance in order to release you."

"My God, James! think of the prison! of eternal confinement! but it is not possible! and what will become of me, if I should be forbidden to accompany you? No, no! you will not reject the sacrifice which this generous man offers to make!"

"Angela!" said the duke, in a tone of reproach; "Angela! and this generous man, shall we abandon him shamefully when he is devoted to us—to escape imprisonment, shall we condemn him to an eternal captivity?"

"Him?"

"Doubtless! is he not the possessor of a state secret? Will not De Chemerant be furious at seeing himself tricked. I tell you, he cannot escape prison when the trick shall be discovered."

"Confound it! my duke, attend to your own affairs!" cried Croustillac, "and do not take the bread out of my mouth, as they say. Prisoner of state! that disgusts you, but do you not know that that would be an assured retreat for me, a refuge for my old days? To be frank, the life of an adventurer palls upon me; there must be an end to it. I would have something more sure;

judge, then, if that would not suit me? Prisoner of state! can I not secure that? I beg of you not to take from me the last resource of my old age; do not destroy my future."

"Listen to me, you brave and worthy man," responded Monmouth, affectionately pressing his hand. "I am not deceived by your ingenious pretenses."

"Your highness, I swear——"

"Listen, I beg of you; when you have heard me you will no longer be surprised at my refusal. You will see that I cannot accept your generous offer without being doubly culpable. You will understand the sad memories, not to say remorse, that your devoted offer and the present chain of circumstances awake in me. And you, Angela, my dearly beloved, you shall at last learn a secret that until this present moment I have hidden from you; it needed circumstances as grave as these in which I am now placed to force me to make this sad revelation."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MARTYR.

"JAMES! James! what are you saying? you terrify me!" exclaimed Angela, as she witnessed the duke's emotion.

"You know," said the duke to Croustillac, "in consequence of what political events I was arrested and confined to the Tower of London in 1685?"

"You will excuse me, your highness, if I know not a word of it; I am as ignorant as a fish of contemporaneous history, which, be it said in passing, and without boasting, rendered my part outrageously difficult to play; for I was always afraid I should make some ridiculous statement, and thus compromise, not my reputation as a scholar—I am no priest—but your fortune which I so imprudently assumed."

"Very well then," said the duke; "after the death of my father; when the Duke of York, my uncle, ascended the throne under the title of James II., I entered into a conspiracy against him. I shall not seek to justify my conduct; years of reflection have made things clear to me. I know now that I was as culpable as I was insane; the young Duke of Argyle was the soul in this plot. All this was carried on under the very eyes of the Prince of Orange, then a stadtholder, now King of England. Argyle knew my views of the Protestant action, my ambition, my resentment against James II.; he had no trouble in associating me with his plans. At once, owing to my name and influence, I was at the head of the conspiracy. I had news from England which only waited my presence there to overthrow the throne of the papist king to proclaim me king in his place. I departed from the Texel with three vessels transporting soldiers whom I had recruited. Argyle, having preceded me in Scotland, had paid with his head for the audacity of his attempt. I landed in England at the head of a number of devoted partisans. I realized then how greatly I had been deceived. Three or four thousand men at the most joined the handful of brave men who were pledged to my cause, and among others were Mortimer, Rothsay and Dudley. The son of Monck, the young Duke of Albemarle, advanced against me at the head of a royal army; and I, desiring to bring fortune to the point, made a decisive move. I attacked the enemy at Sedgemore, near Bridgewater; I was beaten in spite of the prodigies of valor shown by my little army, and, above all, by my cavalry, commanded by the brave Lord George Sidney." In pronouncing this name, the voice of the prince failed him, and deep emotion was depicted upon his face.

"George Sidney! my second father! my benefactor!" cried Angela. "It was in fighting for you he was killed! it was at that battle, then, that he was killed? This is the secret you have hidden from me?"

The duke bent his head, and after a few minutes' silence, said, "You will know all, very soon, child! Our rout was complete. I wandered off at hazard; my head had a price upon it. I was seized the day after this fatal defeat and conducted to the Tower of London. My case was tried. Convicted of high treason, I was condemned to death."

"Oh," cried Angela, throwing herself into the duke's arms; "you deceived me; I believed you to be only exiled."

"Be calm, Angela; yet I have hidden this from you, as much that you should not be troubled as—." Then, after a moment's hesitation, Monmouth continued, "you shall know all; it requires much courage to make this revelation."

"Why? What have you to fear?" said Angela.

"Alas! poor child, when you have heard me, perhaps you will regard me with horror!"

"You, James? do you believe that I can ever do that?"

"Well," said Monmouth, "whatever the result, I must speak, at the risk, perhaps, of separating us forever."

"Never, never!" cried Angela despairingly.

"Zounds! I will sooner throw De Chemerant from these cliffs at the least pretense," cried Croustillac. "And, as for that, with your slaves, we could furnish him a fine escort. But I think—will you try this method? How many slaves can you arm, sir?"

"You forget that De Chemerant's escort is considerable; the negro fishermen have gone—there are not more than four or five men here. Violent means are impossible. Providence doubtless wills that I shall expiate a great crime. I will be resigned."

"A crime, James? guilty of a great crime? I will never believe it!" cried Angela.

"If my crime was involuntary, it was none the less horrible. Angela, it is now my duty to tell you what I owe to Sidney, your noble relative who took such care of you in your infancy, poor orphan! While you were receiving your education in France, where he had himself taken you, Sidney, whom I had seen in Holland, attached himself to my fortunes; a singular similarity of tastes, of principles and thoughts, had drawn us together; but he was so proud that I was obliged to make the advances. How happy I was at having first pressed his hand! Never was there a living soul as beautiful as Sidney's. Never was there a nobler character or a more generous and ardent heart! Dreaming of the happiness of the people, deceived as I was myself as to the true end of my plans, he believed that he was serving the holy cause of humanity, when he was in reality only serving the fatal ambition of a man!

While the conspiracy was organizing, he was my most active emissary and my most intimate confidant. To describe to you, my child, the profound, blind attachment of Sidney for myself would be impossible; one affection only struggled in his heart with that which he had vowed to me; it was his tenderness for you—you, his distant relative of whom he had assumed the care. Oh! how he cherished you! Through all the agitations, and the perils of his life as a soldier and conspirator, he always found some moments in which to visit his Angela. There were ever tears in his eyes when he spoke to me of you. Yes, this man, of intrepid courage and indomitable energy, wept like a child in speaking of your tender grace, the qualities of your heart, and your sad and studious youth, poor little abandoned one, for you had no one in the world but Sidney. On that fatal day at Bridgewater he commanded my cavalry. After prodigies of valor, he was left for dead on the battlefield; as for me, carried away in a rush of flying troops, grievously wounded, it was impossible for me to find him."

"Was not that the day when he died?" said Angela, wiping her eyes.

"Listen, Angela; oh, you do not know how these sad memories break my heart!"

"And ours also," said Croustillac. "Brave Sidney! I do not know what it is that tells me that he did not die that day at Bridgewater, and that we shall hear of him again."

Monmouth trembled, remained silent a moment, and then continued: "I must have courage. I will tell you all. Sidney was left for dead on the battlefield; I was arrested, condemned to death, and my execution fixed for the 15th of July, 1685. When they told me I was to be executed the following day, I was alone in my prison.

"In the midst of the terrible thoughts to which I was a prey during those dreadful hours that preceded the moment of my execution, I swear to you, Angela, before the God that hears me, if I had any sweet and consoling thoughts to calm me, they were those I gave to Sidney, in recalling the beautiful days of our friendship. I believed him dead and I said, 'In a few hours I shall be united to him forever.' All at once the door of my cell opened and Sidney appeared!"

"Zounds! so much the better! I was sure he was not dead," exclaimed Croustillac.

"No, he was not dead," replied the duke with a sigh. "Would to God he had died as a soldier on the field of battle."

Angela and Croustillac looked at Monmouth in astonishment. He continued: "At the sight of Sidney I believed myself the dupe of a fancy conjured up by my extreme agitation; but I soon felt his tears on my cheek, and myself

pressed within his arms. 'Saved! you are saved!' he said, through his tears. 'Saved?' said I, gazing at him stupidly. 'Saved, yes; listen to me,' said he, and this was what he told me: My uncle the king could not openly show me mercy; policy forbade; but he did not wish his brother's son to perish on the scaffold. Informed by one of his courtiers who was, notwithstanding, one of my friends, of the resemblance between Sidney and myself, a resemblance which so struck you the first time you saw me," said Monmouth to Angela, "King James had secretly provided Sidney with means to get into my prison. This devoted friend was to assume my clothes, and I to put on his, and go out of the Tower by means of this strategy. The next day, learning of my escape and the devotion of Sidney remaining prisoner in my stead, the king would put him at liberty and give orders to seek me out; but these orders would only be in appearance. He favored, secretly, my departure for France. I was only to write to the king and give him my word to never return to England."

"Ah, well," said Angela, interested to the last degree by this recital; "you accepted Sidney's offer, and he remained a prisoner in your stead?"

"Alas! yes, I accepted it, for all that Sidney said to me seemed so probable; his presence at that hour in the prison, in spite of the severe watch to which I was subjected, made me believe that an all-powerful will aided mysteriously in my flight."

"It was not so, then?" cried Angela.

"Nothing could be more naturally arranged, it seems to me," said Croustillac.

"In effect," said Monmouth, smiling bitterly, "nothing was more naturally arranged; it was only too easy for Sidney to persuade me, to turn aside my objections."

"And what objections could you make?" said Angela. "What was there astonishing in that King James, not wishing to shed your blood on the scaffold, should connive at your escape?"

"And how could Sidney succeed in getting into the prison, sir, without the assistance of some powerful influence?" said the adventurer.

"Oh, is it not so?" said the duke with sad satisfaction, "was it not that all that Sidney said to me might seem probable, possible? Was I not justified in believing him?"

"Undoubtedly," said Angela.

"Was it not," continued Monmouth, "was it not possible to put faith in his words without being misled by the fear of death, without being influenced by a cowardly, horrible egotism? And still, I swear to you, I did not agree to

what Sidney said to me. Before accepting life and liberty which he came to offer me in the name of my uncle, I asked myself what would happen to my friend if James did not keep his promise? I said to myself that the greatest punishment that could befall a man who was an accomplice in aiding another to escape, was imprisonment in turn; thus, admitting this hypothesis, once free, although compelled to hide myself, I had sufficient resources at my disposal not to quit England before having, in my turn, liberated Sidney. What more can I say to you? The instinct of life, the fear of death, doubtless obscured my judgment, troubled my discernment. I accepted, for I believed everything Sidney said to me. Alas! why was I so insane?"

"Insane? Faith, you would have been insane had you not accepted!" cried Croustillac.

"Who, indeed, would have hesitated in your place?" added Angela.

"No, no, I tell you that I should not have accepted; my heart, if not my head, should have revolted at this deceptive thought. But what did I know. A strange fatality, perhaps a frightful egotism, pushed me on. I accepted. I pressed Sidney in my arms, I took his clothes, and I said to him, 'To-morrow!' with the conviction that I should see him the following day. I left my cell; the jailer escorted me to the gate; thanks to my resemblance to Sidney, he noticed nothing wrong, and led me in haste by a secret road as far as a door of the Tower. I was free! I forgot to tell you that Sidney had informed me of a house in the city where I could wait for him safely, for he would return, he said, to me the following day, in order to plan our departure. At last I found, at this house in the city, the precious stones I had confided to Sidney on my departure from Holland, the value of which was enormous. Wrapped up in his mantle, a mantle which you wear to-day, and which has remained sacred to me, I directed my steps toward the city. I rapped at the door; an old woman opened it, and leading me into a secluded chamber, she gave into my hands the iron casket, the key of which Sidney had handed me. I found there my precious stones. Broken with fatigue, for the sleepless hours I had passed were frightful, I fell into a slumber. For the first time since my sentence to death, I sought sleep without saying to myself that the scaffold awaited me on my awakening. When I arose the following day it was broad daylight; a bright sun penetrated between my curtains. I raised them; the sky was clear; it was a radiant summer day. Oh! I felt such rapturous joy and such inexpressible happiness. I had seen my open tomb, and I still lived. I breathed the air in every pore. Seized with gratitude, I threw myself upon my knees, and blessed God, the king, and Sidney. I waited to see this dear friend from one moment to another. I did not doubt, no, I could not doubt, the king's clemency. All at once I heard in the distance the criers announcing important events; it seemed to me that I

heard my name. I thought it was an illusion, but, in fact, it was my name. Oh, then, a frightful presentiment seized me; my hair stood on end. I remained on my knees. I listened with my heart beating violently; the voices came nearer; I still heard my name mingled with other words. A ray of joy, as foolish as my presentiment had been horrible, changed my terror into hope. Madman! I believed they were crying the details of the escape of the Duke of Monmouth. In my impatience, I descended to the street; I bought the account; I mounted again with palpitating heart, holding the paper in my hands."

Saying these words, Monmouth became frightfully pale, and could hardly support himself. A cold perspiration bathed his forehead.

"Well?" cried Angela and Croustillac, who experienced a piercing agony.

"Ah," cried the duke despairingly, "it was the details of the execution of the Duke of Monmouth."

"And Sidney?" cried Angela.

"Sidney had died for me, died a martyr to friendship. His blood, his noble blood, had been shed upon the scaffold instead of mine. Now, Angela, you see, unhappy child, why I have always hidden this terrible secret."

At these words the duke fell back on the sofa, hiding his face in his hands. Angela threw herself at his feet, sobbing bitterly.

Hume says: "After his execution, his partisans held to the hope of yet seeing him at their head; they flattered themselves that the prisoner who had been beheaded was not the Duke of Monmouth, but one of his friends, who resembled him greatly, and who had had the courage to die in his stead."

Sainte-Foix, in a letter on the Iron Mask (Amsterdam, 1768), says: "It is true that the report spread through London that an officer of Monmouth's army who greatly resembled the duke, having been taken prisoner, and knowing death to be inevitable, received a proposition to represent the duke with as much joy as if life had been offered him; and hearing this, that a great lady, having bribed those who could open his coffin, and having looked at the form, cried, 'Ah, that is not the Duke of Monmouth.'" Furthermore, Sainte-Foix, who sought to prove that the Iron Mask was no other than the Duke of Monmouth, cited a passage of another English work by Pym, in which he says: "Count Landy sent to seek Colonel Skelton, who was the ex-lieutenant of the Tower, and whom the Prince of Orange had dismissed to give the place to Lord Lucas." "Skelton," said Count Landy to him the previous evening, in dining with Robert Johnston, "you say that the Duke of Monmouth is living and imprisoned in an English castle?" "I cannot vouch for this, because I do not really know," said Skelton, "but I affirm that the night after the pretended execution of the Duke of Monmouth, the king,

accompanied by three men, came himself to the tower and carried the duke away."

Sainte-Foix cites still another conversation with Father Tournemine, saying, "The Duchess of Portsmouth said to Father Tournemine and to the confessor of King James that she always imputed to that prince the execution of the Duke of Monmouth, because Charles II., at the moment of his death and when about to receive the last communion, had made King James (then Duke of York) promise on the Host, which Huldeston, a Catholic priest, secretly carried, that whatever revolt the Duke of Monmouth might attempt he (James) would never punish him with death; so King James did not put him to death," said Father Sanders.

We will not multiply citations. We only desire to establish that the foundation of this story is not merely a romantic fiction, and that if it is not based upon a historic certainty, it is at least based upon a likely supposition.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DUKE RELATES THE SACRIFICE TO WHICH HE OWES HIS LIFE.

THE chevalier, profoundly moved by the recital of Monmouth, furtively brushed aside his tears, and said, "I understand now what that animal Rutler, with his everlasting dagger, meant by speaking to me of my execution."

"Angela, Angela, my child," exclaimed the duke, lifting his noble countenance bathed in tears, and pressing the young woman to his heart, "how can you ever forgive me the murder of Sidney, my friend, my brother, your only relative, your only protector."

"Alas! have you not replaced him to me, James? I have bewailed his death, believing him killed on the field of battle. Do you believe that my regrets will be greater, now that I know that he sacrificed his life for you—that he did what I would gladly do for you, James, my lover, my husband!"

"Angela! best beloved guardian angel of my life!" cried the duke; "your words cannot assuage the violence of my remorse, but at least you know what religious gratitude I have always had for Sidney, this holy martyr to friendship. What more can I tell you? I passed two days in a state bordering on madness; when I returned to myself I found a letter of Sidney's. He had arranged that I should not receive it until the evening of the day on which he died for me. He explained his pious falsehood; he had not seen King James."

"He had not seen him!" exclaimed Angela.

"No; all that he had said to me was false. So you can understand that I had reason to forever curse the culpable facility with which I had allowed myself to be persuaded. Meanwhile he had died for me; the fable which I had believed in now seemed monstrous folly. No, he had not seen the king! From the depository of my precious stones, he had subtracted wherewith to procure a sum sufficient to gain over one of the officers of the Tower, whom he besought to allow him to see me for the last time. Was this officer in league with Sidney as to the substitution of some one who desired to save me? or was he deceived by the resemblance to such an extent that he suspected nothing. I do not know. The following day, when they went to seek Sidney, he followed the hangman, but he refused to speak for fear his voice would be recognized. The sacrifice was accomplished," said Monmouth, wiping his tears away, which had not ceased to fall during his recital. "I quitted London secretly and went to France under a false name, in order to seek you, Angela. Sidney had given me full power to take her away from the persons to whom he had confided her," said the duke, addressing Croustillac. "Struck by her beauty, her candor, and her other adorable traits, I, believing myself worthy and able to fulfill the last wishes of Sidney

in making his adopted child happy, married this angel. We started for the Spanish colonies, where I believed we would be safe. We took the greatest precautions not to be recognized. By chance I encountered an English captain at Cuba whom I had seen at Amsterdam. I believed myself discovered. We left. After a journey of some months, we established ourselves here. In order to divert suspicion, to watch over my wife, and not wishing to be condemned to an imprisonment which would have been fatal to me, I assumed, by turns, the disguises which you are aware of, and I could, with impunity, traverse the island. Thanks to my precious stones, we were able to purchase a number of small vessels, through the good offices of Master Morris, a man of great probity, who knew, without being in the secret, what to think of the pretended widowhoods of my wife. Not only our commercial vessels increased little by little our fortune, which we shall bequeath to our children, but they afford us always a means of flight. The Chameleon was built for this very purpose, and I have sometimes commanded in the guise of a filibuster, and encountered a Spanish pirate, much to the fright of Angela. We were living here very happily, almost peacefully, when I learned that the Chevalier de Crussol, whose life I had once saved, had become the governor of the island. Although he was a man of honor, I feared to tell him who I was. My first idea was to quit Martinique with my wife; but I then learned of the declaration of war from France to England, Spain and Holland, and that certain rumors began to circulate in England as to the miraculous manner in which I had been saved. My partisans were bestirring themselves, it was said. I could expect no justice from William of Orange, and believed myself safer in this colony than anywhere else. I remained, therefore, in spite of the presence of De Crussol, but redoubled my precautions. The pretended widowhoods of my wife, the frequent visits of the filibuster, the Caribbean, and the buccaneer, furnished a collection of facts so incomprehensible that it was impossible to distinguish the truth, which was in our favor. We were, however, much troubled.

"Monsieur de Crussol, curious to know the strange woman of whom such different tales were related, came to Devil's Cliff. Fate ordained that I should be there, also, in the disguise of the buccaneer. I could not avoid meeting the governor, whom we were far from expecting. In spite of the thick beard which disguised my features, De Crussol had preserved too clear a remembrance of me not to recognize me; but, in order to assure himself of the truth, he said to me abruptly, 'You are not what you appear.' Fearing that all would be disclosed to Angela, who knew that I was a fugitive, but who was ignorant of the dangers to which I would be exposed if my existence was known, I said to De Crussol, 'In memory of a past service, I ask silence, but I will tell you all;' and I did not hide anything from him. He swore on his

honor to keep my secret and do everything in his power to prevent our being disturbed. He kept his promise, but in dying——"

"He told Father Griffen everything from scruples of conscience," said Croustillac.

