THE BLACKSMITH'S HAMMER, OR THE PEASANT CODE

BY

EUGÈNE SUE

The Blacksmith's Hammer

PART I

HOLLAND

CHAPTER I

THE ST ELOI

Early in the month of August of the year 1672, a violent tempest raged on the coast of Holland. Driven by the storm, and already deprived of one of its masts, the French brigantine St. Eloi "fled before the gale," as mariners put it. With only a little triangular bit of sail spread forward, she strove to run into the port of Delft, which lies not far from The Hague. The enormous waves, furiously dashing against the jetty of the port, completely hid it behind a mist of foam. Aware of his close proximity to land, the captain gave at frequent intervals the signal of distress with two pieces of artillery that were placed upon the forecastle. He sought thereby to attract some daring pilot of the port to take charge of the partly dismantled craft, the plight of which became all the more distressful when a dash of the sea carried away a portion of the rudder, and rendered control of the vessel almost impossible. The St. Eloi had left Calais that morning for Dover; the weather was beautiful, the wind favorable. In the middle of the Channel, however, the wind shifted suddenly to west-northwest, and blew with such fury that, compelled to flee before the tempest, and unable either to keep its course for Dover or return to Calais, the brigantine sought to reach a haven of refuge in one of the ports on the Dutch coast.

The distinguished passengers who chartered the St. Eloi for a passage across the Channel to England were three in number: the Marchioness of Tremblay; her niece, Mademoiselle Bertha of Plouernel; and Abbot Boujaron. They were accompanied by a lackey and a maid. The Marchioness of Tremblay was on the way to join in London her nephew, Bertha's brother, Baron Raoul of Plouernel, who was charged by Louis XIV with a special commission to Charles II, King of England. Although, since the beginning of the year, both the latter power and France were at war with the Dutch Republic, or rather the seven United Provinces, strangers occasionally received "letters of safeguard" from the admiralty at Amsterdam, thanks to which they could cross the Channel without fear of the cruisers of Admiral Ruyter's squadron. Equipped with one of these letters, the St. Eloi was under sail for Dover when the storm overtook her. In order not to stand in the way of the pumps, that were kept busy by as many of the men as the

vessel's small crew could afford, bailing the water from a leak in the hold, the passengers were soon obliged to go upon the bridge. Their different attitudes at that critical moment presented striking contrasts. The Marchioness of Tremblay, a woman of ripe age, once reputed a belle but now of haughty demeanor, lay shuddering with fear upon a mattress, stretched out on the vessel's poop; she was supported by her maid, and, in order to prevent her being tossed about by the heavy roll of the ship, she was steadied by a scarf that passed under her arm and was fastened to the taffrail. Beside her, and no less pale than herself, Abbot Boujaron, a man of fifty, short, thick-set and puffy, held himself fast to a shroud with a convulsively clenched hand, while with the other he clung to the arm of his lackey, and emitted plaintive moans, interspersed with bits of expostulatory prayers. Mademoiselle Bertha of Plouernel on the contrary, seemed to take no thought of the danger of the hour, but gave herself over to the imposing poetry of the storm, after having vainly endeavored to reassure her aunt the Marchioness, and induce her to share the serenity that never leaves brave spirits in the lurch. The young girl, barely twenty years of age, was tall, supple, well rounded, with a brunette complexion of radiant beauty. It was emotion and not fear that animated her otherwise pale face, while the spark that shone in her large black eyes, surmounted with well-marked eyebrows, sufficiently denoted the feverish admiration that the sight of the elements in fury inspired her with. With dilating nostrils, a heaving bosom, her forehead lashed by the gale that raised and blew backward the floating ringlets of her hair, she steadied herself with a firm hand against the rigging of the ship, and yielded to the motion of the rolling and pitching craft with a suppleness that unveiled the elegance of her waist while enabling her to preserve her equilibrium. Mademoiselle Plouernel contemplated in wrapt enthusiasm the spectacle presented to her eyes, all the more indifferent to the danger that threatened her, seeing she did not believe in death. Yes, son of Joel, in keeping with the ancient faith of the Gauls, our fathers, the young girl was upheld by the conviction that, as a consequence of the phenomenon called "death," the soul freed itself of its material wrappage, the body, in order to assume a new form appropriate to its entrance upon other spheres. She firmly believed that, body and soul, spirit and matter, life was renewed, or rather continued, in the starry worlds that spangle the firmament.