"How do you know that?" said the duke.

Croustillac then told Monmouth how the mystery of Devil's Cliff had been revealed to the confessor of King James, and how Father Griffen had unintentionally betrayed him.

"Now, chevalier," said Monmouth, "you know at the price of what an admirable sacrifice I owe this life which I have sworn to consecrate to Angela. I have related to you the frightful remorse which the devotion of Sidney causes me. You understand, I hope, that I cannot expose myself to new and cruel regrets by causing your destruction."

"Ah, you think, your highness, that what you have told me will take from me any desire to devote my life to you? Zounds! you are greatly mistaken."

"How?" exclaimed the duke, "you persist?"

"I persist? I persist more than ever, if you please, and for a very simple reason. Hold, sir! why should I hide it from you? A short time since it was more for the sake of the duchess that I wished to serve you, than for interest in you; this is no offense to you, for I did not know you; but now, that I see what you are; now, that I see how you regret your friends, and how gratefully you remember them, and what they do for you, your wife may be a real Blue Beard, she may be the devil in person, she may be in love with all the buccaneers and the cannibals of the Antilles, but I will do for you all that I would have done for the duchess, sir."

"But, chevalier——"

"But, your highness, all I can say to you is that you have inspired me with the desire to be a second Sidney to you; that is all. Zounds! it is very simple; one never inspires such devotion unless one merits it."

"I wish to believe you, chevalier, but a person is unworthy such devotion when he accepts it willingly."

"Zounds, sir; without offense, I must say you are as pig-headed in your generosity as that Flemish bear was insupportable with his everlasting dagger. Come, let us reason together. What you most desire, is it not, is to save me from prison?"

"Doubtless."

"Now I do not think you are very anxious to abandon the duchess. Well, by telling De Chemerant who you are, would you save me? I am not much of a lawyer but it seems to me that that is the question, is it not, madame?"

"He is right, my love," said Angela, looking at her husband beseechingly.

"To proceed," said Croustillac proudly. "Now, you say to this good Chemerant, 'Sir, I am the Duke of Monmouth, and the chevalier here is only a scapegoat.' So be it; so far all goes well. But at this stage the good Chemerant will reply, 'Your highness, do you or do you not consent to head this insurrection in England?'"

"Never! never!" cried the duke.

"Very well, your highness, now I know what insurrection has cost you. Now I have the honor of knowing the duchess; like you I say, 'Never!' only what will the good Chemerant say to this? The good Chemerant will say, 'You are my prisoner,' is it not so?"

"Unhappily it is very likely," said Monmouth.

"Alas! it is only too true!" said Angela.

"As to this rascal, this schemer,' the good Chemerant will continue, addressing himself to me," said Croustillac, "'as to this imposter, this sharper, as he has impudently imposed upon me, so that I confided to him a half-dozen secrets of state, each more important than the other, particularly as to how the confessors of the great kings have played the game of the poisoned shoulder-knot with their penitents, he shall be treated as he deserved.' Now the said Chemerant, so much the more furious that I had caused him to make such a fool of himself, will not handle me very gently, and I may consider myself very lucky if he leaves me to perish in a dungeon, instead of hanging me quickly (seeing his full power), which would be another method of reducing me very effectually to silence."

"Oh! do not speak so, the idea is frightful," cried Angela.

"You see well, then, generous madman, the imminent danger to which you are exposed," said the duke to him tenderly.

"Now, your highness," said the Gascon with imperturbable calm, "as I said a short time ago, to madame, as I believed her madly in love with a certain fellow of leathern tint, it is clear that one does not devote oneself to people to the sole end of being crowned with roses and caressed by sylvan nymphs. It is the danger that constitutes the sacrifice. But that is not the question. In delivering yourself up as prisoner to the good Chemerant, do you in any way spare me prison or scaffold, sir?"

"But, chevalier——"

"But, sir, I shall pursue you constantly with this argument *ad hominum* (that is all my Latin), as the Belgian pursued me with his everlasting dagger."

"You deceive yourself, my worthy and brave chevalier, in believing that your situation is so desperate, when I shall have delivered myself up to Chemerant."

"Prove it to me, your highness."

"Without insisting too much upon my rank and my position, they are such that one would be always obliged to account for with me. So, when I say to De Chemerant, that it is my desire that you be not punished for a trait which does you honor, I do not doubt that De Chemerant will be eager to please me and put you at liberty."

"Your highness, allow me to say that you are entirely mistaken."

"But what more could he ask? Should I not be in his power? What would your capture amount to to him?"

"Your highness, you have been a statesman; you have been a conspirator; you are a great nobleman, consequently you must know men; you reason, pardon my bluntness, as if you did not know them at all, or rather, your generous desires in my behalf blind you."

"No, indeed, sir——"

"Listen to me, your highness. You concede, do you not, that the news that comes from England, and the part Louis XIV. has taken in this conspiracy, prove the importance of Chemerant's mission?"

"Without doubt."

"You will, therefore, concede, your highness, that Chemerant relies upon the success of this mission for his good fortune?"

"That is true."

"Well, your highness, by refusing to take part in this insurrection, you leave Chemerant only the part of a jailer; your capture cannot make a success of the enterprise in which these two kings have so lively an interest. Then, believe me, you will cut a very sorry figure asking clemency of Chemerant, above all, at a time when he will be furious at seeing his hopes destroyed; above all, when he knows that the man in whose favor you intercede has made him see numberless stars at full noon. Believe me, then, your highness, by accepting all Chemerant's propositions, by seconding the plans of these two kings, you could scarcely hope to secure my pardon."

"James! what he says is full of wisdom," said Angela. "I would not counsel you to be cowardly or egotistical, but he is right, you cannot deny it."

The duke bent his head without answering.

"I indeed believe I am right," said Croustillac. "I am wrong often enough once, by chance, to have common sense."

"But, for the love of heaven, at least look things in the face, if I accept," said the duke, taking both hands of Croustillac in his own. "You must conduct me and my wife on board the Chameleon; we will hoist sail and will be saved."

"All right, your highness, that is how I like to hear you speak!"

"Yes, we shall be saved, but you, unhappy man, you will return on the frigate with Chemerant, and when you are brought face to face with my friends, your ruse will be discovered and you will be lost!"

"Zounds! sir, how you go on! Without offending you, you then look upon me as a pitiful fellow; you deprive me of all imagination, of all ingenuity. If I am not mistaken, it is some distance to the Cayman's Creek, at Fort Royal?"

"About three leagues," said the duke.

"Very well, your highness, in this country three leagues are three hours, and in three hours a man like myself has at least six chances of escaping. I have long legs and strong as a stag's. The companion of Rend-your-Soul has taught me how to walk," replied the Gascon, smiling with a malicious air. "Now I swear to you that it will make the good Chemerant's escort take some pretty lively strides to keep up with me."

"And you desire that I should allow you to stake your life on a chance as doubtful as that of an escape, when thirty soldiers, used to the country, would instantly be on your track?" said the duke. "Never!"

"And you desire, your highness, that I place my life, my salvation on a chance as uncertain as the clemency of the good Chemerant?"

"At least I should not sacrifice you to a certainty, and the chances are equal," said the duke.

"Equal!" cried the adventurer indignantly. "Equal, your highness? Do you dare compare yourself with me? Who am I? and what purpose do I serve here below if not to carry an old sword at my side, and to live here and there according to the whims of humankind? I am nothing, I do nothing, I have nothing to care for. To whom is my life of any use? Who interests himself about me? Who even knows if Polyphème de Croustillac exists or not?"

"Chevalier, you are not right, and——"

"Zounds! your highness, you belong to the duchess, the adopted child of Sidney. If he died for you, it is the least you can do to live for her whom he

loved as his own child! If you reduce her to despair, she may die of grief, and you will have two victims instead of one to lament."

"But once more, chevalier——"

"But!" cried Croustillac, with a significant glance at Angela, and beginning to talk loudly enough to deafen one, thus drowning the voice of the duke, "But you are a miserable wretch! an insolent fellow! to speak so to me! Help! help! come to my assistance!"

Then Croustillac said rapidly, and in a low tone, to the duke, "You force me to do this, your highness, for I have no alternative." And the adventurer began to shout at the top of his lungs.

The duke, paralyzed with surprise, remained motionless and looked at him in stupefaction.

At the cry of the Gascon, six men, forming a portion of the escort, which De Chemerant had stationed as sentinels in the gallery by the request of Croustillac, rushed into the room.

"Gag this rascal! gag him instantly!" cried Croustillac, who trembled at the fear that Chemerant might enter at this juncture.

The soldiers obeyed the chevalier's order; they threw themselves upon the duke, who cried, as he struggled with them, "I am the prince; I am Monmouth."

Happily, these dangerous words were stifled by the loud cries of the chevalier, who, from the beginning of this scene, pretended to be a prey to the greatest anger, and stamped his foot with rage.

One of the soldiers, with the aid of his scarf, succeeded in gagging the duke, who was thus prevented from speaking.

Chemerant, attracted by the noise, entered quickly. He found Angela pale and greatly agitated. While she understood the reason of this struggle, she could not help being deeply moved.

"What has he done, then? your highness," cried Chemerant.

"That miserable wretch made such abominably insolent propositions to me that, in spite of my contempt for him, I was obliged to have him gagged."

"Your highness, you were right; but I foresaw that this miserable wretch would break his ominous silence!"

"This scene, however," cried Croustillac, "was not without its use. I was still hesitating, yes, I avow it, I was weak enough to. Now the die is cast; the guilty ones shall suffer for their crime. Let us start at once for the Cayman's Cove; I have sent my orders to Captain Ralph; I shall not be content until I

have seen them embark, under my own eyes; then we will return to Fort Royal."

"Do you really wish to be present at this sad scene, your highness?"

"Do I wish to? I would not give up that precious moment for the throne of England! I shall go to the vessel, and see these two criminals set sail for their destination where the breath of my vengeance will take them!"

"It is final, then, that you insist upon this?" said De Chemerant, still hesitating.

"It is final," returned Croustillac, in a most imposing and threatening voice, all in admirable accord with the part he played; "I expect to be obeyed when my orders are just. Make all preparations for the departure, I beg of you; if this miserable wretch does not choose to walk, he shall be carried; but above all, see that he is securely gagged, for if he should offer any further insolence I do not desire to hear it at any price."

One of the soldiers assured himself that the gag was securely tied; taking the duke, they tied his hands behind his back, and marched him off under guard.

"Are you ready, De Chemerant?" said Croustillac.

"Yes, your highness, I have only to give some orders to my men."

"Go, then, I will await you; I also have some orders to give."

The governor saluted and withdrew.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEPARTURE.

ANGELA and the chevalier were alone.

"Saved! saved by you!" cried Angela.

"I would have wished to use different means, madame, but, without reproach to the duke, he is as obstinate as I am. It was impossible to do differently. There only remain a few moments now in which we may act. Chemerant will return; let us think of what is most pressing. Your diamonds—where are they? Go quickly and get them, madame. Take them with you. Once all is discovered, beware of confiscation."

"The stones are there, in a secret box, in the duke's apartment."

"Go quickly and get them. I will ring for Mirette to get you some clothing."

"Generous friend! But you! Oh God!"

"Be quiet; when I have no longer need to protect you, I will look out for myself. But quick! get your diamonds. Chemerant will be here shortly; I will ring for Mirette." The chevalier touched the bell.

Angela disappeared through the door leading to the duke's private apartments.

Mirette appeared.

"She is very pretty, this little duchess," mused Croustillac to himself, "very pretty. Oh, this time I am struck to the heart, I know it only too well. I shall never forget her. This is love; yes, this is true love. Happily this danger will distract me, or these emotions would make me dizzy. Ah! there she comes!"

Angela entered carrying a small box. "We have always kept these stones in reserve, in case we should be suddenly compelled to fly," said she to Croustillac. "Our fortune is a thousand times assured. Alas! why is it that you——"

The young woman paused, fearing to offend the Gascon; then she continued sadly, with tears in her eyes, "You must have thought me very ignoble, did you not, in accepting without hesitation your noble sacrifice? But you will be kind and indulgent. It was necessary in order to save the one who is the dearest object in the world to me—the man for whom I would give my own life a thousand times over. But wait, this is frightful egotism, to speak to you thus, to you whom I owe everything, and who are going, perhaps, to death for me. I am mad! Forgive me."

"Not another word on this subject, madame, I beg of you. Here is the duke's sword, it was his father's; here also is this little box which his mother gave him. These are precious relics; put them all in this large basket."

"Good and generous man!" exclaimed Angela, who was deeply moved; "you think of everything!"

Croustillac made no reply; he turned his head away in order that the duchess should not see the great tears rolling down his cheeks. He extended his large, bony hands to the duchess, and said, in a stifled voice, "Adieu, forever adieu! You will forget that I am a poor devil of a fellow and you will remember me sometimes as——"

"As our best friend, as our brother," said Angela, bursting into tears.

Then she took from her pocket a small medallion containing her cipher, and said to Croustillac, "See what I returned to the house to seek this evening. I desired to offer you this token of our friendship; it was in bringing it to you that I overheard your conversation with Colonel Rutler. Accept it, it will be a double souvenir of our friendship and of your generosity."

"Give it to me! oh, give it to me!" cried the Gascon, and then, pressing it to his lips, he said, "I am more than paid for what I have done for you, for the duke——"

"We are not ingrates. As soon as the duke is safe, we shall not leave you in the power of Chemerant, and——"

"Here is Mirette; let us resume our rôle," cried Croustillac, interrupting the duchess.

Mirette entered, followed by the slave, carrying in her hand Croustillac's old sword; a soldier bore the basket containing the clothes.

Angela placed the box of diamonds and Monmouth's sword in the basket.

Chemerant entered the room, saying, "Your highness, all is in readiness."

"Offer madame your arm, if you please," said the chevalier to Chemerant, with a gloomy manner.

Angela appeared struck with a sudden thought and said to the chevalier, "Sir, I wish to say something, privately, to Father Griffen. Do you refuse me this last petition?"

"Just now, your highness, the good Father, hearing the noise, came to ask if he might speak to madame."

"He is here!" cried Angela, "God be praised!"

"Let him enter," said the Gascon gloomily.

Chemerant bowed and the guard withdrew.

Father Griffen entered. He was grave and sad.

"My Father," said Angela, "can you give me some moments' interview?"

So saying, she entered a room near by, followed by the priest.

"Your highness," said Chemerant, showing a paper to the Gascon, "here is a letter which was found on the person of Colonel Rutler; it leaves no doubts as to the plots of William of Orange against your highness. Rutler will be shot upon our arrival at Fort Royal."

"We will speak of that later, sir, but I lean toward clemency in the colonel's case—not through weakness, but from policy. I will explain to you another time my reasons for this."

The little bay in which the Chameleon lay at anchor was not very far from the residence of Blue Beard. When the escort arrived there the horizon was tinged with the first rays of the rising sun. The Chameleon was a brigantine, light and swift as a kingfisher, riding gracefully on the waves, at her mooring. Not far from the Chameleon was seen one of the coast guards who traversed in his rounds the only point of Cabesterre which was accessible.

The launch of the Chameleon, commanded by Captain Ralph's first mate, waited at the landing; in it were four sailors seated, with oars raised, ready to row at the first signal.

The Gascon's heart beat as if it would burst. At the moment of attaining the price of his sacrifice, he trembled lest an unlooked-for accident should upset the fragile scaffolding of so many stratagems.

The litter in which Monmouth was shut up arrived on the bank, and was quickly followed by that containing Angela.

The soldiers ranged themselves along the landing. The Gascon said to Angela, in an agitated tone, "Go on board ship, madame, with your accomplice; this package (and he put into the hands of the mate a paper) will inform Captain Ralph of my final orders. Meanwhile," said the chevalier all at once, "wait—I have an idea!"

Chemerant and Angela gazed at Croustillac with surprise.

The adventurer believed he had discovered a means of saving the duke, and of himself escaping from Chemerant; he had no doubt of the resolution and devotion of the five sailors in the boat; he thought of precipitating himself with Angela and Monmouth into the boat and ordering the sailors to make all speed over the waves in order to join the Chameleon, and to set sail with speed. The soldiers, though thirty in number, would be so surprised by this sudden flight that success would be possible. A new incident upset this project of the chevalier.

A voice which, though distant, was very powerful, cried, "In the name of the king, stop; allow no one to embark!"

Croustillac turned suddenly toward the direction from which the voice came, and he saw a marine officer who was coming out of a redoubt erected near Cayman's Cove.

"In the name of the king, allow no one to embark," came the voice again.

"Be easy, lieutenant," responded a subordinate, who until then had not been perceived, for he was hidden by the piles of the wharf, "I will not allow the tender to leave without your orders."

"That is well, Thomas, and beside," replied the officer, firing a shot from his gun as a signal, "the coastguard will not permit the brigantine to sail."

It would be impossible to paint the frightful agony of the actors in this scene. Croustillac saw that his plan for flight was out of the question, because the slightest signal from the coastguard would prevent the departure of the Chameleon.

The officer who had just appeared stopped in front of Croustillac and Chemerant, and said to them, "In the name of the king, I order you to tell me who you are and where you are going, gentlemen; by the governor's orders no one can sail from here without a permit from him."

"Sir," said Chemerant, "the soldiers who are with me are part of the governor's guard; you see, I am acting by his consent."

"An escort, sir! you have an escort!" said the astonished officer.

"There, near the mole, sir," said Croustillac.

"Oh, that is another matter, sir; the light was so feeble that I had not noticed the soldiers. I hope you will pardon me, sir."

This man, who seemed extremely talkative, approached the governor's guard, examined them a moment, and said with excessive volubility, "My orders are simply to prevent persons going toward the wharf, just now the Chameleon, and a fine vessel she is, belonging to Blue Beard, and which has bravely run down a Spanish pirate—came last night to the mooring."

"Sir, I beg you to silence this insupportable babbler," said the chevalier to Chemerant, "you must see how painful this scene is to me."

"You see, sir," said Chemerant to the lieutenant of marines, "the persons who are going to embark, do so under my personal responsibility. I am Chemerant, commissioner extraordinary to the king, and am furnished with full powers."

"Sir," said the lieutenant, "it is unnecessary to cite your authority; this escort is sufficient guarantee, and——"

"Then, sir, remove the order."

"Nothing is easier, sir; the order being now useless, it is useless to maintain it." "Thomas," cried this irrepressible talker to his subordinate, "you know the order that I gave you?"

"Which, lieutenant?"

"How! brainless one!"

"Sir, my time is valuable, I must return shortly to Fort Royal," said Chemerant.

The lieutenant continued, recklessly, "How! you have forgotten the order I gave you?"

"The last one? no, lieutenant."

"No, lieutenant! well, repeat it, then; let us hear the order." Then, addressing Chemerant, he said to him, while pointing to his soldier, "He hasn't the memory of a gosling! I am not sorry to give him this lesson before you, it will profit him."

"Confound it! I am not here to assist in educating your functionaries," said Chemerant.

"Well, Thomas, this order?"

"Lieutenant, it was to let no one embark on the vessel."

"Very well, that is all right; now I remove the embargo."

"Go on board at once, madame," said Croustillac, unable to moderate his impatience.

Angela cast a last look at him.

The duke made a despairing effort to break his fetters, but he was quickly carried off to the tender by the soldiers.

At a sign from Blue Beard, the sailors dipped their oars into the sea and headed for the Chameleon.