A second dash of the sea finished and carried off the brigantine's rudder. The vessel's position became desperate. The captain fired a last signal of distress, still hoping to be heard by the pilots of Delft and to bring them to his aid. The signal was heard. A caravel, a sort of solid yet light ship, that, thanks to its special build, is better able than any other to beat its way against violent winds and over heavy seas, was seen to emerge from the harbor. Tacking with as much skill as daring, at times disappearing in the troughs of the towering waves that seemed to swallow her up, the caravel

would again reappear riding their crests and almost lying upon her white sails that grazed the foam of the billows as the wings of a sea bird graze the water. At the risk of foundering, the caravel steadily approached the disabled brigantine.

"Ah," cried the captain of the St. Eloi, "to dare come out to our help in such a storm, the commander of that caravel must be as generous a man as skilful and intrepid a sailor!"

Struck by these words Mademoiselle Plouernel followed with increased interest the manoeuvres of the caravel, that steadily tacked its way towards the distressed brigantine. The sturdy craft went upon a new leg, in order to pass within hailing distance of the brigantine, that now, wholly dismantled and deprived of its rudder, had become the toy of wave and wind, the combined violence of which was driving her towards the shore, where she would inevitably have been dashed to pieces.

Suddenly—a common phenomenon near land—the storm was almost completely hushed; the sea, however, would long continue heavy, and its action, combined with that of the tide, carried the St. Eloi, which was unable to steer herself into port, straight upon the rocks that littered the shore. The caravel had made good use of the last gusts of wind and drawn steadily nearer. She had only a few sailors on board. At the stern and, despite his youth, managing the rudder with a vigorous and experienced hand, stood a mariner of about twenty years. The youth presented a virile and charming picture. His head and neck were bare, his hair and forehead streamed with the spray of the dashing waves. He wore a jacket of red wool and wide breeches of white cloth that were half hidden in his large fisherman's boots. The resolute attitude of the young mariner, who, at the risk of his own life, strove to save the lives of strangers to him; his calm, intelligent and bold face—in short the youth's attitude, appearance and conduct, imparted to the heroism of his action a character of such grandeur and touching generosity that both the courage and personality of the approaching savior of the brigantine made a lively impression upon Mademoiselle Plouernel. As soon as he hove within hailing distance, the young master of the caravel shouted in French to the captain of the St. Eloi that, although the swell of the sea still continued heavy and rendered approach dangerous, he would manoeuvre in such manner as to tow the brigantine into port. Laborious, delicate and difficult was the operation requisite to keep the disabled ship from certain wreck by being cast upon the rocks by the rising tide. The skilful manoeuvre was successfully executed by the master of the caravel. His sailors threw a cable to the brigantine; out came their long oars in order to supplement the dying wind; at the expiration of an hour the St. Eloi, finally out of danger, cast anchor in the harbor of Delft.

CHAPTER II

BERTHA OF PLOUERNEL

Once disembarked at the port of Delft, the Marchioness of Tremblay regained her spirits, that the fright of the tempest had upset, and she remembered often to have met in Paris a certain Monsieur Tilly at the house of Monsieur Van Orbek, a rich Dutchman, who, emulating in sumptuous display the famous contractor Samuel Bernard, gave the handsomest feasts in the world, whither both court and town crowded. On such occasions, Monsieur Tilly more than once gallantly offered the Marchioness the hospitality of his house in The Hague, if she should ever happen to visit that city; his residence, he said, was at her disposal. The Marchioness now remembered the offer, and finding it unpleasant to have to wait in a wretched hostlery of the seaport of Delft for some neutral vessel bound to England—a rare occurrence since the breaking out of the war—the lady despatched an express to Monsieur Tilly, certain that he would deem himself highly honored at extending hospitality to her. Indeed, Monsieur Tilly gallantly hastened in person from The Hague to Delft, whence he himself took the Marchioness, her niece and Abbot Boujaron to The Hague, being at the time all the better able to tender his hospitality to the distinguished guests, seeing that, as he explained, his wife was then at Amsterdam at the sick-bed of her mother.

The Marchioness of Tremblay was speedily installed at The Hague in the residence of Monsieur Tilly, where she occupied on the first floor a vast apartment furnished with the luxury peculiar to those republican navigators, who, trafficking with the whole world, gathered in their homes most precious fabrics, porcelains and furnitures from China and the East Indies, vases from Japan, lacquer cabinets and folding-screens from Coromandel, carpets from Smyrna, glasswork from Venice. All these rare curiosities were found in profusion at Monsieur Tilly's residence. Still suffering from the fatigue of her rough passage, the Marchioness was partly stretched upon a reclining chair, placed near a glass door that opened upon a balcony, sheltered from the rays of the sun and the public gaze by a sort of netting striped red and white. Mademoiselle Plouernel sat not far from her aunt, who, continuing the conversation that the two had been carrying on, proceeded to say:

"You will have to admit, my dear, that the lot of Mademoiselle Kerouaille is worthy of envy. The King—"

But noticing that her niece was not listening, the Marchioness broke off, remarking:

"Bertha, your absentmindedness is singular. What is it that you are thinking about? Tell me!"

"I was thinking of my brother Raoul. I hope his illness will not grow worse during the delay that our journey to London is unfortunately undergoing," answered Mademoiselle Plouernel in accents of deep emotion.

And after a moment's silence she continued:

"But there is in all this something that seems unexplainable to me. Monsieur Noirmont left London two or three days after the date of the letter that informed you of my brother's illness, and still Monsieur Noirmont stated to us only a short time ago, at Versailles, that at the time of his departure from England he left Raoul in perfect health."

"Monsieur Noirmont must have wished to conceal the truth from us," replied the Marchioness, slightly embarrassed; "people always dislike to be the bearers of bad news."

"And yet nothing seemed more sincere than the extreme astonishment with which Monsieur Noirmont was struck when he learned from us of my brother's illness, and—"

"Good God, my dear, I wish I had your facility for doubting facts," said the Marchioness, impatiently interrupting her niece; "but I am not allowed to entertain any such doubts. I only console myself in advance with the thought of the excellent influence that will be exercised upon Raoul's health by my presence, and yours especially—"

"Mine?" answered Bertha sadly; "I hope it will be so."

"That should be, to you, not a hope, but a certainty."

"My elder brother has until now shown so much coolness towards me—"

"My niece, such a reproach!"

"It is not a reproach—it is the expression of a sorrow. For the rest, Raoul and I have spent our childhood and the first years of our youth almost as strangers to each other. He lived near my father, I near my mother. I can not be surprised at Raoul's indifference towards me."

"You greatly err, my dear, with regard to what you wrongly, very wrongly, term his indifference. Do you forget that by virtue of his right of primogeniture, with the death of my brother, he has become the head of our family? The quality of head of our family confers upon Raoul the full authority that your father and mother were vested with during their lives over their children. As a matter of course, such authority imposes upon Raoul, in his relations towards you and Guy, your second brother, a certain degree of reserve, of gravity, I might say of severity that must in no wise be confounded with indifference. He, on the contrary, is exceptionally attached to you. But I must say—and I beg you not to see in my words even the shadow of a reproach," the Marchioness added, insinuatingly, "I must admit that a certain turn to freedom in your disposition, a certain stubborn way of looking at some things from a viewpoint that is wholly opposed to Raoul's, may have occasionally, I shall not say made him take umbrage at you, but may have given some uneasiness to the warm solicitude that he entertains for you—seeing that it is his duty to fill towards you the strict functions of a father."

"I might answer you, aunt, that Raoul showed himself cold and severe towards me before the loss of my father and my poor mother—a loss that would be irreparable to me but for the certainty of some day re-rising into new life with that idolized mother, in the spirit world where we shall all meet again."

"Your father's loss must, accordingly, be less irreparable to you than your mother's," observed the Marchioness with some bitterness; "to say the least, the difference that you establish in your grief for the departed ones, is strange."

"Aunt," replied Bertha with a firm voice, "I respected my father and adored my mother. She nursed me, brought me up, educated me. I never left her. My happiest days were spent at her side in Brittany, in the retirement of our Castle of Plouernel, where I spent my first eighteen years, while all that time my father lived at court. I barely saw him once every year for a short time during his transient visits to the castle when the hunting season would bring him to his domains. So you see, my mother has left me numerous tokens of remembrance. They were continuous and loving, profoundly loving. They render, they will ever render her loss—or rather, her absence—irreparable to me, at least in this world. But let us return to Raoul. As I told you a moment ago, he always showed himself, even when still young, cold and even haughty towards me, whenever he accompanied my father into Brittany, and he felt offended at my having my own way of looking at things, a way that frequently was different from his own."