"Are you satisfied now, your highness," said Chemerant.

"No, no; not yet, sir. I shall not be content until I see the vessel set sail," replied the Gascon in a changed voice.

"The prince is implacable in his hate," thought Chemerant; "he trembles still with rage, although his revenge is assured."

All at once the sky was irradiated by the rays of the sun which made more somber still the line of azure which the sea formed on the horizon; the sun rose majestically, pouring torrents of red upon the water, the rocks, and the bay.

At this instant the Chameleon, which had been joined by the small boat, flung to the breeze its white sails, and began to draw in its cable, by which it was attached to the mooring. The brigantine, with a graceful movement, began to tack; during a few seconds it completely hid the disk of the sun, and appeared enveloped in a brilliant aureole. Then the swift vessel, turning its prow toward Cayman's Cove, began to make toward the open sea.

Croustillac remained motionless in sorrowful reverie, with his eyes fixed upon the vessel, which was carrying away the woman whom he so suddenly and so madly loved.

The adventurer, thanks to his keen sight, could perceive a white handkerchief which was waved from the stern of the vessel. It was the last farewell of Blue Beard.

Shortly the breeze freshened. The little vessel, with swift movement, bent under her sails, and went so rapidly that it was, little by little, lost in the midst of the warm mist of the morning. Then it entered into a zone of torrid light which the sun threw on the waves.

For some time Croustillac could not follow the Chameleon with his eyes; when he saw her again, the brigantine drew nearer and nearer to the horizon, appearing but a speck in space. Then, doubling the last point of the island, she disappeared all at once.

When the poor chevalier could no longer see the vessel, he experienced a profound sorrow. His heart seemed as empty and as solitary as the ocean.

"Now, sir," said Chemerant, "let us go and find the friends who are awaiting you so impatiently. In an hour we will be on board the frigate."

PART IV.
CHAPTER XXX.
REGRETS.

AS long as Croustillac contemplated his sacrifice; as long as he had been exalted by its dangers and upheld by the presence of Angela and Monmouth; he had not realized the cruel consequences of his devotion; but when he was alone, his thoughts became very painful. Not that he feared the danger which menaced him, but he felt keenly the absence of Angela, for whom he had braved everything. Under the eye of Angela, he had gayly faced the greatest peril; but he would never see her again. This was the real reason of his gloomy dejection.

With arms crossed upon his breast, bowed head, fixed gaze and somber manner, the adventurer remained silent and motionless. Twice De Chemerant addressed him: "Your highness, it is time to go."

Croustillac did not hear him. Chemerant, realizing the uselessness of words, touched him lightly on the arm, repeating louder, "Your highness, there still remain more than four leagues to travel before arriving at Fort Royal."

"Zounds! sir; what do you want?" cried the Gascon, turning impatiently toward De Chemerant.

The face of the latter expressed so much surprise at hearing the man whom he believed to be the Duke of Monmouth give vent to such a peculiar exclamation, that the Gascon realized the imprudence of which he had been guilty. He quickly recovered his usual coolness, looked at De Chemerant in an abstracted manner; then, as if he had awakened from a profound meditation, he said, in a short tone, "Very well, sir, let us go." Again mounting his horse, the Gascon took the road to Fort Royal, still followed by the escort and accompanied by De Chemerant.

Croustillac was not a man, in spite of his chagrin, to entirely despair of the present. Chemerant, recovering from his surprise, attributed the somber taciturnity of the Gascon to the painful thoughts which the criminal conduct of the Duchess of Monmouth must cause him; while the adventurer, summing up the chances of escape which remained to him, analyzed the state of his heart, reasoning as follows: "Blue Beard (I shall always call her that—it was thus I heard her name for the first time, when I thought of her without knowing her), Blue Beard is gone—forever gone; I shall never see her again, never, never, it is evident. It will be impossible to escape from the memory of her. It is absurd, stupid, not to be imagined, but so it is—this proves it that this little woman has completely subjugated me. I was gay, careless and loquacious as a bird on the bough, but little scrupulous as to delicacy, and now behold me, sad, morose, taciturn, and of a delicacy so

inordinate that I had a horrible fear lest Blue Beard should offer me, in parting, some remuneration other than the medallion from which she had the generosity to remove the jewels. Alas! from this time forth, this memory will be all my happiness—sad happiness! What a change! I, who heretofore cared so much the more for bravery of attire since I was badly clothed; I, who would have found such happiness in wearing this velvet coat garnished with rich gold buttons—I wish for the moment to come when I can don my old green garments and my pink hose, proud to say 'I leave this Potosi, this Devil's Cliff, this diamond mine, as much of a beggar as when I entered into it.' Is it not, my faith, very plain that before knowing Blue Beard, I had never in my life had such thoughts? Now, what remains for me to hope?" said Croustillac, adopting, as was his wont, the interrogative form to make what he called his "examination of conscience."

"Now, then, be frank, Polyphème, do you care much for life?"

"Eh! eh!"

"What say you to being hanged?"

"H—m, h—m."

"Come, now, frankly?"

"Frankly? well, the gallows, strictly speaking, might please me if Blue Beard was there to see me hanged. And yet, no, it is an ignoble death, a ridiculous death; one's tongue hangs out, one kicks about——"

"Polyphème, you are afraid—of being hanged?"

"No, faith! but hanged all alone, hanged by myself, hanged like a mad dog, hanged without two beautiful eyes looking at you, without a pretty mouth smiling at you——"

"Polyphème, you are a stupid oaf; do you believe that Her Grace the Duchess of Monmouth would come to applaud your last dance? Once more, Polyphème, you are tricking, you seek all sorts of evasions. You are afraid of being hanged, I tell you."

"So be it—yes, I am afraid of the gallows, I own it; let us speak no more of it. Put aside these probabilities, do not admit into our future this exaggerated fear. Zounds! one is not hanged for so little, while the prison is possible, not to say probable. Let us talk, then, of the prison."

"Well, how does the prison seem to you, Polyphème?"

"Eh! eh! the prison is devilishly monotonous. I know well that I should have the resource of thinking of Blue Beard, but I shall think of her so much, I shall think of her even better in the peaceful solitude of the woods, in the calm of the paternal valley. The paternal valley! yes, decidedly, it is there"

that I would prefer to finish my days, dreaming of Blue Beard. Only, shall I ever find it again, this paternal valley? Alas! the mists of our Gavonne are so thick that I shall wander long, without doubt, before I find this dear valley again.

"Polyphème, you purposely wander from the subject; you wish to escape the prison as well as the gallows, in spite of your philosophical bombast.

"Well, yes, zounds! I do want to escape both; to whom should I avow it if not to myself? Who will comprehend me if not I, myself?

"That admitted, Polyphème, how will you evade the fate that threatens you?

"Just at present this road is hardly favorable for escape, I know; rocks on the right hand, on the left the sea, in front of and behind me the escort. My horse is not bad; if it was better than that of the good Chemerant, I might make a trial of swiftness with him.

"And then, Polyphème?

"And then I would leave good Chemerant on the road.

"And then?

"And then, abandoning my horse, I would conceal myself in some cavern; I would climb the rocks; I have long legs and muscles of steel.

"But, Polyphème, you will be sure to find the maroons. You, who are not accustomed as they are to a nomadic life, you will be easily found by them, at least if you are not devoured by wildcats or killed by serpents. Such are your only two chances of escaping the efforts they will make to catch you again.

"Yes, but at least I have some chance of escape, while in following the good Chemerant, as the sheep follows the butcher who leads it to the slaughter-house, I fall full into the hands of my partisans. Mortimer will fall on my neck, not to embrace me, but to strangle me, when he sees who I am, or rather, whom I am not; while in attempting to escape I may succeed, and, who knows? perhaps rejoin Blue Beard. Father Griffen is devoted to her; through him I shall learn where she is, if he knows.

"But, Polyphème, you are mad! You love this woman without a ray of hope. She is passionately in love with her husband; and, although people have complacently taken you for him, he is as handsome, as much of a 'grand seigneur,' as interesting, as you are ugly, ridiculous, and insignificant, although of ancient race, Polyphème.

"Eh? Zounds! what does it matter? In again beholding Blue Beard I shall not be happy, that is true, but I shall be content. Cannot one enjoy a beautiful sight, an admirable picture, a magnificent poem, an enchanting piece of

music, although this sight, this picture, this poem, this music, are not one's own? Well, such will be the kind of my content in the presence of the divine Blue Beard.

"A last observation, Polyphème. Your rhapsody, happy or not, will it not awaken the suspicions of De Chemerant? Will you not thus compromise the safety of those whom you have, I must avow, very skillfully rescued?

"There is nothing to fear on that side. The Chameleon flies like an albatross—she is already the devil knows where. She will put to their wits' ends all the coastguards of the islands to know where she is. Thus, then, I see no inconvenience in trying whether my horse goes faster than that of the good Chemerant. The good man seems to me plunged in meditation just now; the strand is good and straight. If I should start——

"Come, then, try—start, Polyphème!"

Scarcely had the adventurer mentally given himself this permission, when, giving some touches of his spur to the horse, he set off suddenly with great rapidity.

Chemerant, surprised for a moment, gazed after the flying Croustillac; then, not comprehending this strange action on the part of the supposed duke, he started in pursuit.

Chemerant had been in many wars, and was an excellent rider. His horse, without being superior to that of Croustillac, being much better managed and trained, immediately regained the distance the adventurer had covered. Chemerant closely followed the track of Croustillac, crying, "My lord, my lord, where are you going?"

Croustillac, seeing himself so closely pursued, urged his horse forward with all his force.

Very soon the adventurer was obliged to stop short; the strand formed an elbow in this place, and the Gascon found himself face to face with enormous blocks of rock leaving only a narrow and dangerous passage.

Chemerant rejoined his companion. "By all the furies! my lord," he cried, "what gnat has bitten your highness? Why this sudden and furious gallop?"

The Gascon responded, coolly and boldly, "I am in great haste, sir, to rejoin my partisans—this poor Mortimer especially, who awaits me with such lively impatience. And then, in spite of me, I am besieged with certain vexatious ideas concerning my wife, and I wish to fly from them, these ideas, to fly from them by any means," said the Gascon, with a dolorous sigh.

"It appears to me, my lord, that morally and physically you fly from them with all your might; unfortunately the road forbids your escaping them any further."

Chemerant called the guide. "At what distance are we from Fort Royal?" he asked him.

"A league at most, sir."

Chemerant pulled out his watch and said to Croustillac, "if the wind is good at eleven o'clock, we might be under sail and en route for the coast of Cornwall, where glory awaits you, my lord."

"I hope so, sir, without which it would be absurd in me to go there. But apropos of our enterprise, it seems to be a bad beginning to inaugurate it with a murder."

"What do you mean, your highness?"

"I should see with pain the shooting of Colonel Rutler. I am superstitious, sir; this death seems to me a bad omen. The crime was one entirely personal to me; I then formally demand from you his pardon."

"Your highness, his crime was flagrant, and——"

"But, sir, the crime has not been committed. I insist that the colonel shall not be shot."

"He should, at least your highness, expiate by perpetual imprisonment his audacious attempt."

"In prison? so be it; one can get out of it, thank God! or at least, one can hope so, which shortens the time infinitely. Beside, the colonel might noise abroad my approaching descent into Cornwall, which would be truly disastrous."

"What you desire in this case shall be done, your highness?"

"Another thing, sir. I am superstitious, as I have told you. I have remarked in my life certain lucky and unlucky days. Now, for nothing in this world would I choose to begin an enterprise so important as ours under the influence of an hour which I believe to be fatal to me. Beside, I am much fatigued; you ought to be able to understand that, in thinking of the emotions of all kinds which have beset me since yesterday."

"What, then, are your designs, your highness?"

"They will perhaps not agree with yours, but I will credit you with doing what I desire, which is not to set sail before to-morrow morning at sunrise."

"Your highness!"

"I know, sir, what you are going to say to me, but twenty-four hours, more or less, are not of much consequence, and, finally, I have decided not to put my foot on board to-day. I should bring upon you the most direful fate; I should draw upon your frigate all the tempests of the tropics. I will, then,

pass the day with the governor, in absolute retirement. I have need of being alone," added Croustillac, in a melancholy tone; "alone, yes, always alone, and I ought to begin my apprenticeship to solitude."

"Solitude? But, my lord, you will not find it among the agitations which await you."

"Ah! sir," responded Croustillac philosophically, "the unfortunate finds solitude even in the midst of the crowd, when he isolates himself in his regrets. A wife whom I loved so much!" added he, with a profound sigh.

"Ah! your highness," said De Chemerant, sighing in order to put himself in sympathy with Croustillac, "it is terrible; but time heals the deepest wounds."

"You are right, sir, time heals the deepest wounds. I will have courage. Well rested, well recovered from my fatigue and my cruel agitations, to-morrow I will console myself, I will forget all in embracing my partisans."

"Ah! your highness, to-morrow will be a blessed day for all."

The position of the supposed duke demanded too much consideration from De Chemerant for him not to give in to the suggestions of his companion; he acquiesced, then, though with regret, in the will of Croustillac.

The Gascon, in postponing the hour in which his deception should be discovered, hoped to find a chance to escape. He remembered that Blue Beard had said to him, "We will not be ungrateful; once the duke is in safety, we will not leave you in the power of De Chemerant; only seek to gain time."

Although Croustillac did not count much on the promise of his friends, knowing all the difficulties which they would have to brave and to conquer before they could succor him, he wished in any case not to sacrifice this chance of safety, however uncertain it should be.

Thus, as the guide had informed them, they arrived at Fort Royal at the end of an hour's march.

The residence of the governor was situated at the extremity of the city, on the edge of the savannahs; it was easy to reach it without encountering any one.

Chemerant sent one of the guards in all haste to warn the governor of the arrival of his two guests.

The baron had replaced his long peruke, and resumed his heavy, tight-fitting coat, in order to receive De Chemerant and the supposed duke. He regarded the latter with eager curiosity, and was extremely puzzled by the black velvet coat with the red sleeve. But, remembering that De Chemerant

had spoken to him of a state secret in which the inhabitants of Devil's Cliff found themselves mixed up, he did not dare to meet Croustillac without profound deference.

The governor, profiting by a moment during which the adventurer cast a melancholy glance at the window, striving to see whether it would serve his purpose, said in a low tone to De Chemerant, "I expected to see a lady, sir. This litter that you brought with you——"

"Well, baron, you unfortunately counted without your hostess."

"You must have been much heated by this morning sun," added the baron with a careless air, although he was piqued by De Chemerant's answer.

"Very much heated, sir, and your guest also. You should offer him some refreshment."

"I have thought of that, sir," replied the baron, "and have ordered three covers laid."

"I do not know, baron, whether my lord (indicating Croustillac) will deign to admit us to his table."

The governor, stupefied with surprise, regarded Croustillac with a new and burning curiosity. "But, sir, is this, then, a great personage?"

"Baron, I am again under the necessity of reminding you that it is my mission to ask questions of you and not——"

"Sufficient, sufficient, sir. Will you ask the guest whom I have the honor to receive if he will do me the favor to accept this breakfast?"

Chemerant transmitted the invitation of the baron to Croustillac, who, pretending fatigue, asked to breakfast alone in his apartment.

Chemerant whispered a few words in the ear of the governor, who immediately offered his finest apartment to the supposed great personage.

Croustillac prayed the baron to have the pannier, of which one of the two guards had taken charge, and which, as we know, contained only Croustillac's old garments, brought to his room.

Chemerant was in the room of the Gascon when the pannier was brought in.

"Who would think, to look at this modest pannier, that it contained more than three millions' worth of jewels?" said Croustillac negligently.

"What imprudence! your highness!" cried De Chemerant. "These guards are trusty, but——"

"They are ignorant of the treasure they carry; there is, then, nothing to fear."

"Your highness, I ought to tell you that it is not the intention of the king that you should use your personal resources in order to bring this enterprise to a successful end. The purser of the frigate has a considerable sum destined to the payment of the recruits who are embarked, and for necessary expenses, once the debarkation is accomplished."

"It does not matter," said Croustillac. "Money is the sinew of war. I had not foreseen this disposition of the 'great king,' and I wish to put at the service of my royal uncle that which remains to me of blood, fortune and influence."

After this sounding peroration, De Chemerant went out.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CROUSTILLAC DEPARTS.

CROUSTILLAC seated himself at the table which had been prepared for him, ate but little, and then lay down, hoping that sleep would calm him and perhaps bring to him some fortunate idea of how to escape. He had recognized with chagrin the impossibility of escaping by the window of the chamber he occupied; the two sentries of the governor's residence paced constantly at the foot of the building.

Once alone, De Chemerant began to reflect on the singular events of which he had been the witness. Although he did not doubt that the Gascon was the veritable Duke of Monmouth, the conduct of the duchess seemed so strange to him, the manners and language of Croustillac, although very skillfully adapted to his rôle, were sometimes so redolent of the adventurer, that without the aid of the evident proofs which should demonstrate to him the identity of the person of the duke, De Chemerant would have conceived some suspicions. Nevertheless, he resolved to profit by his sojourn at Fort Royal to question the governor anew on the subject of Blue Beard, and Colonel Rutler on the subject of the Duke of Monmouth. The baron did no more than to repeat certain public rumors, viz., that the widow was on the best possible terms with the three bandits who haunted Devil's Cliff.

Chemerant was reduced to deploring the depravity of the young woman, and the blindness of the unfortunate duke, a blindness which had, without doubt, endured till that very moment.

As for Rutler, his arrest by De Chemerant, the arrival of the envoy from France at Devil's Cliff, far from shaking his conviction in respect to Croustillac, had confirmed it; thus, when De Chemerant came to question him, in announcing to him that he was not to be shot, the colonel, on his part unwittingly, concurred in giving still more authority to the false rôle of the adventurer.

The sun was on the point of setting. Chemerant, completely reassured as to the very satisfactory result of his mission, was thinking over the advantages it must bring to him, while walking up and down the terrace of the governor's residence, when the baron, out of breath with having climbed so high, came to tear his guest away from the ambitious thoughts with which he was delighting himself.

"Sir," said the governor to him, "a merchant captain called Master Daniel, and commanding the three-master the Unicorn has arrived from St. Pierre with his ship; he asks to talk with you for a moment on very pressing affairs."

"May I receive him on this terrace, baron?"

"Certainly, sir; it is much cooler here than below." Then advancing to the staircase by which he had ascended, the baron said to one of his guards, "Send Master Daniel up here."

We have forgotten to say that as soon as the supposed duke had manifested a desire to pass the night on land the frigate had received orders to anchor at the extremity of the roads.

After some minutes, Captain Daniel, our old acquaintance, appeared on the terrace. The physiognomy of the captain, ordinarily so frank and joyous, betrayed great embarrassment.

The worthy captain of the Unicorn, so completely king on the deck of his vessel, seemed uncomfortable and ill at ease. His cheeks, always more than red, were slightly pale; the almost imperceptible quivering of his upper lip agitated his thick gray mustache—a physiological sign which indicated in Captain Daniel a grave preoccupation; he wore trousers and tunic of blue and white striped cloth; in his girdle of red cotton was thrust a long Flemish knife; an India handkerchief, knotted sailor fashion, surrounded his brick-colored throat; finally, he mechanically gave the most whimsical forms to the large and flexible straw hat which he twisted about with both hands.

The worthy master, with many low bows, approached De Chemerant, whose dry, harsh face, with its piercing glance, seemed to intimidate him greatly.

"I am sure that this poor man is all in a perspiration," said the governor to De Chemerant, in a pitying tone.

In fact, great drops of perspiration covered the prominent veins on the bald and sunburned forehead of Captain Daniel.

"What do you wish?" said De Chemerant to him brusquely.

"Come, speak, explain yourself, Master Daniel," added the baron, in a gentler tone, seeing the merchant captain more and more intimidated.

At last the captain ended by saying, in a voice strangled by emotion, and addressing himself to De Chemerant, "Your highness——"

"I am not 'your highness' but 'sir,'" replied Chemerant; "speak, I am listening."

"Well, then, my good sir, I arrived at St. Pierre with a cargo, a very rich cargo of sugar, coffee, pepper, cloves, tafia——"

"I do not need to know the inventory of your cargo; what do you want?"

"Come, Master Daniel, my boy, reassure yourself, explain yourself, and dry your forehead; you look as if you had come out of the water," said the baron.

"Now, your high—now, good sir, although I have a dozen small guns, and a few swivel guns, my cargo is of such value that I come, good sir, in fear of corsairs and pirates——"

"Well?"

"Go on, Master Daniel, I have never seen you thus."

"I come, good sir, to ask your permission to set sail in company with the frigate which has anchored just now in the roads."

"Confound it! I can understand why you are embarrassed in making such a request, Master Daniel," said the baron. "They are to give you his majesty's frigates to serve as escort to your cargo!"

Chemerant looked fixedly at the captain, shrugged his shoulders, and responded, "It is impossible! The frigate is a fast sailer; she could not diminish her speed to attend on your vessel—you are crazy!"

"Oh, sir, if it is only that, fear nothing. Without decrying his majesty's frigate, since I do not know her, I can engage to follow her, no matter how much sail she carries, or whatever wind or sea is in her sails or ahead."

"I tell you you are crazy. The Thunderer is the swiftest of ships."

"My good sir, do not refuse me," said Master Daniel, in a supplicating tone. "If this proud frigate sails quicker than the Unicorn—well, this man-of-war will desert the poor merchant ship, but at least I shall have been a good part of the way under the shelter of the flag of the king, and the prowlers of the sea are only especially to be feared in the starting. Ah, sir, a cargo worth more than a million, by which the enemies of our good king will profit if they succeed in getting possession of the Unicorn——"

"But I repeat to you that the frigate, although a man-of-war, would not have time to defend you if you were attacked; her mission is such that she ought not to be embarrassed with a convoy."

"Oh, good sir," replied Captain Daniel, clasping his hands, "you will have no embarrassment because of me; there will be no risk of my being attacked if they see me under the protection of your guns. There is not a corsair who would dare even to approach me, seeing me so bravely accompanied. With all respect, sir, the wolves attack the lambs only when the dogs are absent."

"Poor lamb of a Master Daniel!" said the governor.

"Ah, good sir, let it not be said that a warship of the king, our master, refused a poor unfortunate merchant who asked only the protection of his flag, so long as he was able to follow it."

Chemerant found it hard to refuse this request, which in nowise interfered with the maneuvers of the frigate, as Captain Daniel engaged to follow the

course of the Thunderer or allow himself to be abandoned. Nevertheless, De Chemerant refused. "You know well," he said to the captain, "that if, in spite of our escort, a corsair attacked you, a king's ship could not leave you defenseless. Again, you will hinder the maneuvers of the frigate. It is impossible."

"But, sir, my rich cargo——"

"You have guns, defend it. I will not allow you the convoy. It is impossible."

"Alas! my good God! I, who have come expressly from St. Pierre to ask this favor from you!" said Daniel, in a dolorous tone.

"Well, you will wait for another chance. I cannot cover you with my flag."

"However, good sir——"

"Enough!" said Chemerant, in a harsh and peremptory tone.

Captain Daniel made a last reverence, and, retreating slowly to the staircase, he disappeared.

"To see these merchants! To hear them one would think there were no interests in the world but those of their cargoes," said De Chemerant.

"There are, however, very few circumstances in which one refuses an escort," said the governor, with an air of astonishment.

"There are very few, indeed, baron, but there are some," said Chemerant brusquely, while withdrawing.

Croustillac had been conducted to the finest apartment in the house. When he awoke night had fallen, and the moon shone with so brilliant a light that it illuminated his chamber perfectly.

Croustillac looked out of his window; the two sentinels paced peacefully at the foot of the wall.

"The devil!" said the adventurer. "It is decidedly impossible to make my escape on this side; there are at least twenty feet to descend just to fall on the backs of these sentinels, and they would find this manner of quitting the governor's house very singular. Let us look at the other side, then."

Croustillac approached the door with a light step; but a bright light thrown on the floor showed him that the neighboring room was lighted and probably occupied.

By the aid of a tinder-box which he found on the mantel, he lighted a candle, and dressed himself in his old clothes, with a melancholy satisfaction. They exhaled the strong and aromatic odor of the plants and herbs of the surroundings through which Croustillac had so long walked in his wanderings in the forest around Devil's Cliff.

"Zounds! Chance is devilishly well named Chance," said the Gascon to himself. "It has always had a particular affection for me. If it was canonized, I would make it my patron saint. Chance—Polyphème, Sire de Croustillac! When, on board the Unicorn, I made a bet that I would marry Blue Beard, who could have foreseen that this foolish wager was almost won; for, after all, in the eyes of the man with the dagger and of De Chemerant, I passed, I still pass, as the husband of the lady of Devil's Cliff. How all things hang together in fate! When I quitted the parsonage of Father Griffen, nose in air, shoulders squared, my switch in my hand to drive away the serpents, who the devil would have said that I left to go, not directly it is true, to incite the Cornwallers to revolt in favor of King James and Louis XIV! Zounds! One may well say that the ways of Providence are inscrutable. Who could have penetrated into this? Ah! now the critical moment approaches. I am sometimes tempted to disclose all to the good man Chemerant. Yes, but I think that each hour gained removes the duke and his wife three or four leagues further from Martinique. I think that here, on land, my trial might be carried out immediately and my gallows raised in the wink of an eye, while on the open sea there would perhaps be no persons present competent to judge me. I think, after all, that if Blue Beard has begged (as I suppose) Father Griffen to endeavor to withdraw me from the claws of Chemerant, that a sudden and imprudent revelation on my part would spoil all. Much better, then, to keep silence. Yes, all well considered," resumed Croustillac after a moment of reflection, "to let De Chemerant's mistake last as long as possible, that is the better part for me to take."

During these reflections Croustillac had dressed himself. "Now," he said, "let me see if there are any means of getting out of here secretly."

So saying, he softly opened the door and beheld with disappointment the lackeys of the governor, who rose respectfully on seeing him. One went to seek the baron; the other said to Croustillac, "Monsieur the governor forbade us to enter the chamber of your highness until called; he will come on the instant."

"No matter, my boy, only show me the door to the garden. It is very warm; I wish to take the air for awhile—but no, there are undoubtedly trees in the garden; I prefer the open space, the field——"

"That is very simple, your highness; in descending from the gallery you will find yourself in the garden, from which a gate opens into the fields."

"Very well, then, my boy, conduct me there quickly. I long for the fields like a bird in a cage."

"Ah, it is not necessary, your highness; here is monsieur the baron, he will conduct you himself," said the lackey.

"To the devil with the baron!" thought Croustillac. The governor was not alone; Chemerant accompanied him.

"Faith, your highness," said the latter, "fortunately we see you risen. We came to wake you."

"To wake me—and why?"

"Wind and tide wait for no one. The tide goes out at three o'clock; it is now half-past two. It will take us a half hour to reach the mole, where the boat awaits us. We have just time to get there, your highness."

"Now, then, the die is cast," said Croustillac. "Let us try only to gain a few hours before being presented to my partisans. Sir, I am at your orders," added the adventurer, draping himself in a brown mantle which he had found with his clothes.

The governor felt it his duty to accompany, as escort, De Chemerant and the mysterious unknown to the mole; the flight of the Gascon was thus rendered absolutely impossible.

At the moment of quitting the governor, Chemerant said to him, "Sir, I will render to the king a full account of the efficient aid you have given me. I can now say it to you, the secret has been perfectly kept."

"But, sir, may I know what were these indications?" cried the baron, so poorly informed on what he was burning to know.

"You may be certain, baron," said Chemerant, cordially pressing his hand, "that the king will know all—and it will not be my fault if you are not rewarded as you deserve."

Thus saying, Chemerant gave the order to put off.

"If the king is to know all he will be much ahead of me," said the baron, slowly returning to his house. "What I have learned from the guards of the escort has only augmented my curiosity. It was hardly worth the trouble to toil and moil, and stay on one's feet all night, to be so badly informed of things of the greatest importance, taking place in my own government!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FRIGATE.

THE moon threw a brilliant light over the waters of Fort Royal. The long boat which bore Croustillac and his fortunes advanced rapidly toward the Thunderer, which was anchored at the entrance of the bay.

The Gascon, enveloped in his mantle, occupied the place of honor in the boat, which seemed to fly over the water.

"Sir," said he to Chemerant, "I wish to reflect ripely on the discourse which it is my intention to address to my partisans; you comprehend—it is necessary that I pronounce a sort of manifesto in which I disclose my political principles; that I tell them my hopes in order to make them partakers in them; that, in fine, I give them, in a manner, a plan of campaign; now all this needs long elaboration. These are the bases of our undertaking. It is necessary to disclose all to them—the consequences of the alliance, or rather the moral, that is to say material support which England lends us, or rather France—In short," said Croustillac, who began to be singularly mixed up in his politics, "I do not wish to receive my partisans till to-morrow, in the morning. I wish, even, that my arrival on board should be conducted as quietly as possible."

"It is very probable, my lord, that all these brave gentlemen are asleep, for they did not know at what hour your highness was to arrive."

"This mad—this brave Mortimer is capable of waiting up all night for me," said Croustillac, with disquietude.

"That is not to be doubted, your highness, by one who knows the ardent impatience with which he desires your return."

"Hold, sir," said the Gascon, "between you and me, I know my Mortimer; he is very nervous, very impressionable. I should fear for him—a shock, a too sudden effect of joy, should I appear abruptly before him. Thus, in going aboard I shall take the precaution of well wrapping myself up in order to escape his eyes—and even if he asks you if I shall soon arrive, oblige me by answering him in an evasive manner. In this way we can prepare him for an interview, which without these precautions might prove fatal to this devoted friend."

"Ah! fear nothing, your highness; excess of joy can never be fatal."

"Indeed, you deceive yourself, sir; without taking account of a thousand general facts with which I might corroborate my opinion, I will cite on this subject a fact quite personal and particular to the very man of whom we are now talking."

"To Lord Mortimer?"

"To him, sir. I shall never forget that once I saw him seized with frightful convulsions under circumstances almost similar. There were nervous starts—swoons——"

"However, your highness, Lord Mortimer has an athletic constitution."

"An athletic constitution? Come, then, it only remained that I should encounter a Hercules in this run-mad Pylades," thought Croustillac. He spoke aloud:

"You don't know, sir, that it is these very men of great strength who are just the ones who most keenly feel such shocks. I will even tell you—but this is entirely between ourselves—at least——"

"Your highness may be sure of my discretion."

"You will understand my reserve, sir. I will tell you then that, on the occasion of which I speak—this unfortunate Mortimer was so stupefied—if it were not for our intimate friendship, I should say rendered stupid) by seeing too suddenly some one he had not met for a long time—that his head—you comprehend——"

"What, your highness, his reason——"

"Alas! yes, in this instance only—. You now comprehend why I demand secrecy of you?"

"Yes, yes, your highness."

"But that was not all; the shock suffered by poor Mortimer was such that, after having remained several moments stupefied with surprise, he no longer recognized this person; no, sir, he did not recognize him, though he had seen him a thousand times!"

"Is it possible, your highness?" said De Chemerant, in a tone of respectful doubt.

"It is, alas! only too true, sir, for you have no idea of the excitability of this good fellow. So I, who am his friend, should watch carefully that no trouble come to him. Think, then, if I should expose him to the risk of not knowing me. Mortimer is now the one whom I love most in the world, and you know, alas! sir, if the consolations of friendship are necessary to me."

"Still these unhappy memories, your highness?"

"Yes, I am weak, I own it—it is stronger than I."

"What is this ship anchored not far from the frigate?" demanded De Chemerant of the master of the long boat, in order to change the conversation, out of regard for the feelings of the supposed duke.

"That, sir, is a merchantman, which arrived last night from St. Pierre," said the sailor, respectfully removing his cap.

"Ah! I know," said De Chemerant; "it is probably the ship of that fool of a merchant-captain who demanded our escort. But here we are, your highness—the lights are all out—you are not expected."

"So much the better, so much the better; provided Mortimer is not there."

"It seems to me that I see him on the bridge, your highness."

Croustillac raised his mantle almost to his eyes.

"Ah! there is the officer of the watch on the ladder. What a pity to arrive so late, your highness. It is to the beat of drums, the flourish of trumpets, that your highness should have been received, with the ship's crew presenting arms."

"Honors to-morrow—honors to-morrow," said Croustillac; "the hour of these frivolities always comes soon enough."

Chemerant drew aside to allow the Gascon to mount the ladder first. The latter breathed freely again on seeing on deck only an officer of marines, who received him with bared head and a profoundly respectful air. Croustillac responded with great dignity, and above all, very briefly, enveloping himself in his mantle with the utmost care, and casting uneasy glances around him, fearing to see the terrible Mortimer. Fortunately he saw only the sailors talking together or reclining by the side of the guns.

The officer, who was speaking in a low tone to De Chemerant, saluting Croustillac again, said to him:

"Your highness, since you command it, I will not awaken the captain, and I shall have the honor of conducting you to your cabin."

Croustillac inclined his head.

"Till to-morrow, your highness," said De Chemerant.

"Till to-morrow," responded the adventurer.

The officer descended by the hatchway to the gun-deck, opened the door of a large, wide cabin perfectly lighted by a skylight, and said to the Gascon: "Your highness, there is your cabin; there are two other small rooms to the right and left."

"This is admirable, sir; do me the favor, I pray you, to give the strictest orders that no one enters my cabin to-morrow until I call. No one, sir, you understand—absolutely no one!—this is of the last importance."

"Very well, my lord. Your highness does not wish that I should send one of the people to assist you to disrobe?"

"I am a soldier, sir," said Croustillac proudly, "and I disrobe without assistance."

The young officer bowed, taking this response for a lesson in stoicism; he went out, ordering one of the orderlies to allow no one to enter the cabin of the duke, and again ascended on deck to rejoin De Chemerant.

"Your duke is a veritable Spartan, my dear De Chemerant," said he to him. "Why! he has not brought even a lackey."

"That is true," responded De Chemerant; "such strange things have taken place on land that neither he nor I thought of it; but I will give him one of my people. Just now the important thing is to set sail."

"That is also the opinion of the captain. He gave me orders to wake him if you judged it necessary to depart at once."

"We will start on the instant, for both wind and tide are in our favor, I think," answered De Chemerant.

"So favorable," said the officer, "that if this wind holds, to-morrow by sunrise we shall no longer be able to see the shores of Martinique."

A half-hour after the arrival of the Gascon on board, the Thunderer got under sail with an excellent breeze from the southwest.

When De Chemerant saw the frigate leaving the roads, he could not refrain from rubbing his hands, saying to himself, "Faith it is not that I am vain and boastful, but I would only have given this mission in a hundred to the most skillful of men—to unravel the projects of the English envoy, to conquer the scruples of the duke, to aid him to revenge himself on a guilty wife, to tear him by force of eloquence from the overwhelming feelings this conjugal accident has roused in his soul, to bring him back to England at the head of his partisans—by my faith, Chemerant, my friend, that was left to you to do! Your fortune, already on the road to success, behold it forever assured; this good success delights me the more that the king regards this affair as important. Once more, bravo!"

Chemerant with a light and joyful heart slept, cradled by the most pleasing and ambitious thoughts.

It was half-past ten in the morning; the wind was fresh, the sea a little rough, but very beautiful; the Thunderer left behind her a shining wake. The land was no longer to be seen. The ship was in mid-ocean.

The officer of the watch, armed with a glass, examined with attention a three-masted vessel about two cannon shots distant, which kept precisely the same route as the frigate and sailed as quickly as she did, although carrying a few light sails the less.

On the extreme horizon the officer remarked also another ship which he as yet distinguished vaguely, but which seemed to follow the same direction as the three-master, whose maneuver we have just pointed out. Wishing to find out if this latter ship would persist in imitating the movements of the Thunderer, the officer ordered the man at the wheel to bear away a little more to the north.

The three-master bore away a little more to the north.

The officer gave orders to bear away to the west.

The three-master bore away to the west.

More annoyed than startled at this persistence, because the three-master was not capable of a struggle with a frigate, the officer, by the order of the captain, tacked about and sailed straight down upon the importunate vessel.

The importunate three-master tacked about also, and continued to scrupulously imitate the evolutions of the frigate, and sailed in concert with her, but always beyond reach of her guns.

The captain, irritated by this, veered about and ran straight down upon the three-master. The three-master proved that she was, if not a better sailer, at least as good a one as the frigate, which was never able to shorten the distance between them. The captain, not wishing to lose precious time in this useless chase, resumed his course.

The vexatious three-master also resumed its course.

This mysterious ship was no other than the peaceable Unicorn. Captain Daniel, in spite of the refusal of De Chemerant, had judged it proper to attach himself obstinately to the Thunderer until they reached the open sea.

A new personage appeared on the deck of the frigate. This was a man of about fifty years of age, large, stout, wearing a buff coat with wide scarlet breeches, and boots of sheepskin. His hair and mustache were red, his eyes light blue, the eyeballs veined with little vessels which the slightest emotion injected with blood, showing a violent and passionate temper.

We hasten to inform the reader that this athletic personage was the most fanatical of all the fanatical partisans of Monmouth, and he would have thought himself a thousand times blessed to have shared the fate of Sidney; in a word, this man was Lord Percy Mortimer. His disquietude, his agitation, his impatience, were inexpressible; he could not stay in one place a moment.

Twenty times had Lord Mortimer descended to the door of Croustillac's cabin to know if "my lord the duke" had not asked for him. In vain had he implored the officer to send word to the duke that Mortimer, his best friend, his old companion in arms, wished to throw himself at his feet; his wishes

were vain, the orders of the unhappy Croustillac, who regarded each minute gained as a precious conquest, were rigorously carried out.

Chemerant also went upon deck, clothed in a magnificent dress, his air radiant and triumphant; he seemed to say to all: "If the prince is here, that is thanks to my ability, to my courage." Seeing him, Mortimer approached him quickly.

"Well, sir," he said to him, "may we know at last at what hour the duke will receive us?"

"The duke has forbidden any one to enter his apartment without his order."

"I am on red-hot coals," replied Mortimer; "I shall never forgive myself for having gone to bed this night, and not to have been the first to press our James in my arms, to throw myself at his feet—to kiss his royal hand."

"Ah, Lord Mortimer, you love our brave duke well?" said De Chemerant; "partisans such as you are rare!"

"If I love our James!" cried Mortimer, turning a deep and apoplectic red, "if I love him! Hold! I and Dick Dudley, my best friend, who loves the duke, not as much as I (we fought once because he made this absurd claim)—I and Dudley, I tell you, asked each other just now if we should have the strength to again see our James without giving way—like silly women."

"The duke was right," thought De Chemerant. "What enthusiasm! It is not attachment, it is frenzy." Mortimer resumed with vehemence: "This morning on rising we embraced each other; we committed a thousand extravagances on thinking we should see him again to-day. We could not believe it, and even yet I doubt it. Ah! what a day! what a day! To see again in flesh and blood a friend, a companion in arms whom we had believed dead, whom we had wept for for five years! Ah! you do not know how he was cherished and regretted, our James! How we recalled his bravery, his courage, his gayety! What happiness to say, not it was, but it is the heart of a king, a true heart of a king, that of our duke."