"The reason is, my dear, that for people of our class there is but one way of looking upon a number of things—such as religion, morals, politics—"

"In that case I must be an exception to the general rule; but that is of no consequence. Believe me, aunt, I have the liveliest desire to find myself mistaken with regard to Raoul's sentiments towards me; and, I must admit it, I have been profoundly touched by his request to see me at a time when, as I hear, he is seized with a grave disease, the reality of which I still wish I could doubt. I did not expect such a proof of tenderness on his part. And so, as I said before, I hope Raoul's illness has not grown worse, seeing that, alas! like so many others, he has preserved the prejudice of death, a thing that adds such cruel agonies to all illness."

"The prejudice of death!" repeated the Marchioness, shrugging her shoulders and hardly able to control herself. "That is one of your extravagances! You set yourself up in rebellion against our holy religion!"

"A sublime extravagance!" replied Bertha with a radiant smile. "It suppresses superstitions; it frees us from the terror of decease; it imparts to us the certainty of living anew near those whom we have loved."

"My dear niece, I would take you to be out of your mind, were it not that I know you really derive pleasure from such eccentricities. But however that may be, I have the infirmity of sharing with your brother and with so many other weak minds the vulgar prejudice of death. I hope, and I have every reason to hope, that the state of Raoul's health, although grave, is by no means alarming. Far away from his own country, his family, his friends, but still considering it to be a sacred duty on his part to remain in London in the service of the King our master, he has fallen into a sort of listless languor, a black melancholy, and he relies upon our presence, and yours especially, to dissipate his distemper."

"A distemper of languor?" replied Mademoiselle Plouernel pensively. "It seems to me such a disease is generally preceded by symptoms of dejection and sadness; but Monsieur Noirmont said to us that when he left Raoul, my brother's spirits, good looks and genuinely French mirthfulness eclipsed the most brilliant seigneurs of the court of King Charles II."

"Oh, I doubt not that! Poor Raoul is capable of the greatest sacrifices in order worthily to represent his master, our great King; he would even suppress his physical pains and moral sufferings."

"Excuse me, aunt, but I am unable to understand you. I was not aware that my brother had a political mission to fill."

"And yet there is nothing more simple! Does not your brother, charged with a mission to King Charles II during the absence of the French ambassador Monsieur Croissy, represent his Majesty Louis XIV at London? Consequently, however deep his melancholia may be, is not my nephew bound to conceal it from the eyes of the English court, so as not to be outdone in gracefulness, wit and mirth by the English courtiers, and to continue to eclipse them all in honor of his master? Thus it is that Raoul is fulfilling the duties imposed upon him by his mission to King Charles. But," added the Marchioness, after this plausible answer to her niece's objections, and wishing, moreover, to change the subject of a conversation that embarrassed her, "but by the way of the good King Charles—the name of that gallant and joyful prince leads me back to the subject that we wandered from with this long digression upon my nephew. I must repeat to you what I was saying and which your absentmindedness at the moment prevented you from hearing. I was speaking of the beautiful young Breton lady."

"What did you say about her, aunt?"

"I was saying: Admit that the lot of the beautiful Mademoiselle Kerouaille, who is to-day the Duchess of Portsmouth, and one of the greatest ladies of England, by reason of the favor that she has received, is a lot worthy of envy."

Bertha of Plouernel shuddered; her beautiful and usually pale visage was suffused by a blush; her black eyebrows contracted; and, gazing at the Marchioness with undisguised amazement, she said:

"Is it to me that you put such a question?"

"What astonishes you, my dear?"

"You ask me whether the lot of Mademoiselle Kerouaille seems to me worthy of being envied?"

"Why, yes, my dear child; the question is quite natural."

"You, then, despise me!" cried Mademoiselle Plouernel with an outburst of indignation. "You, my father's sister! Oh, madam—madam!"

"Truly, niece, I drop from the clouds!" answered the Marchioness with profound sincerity. "What! Do I despise you because I mention to you the

enviable lot of a noble young girl who has had the signal honor of serving the interests of the great King, our neighbor—and of meriting the affection and favors of such a powerful monarch!"