"It must be that this is true, my lord, since with the exception of yourself, of Lord Dudley, and this poor Lord Rothsay who, ill as he is from his old wounds, has chosen to accompany you, the other gentlemen who came to offer their arms, their lives and their fortunes to our duke, knew him only by reputation."

"And I should like well to see if, on his renown alone, and on our guarantee, they would not love him as much as we love him. This recalls to me that once I fought my friend Dick Dudley because he vowed he loved me a little more than our James!"

"The fact is, my lord," said De Chemerant, "that few princes are capable of inspiring such enthusiasm simply by their renown."

"Few princes, sir!" cried Lord Mortimer in a formidable voice, "few princes! Say, then, no other prince—ask Dudley!"

Lord Dudley appeared at this moment on the deck. The hair and mustache of this nobleman were black and beginning to turn gray; in stature, strength, and stoutness there was a great conformity between him and Mortimer; true types (physically speaking) of what are called gentlemen-farmers.

"What's the matter, Percy?" said Lord Dudley familiarly to his friend.

"Is it not true, Dick, that no prince can be compared with our James?"

"Excepting our worthy friends and allies on this vessel, any dog who dares maintain that James is not the best of men I will beat him till the blood comes, and cut him in quarters," said this robust personage, striking with one of his fists the gunwale of the ship. Then, addressing De Chemerant: "But now you know him as well as we—you, the chosen you, the happy man who saw him first! Your hand, De Chemerant, your brave and loyal hand—more brave and more loyal, if it is possible, since it has touched that of our duke!"

Dudley violently shook the right hand of De Chemerant, while Mortimer shook no less violently the left hand.

There is nothing more contagious than enthusiasm. The partisans of Monmouth had one by one come up on deck and grouped themselves around the two noblemen—all wishing in their turn to press the hand which had touched that of the prince.

"Ah! gentlemen, I suspect that his grace puts off the honor of seeing you. He fears the emotion inseparable from such a moment."

"And we, then!" cried Dudley. "It is now about forty days since we left Rochelle, is it not? Well, may I die if I have slept more than three or four hours any night, and then the sleep, at once agitated and pleasant, that one sleeps on the eve of a duel—when one is sure of killing one's man. At least, that is the effect of this impatience on me. And you, Percy?" said the robust gladiator to Mortimer.

"On me, Dick?" responded the latter; "it has a contrary effect on me; every moment I wake with a start. It seems to me that I should sleep thus the eve of the day that I was going to be shot."

"As for me," said another gentleman, "I know the duke only from his portrait."

"I only from his renown."

"I, as soon as I knew that it concerned marching against the Orange faction—I quitted all, friends, wife, child."

"So did we——"

"Ah, sir, it is also for James of Monmouth," said another, "that is a name which is like the sound of a trumpet."

"It suffices to pronounce this name in Old England," said another, "to drive all these Holland rats into their marshes."

"Beginning with this William——"

"On my honor, gentlemen," said De Chemerant, "you make me almost proud of having succeeded so well in an enterprise which, I dare to say, is a very delicate one. I do not wish to attribute to my reasoning, to my influence, the resolution of the prince—but believe, at least, gentlemen, that I have known how to make good use with him of the enthusiasm with which his memory has inspired you."

"And so, our friend, we will never forget what you have done! You have brought him here to us—our duke!" cried Mortimer cordially.

"For that alone we owe you eternal gratitude," added Dudley.

"To see him! to see him," cried Mortimer in a new access of feeling, "to see him again whom we believed to be dead—to see him indeed face to face—to again find before our eyes this proud and noble figure—to see it again in the midst of the fire—the—the—ah, well—yes, I weep—I weep," cried the brave Mortimer, no longer restraining his emotion; "yes, I weep like a child, and a thousand thunderbolts crush those who do not comprehend that an old soldier thus can weep."

Emotion is as contagious as enthusiasm.

Dick, followed the example of his friend Percy, and the others did as Dick and his friend Percy did.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE JUDGMENT.

A new personage came to augment the number of the passionate admirers of Monmouth. There was seen advancing, supported by two servants, a man still young, but condemned to premature infirmity by numerous wounds.

Lord Jocelyn Rothsay, in spite of his sufferings, had wished to join himself to the partisans of the prince, and if not to fight for the cause that Monmouth was going to defend, at least to come before the duke and to be one of the first to felicitate him on his resurrection.

Lord Rothsay's hair was white, although his pale face was still young and his mustache was as black as his bold and brilliant eyes. Enveloped in a long dressing-gown, he advanced with difficulty, supported on the shoulders of the two servants.

"Here is the brave Rothsay who has as many wounds as hairs in his mustache," cried Lord Dudley.

"By the devil, who will not carry me away before I have seen our duke, at least," said Rothsay, "I will be, like you, one of the first to press his hand. Have I not, in my fresh youth, risked my life to hasten by a quarter of an hour a love tryst? Why should I not risk it in order to see our duke a quarter of an hour sooner?"

A man with troubled face appeared on deck shortly after Rothsay.

"My lord," said he entreatingly, "my lord, you expose your life by this imprudence! The least violent movement may renew the hemorrhage from this old wound which——"

"The devil! doctor, could my blood flow better or more nobly than at the feet of James of Monmouth?" cried Rothsay with enthusiasm.

"But, my lord, the danger——"

"But, doctor, it would be to his everlasting shame if Jocelyn Rothsay should be one of the last to embrace our duke. I made this voyage for no other purpose. Dick will lend me one shoulder, Percy another, and it is sustained by these two brave champions that I shall come to say to James: Here are three of your faithful soldiers of Bridgewater."

So saying, the young man abandoned his two servants, and supported himself on the shoulders of the two robust noblemen.

The roll of drums, to which was added the flourish of trumpets, the shrill noise of the boatswain's whistle, announced that the marines and infantry belonging to the frigate were assembling; very soon they were drawn up on deck, with their officers at their head.

"Why this show of arms?" asked Mortimer of Chemerant.

"To render homage to the duke and to receive him with the honors of war when he comes directly to review the troops."

The captain of the frigate advanced toward the group of gentlemen: "Gentlemen, I have just received the orders of his grace."

"Well?" all said with one voice.

"His highness will receive you at eleven o'clock precisely; that is to say, in exactly five minutes."

It is impossible to give any idea of the exclamations of profound joy which escaped from every breast.

"Hold! now, Dick, I feel myself growing faint," said Mortimer.

"The devil! pay attention, Percy," said Rothsay; "do not fall; you are one of my legs."

"I," said Dudley, "I have a sort of vertigo——"

"Listen, Dick; listen, Jocelyn," said Mortimer; "these worthy companions have never seen our duke; be generous, let them go first; we shall see him first from a distance; that will give us time to place ourselves in his sight. Is it done?"

"Yes, yes," said Dick and Jocelyn.

Eleven o'clock sounded. For some moments the deck of the frigate offered a spectacle truly grand. The soldiers and marines in arms covered the gangways. The officers, bareheaded, preceding the gentlemen, slowly descended the narrow stairway which led to the apartment appropriated to the Duke of Monmouth.

Last, behind this first group advanced Mortimer and Dudley, sustaining between them the young Lord Rothsay, whose bowed figure and trembling steps contrasted with the tall stature and manly bearing of his two supports.

While the other gentlemen incumbered the narrow stairway, the three lords—these three noble types of chivalrous fidelity—remained on the deck.

"Listen, listen," said Dudley, "perhaps we shall hear the voice of James——"

In fact, the most profound silence reigned at first, but it was soon interrupted by exclamations of joy with which mingled lively and tender protestations. At last the stairway was free.

Scarcely moderating their impatience from regard for Lord Rothsay, who descended with difficulty, the two lords reached the gun-deck and entered in their turn the great cabin of the frigate, where Croustillac gave audience to

his partisans. For some moments the three noblemen were stupefied by the tableau presented to their eyes.

At the back of the great cabin, which was lighted by five portholes, Croustillac, clothed in his old green coat and pink stockings, stood proudly beside De Chemerant; the latter, swelling with pride, seemed to triumphantly present the chevalier to the English gentlemen.

A little back of De Chemerant stood the captain of the frigate and his staff. The partisans of Monmouth, picturesquely grouped, surrounded the Gascon.

The adventurer, although a little pale, retained his audacity; seeing that he was not recognized, he resumed little by little his accustomed assurance, and said to himself: "Mortimer must have boasted of knowing me intimately in order to give himself airs of familiarity with a nobleman of my degree. Come then, zounds! let that last which can!"

The force of illusion is such that among the gentlemen who pressed around the adventurer some discovered a very decided "family look" to Charles II.; others, a striking resemblance to his portraits.

"My lords and gentlemen," said Croustillac, with a gesture toward De Chemerant, "this gentleman, in reporting to me your wishes, has decided me to return to your midst."

"My lord duke, with us it is to the death!" cried the most enthusiastic.

"I count on that, my lords; as for me, my motto shall be: 'All for England and'——"

"This is too much impudence! blood and murder!" thundered Lord Mortimer, interrupting the chevalier and springing toward him with blazing eyes and clinched fists, while Dudley upheld Lord Jocelyn.

The apostrophe of Mortimer had an astounding effect on the spectators and the actors in this scene. The English gentlemen turned quickly toward Mortimer. De Chemerant and the officers looked at each other with astonishment, as yet comprehending none of his words.

"Zounds! here we are," thought Croustillac; "only to see this tipsy brute; I should smell the Mortimer a league off." The nobleman stepped into the empty space that the gentlemen had left between the Gascon and themselves, in recoiling; he planted himself before him, his arms crossed, his eyes flashing, looking him straight in the face, exclaiming in a voice trembling with rage: "Ah! you are James of Monmouth—you!—it is to me—Mortimer—that you say that?"

Croustillac was sublime in his impudence and coolness; he answered Mortimer with an accent of melancholy reproach: "Exile and adversity must

indeed have changed me much if my best friend no longer recognizes me!" Then, half-turning toward De Chemerant, the chevalier added in a low tone: "You see, it is as I told you; the emotion has been too violent; his poor head is completely upset. Alas, this unhappy man does not know me!"

Croustillac expressed himself so naturally and with so much assurance, that De Chemerant still hesitated to believe himself the dupe of so enormous an imposition; he did not long retain any doubts on this subject.

Lord Dudley and Lord Rothsay joined Mortimer and the other gentlemen in showering upon the unfortunate Gascon the most furious apostrophes and insults.

"This miserable vagabond dares to call himself James of Monmouth!"

"The infamous impostor!"

"The scoundrel must have murdered him in order to pass himself off for him!"

"He is an emissary of William!"

"That beggar, James, our duke!"

"What audacity!"

"To dare to tell such a lie!"

"He ought to have his tongue torn out!"

"To deceive us so impudently—we who had never seen the duke!"

"This cries for vengeance!"

"Since he takes his name he must know where he is!"

"Yes, he shall answer for our duke!"

"We will throw him into the sea if he does not give our James back to us!"

"We will tear out his nails to make him speak!"

"To play thus with what is most sacred!"

"How could De Chemerant have fallen into a trap so gross!"

"This miserable wretch has deceived me most outrageously, gentlemen!" cried De Chemerant, striving in vain to make himself heard.

"Come, then; explain yourself, sir."

"He shall pay dearly for his audacity, gentlemen."

"First, chain up this traitor."

"He abused my confidence by the most execrable lies. Gentlemen, any one would have been deceived as much as I was."

"One cannot mock thus the faith of brave gentlemen who sacrifice themselves to the good cause."

"De Chemerant, you are as culpable as this miserable scoundrel."

"But, my lords, the English envoy was deceived as well as I."

"It is impossible; you are his accomplice."

"My lords, you insult me!"

"A man of your experience, sir, does not allow himself to be made ridiculous in this way."

"We must avenge ourselves!"

"Yes, vengeance! vengeance!"

These accusations, these reproaches bandied about so rapidly, caused such a tumult that it was impossible for De Chemerant to make himself heard among so many furious cries. The attitude of the English gentlemen became so threatening toward him, their recriminations so violent, that he placed himself alongside the officers of the frigate, and all carried their hands to their swords.

Croustillac, alone between the two groups, was a butt for the invectives, the attacks, and the maledictions of both parties. Intrepid, audacious, his arms crossed, his head high, his eye unblenching, the adventurer heard the muttering and bursting forth of this formidable storm with impassible phlegm, saying to himself: "This ruins all; they may throw me overboard—that is to say, into the open sea; the leap is perilous, though I can swim like a Triton, but I can do no more; this was sure to happen sooner or later; and beside, as I said this morning, one does not sacrifice oneself for people in order to be crowned with flowers and caressed by woodland nymphs."

Although at its height, the tumult was dominated by the voice of Mortimer who cried: "Monsieur De Chemerant, have this wretch hanged first; you owe us this satisfaction."

"Yes, yes, hang him to the yardarm," said the English gentlemen; "we will have our explanations afterward."

"You will oblige me much by explaining yourselves beforehand!" cried Croustillac.

"He speaks! he dares to speak!" cried one.

"Eh! who, then, will speak in my favor, if not myself?" replied the Gascon.

"Would it be you, by chance, my gentleman?"

"Gentlemen," cried De Chemerant, "Lord Mortimer is right in proposing that justice be done to this abominable impostor."

"He is wrong; I maintain that he is wrong, a hundred thousand times wrong!" cried Croustillac; "it is an obsolete, tame, vulgar means——"

"Be silent, unhappy wretch!" cried the athletic Mortimer, seizing the hands of the Gascon.

"Do not lay your hands on a gentleman, or, Sdeath! you shall pay dear for this outrage!" cried Croustillac angrily.

"Your sword, scoundrel!" said De Chemerant, while twenty raised arms threatened the adventurer.

"In fact, the lion can do nothing against an hundred wolves," said the Gascon majestically, giving up his rapier.

"Now, gentlemen," resumed De Chemerant, "I continue. Yes, the honorable Lord Mortimer is right in wishing to have this rascal hanged."

"He is wrong! as long as I can raise my voice I will protest that he is wrong! it is a preposterous, an unheard-of idea; it is the reasoning of a horse. A fine argument is the gallows!" cried Croustillac, struggling between two gentlemen who held him by the collar.

"But before administering justice, it is necessary to oblige him to reveal to us the abominable plot which he has concocted. It is necessary that he should unveil to us the mysterious circumstances by the aid of which he has shamelessly betrayed my good faith."

"To what good? 'Dead the beast, dead the venom,'" cried Mortimer roughly.

"I tell you that you reason as ingeniously as a bulldog which leaps at the throat of a bull," cried Croustillac.

"Patience, patience; it is a cravat of good hemp which will stop your preaching very soon," responded Mortimer.

"Believe me, my lords," replied De Chemerant, "a council will be formed; they will interrogate this rascal; if he does not answer, we shall have plenty of means to force him to it; there is more than one kind of torture."

"Ah, so far I am of your mind," said Mortimer; "I consent that he shall not be hanged before being put to the rack; this will be to do two things instead of one."

"You are generous, my lord," said the Gascon.

In thinking of the fury which must have possessed the soul of De Chemerant, who saw the enterprise which he thought he had so skillfully conducted a complete failure, one understands, without excusing it, the cruelty of his resolution in regard to Croustillac.

Their minds were so excited, the disappointment had been so irritating, so distressing even, for the greater part of the adherents of Monmouth, that these gentlemen, humane enough otherwise, allowed themselves on this occasion to be carried away by blind anger, and but little more was needed to bring it about that the unfortunate Croustillac should not even be cited before a species of council of war, whose meeting might at least give an appearance of legality to the violence of which he was the victim.

Five noblemen and five officers assembled immediately under the presidency of the captain of the frigate.

De Chemerant placed himself on the right, the chevalier stood on the left. The session commenced.

De Chemerant said briefly, and with a voice still trembling with anger: "I accuse the man here present with having falsely and wickedly taken the names and titles of his grace the Duke of Monmouth, and with having thus, by his odious imposture, ruined the designs of the king, my master, and under such circumstances the crime of this man should be considered as an attack upon the safety of the state. In consequence, I demand that the accused here present be declared guilty of high treason, and be condemned to death."

"Sdeath, sir, you draw your conclusions quickly and well; here is something clear and brief," said Croustillac, whose natural courage rose to the occasion.

"Yes, yes, this impostor merits death; but before that, it is necessary that he should speak, and that he should at once be put to the question," said the English lords.

The captain of the frigate, who presided over the council, was not, like De Chemerant, under the influence of personal resentment; he said to the Englishmen: "My lords, we have not yet voted a punishment; it is necessary before interrogating him to listen to his defense, if he can defend himself; after which we will consult as to the punishment which should be inflicted upon him. Let us not forget that we are judges and that he has not yet been declared guilty."

These cool, wise words pleased the five lords less than the angry excitement of De Chemerant; nevertheless, not being able to raise any objection, they were silent.

"Accused," said the captain to the chevalier, "what are your names?"

"Polyphème, Chevalier de Croustillac."

"A Gascon!" said De Chemerant, between his teeth; "I might have known it from his impudence. To have been the sport of such a miserable scoundrel!"

"Your profession?" continued the captain.

"For the moment, that of an accused person before a tribunal over which you worthily preside, captain; for you do not choose, and with reason, that men should be hanged without a hearing."

"You are accused of having knowingly and wickedly deceived Monsieur de Chemerant, who is charged with a mission of state for the king, our master."

"It is De Chemerant who deceived himself; he called me 'your highness,' and I innocently answered to the name."

"Innocently!" cried De Chemerant furiously; "how, scoundrel! have you not abused my confidence by the most atrocious lies? have you not surprised from me the most important secrets of state by your impudent treachery?"

"You have spoken, I have listened. I may even declare, for my justification, that you have appeared to me singularly dull. If it is a crime to have listened to you, you have rendered this crime enormous——"

The captain made a sign to De Chemerant to restrain his indignation; he said to the Gascon: "Will you reveal what you know relative to James, Duke of Monmouth? Will you tell us through what chain of events you came to take his names and titles?"

Croustillac saw that his position was becoming very dangerous; he had a mind to reveal all; he could address himself to the devoted partisans of the prince, assure himself of their support in announcing to them that the duke had been saved, thanks to him. But an honorable scruple withheld him; this secret was not his own; it did not belong to him to betray the mysteries which had concealed and protected the existence of the duke, and might still protect him.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CHASE.

WHEN the captain intimated anew to Croustillac the order to reveal all he knew about the duke, the adventurer responded, this time with a firmness full of dignity:

"I have nothing to say on this subject, captain; this secret is not mine."

"Thunder and blood!" cried Mortimer, "the torture shall make you speak. Light two bunches of tow dipped in sulphur. I will myself place them under his chin; that will loosen his tongue—and we shall know where our James is. Ah! I had indeed a presentiment that I should never see him again."

"I ought to say to you," said the captain to the Gascon, "that if you obstinately maintain a culpable silence, you will thus compromise in the gravest manner the interests of the king and of the state, and we shall be forced to have recourse to the harshest means in order to make you speak."

These quiet words, calmly pronounced by a man with a venerable countenance, who since the beginning of the scene had endeavored to moderate the violence of the adversaries of Croustillac, made on the latter a lively impression; he shivered slightly, but his resolution was not shaken; he answered with a steady voice: "Excuse me, captain, I have nothing to say, I will say nothing."

"Captain," cried De Chemerant, "in the name of the king, by whom I am empowered, I formally declare that the silence of this criminal may be the occasion of grave prejudice to the interests of his majesty and the state. I found this man in the very domain of my lord the Duke of Monmouth, provided even with precious objects belonging to that nobleman, such as the sword of Charles II., a box with a portrait, etc. All concurs, in fine, to prove that he has the most precise information concerning the existence of his grace the Duke of Monmouth. Now this information is of the highest importance relative to the mission with which the king has charged me. I demand therefore that the accused should immediately be constrained to speak by all the means possible."

"Yes! yes! the torture," cried the noblemen.

"Reflect well, accused," said the captain, again. "Do not expose yourself to terrible suffering; you may hope everything from our indulgence if you tell the truth. If not, take care!"

"I have nothing to say," replied Croustillac; "this secret is not mine."

"This means a cruel torture," said the captain. "Do not force us to these extremities."

The Gascon made a gesture of resignation and repeated: "I have nothing to say."

The captain could not conceal his chagrin at being obliged to employ such measures.

He rang a bell.

An orderly appeared.

"Order the provost to come here, four men to remain on the gun-deck near the forward signal light, and tell the cannoneer to prepare bunches of tow dipped in sulphur."

The orderly went out.

The orders were frightfully positive. In spite of his courage, Croustillac felt his determination waver; the punishment with which they threatened him was fearful. Monmouth was then undoubtedly in safety; the adventurer thought that he had already done much for the duke and for the duchess. He was about to yield to the fear of torture, when his courage returned to him at this reflection, grotesque, without doubt, but which, under the circumstances in which it presented itself to his mind, became almost heroic, "One does not sacrifice oneself for others with the sole aim of being crowned with flowers."

The provost entered the council room.

Croustillac shuddered, but his looks betrayed no emotion.

Suddenly, three reports of a gun, in succession resounded long over the solitude of the ocean.

The members of the improvised council started from their seats.

The captain ran to the portholes of the great cabin, declaring the session suspended. Partisans and officers, forgetting the accused, ascended in haste to the deck.

Croustillac, no less curious than his judges, followed them.

The frigate had received the order to lay to until the issue of the council which was to decide the fate of the chevalier.

We have said that the Unicorn had obstinately followed the Thunderer since the evening before; we have also said that the officer of the watch had discovered on the horizon a ship, at first almost imperceptible, but which very soon approached the frigate with a rapidity almost marvelous.

When the Thunderer lay to, this ship, a light brigantine, was at the most only half a league from her; in proportion as she approached, they distinguished her extraordinarily high masts, her very large sails, her black

hull, narrow and slender, which scarcely rose out of the water; in one word, they recognized in this small ship all the appearance of a pirate.

At the apparition of the brigantine the Unicorn at once proceeded to place herself in her wake, at a signal which she made to her.

It was in time of war; the preparations for combat began in a moment on board the frigate. The captain, observing the singular maneuver of the two ships, did not wish to expose himself to a hostile surprise.

The brigantine approached, her sails half reefed, having at her prow a flag of truce.

"Monsieur de Sainval," said the captain to one of his officers, "order the gunners to stand by their guns with lighted matches. If this flag of truce conceals a ruse, this ship will be sunk."

De Chemerant and Croustillac felt the same astonishment in recognizing the Chameleon on board of which the mulatto and Blue Beard had embarked.

Croustillac's heart beat as if it would burst; his friends had not abandoned him, they were coming to succor him—but by what means?

Very soon the Chameleon was within speaking distance of the frigate and crossed her stern. A man of tall stature, magnificently dressed, was standing in the stern of the brigantine.

"James!—our duke! there he is!" cried enthusiastically the three peers, who, leaning over the taffrail of the frigate, at once recognized the duke.

The brigantine then lay to; the two ships remained immovable.

Lord Mortimer, Lord Dudley and Lord Rothsay gave vent to cries of the wildest joy at the sight of the Duke of Monmouth.

"James! our brave duke!—to see you—to see you again at last!"

"Is it possible? you are the Duke of Monmouth, my lord?" cried De Chemerant.

"Yes, I am James of Monmouth," said the duke, "as is proved by the joyful acclamations of my friends."

"Yes, there is our James!"

"It is he indeed, this time!"

"It is indeed our duke, our veritable duke!" cried the noblemen.

"Your highness, I have been most unworthily deceived since day before yesterday, by a miserable wretch who has taken your name."

"Yes, and we are going to hang him in honor of you!" cried Dudley.

"Be careful how you do that," said Monmouth; "the one whom you call a miserable wretch has saved me with the most generous devotion, and I come, De Chemerant, to take his place on board your ship, if he is in any danger for having taken mine."

"Surely, your highness," said De Chemerant, seizing this occasion of assuring himself of the person of the prince, "it is necessary that you should come on board; it is the only means by which you can save this vile impostor."

"That is, if this 'vile impostor' does not save himself, however," said Croustillac, springing upon the taffrail and leaping into the sea.

The movement was so sudden that no one could oppose it. The Gascon plunged under the waves, and reappeared at a short distance from the brigantine, toward which he directed his course.

There was but a short distance between the two vessels; the Chameleon was almost level with the sea; the chevalier, aided by the Duke of Monmouth and some of the sailors, found himself on the deck of the little ship before the passengers on the frigate had recovered from their surprise.

"Here is my savior, the most generous of men!" said Monmouth, embracing Croustillac.

Then James said a few words in the ear of Croustillac, who disappeared with Captain Ralph.

The duke, advancing to the edge of the stern of the brigantine, addressed himself to De Chemerant: "I know, sir, the projects of the king, my uncle, James Stuart, and those of the king, your master; I know that these brave gentlemen come to offer me their arms to aid me in driving William of Orange from the throne of England."

"Yes, yes, when you shall be at our head we will drive away these Dutch rats," cried Mortimer.

"Come, come, our duke, with you we will go to the end of the world," said Dudley.

"My lord, you may count on the support of the king, my master. Once on board, I will communicate to you my full powers," cried De Chemerant, ravished to see that his mission, which he had believed desperate, revived with every chance of success.

"Your highness, do you wish the long boat sent for you, or will you come in one of your own boats?" added De Chemerant; "and since your highness is interested in this miserable rascal, his pardon is assured."

"Make haste, noble duke——"

"Come as you wish, James—our James—but come at once!"

"Yes, come," said Mortimer, "or we will do as this rascal in green cassock and pink stockings; we will leap into the water like a band of wild ducks, to be the sooner with you."

"No imprudence, no imprudence, my old friends," said Monmouth, who sought to gain time since the Gascon disappeared.

At last Captain Ralph came to say a word in the ear of the prince; the latter gave a new order in a low voice and with a radiant air.

"Your highness, they are about launching the long boat," said De Chemerant, who was burning with impatience to see the duke on board.

"It is useless, sir," said the duke. Then, addressing himself formally to the noblemen with an accent of profound emotion: "My old friends, my faithful companions, farewell, and forever farewell, I have sworn by the memory of the most admirable martyr to friendship, never to take part in civil troubles which might deluge England with blood; I will not break my oath. Farewell, brave Mortimer, farewell good Dudley, farewell valiant Rothsay; it breaks my heart not to embrace you for a last time. Forget this my appearance. Henceforth let James of Monmouth—be dead to you as he has been to all the world for five years! Again farewell, and forever farewell!"

Then turning toward his captain, the duke cried quickly in a sonorous voice:

"Set all sails, Ralph!"

At these words Ralph seized the helm; the sails of the brigantine, already prepared, were hoisted and trimmed with marvelous rapidity. Thanks to the breeze and her galley oars, the Chameleon was under way before the passengers of the frigate had recovered from their surprise. The brigantine, in moving off, kept in the direction of the stern of the frigate in order not to be exposed to her guns.

It is impossible to paint the rage of De Chemerant, the despair of the noblemen, in seeing the light vessel rapidly increasing the distance between them.

"Captain," cried De Chemerant, "set all sail; we will overhaul this brigantine; there is no better sailer than the Thunderer."

"Yes, yes," cried the peers, "board her!"

"Let us capture our duke!"

"When we have him we will force him to place himself at our head!"

"He will not refuse his old companions!"

"My boys, two hundred louis to drink the health of James of Monmouth if we overtake this waterfly," cried Mortimer, addressing the sailors, and pointing to the little vessel.

The Chameleon soon found herself beyond reach of the guns of the frigate. She quitted the direction she had first taken, and in place of keeping close to the wind, altered her course.

This maneuver exposed the Unicorn, which during the conference of the duke and De Chemerant had remained behind in the wake of the Chameleon and absolutely in a line with her.

It is on board the latter ship that we shall conduct the reader; he can thus assist at the chase which the frigate is about to give to the brigantine.

Polyphème de Croustillac was on the deck of the Unicorn in company with his old host, Captain Daniel, and Father Griffen, who embarked the evening before on this vessel.

The reader recalls the plunge that Croustillac made in leaping from the taffrail of the frigate into the sea in order to rejoin Monmouth. While the Gascon shook himself, rubbed his eyes, and allowed himself to be cordially embraced by the duke, the latter had said to him: "Go quickly and await me on board the Unicorn; Ralph will conduct you there."

Croustillac, still dizzy from his leap, enraptured at having escaped from De Chemerant, followed Captain Ralph. The latter made him embark in a little yawl rowed by a single sailor.

It was thus that the adventurer boarded the Unicorn. In order not to lose time, Ralph had ordered the sailor to follow the chevalier and abandon the yawl; the transfer of the Gascon was then executed very rapidly.

The duke had not given the order to hoist the sails of the frigate until he knew Croustillac to be in safety, for he foresaw that De Chemerant would inevitably abandon the shadow for the substance, the false Monmouth for the true, the Unicorn for the Chameleon.

Master Daniel, at sight of the Gascon, cried out: "It is written that I never shall see you come aboard my ship but by strange means! In leaving France you fell from the clouds; in quitting the Antilles, you come to me from out of the sea like a marine god; like Neptune in person."

Very much surprised at this encounter, and especially at seeing Father Griffen, who, standing on the poop, attentively observed the maneuvers of the two ships, the chevalier said to the captain: "But how the devil do you find yourself here at a given point to receive me, coming out of that nutshell down there, floating away at hazard?"

"Faith, to tell the truth, I know almost nothing about it."

"How is that, captain?"

"Yesterday morning my shipowner at Rochelle asked me if my cargo was complete. I told him it was; he then ordered me to go to Fort Royal, where a frigate was just leaving, and earnestly demand her escort; if she refused it, I was to make myself escorted all the same, always keeping in sight of the said frigate, whatever she might do to prevent me. Finally, I was to conduct myself toward her almost as a mongrel cur toward a passer-by to whom he attaches himself. The man in vain drives the dog away; the dog always keeps just beyond reach of foot or stone; runs when he runs, walks when he walks, gets out of the way when he pursues him, stops when he stops, and finishes by keeping at his heels in spite of him. That is how I have maneuvered with the frigate. That is not all; my correspondent also said to me: 'You will follow the frigate until you are joined by a brigantine; then you will remain just behind her; it may be that this brigantine will send you a passenger (this passenger I now see was yourself); then you will take him and set sail at once for France without troubling yourself about either the brigantine or the frigate; if not, the brigantine will send you other orders, and you will execute them.' I know only the will of my shipowners; I have followed the frigate from Fort Royal. This morning the brigantine joined me, just now I fished you out of the water; now I set sail for France."

"The duke will not come on board, then?" asked Croustillac.

"The duke? what duke? I know no other duke than my shipowner or his correspondent, which is all the same as—ah! look there! there goes the frigate, giving tremendous chase to the little ship."

"Will you abandon the Chameleon thus?" cried Croustillac. "If the frigate overhauls her will you not go to her aid?"

"Not I, by the Lord, although I have a dozen little guns which can say their word as well as others, and the twenty-four good fellows who form my crew are a match for the marines of the king—but that is not the point. I know only the orders of my shipowners. Ah, now the brigantine cuts out some work for the frigate," said Daniel.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RETURN.

THE Thunderer pursued the Chameleon furiously. Whether from calculation, or from an enforced slackening in her course, several times the brigantine seemed on the point of being overtaken by the frigate; but then, taking a turn better suited to her construction, she regained the advantage she had lost.

Suddenly, by a brisk evolution, the brigantine tacked about, came straight toward the Unicorn, and in a few minutes came within reach of the voice.

One may judge of the joy of the adventurer when on the deck of the Chameleon, which passed astern of the three-master, he saw Blue Beard leaning on the arm of Monmouth, and heard the young woman cry to him in a voice full of emotion: "Adieu, our savior—adieu—may Heaven protect you! We will never forget you!"

"Adieu, our best friend," said Monmouth. "Adieu, brave and worthy chevalier!"

And the Chameleon moved off, while Angela with her handkerchief, and Monmouth with a gesture of the hand, made a last sign of farewell to the adventurer.

Alas! this apparition was as short as it was ravishing. The brigantine, after having for a moment grazed the stern of the Unicorn, turned back on her way and made straight toward the frigate, with incredible boldness, keeping almost within range of her guns.

The Thunderer in her turn tacked about; without doubt the captain, furious at this useless chase, wished to end it at any price. A sudden flash, a dull and prolonged report was heard a long distance, and the frigate left behind her a cloud of bluish smoke.

At this significant demonstration, no longer amusing herself with doubling before the frigate, the Chameleon came close up to the wind—a movement particularly favorable to her—and then took flight seriously. The Thunderer pursued her, both ships directing themselves to the south.

The Unicorn had the cape on the northeast. She sailed splendidly. One thus comprehends that she would leave very soon and very far behind the two ships which sank more and more below the horizon.

Croustillac remained with his eyes riveted on the ship which bore Blue Beard away. He followed it with yearning and desolate eyes until the brigantine had entirely disappeared in space. Then two great tears rolled down the cheeks of the adventurer.

He let his head fall into his two hands with which he covered his face.

Captain Daniel came to suddenly interrupt the sad reverie of the chevalier; he slapped him joyously on the shoulder and cried out: "Ah, ha, our guest, the Unicorn, is well on her way; suppose we go below and drink a madeira sangaree while waiting for supper? I hope you are going to show me again some of your funny tricks which made me laugh so much, you know? when you held forks straight on the end of your nose. Come, let us drink a glass."

"I am not thirsty, Master Daniel," said the Gascon, sadly.

"So much the better; you will only drink with the more pleasure; to drink without thirst—that is what distinguishes the man from the brute, as they say."

"Thanks, Master Daniel, but I cannot."

"Ah! the devil! what is the matter with you then? You have a very queer air; is it because you have not been lucky, you who boasted you were going to marry Blue Beard before a month had passed? Say then, do you remember? You must have lost your bet completely; you have not dared only to go to Devil's Cliff, I am sure."

"You are right, Master Daniel, I have lost my bet."

"As you bet nothing at all it will not ruin you to pay it, fortunately. Ah! say then, I have had several questions on my tongue for a quarter of an hour: how did you come to be on board the frigate? how did the captain of the brigantine pick you up? did you know him? and then, this woman and this lord who said adieu to you just now—what does all this mean? Oh, as to that, if it bothers you, do not answer me; I ask you that, only to know it. If it is a secret, motus, let us speak no more of it."

"I can tell you nothing on that subject, Master Daniel."

"Let it be understood, then, that I have asked no questions about it, and long live joy! Come, laugh then, laugh then! what makes you sad? Is it because here you are still with your old green coat and the very pink hose so prettily stained with seawater, be it said without offending you? I will lend you a change, although it is as hot as a furnace, because it is not healthy to let one's clothes dry on one's body. Come, come, quit that gloomy air! See, are you not my guest, since you are here by order of my shipowner? And, whatever comes, have I not told you that you can stay on board the Unicorn as much as you please? for, by the Lord, I adore your conversation, your stories, and especially your tricks. Ah! say, I have a species of tow made with a thread of the bark of the palm tree, that will burn like priming; that will be famous, you will swallow that, and you will spit flame and fire like a real demon; is it not true?"

"The chevalier appears not disposed to amuse you very much, Master Daniel," said a grave voice.

Croustillac and the captain turned; it was Father Griffen who, from the poop, had watched the pursuit of the brigantine, and who now was descending to the deck.

"It is true, Father, I feel somewhat sad," said Croustillac.

"Bah! bah! if my guest is not in the mood, he will be, very soon, for he is not naturally a melancholy man. I will go to prepare the sangaree," said Daniel. And he quitted the deck.

After some moments of silence, the priest said to Croustillac:

"Here you are, again, the guest of Captain Daniel; here you are, as poor as you were ten days ago."

"Why should I be richer to-day than I was ten days ago, Father," asked the Gascon.

It must be said to the praise of Croustillac, that his bitter regrets were pure from all covetous thoughts; although poor, he was happy to think that, apart from the little medallion Blue Beard had given him, his devotion had been entirely disinterested.

"I believe," said Father Griffen, "that the Duke of Monmouth will be annoyed at not being able to requite your devotion as he ought. But it is not altogether his fault; events have so pressed upon one another——"

"You do not speak seriously, Father. Why should the duke have wished to humiliate a man who has done what he could to serve him?"

"You have done for the duke what a brother might have done; and why, knowing you to be poor, should he not, as a brother, come to your aid?"

"For a thousand reasons, I should be disturbed beyond measure, Father. I even count on the events of the life, more adventurous than ever, that I am about to lead, to distract my mind, and I hope——"

The Gascon did not finish his sentence, and again concealed his face in his hands. The priest respected his silence and left him.

Thanks to trade winds and a fine passage, the Unicorn was in sight of the coast of France about forty days after her departure from Martinique.

Little by little the gloomy sadness of the chevalier softened. With an instinct of great delicacy—an instinct as new to him as the sentiment which, without doubt, had developed it—the chevalier reserved for solitude the tender and melancholy thoughts awakened in him by the remembrance of Blue Beard, for he did not wish to expose these precious memories to the rude pleasantries of Captain Daniel, or to the interpretations of Father Griffen.

At the end of eight days the chevalier had again become in the eyes of the passengers of the Unicorn what he had been during the first voyage. Knowing that he was to pay his passage by his good companionship, he put that kind of probity which was natural to him into his efforts to amuse Captain Daniel; he showed himself so good a companion that the worthy captain saw with despair the end of the voyage approach.

Croustillac had formally declared that he was going to take service in Moscow where the Czar Peter then received soldiers of fortune gladly.

The sun was on the point of setting when the Unicorn found herself in sight of the shores of France. Captain Daniel, from motives of prudence, preferred waiting for the morning before proceeding to the anchorage.

Shortly before the moment of sitting down to the table, Father Griffen prayed the Gascon to come with him to his room. The grave, almost solemn, air of the priest appeared strange to Croustillac.

The door closed, Father Griffen, his eyes filled with tears, extended his arms to the Gascon, and said: "Come, come, excellent and noble creature; come, my good and dear son."

The chevalier, at once moved and astonished, cordially pressed the priest in his arms and said to him: "What is it, then, my father?"

"What is it? what is it? How, you, a poor adventurer, you, whose past life should have rendered less scrupulous than others, you save the life of the son of a king, you devote yourself to his interests with as much abnegation as intelligence; and then, that done and your friends in safety, you return to your obscure and miserable life, not knowing even at this hour, on the eve of reentering France, where you will lay your head to-morrow! and that without one word, one single word of complaint, of the ingratitude, or at least, of the forgetfulness of those who owe you so much!"

"But, my Father——"

"Oh, I have observed you well during this voyage! Never a bitter word, never even the shadow of a reproach; as in the past, you have become gay and thoughtless again. And yet—no—no—I have well seen that your gayety was assumed; you have lost in this voyage your one possession, your only resource—the careless gayety which has aided you to bear misfortune."

"My Father, I assure you, no."

"Oh, I do not deceive myself, I tell you. At night I have surprised you alone, apart, on the deck, sadly dreaming. Of old, did you ever dream thus?"

"Have I not, on the contrary, during the voyage, diverted Captain Daniel by my pleasantries, good Father?"