"Madam," replied Bertha, interrupting the Marchioness with a trembling voice, "during the nearly eighteen months since I had the misfortune of losing my mother, I have lived with you in Paris or Versailles; I thought you knew me somewhat; I find that I am mistaken, since you look surprised to see me revolt at infamy, and since you dare to ask me such a question."

"Infamy! In truth, you are losing your mind, my dear niece."

"Not one, but many infamies," Bertha of Plouernel proceeded, with biting satire. "Madam, I have no choice but to say so plainly to you. Thanks to the licence in morals that reigns in your salon, at court and everywhere else, I have despite myself learned things that a young girl should never as much as suspect—the principles that guide the conduct of the great world."

"And what did you learn, niece?"

"Among a thousand other indignities, I learned this, madam: King Charles was still hesitating whether or not to declare war upon the Dutch Republic, where we now are meeting with generous hospitality; Louis XIV thereupon charged the Duchess of Orleans to overcome the indecision of her brother Charles II by whatever means she could. She agreed; departed for London equipped with a considerable sum of money and intentionally leading in her train one of her ladies of honor, a young girl of extraordinary beauty—Mademoiselle Kerouaille. And what was the purpose that caused the Duchess of Orleans to take the handsome girl in her company? It was for the purpose of delivering her to the King in return for his declaration of war upon the Dutch. Lewdness matched with treachery—infamy! Such is the statecraft of these monarchs!"

"One moment, niece. You are mistaken in your appreciations."

"Madam, I said there was not one but several infamies. Did I exaggerate? Let us number them: speculating upon the dissoluteness of the King of England, Louis XIV sends his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Orleans, to fill the role of a coupler—is not that enough of an infamy? And when we see that princess lowering herself to such an ignoble commerce, towards whom? towards her own brother—is there not in that a double infamy?"

"Once more, my niece, what do you know about the negotiations between princes?"

"Finally, Mademoiselle Kerouaille, an accomplice in the ignominious transaction, sells herself to the King of England and accepts the duchy of Portsmouth as the price of her public shame—a further infamy! Shame upon these execrable beings!"

"You seem to forget that you speak of crowned heads!"

"It is true, madam! I forgot that a Prince of the Catholic Church, Bossuet, the Bishop of Meaux, dared to say, in the very house of God, in the presence of the court, assembled on that occasion to hear the funeral oration on the Duchess of Orleans: 'She went on a mission to unite two kingdoms by pleasing methods, and her own virtue was the sole mediator between the two Kings.' Is such language not infamous enough on the lips of a man invested with an august character? Hypocrisy, servility, cowardice—what apanages to a priest who, rather than corrupt, should purify the human race!"

After having first betrayed her sincere astonishment at the vehement indignation of Mademoiselle Plouernel, and after a sense of suppressed anger and even rage succeeded her astonishment, the Marchioness of Tremblay collected herself, reflected for a moment, and promptly imparting to her features the sweetest expression that they could assume, and to her voice the most affectionate accents into which she was capable of modulating it, she rose from her reclining chair and said to her niece, who was still trembling with contempt and disgust:

"Dear child—come to my arms. Let me embrace you—you are an angel."

Not a little astonished at this outburst of tenderness, the young lady hesitated to respond to the invitation of her aunt, who repeated:

"Yes, come and let me embrace you; you are a noble being, worthy of the name that you carry; you are an angel, an archangel; you have issued triumphant from a trial to which I wished to put you."

"A trial?" queried Mademoiselle Plouernel without any effort at concealing her incredulity; but immediately after, and yielding to the impulse of all pure and straightforward characters, who are ever more disposed to believe good than evil, Bertha approached the Marchioness, who, taking her niece in her arms, pressed the noble girl to her heart and kissed her effusively.

"Blessed be God! It was only a trial!" repeated the young girl, smiling with gratification and feeling her chest relieved of a heavy weight. "But aunt, dear

aunt, I mean not to reprove you—only those are tried who are doubted. Did you doubt me?"

"No; of course not! But in our days one sees a King's love turn so many young heads, even the most solid, that—"

"And you mistrusted the solidity of mine?"

"However certain I was, I wished, dear niece, to see you prove it in all the luster of good judgment and purity. Only, and neither do I now mean to convey a reproach, I do deplore that a young person of your birth should, as it sometimes happens with you, forget herself to the point of speaking irreverently of the priests, the bishops, the Princes of the Church, and above all of the great King, our master, of whom your brother has the honor of being one of the most faithful, the most devoted servants."

"Aunt, let us not discuss the worthiness of Bossuet and his fellows, any more than the worthiness of him whom you style your master; he never will be mine. I have but one Master: He thrones in heaven."

"Do doubt; but after God, come the priests, the ministers, the Pope, the bishops, and then comes the King, to whom we owe blind submission, boundless devotion, pious respect."

"Pious respect! When at Versailles I saw that King promenading in public in one carriage with the Queen his wife and his two mistresses—the old and the new—Mademoiselle La Valiere and Madam Montespan! Is such audacity in bad morals to be respected? No! I shall not respect that infamous King who surrounds himself with high-born courtesans!"

"In truth, my dear, you are losing your reason. The violence of your language! Where can you have drawn such principles from?"

"Excuse my Breton frankness, but I could not respect a person who inspires me with aversion, disgust and contempt. What! That prince knows how his scandalous amours afflict the Queen. He is aware of the bitterness of the rivalry between La Valiere and Montespan! And yet, without pity for the laceration of the hearts of those three women, he forces them to gulp down the affront put upon them, to silently swallow their mutual jealousy and resentment, to smother their shame. He forces them to appear in public face to face; he drags them triumphantly after him as if anxious to glory openly in his double adultery! Ah, I repeat it, that ridiculous self-infatuation, that disregard of all sense of chastity, that brutal disdain for all human feelings,

that insolent cynicism towards women—no, that never could inspire me with aught but aversion, contempt and disgust!"

"Oh, my niece, in their fervent adoration of their much beloved sovereign, La Valiere, Montespan and the Queen do as people do who make to God a sacrifice of their pains—they offer their torn hearts to their idol, the handsomest, the greatest King in the whole world!"

"Well, aunt, that theory becomes excessively hyperbolic. Have I not seen him, that 'great King,' an undersized man in reality, seeking to add inches to his stature with the aid of immoderately high heels and enormous wigs! Tell me, deprived of his heels, his wigs and, above all, his royal mantle, what, I pray you, is left of the 'idol'? Why, a little stuffed and groomed crow! For the rest, a good carpet dancer, a still better knight of the carrousel; always in red paint, severe, buttressed in the majesty of his trappings, never laughing out of fear to expose his villainous teeth, otherwise negligent of his appearance and never shaving but every three days, passionately fond of perfumery in order to conceal his bad breath, finally having, under the category of truly 'great' nothing to show except his appetite, to judge from his voracity, which I once witnessed at Versailles on a gala day! But raillery carries me away, and I blush, myself," added Mademoiselle Plouernel, whose features quickly assumed an expression of deep sadness. "Am I ever to forget that my mother's brother finished his days in a dungeon, the victim of the iniquity of Louis XIV!"

CHAPTER III

THE HUGUENOT COLONEL

The Marchioness of Tremblay had her secret reasons to suppress her own sentiments, and not to fulminate against what she termed the "enormities of her niece," who, however, on this occasion, had given stronger vent than ever before to her hostility for the "idol" who was desolating Gaul. Accordingly, Bertha's aunt contented herself with a few forced smiles, and seeking to give a different turn to the conversation that, besides being generally distasteful to her, threw doubts into her mind concerning the secret plans that she was pursuing, she observed in a mild tone:

"After all, my dear, the unwonted vehemence of your language has its excuse in this, that the contagion of the country on whose shores we suffered shipwreck has smitten you. This wicked little heretical republic, once so severely chastised by Louis XIV, has always held our great King in particular aversion. The heretical and republican pestilence must have mounted to your head; who knows," she added with an affectation of archness, "but you may come out of the country a full-fledged Huguenot."

"I should then have, at least, the consolation of knowing that I shall not be the first or only Huguenot in our family," answered Mademoiselle Plouernel, whose features the line of thought into which her aunt's words threw her seemed suddenly to overcast with pensiveness; "I would be but following the example of one of our ancestors who was not much of a partisan of royalty. Was not my father's grandfather a Huguenot? Did not Colonel Plouernel, as he was then called, take part in the religious wars of the last century under the great Coligny, one of whose bravest officers he proved himself? Did he not fight valiantly against the royal and Catholic armies?"