"Oh, I have observed you well; if you have consented to amuse Master Daniel, it was in order to recompense him as you could for the hospitality he has given you. Listen, my son—I am old—I can say all to you without offending you; well, conduct such as yours would be very worthy, very fine on the part of a man whose antecedents, whose principles rendered him naturally delicate; but on your part, whom an idle, perhaps culpable youth, should seem to have robbed of all elevation of thought, it is doubly noble and beautiful; it is at once the expiation of the past and the glorification of the present. Thus, such sentiments cannot remain without their recompense—the trial has endured too long. Yes, I almost blame myself for having imposed it on you."

"What trial, my Father?"

"Yet, no; this trial has permitted you to show a delicacy as noble as touching——"

A knock at the door of Father Griffen's room.

"What is it?"

"Supper, Father."

"Come, let us go, my son," said Father Griffen, regarding Croustillac with a peculiar air; "I do not know why it seems to me that the journey will terminate fortunately for you."

The chevalier, very much surprised that the Reverend Father should have brought him to his room in order to hold the discourse we have reported, followed Father Griffen on deck.

To the great astonishment of Croustillac, he saw the crew in gala attire; lighted torches were suspended to the shrouds and the masts. When the adventurer appeared on deck, the twelve guns of the three-master resounded in salute.

"Zounds! Father, what is all this?" said Croustillac; "are we attacked?"

Father Griffen had no leisure to respond to the adventurer; Captain Daniel, in his holiday clothes, followed by his lieutenant, his officer and the masters and mates of the Unicorn, came to respectfully salute Croustillac, and said to him with ill-concealed embarrassment: "Chevalier, you are my shipowner; this ship and its cargo belong to you."

"To the devil with you, comrade Daniel!" responded Croustillac; "if you are as crazy as this before supper, what will you be when you have been drinking, our host?"

"I ask no end of pardons, chevalier, for having made you balance things on your nose, and for having led you to chew oakum in order to spit fire during

the voyage. But as true as we are in sight of the coast of France, I did not know that you were the proprietor of the Unicorn."

"Ah, Father, explain to me," said Croustillac.

"The Reverend Father will explain to you many things—so much the better, chevalier," continued Daniel, "that it is he who brought me just now the letter of my correspondent of Fort Royal, which announces to me that in view of the power of attorney he has always had from my shipowner in Rochelle, he has sold the Unicorn and her cargo as attorney to Chevalier Polyphème de Croustillac; thus then the Unicorn and her cargo belong to you, chevalier; you will give me a receipt and discharge of the said Unicorn and of the said cargo when we reach a port of France, or foreign land which it shall suit you to designate; which receipt and discharge I will send to my shipowner for my entire discharge of the said ship and said cargo."

Having pronounced this legal formula all in a breath, Captain Daniel, seeing Croustillac abstracted and anxious, thought that the chevalier bore him some grudge; he replied with new embarrassment: "Father Griffen, who has known me for many years, will affirm to you, and you will believe it, chevalier, I swear to you that in asking you to swallow oakum and spit out flame, I did not know that I had to do with my owner, and the master of the Unicorn. No, no, chevalier, it is not for one who possesses a ship, which, all loaded, might be worth at least two hundred thousand crowns——"

"This ship and her cargo is worth that price?" said the adventurer.

"At the lowest price, sir; at the lowest price, sold in a lump and at once; but, by not hurrying, one would have fifty thousand crowns more."

"Do you now comprehend, my son?" said Father Griffen, "our friends of Devil's Cliff, learning that grave interests recalled me suddenly to France, have charged me with making you accept this gift on their parts. Pardon me, or rather felicitate me for having so well proved the elevation of your character, in revealing to you only at this late hour, the bounty of the prince."

"Ah, Father," said Croustillac bitterly, drawing from his breast the medallion that the duchess had given him, and which he wore suspended by a leathern cord, "with that, I was recompensed as a gentleman, why now do they treat me as a vagabond in giving me this splendid alms?"

The next day the Unicorn entered port, Croustillac, making use of his new rights, borrowed twenty-five louis of Captain Daniel, on the value of the cargo, and forbade him to land for twenty-four hours.

Father Griffen was to lodge at the seminary. Croustillac appointed a meeting with him for the next day at noon. At noon the chevalier did not appear, but sent the priest the following note by a messenger of La Rochelle:

"My good Father I cannot accept the gift which you have offered me. I send you a deed drawn up according to rule, which substitutes you in all my rights over this ship and her cargo. You will employ it all in good works, as you understand how to do. The notary who will send you this note will consult with you as to formalities; he has my power of attorney.

"Adieu, my good Father; sometimes remember the Gascon, and do not forget him in your prayers.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ABBEY.

THE abbey of St. Quentin, situated not far from Abbeville and almost at the mouth of the Somme, possessed the finest farms in the province of Picardy; each week its numerous tenants paid in kind a part of their rents. In order to represent abundance, a painter might have chosen the moment when this enormous tithe was carried to the convent.

At the end of the month of November, 1708, about eighteen years after the events of which we have spoken, the tenants were met together on a misty, cold autumn morning, in a little court situated outside the buildings of the abbey and not far from the lodge of the porter.

Outside one saw the horses, the asses, and the carts which had served for the transportation of the immense quantity of produce destined for the provisioning of the convent.

A bell rang, all the peasants pressed to the foot of a small staircase of a few steps, situated under a shed which occupied the back part of the court. The flight of steps was surmounted by a vault through which one came out from the interior of the convent.

The cellarer, accompanied by two lay brethren, appeared under this vault.

The fat, rubicund, animated face of the Father, detached itself like a Rembrandt on the obscure depth of the passage at the extremity of which he had stopped; from fear of the cold, the monk had drawn over his head the warm hood of his black cloak. A soft soutane of white wool draped itself in large folds about his enormous obesity.

One of the brothers carried an ink bottle at his girdle, a pen behind his ear, and a big register under his arm; he seated himself on one of the steps of the staircase, in order to enter the rents brought by the farmers.

The other brothers classified the goods under the shed as they were placed there; while the cellarer, from the top of the flight of steps, presided solemnly over their admission, his hands concealed in his large cuffs.

It is impossible to number and describe this mass of comestibles placed at the foot of the staircase. Here were enormous fish from the sea, the lake, or the river, which still wriggled on the slabs of the court; there magnificent capons, monstrous geese, large ducks coupled by their feet, fluttered convulsively in the midst of mountains of fresh butter and immense baskets of eggs, vegetables, and winter fruits. Further on were tethered two of these sheep fattened on the salt meadows, which give such fine flavor to their succulent flesh. Fishers rolled along small barrels of oysters; further on were

shellfish of every kind, lobsters, eels and shrimps, which shook the wicker baskets in which they were inclosed.

One of the porters of the abbey was on his knees before a buck a year old, in full flesh, and killed the day before; he weighed with his hand a quarter, to make the cellarer admire its weight; near the buck lay two kids, a good number of hares and partridges; while another porter opened hampers filled with every species of marsh fowl and birds of passage, such as wild duck, woodcock, teal, plovers, etc.

Finally, in another corner of the court, were spread out the more modest, but no less useful offerings, such as sacks of the purest flour, dried vegetables, strings of perfumed hams, etc.

At one time these gastronomics were so heaped up that they reached the level of the staircase where the cellarer stood.

Seeing this rotund monk with his shining face, his vast abdomen, standing on this pedestal of comestibles which he watched with the eye of a gormand, one would have called him the genius of good cheer.

According to the quantity or quality of his tribute, each tenant, after having received a word of blame or praise from the cellarer, withdrew with a slight genuflection. The Reverend Father even deigned at times to withdraw from his long sleeves his fat, red hand, to give it to the most favored to kiss.

The roll-call of the lay brother was almost at an end.

There was brought to the cellarer a savory caudle in a silver bowl borne on a tray of the same metal. The Reverend Father swallowed this consommé, a perfect specific against the morning cold and fog. At this moment the lay brother complained of having in vain twice called James, the tenant of the farm of Blaville, who owed ten hens, three sacks of wheat and one hundred crowns for the rent of his farm.

"Ah, well!" said the cellarer, "where then is James? He is ordinarily exact. For fifteen years that he has held the farm of Blaville, he has never failed in his rent."

The peasants still called for James.

James did not appear.

From out the crowd of farmers came two children, a young boy and a young girl from thirteen to fourteen years of age; trembling with confusion, they advanced to the foot of the staircase—redoubtable tribunal!—holding each other by the hand, their eyes downcast and full of tears.

The little girl fingered the corner of the apron of coarse cloth covering her petticoat of whitish cloth rayed with wide black stripes; the young boy

convulsively grasped his cap of brown wool. They stopped at the foot of the staircase.

"These are the children of the farmer James," said a voice.

"Very well! and the ten hens, and the three sacks of wheat, and the one hundred crowns from your father?" said the reverend man severely.

The two poor children pressed against each other, nudging one another with the elbow, as an encouragement to answer.

Finally the young boy, having more resolution, raised his noble, handsome face, which his coarse garments rendered still more remarkable, and sadly said to the monk: "Our father has been very ill for two months; our mother is taking care of him—there is no money in the house; we have been obliged to take the wheat and the rent to support the day laborer and his wife who takes my father's place in the farm work, and then it has been necessary to sell the hens to pay the doctor."

"It is always the same story when tenants fail in their rents," said the monk roughly. "James was a good and punctual farmer; this is how he spoils all, just like the others; but in the interests of the abbey as well as in his own, we will not let him wander into the bad way." Then, addressing himself to the children, he added severely: "The father-treasurer will consider this—wait there."

The two children withdrew into an obscure corner of the shed. The young girl seated herself, weeping, on a bench; her brother stood near her, looking at his sister with gloomy sadness.

The roll-call finished, the monks re-entered the abbey, the peasants regained the horses and carts which had brought them, the two children remained alone in the court, waiting with sad disquietude the decision of the treasurer with regard to their father.

A new personage appeared at the gate of the little court. This was a tall old man with large, white mustache and neglected beard; he walked with difficulty with the help of a wooden leg, and wore a uniform-coat of green with an orange-colored collar; a wallet of leather slung on his back carried his modest baggage; he supported himself on a thick cane made from the dogwood tree, and on his head was a big Hungarian cap of black worn fur, which descending to his eyebrows, gave him the most savage air in the world; his hair, as white as his mustache, tied with a leathern string, formed a long queue which fell to his shoulders; his skin was tanned, his eyes were bright and lively, though age had bowed his tall stature.

This old man entered the court without seeing the children; he looked about him like a man seeking to find his way; perceiving the two little peasants, he went straight to them.

The young girl, startled by this strange figure, or rather, by this enormous cap of bristling fur, gave a cry of affright; her brother took her hand to reassure her, and although the poor child wished to withdraw it, he advanced resolutely toward the old man.

The latter stopped, struck with the beauty of these two children, and especially the delicate features of the young girl, whose face of perfect regularity was crowned with two bands of blond hair half concealed under a poor little child's cap of a brown color; she wore, like her brother, rude wooden shoes and wool stockings.

"You are afraid of me then! Zounds! you will not tell me, then, where the Abbey of St. Quentin is?" said the old soldier.

Although he was far from wishing to intimidate the children, the tone of his voice frightened the young girl still more, who, pressing closely to her brother, said to him in a low tone: "Answer him, James, answer him; see what a wicked air he has."

"Have no fear, Angela, have no fear," answered the boy. Then he said to the soldier: "Yes, sir, this is the Abbey of St. Quentin; but if you wish to enter the porter's lodge is on the other side, outside of this court."

The boy might have spoken a long time without the soldier paying attention to his words.

When the young girl called her brother "James" the old man made a movement of surprise; but when James, in his turn, called his sister "Angela" the old man started, let his stick fall, and was obliged to support himself against the wall, so violent was his agitation.

"You call yourselves 'James' and 'Angela,' my children?" said he, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, sir," answered the young boy entirely reassured, but astonished at this question.

"And your parents?"

"Our parents are tenants of the abbey, sir."

"Come," said the soldier, whom the reader has doubtless already recognized, "I am an old fool—but—the union of these two names—James—Angela. Come, come, Polyphème, you lose your head, my friend; because you encounter two little peasants you imagine—" he shrugged his shoulders; "it is hardly worth while to have this big white beard at one's chin only to give

way to such visions! If it is to make such discoveries that you return from Moscow, Polyphème, you might just as well—have done——"

While speaking thus to himself, Croustillac had examined the young girl with the greatest curiosity; more and more struck with a resemblance which seemed incomprehensible, he fastened eager eyes on Angela.

The young girl again frightened, said to her brother, hiding her face behind his shoulder: "Heavens! how he frightens me, again!"

"However, these features," said Croustillac, feeling his heart beat with doubt, anxiety, fear and despair all at once, "these charming features recall to me—but no—it is impossible—impossible. By what probability? Decidedly, I am an old fool. Farmers? Come, that sabre cut I got on the head at the siege of Azof has deranged my brain. After all, there are chances so strange (and surely, more than any one else, I should believe in the oddities of chance; I should be an ingrate to deny it); yes, chance might occasion peasants to give their children certain names rather than others, but chance does not make these resemblances—come, it is impossible. After all, I can ask them, and in asking them I shall laugh at myself; it is stupid. My children, tell me, what is your father's name?"

"James, sir."

"Yes, James—but James—what?"

"James, sir."

"James? nothing more?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy, regarding Croustillac with surprise.

"This is more and more strange," said Croustillac, reflecting.

"Has he been long in France?"

"He has always been here, sir."

"Come, I was mad; decidedly, I was mad. Has your father ever been a soldier, my children?"

Angela and James looked at each other with astonishment.

The young boy answered: "No, sir, he has always been a farmer."

At this moment the door which communicated with the abbey opened and one of the lay brothers appeared at the top of the stairway.

This brother was the type of an ignoble monk, gross and sensual. He made a sign to the children, who tremblingly approached.

"Come here, little one," said he to the girl.

The poor child, after casting a doubtful look at her brother, whom she could not make up her mind to leave, timidly mounted the steps.

The monk took her insolently by the chin with his coarse hand, turned up her face which she held down, and said to her: "Pretty one, you will warn your father that if he does not pay eight days from now his rent in kind and the hundred crowns which he owes, there is a farmer who is more solvent than he who wants the farm and who will obtain it. As your father is a good fellow, they will give him eight days—but for that, they would have turned him out to-day."

"My God! my God!" said the children, weeping and clasping their hands, "there is no money at home. Our poor father is sick. Alas! what shall we do?"

"You will do what you can," said the monk, "that is the order of the prior;" and he made a sign to the young girl to go.

The two children threw themselves into each other's arms, sobbing, and saying: "Our father will die of this—he will die!"

Croustillac, half-hidden by a post of the shed, had been at once touched and angered by this scene. At the moment the monk was about to close the door, the Gascon said to him: "Reverend Father, a word—is this the Abbey of St. Quentin?"

"Yes, and what of it?" said the monk rudely.

"You will willingly give me a lodging till to-morrow, will you not?"

"Hum—always beggars," said the monk. "Very well; go and ring at the porter's gate. They will give you a bundle of straw and give you bread and soup." Then he added: "These vagabonds are the plague of religious houses."

The adventurer became crimson, drew up his tall form, thrust, with a blow of his fist, his fur cap over his eyes, struck the earth with his stick, and cried in a threatening tone: "Zounds! Reverend Father, know your company a little better, at least."

"Who is this old wallet-bearer?" said the irritated monk.

"Because I carry a wallet it does not follow that I ask alms of you, Reverend Father," said Croustillac.

"What dost thou want, then?"

"I ask a supper and a shelter because your rich convent can well afford to give bread and shelter to poor travelers. Charity commands this from your abbot. And beside, in sheltering Christians, you do not give, you restore. Your abbey grows very fat from its tithes."

"Wilt thou be quiet, thou old heretic, thou insolent old fellow!"

"You call me an insolent old fellow. Very well; learn, Don Surly, that I have still a crown in my wallet, and that I can do without your straw and your soup, Don Ribald."

"What dost thou mean by Don Ribald, rascal that thou art?" said the lay brother, advancing to the top of the steps. "Take care lest I give thy old rags a good shaking."

"Since we thee-and-thou each other, Don Drinker, take care in thy turn, Don Greedy, that I do not make thee taste of my stick, Don Big Paunch, infirm as I am, Don Brutal."

The vigorous monk for a moment made as though he was about to descend to chastise the Gascon, but he shrugged his shoulders and said to Croustillac: "If thou hast ever the impudence to present thyself at the porter's lodge, thou wilt be thrashed to some purpose. That is the kind of hospitality thou wilt receive henceforth from the Abbey of St. Quentin." Then addressing himself to the children: "And you be sure to tell your father that in eight days he pays or quits the farm, for, I repeat to you, that there is a farmer more solvent than he who wants it."

The monk shut the door brusquely.

"I cannot tell it to the children," said the adventurer, speaking to himself; "that would be a bad example for youth; but I had something like a feeling of remorse for having aided in the burning of a convent in the Moravian War—well, it pleases me to imagine that the roasted ones resembled this fat, big-bellied animal, and it makes me feel quite cheerful. The scoundrel! to treat those poor children so harshly! It is strange how I interest myself in them—if I had at least some reason for it, I should let myself hope. After all, why not clear up my doubts? What do I risk by it? I have plenty of money. Ah, then, my children," said he to the young peasants, "your father is sick and poor? He will not be vexed to gain a little windfall; although I carry a wallet, I have a purse. Well, instead of going to dine and sleep at the inn (may the lightning strike me if I ever set foot in this abbey, the Lord confound it!) I will go and dine and sleep at your place. I will not be any trouble to you. I have been a soldier, I am not hard to suit; a stool in the chimney corner, a morsel of lard, a glass of cider, and for the night a bundle of fresh straw, the gentle warmth of the stable—that is all I need; and that means a piece of twenty-four sous which will come into your house. What do you say to that?"

"My father is not an innkeeper, sir," answered the young boy.

"Bah! bah! my boy, if the good man has sense; if the good mother is a housekeeper, as she ought to be, they will not regret my coming; this piece of good luck will make your pot boil for a whole day. Come, conduct me to

your farm, my children; your father would scold you for not bringing him an old soldier."

In spite of his apparent roughness and his uncouth figure, the chevalier inspired James and Angela with confidence; the children took each other by the hand and walked before the invalid soldier, who followed them absorbed in a profound reverie.

At the end of an hour's walk, they arrived at the entrance of a long avenue of apple trees, which led to the farm.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

REUNION.

JAMES and Angela entered the farm in order to learn if their father would consent to give the old soldier hospitality. While waiting the return of the children, the adventurer closely scanned the outbuildings of the farm.

Everything appeared to be carried on with care and neatness; at the side of the working buildings was the farmer's house; two immense walnut trees shaded the door and its thatched roof of velvety green moss; a light smoke escaped from the brick chimney; the sound of the ocean was heard in the distance, as the farm lay almost on the cliffs of the coast.

The rain began to fall; the wind moaned; a shepherd boy was bringing home from the fields two beautiful brown cows which turned toward their warm stable, causing their little bells to give forth a melancholy sound. The adventurer was touched by this peaceful scene. He envied the lot of the people of this farm, even though he knew their momentary embarrassment. He saw approaching him a woman pale and small in figure, and of middle-age. She was dressed like the peasants of Picardy, but with extreme neatness. Her son accompanied her; her daughter remained in the doorway.

"We are very much grieved, sir."

Hardly had the woman said these words, when Croustillac became as pale as a ghost, extended his arms toward her without saying a word, let his cane escape, lost his equilibrium and fell suddenly his full length on a heap of dry leaves which was, happily, behind him.

The adventurer had fainted.

The Duchess of Monmouth (for it was she) not at once recognizing the chevalier, attributed his weakness to fatigue or need, and hastened, with the assistance of her two children, to resuscitate the stranger.

James, a strong boy for his age, supported the old man to the trunk of one of the walnut trees, while his mother and sister hurried off to seek a cordial. In opening the chevalier's coat in order to facilitate his respiration, James saw, attached by a leathern braid, the rich medallion which the adventurer carried on his breast.

"Mother! see this beautiful reliquary," said the young lad.

The duchess approached and was in turn stupefied at recognizing the medallion she had once given Croustillac. Then, regarding the chevalier with closer attention, she cried:

"It is he! it is the generous man who saved us!"

The chevalier began to revive. When he opened his eyes they were filled with tears.

It would be impossible to paint the happiness, the transports of the good Croustillac.

"You in this dress, madame! you whom I see after so many years! When I heard these children just now call each other James and Angela, my heart beat so strong! But I could not believe—hope—And the duke?"

The Duchess of Monmouth put one finger on her lips, shook her head sadly, and said: "You are going to see him! Alas! why should the pleasure of seeing you again be saddened by the sickness of James? Had it not been for this, to-day would have been beautiful for us."

"I can hardly recognize you again, madame; you, in this costume—in this sad condition."

"Silence! my children may hear you. But wait a moment here; I will go and prepare my husband to receive you."

After some minutes the adventurer entered Monmouth's room; the latter was extended on one of those green serge canopied beds such as may still be seen in the houses of some of the peasants.

Although he was emaciated by suffering, and was at that time more than fifty years old, the physiognomy of the duke showed the same gracious and high character.

Monmouth held out his hands affectionately to Croustillac, and indicating a chair at his bed, said to him: "Seat yourself there, my good friend. To what miraculous chance do we owe this happy meeting? I cannot believe my eyes! So, chevalier, we are reunited after more than eighteen years of separation. Ah! how often Angela and I have spoken of you and of your devoted generosity. Our regret was not being able to tell our children the debt of gratitude that we owe you, and which they also owe you."

"Ah, well, my duke, consider what is most pressing," said the Gascon, "each in his turn."

So saying, he took his knife from his pocket, unfastened his coat, and gravely made a large incision in the lining.

"What are you doing?" asked the duke.

The chevalier drew from his secret pocket a kind of leathern purse, and said to the duke: "There is in this one hundred double-louis, your highness; on the other side there is as much. This is the first of my savings on my pay, and the price of the leg which I left the past year at the battle of Mohiloff, after the passage of Beresina; for he was first, Peter the Great—well-

named—in paying generously the soldiers of fortune who enrolled themselves in his service and who gave, many of them, the sacrifice of some one of their limbs."

"But, my friend, I do not understand you," said Monmouth, gently pushing away the purse which the adventurer tendered him.

"I will be explicit, my lord; you are in arrears to the amount of one hundred crowns of rent, and you are threatened with being turned out of this farm in eight days. It is a pot-bellied animal, bearded and corpulent, robed in the garb of a monk, who has made this threat to your poor, dear children but a short time since at the convent door."

"Alas, James! this is only too probable," said Angela, sadly, to her husband.

"I fear it," said Monmouth, "but this is not a reason, my friend, to accept——"

"But, my lord, it seems to me that you made me such a fine gift, it is now eighteen years ago, that we might well share it to-day; and when we speak of the past, in order to disembarass yourself at once of what concerns me, and to speak henceforth of your affairs at our ease, my lord, in two words, this is my history. Upon my arrival at Rochelle, Father Griffen told me that you had presented me the Unicorn and its cargo!"

"My God! my friend, this was such a small thing after all that you had done for us," said James.

"May we not at least recognize all that you have done for us?" said Angela.

"Without doubt, it was little—it was nothing at all—a cup of coffee well sugared, with rum to soften it, was it not? Only the cup was a ship, and to fill it there was coffee and sugar and rum, the cargo of a vessel of eight hundred tons—the whole worth two hundred thousand crowns. You are right—it was less than nothing—but in order to put aside useless discussion and to be frank, Zounds! this gift wounded me——"

"My friend——"

"I was paid by this medallion—speak no more of it. Besides, I have no longer the right to resent it; I made deed of gift of the whole to Father Griffen in order that he might in his turn give it to the poor, or to the convent, or to the devil if he chose to."

"Can it be possible that you refused it?" exclaimed both husband and wife.

"Yes, I did refuse it, and I am sure, my lord, although you pretend surprise, that you would have acted as I did. I was not already so rich in good works as not to keep the memory of Devil's Cliff pure and without stain. It was a

costly luxury, perhaps, but I had been James of Monmouth twenty-four hours, and somewhat of my rôle of grand seigneur still clung to me."

"Noble and excellent heart!" exclaimed Angela.

"But," said Monmouth, "you were so poor!"

"It is just because I am used to poverty and an adventurous life that that cost me nothing—I said to myself: 'Polyphème—consider! thou hast dreamed this night that thou wast worth two hundred thousand crowns.' I dreamed this dream—all has been said—and that did me good. Yes, often in Russia, when I was in misery—in distress—or when I was nailed to my pallet by a wound, I said to myself, to comfort and to rejoice me: 'After all, Polyphème, for once in thy life thou hast done something noble and generous.' Well, you may believe me, that restored my courage. But this is boasting, and what is worse, it unmans me—let us return to my departure from Rochelle. I avow it to you and I thank you for it; nevertheless, I have profited a little by your generosity. As nothing remained to me of my three unlucky crowns, and that was a small sum to travel to Moscow on, I borrowed twenty-five louis from Master Daniel on the cargo; I paid my passage on a Hamburg ship from Hamburg to Fallo; I embarked for Revel on a Swedish vessel; from Revel I went to Moscow; I arrived there like seafish in Lent; Admiral Lefort was recruiting a forlorn hope to reinforce the polichnie of the czar; in other words, the first company of infantry equipped and maneuvering after the German mode which had existed in Russia. I had made the campaign in Flanders with the 'reiters;' I knew the service; I was then enrolled in the polichnie of the czar, and I had the honor of having this great man for file closer, for he served in this company as a simple soldier, seeing he had the habit of thinking that in order to know a trade it is necessary to learn it.

"Once incorporated in the Muscovite army, I served in all the wars. Do not think, my lord, that I am going to recount to you my campaigns, to speak to you of the siege of Azof, where I received a saber cut on my head; the taking of Astrakhan under Scheremetoff, where I received a lance thrust in my loins; of the siege of Narva, where I had the honor of aiming at his majesty, Charles XII., and the good fortune to miss him; and finally, the great battle of Dorpat.

"No, no, do not fear, my lord; I keep these fine stories to put your children to sleep with during the winter nights, in the chimney corner, when the seawinds rage in the branches of your old walnut trees. All that remains for me to say to you, my lord, is that I have made war ever since I left you, first as a noncommissioned officer, and then as lieutenant. I might have done it still, perhaps, if last year I had not forgotten one of my legs at Mohiloff. The czar generously gave me the capital of my pension, and I returned to France because, after all, it is there that one dies best—when one is born there; I

went on foot, lounging along, regaining my paternal valley, lodging and sleeping in the abbeys to spare my purse, when chance—this time, no," said the chevalier, in a grave and penetrating tone which contrasted greatly with his ordinary language, "oh, this time, no—it was not chance, but the providence of the good God which caused me to meet with your children, my lord; they have brought me here; I fell back in a swoon on a heap of dry leaves on recognizing the duchess, and here I am.

"Now, here is my plan—at least, if you consent to it, my lord. My paternal valley is very empty—my father and my mother are long since dead; I should wish, of all things, to establish myself near you. Although lame, I am still good for something, if only to serve as a scarecrow to hinder the birds from eating your apples and cherries. I will forget that you are 'my lord:' I will call you 'Master James,' I will call the duchess, 'Dame James,' your children shall call me Father Polyphème; I will tell them of my battles, and it will go on like that, *vitam æternam*."

"Yes! yes! we accept; you shall never leave us," said James and Angela together, their eyes filled with tears.

"But on one condition," said the chevalier, drying his eyes also, "that is, that I, who am as proud as a peacock, shall pay you, in advance, my board; and that you will accept from me these two hundred louis that you refused; total, six thousand livres; at five hundred francs a year, twelve of board. In twelve years we will make another lease."

"But, my friend——"

"But, my lord, it is yes or no. If it is yes, I remain, and I am more happy than I deserve to be. If it is no, I take again my stick, my wallet, and I start for the paternal valley, where I shall die, in a corner sadly and all alone, like an old dog who has lost his master."

Grotesque as were these words, they were spoken in a tone so full of emotion and so touching that the duke and his wife could not refuse the offer of the chevalier: "Well then, I accept."

"Hurrah!" cried Croustillac, in the voice of a stentor, and he accompanied this Muscovite exclamation by throwing into the air his old fur cap.

"Yes, I accept with all my heart, my old friend," said Monmouth, "and—why conceal it from you?—this unexpected succor which you offer us so generously, saves, perhaps, my life—saves, perhaps, my wife and children from misery, for this sum sets us afloat again, and we can brave two years as bad as those which have been the cause of our first embarrassment. Fatigue, chagrin, fear for the future, have made me ill; now, tranquil as to the fate of my dear ones, assured of a friend like you—I am sure that my health will return to me."

"Zounds! my lord, how did it happen that, with the enormous amount of jewels that you had, you are reduced?"

"Angela will tell you that, my friend; emotion at once so keen and so sweet as I feel has fatigued me."

"After having left you on board of the Unicorn," said Angela "we set sail for Brazil; we sojourned there some time, but from prudence, we resolved to depart for India on board a Portuguese vessel. We had lived three years in this little-known country, very happy and very tranquil, when I fell seriously ill. One of the best physicians in Bombay declared that the climate of India would become fatal to me; my native air alone could save me. You know how James loves me; it was impossible for me to alter his resolution; he chose at all hazards to return to Europe, to France, in spite of the dangers that threatened him. We started from the Cape in a Dutch ship, making sail for the Texel. We possessed a very considerable sum coming from the sale of our jewels. Our voyage was very fortunate as far as the coast of France, but there a terrible tempest assailed us. After losing her masts, and being beaten about by the waves for three days, our ship went ashore on the coast a quarter of a league from here; by a miracle of Heaven, James and I alone escaped an almost certain death. Several of the passengers were, like us, cast on the beach during this horrible night—all perished. I repeat to you, my friend, that a miracle from Heaven was necessary to save us, James and me—to save me especially, ill as I was. The tenants whom we replaced on this farm found us almost dying on the shore; they brought us here. The ship was swallowed up with all our riches; James, occupied solely with me, had forgotten all; we no longer possessed anything; I was an orphan with no fortune; James could not apply to any one without being recognized.

"What remained to us in Martinique had, without doubt, been confiscated—and then, how could we claim this property? For all resource there remained to us a ring which I wore on my finger at the time of the ship-wreck; we intrusted it to the tenants of this farm, who had received us, to sell the diamond at Abbeville; they got for it about four thousand livres—that was all our store. My health was so affected that we were obliged to stop here; this measure, besides reconciled both prudence and economy; the farmers were good, full of cares for us.

"Little by little my health became re-established. Almost without resources we thought of the future with terror; however, we were young, misfortune had redoubled our love; the simple, obscure, peaceable life of our hosts impressed us; they were old, without children; we proposed to them to take the half of their farm, and to make our apprenticeship under their direction, avowing to them that we had no other resources than the four thousand livres that we would share with them. Touched with our position, these good

people wished at first to dissuade us from this project, representing to us how hard and laborious this life was. I insisted; I felt myself full of courage and strength; James had lived a hard life too long not to accustom himself to that of the fields. We accomplished our design; I was tranquil about James. Who would seek the Duke of Monmouth in an obscure farm in Picardy? At the end of two years we had finished our apprenticeship, thanks to the lessons and teaching of our good forerunners; their little fortune, augmented by our four thousand livres, was sufficient. They made an agreement with the treasurer of the abbey that we should succeed them and we take the entire farm."

"Ah, madame, what resignation! what energy!" cried the chevalier.

"Ah, if you knew, my friend," said Monmouth, "with what admirable serenity of soul, with what gentle gayety Angela endured his rough life—she, accustomed to a life of luxury!—if you knew how she always knew how to be gracious, elegant, and charming, all the while superintending the affairs of the household with admirable activity!—if you knew in fine, what strength I drew from this brave and devoted heart; from this gentle regard always fixed upon me with an admirable expression of happiness and content precarious as was our position! Ah, who will ever recompense this beautiful conduct?"

"My friend," said Angela tenderly, "has not God blessed our laborious and peaceful life? Has He not sent us two little angels to change our duties into pleasures? What shall I say to you?" resumed Angela, addressing the chevalier; "for the almost sixteen years that this uniform life has lasted, of which each day has brought its bread, as the good folks say, never a chagrin had come to trouble it, when, in the past year, a bad harvest hampered us very much. We were obliged to discharge two of our farm hands for economy's sake. James redoubled his efforts and his work, his strength gave out; he took to his bed; our small resources were exhausted. A bad year, you see, for poor farmers," said Angela, smiling softly, "is terrible. In short, without you, I do not know how we could have escaped the fate which threatened us, for the Abbot of St. Quentin is inflexible toward tenants in arrears, and yet it was our pride to pay him always a term in advance. One hundred crowns—as much as that—and a hundred crowns, chevalier, are not easily gotten together."

"A hundred crowns? That does not pay for the embroidery on a baldric," said James with a melancholy smile. "Ah, how many times, in experiencing what misfortune is, have I regretted the good I might have done."

"Listen, my lord," said Croustillac gravely, "I am no devotee. Just now I came near shaking a monk out of his robes; I committed irregularities during my campaign in Moravia, but I am sure there is One above Who does not lose sight of honest people. Now, it is impossible that after nineteen years of

work and resignation, now when you grow old, with two beautiful children, you should dream of remaining at the mercy of an avaricious monk or a year of frost. In listening to you, an idea has come to me. If I was the boaster of old, I should say that it was an idea from above; but I wholly believe that it is a fortunate idea. What has become of Father Griffen?"

"We do not know; we did not return to Martinique."

"He belongs to the order of Preaching Friars; he must be at the end of the world," said Monmouth.

"I, who have had no news of France for eighteen years, I know no more than you, my lord, but this is why I concern myself. I left to him the price of the Unicorn; he is a good and honest priest; if he still lives, there must remain to him some of it, for he would have been prudent and careful in his almsgiving. My advice would be to seek to know where the Reverend Father is, for if the good God has willed that he should have kept some good morsel from the Unicorn, own, my lord, that this would not be bad eating at this moment; if not for you, at least, for these two beautiful children, for my heart bleeds to see them with their wooden shoes and their woolen hose, although they may keep their feet warmer than boots of leather and gilded spurs, or shoes of satin with silken hose, should they be red, these hose! red like those I wore in 1690," added the chevalier, with a sigh. Then he resumed: "Ah, well! my lord, what say you to my Griffen idea?"

"I say, my friend, that it is an idle hope. Father Griffen is without doubt dead; he will doubtless have left your fortune to some religious community."

"To the Abbey of St. Quentin, perhaps," said Angela.

"Zounds! it wants but that! I would instantly set fire to the monastery!"

"Ah—fie! fie! chevalier!" said Angela.

"It is also because I am raging at having done what I did with your two hundred thousand crowns; but could I then imagine that I should find again, as a farmer, the son of a king who handled his diamonds by the shovelful? Ah, it is no use to philosophize here; but to find Father Griffen again if he is still living!"

"And how to find him again?" said Monmouth.

"By seeking him, my lord. I who have no reason for concealing myself, to-morrow I will take up this quest, hobbling around. Nothing is more simple; in truth, I am stupid not to have thought of it sooner. I will direct myself at once to the Superior of Foreign Missions, thus we shall know what we have to look to. The Superior will at least inform me if the good Father is alive or not; and even, on this account, I will to-morrow make a visit to your neighbor, the abbot of St. Quentin. He will tell me what to do about it—how

to get this information. I will carry him your hundred crowns; that will be a good way to contrive the interview."

The three friends passed the day together. We leave the reader to imagine the stories, the reminiscences, gay, touching, or sad, which were recalled.

On the morrow Croustillac, who had already made friends with young James, started for the abbey. The amount of the rent, in bright louis d'or, was an excellent passport to the presence of the treasurer.

"Father," said Croustillac, "I have a very important letter to place in the hands of a good priest of the order of Preaching Brothers; I do not know if he is alive or dead; if he is in Europe, or at the end of the world; to whom should I address myself for information on this subject?"

"To one of our canons, my son, who has had much to do with missions, and who, after long and painful apostolic labors, came six months since to repose in a canonicate of our abbey."

"And when can I see this venerable canon, Father?"

"This very morning. In descending to the court of the cloister, ask a lay brother to conduct you to Father Griffen."

Croustillac gave so tremendous a blow of his staff on the floor, shouting three times his Muscovite exclamation, "hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" that the reverend treasurer was startled by it, and rang the bell precipitately, thinking he had to do with a madman.

A friar entered.

"Pardon, good Father," said Croustillac; "these savage cries, and this no less savage blow of the stick, paint to you the state of my soul, my astonishment, my joy! It is Father Griffen, himself, that I seek."

"Then conduct this gentleman to Father Griffen," said the treasurer.

We will not attempt to depict this new recognition, so important in the results the Gascon expected from it. We will only say that the good priest, charged with the trust of Croustillac, and fearing lest the chevalier should one day come to regret his disinterestedness, but wishing, however, to execute till then his charitable intentions, and not to deprive the unfortunate of this rich alms, had each year distributed to the poor the revenue of the capital, which he reserved for a pious foundation if the Gascon should not reappear.

The sale of the Unicorn, prudently managed, had brought about seven hundred thousand livres. The Father, finding by chance an advantageous sale of property in the environs of Abbeville, not far from the abbey of St.

Quentin, had profited by it. He had thus become proprietor of a very fine estate called Chateauvieux.

On his return from his long voyages, six months before the time of which we speak, Father Griffen had asked by preference, a canonicate in Picardy, in order to be more within reach of the property which he managed, always ignorant whether the Gascon was dead or alive, but inclining rather to the former supposition, after a silence of eighteen years.

Father Griffen, very old, very infirm, quitted the abbey only to visit the estate of Chateauvieux. During the six months he lodged at St. Quentin, he had never gone to the side of the farm of which James of Monmouth was the farmer. The reunion of Father Griffen, the duke and his wife, was as touching as that of the adventurer.

After much discussion it was decided that one-half of the estate belonged to James; the other half to Croustillac, in whose name it remained.

The Gascon immediately made his will in favor of the two children of Monmouth on condition that the son should take the name of Jacques de Chateauvieux.

In order to explain this sudden change of fortune to the eyes of the people of the abbey and the environs, it was agreed that Croustillac should pass as an uncle from America, who had come incognito to test his nephew and his wife, poor cultivators of the soil.

James gave up his farm to the tenant who had been destined to replace him, and departed with his wife, his children and his uncle Croustillac for Chateauvieux.

The three friends lived long and happily in their domain, and their children and grandchildren lived there after them. The chevalier never left Monmouth and his wife. Once a year Father Griffen came to pass some weeks at Chateauvieux.

One single day yearly cast a gloom over this peaceful and happy life; this was the anniversary of the 15th of July, 1685, the anniversary of the sacrifice of the courageous Sidney.

Never did the son of James of Monmouth know that his father descended from a royal race. The secret was always kept by James, by his wife, by Croustillac, and by Father Griffen.

Age had so changed the duke; so many years, beside, had passed over the event of Martinique, that he was no longer disquieted by it. Only sometimes, the children and grandchildren of James of Monmouth opened astonished eyes when their good and old friend, the Chevalier de Croustillac, addressing himself to the Duchess of Monmouth with an air of understanding, said to

her, while striving to hide a tear of emotion, the following apparently truly cabalistic words:

Blue Beard, Whirlwind, Rend-your-Soul, Youmäale, Devil's Cliff.

THE END.