"Alas, it is but too true. The apostasy of that Plouernel is a blot upon our family. He was the youngest son of the family. After his eldest brother, the Count, and the latter's son, the Viscount, were both killed in the front ranks of the royal and Catholic army, at the battle of Roche-la-Belle, fighting against the rebellious heretics, the Huguenot colonel became by that catastrophe the head of our house, and came into possession of its vast domains. Unfortunately, his son shared the paternal vice of heresy, but at last his grandson, who was my father, re-entered, thanks to God, the bosom of the Catholic Church, and resumed the observance of our old traditions of love, respect and loyalty to our Kings. Let us leave the two Plouernels, the only two unworthy members of our family, buried in their double felony. We should endeavor to forget that the two ever lived."

"It goes against my grain, aunt, to contradict you, but I can assure you that Colonel Plouernel, by reason of his courage, his virtues and the nobility of his character, is perhaps the only male member of whom our family may be justly proud."

As Mademoiselle Plouernel was saying these last words she happened to cast her eyes in the direction of the net awning that sheltered from the rays of the sun the wide balcony near which she was seated. She remained silent for a moment, while her eyes, looking intently into the space that stretched before Monsieur Tilly's house, seemed to follow with so much interest someone who was passing on the street, that, half rising from her easy-chair, the Marchioness inquisitively asked her niece:

"What is it you see out there? You seem to be absorbed in deep contemplation."

"I am looking at the young mariner whom you know," answered Bertha without evincing the slightest embarrassment; "he was just passing with a grey-haired man, I doubt not his father; there is a marked resemblance between the two. Both have very sympathetic ways and faces."

"Of what mariner are you speaking, if you please? I know nobody of that class."

"Why, aunt, can you have so soon forgotten the services rendered us when we were in mortal danger—you who believe in death? Would not the brigantine on which we embarked from Calais have foundered with every living soul on board, had it not been for the heroic action of that young mariner, French like ourselves, who braved the tempest in order to come to our aid, and snatch us from the imminent danger that we ran?"

"Well! And did not Abbot Boujaron give the mariner ten louis in my name, in payment for the service that he rendered us? We are quits with him."

"It is true—and immediately upon receiving the remuneration, which went unaccompanied by a single courteous word, or a single expression that came from the heart, the young mariner turned, threw the ten louis into the cap of an invalid sailor who was begging on the wharf, and our generous rescuer said with a smile to the poor man: 'Take this, my friend, here are ten louis that Monsieur the Abbot gives you—for you to pray for the absolution of his sins; we all need being prayed for, abbots as much as anybody else.' And with a respectful salute he walked away."

"And that was what I call a piece of extreme impertinence!" interjected the Marchioness, interrupting her niece. "The idea of giving the ten louis to the beggar to pray for the absolution of the Abbot's sins! Was not that to insinuate that the holy man had a heavily loaded conscience? I was not aware of the fellow's effrontery and ingratitude; I was still too sea-sick and under the effect of the fright we went through. Well, then, to return to the salt water rat, the fellow's disdain for the remuneration offered him, cancels even more completely whatever debt we may have owed him."

"That is not my opinion, aunt. Accordingly I requested our host, Monsieur Tilly, to be kind enough to ascertain the name and address of our brave countryman, who can only be a temporary resident of Delft—to judge by what has been reported to me."

"And for what purpose did you make the kind inquiry, dear niece?"

"I wish to commission Monsieur Tilly to assure our generous rescuer of our gratitude, and to ask him to excuse the strange conduct of Monsieur the Abbot towards him—excuses that, I must admit, I had not the courage to offer on the spot; I felt so confused at the humiliation that he was put to, and, besides, I felt too indignant at the conduct of the Abbot to trust myself to speak to him. Just now, as I saw him crossing the square—"

"You probably had a wish to call him from the window?" asked the Marchioness suffocating with repressed anger. "Truly, dear niece, you are losing your head more and more. Such a disregard for propriety on the part of a person of your quality!"

"I never thought of calling our countryman out of the window; I was only sorry that Monsieur Tilly did not happen to be with us at the time. He might have gone out after him and asked him to step in."

"My dear, what you say upon this subject is so absurd, that I even prefer to hear your praises of Colonel Plouernel—although that topic is not of the most edifying."

"Nothing easier than to accommodate you, aunt," answered Bertha with a smile that seemed to foreshadow numerous subjects for the suffocation of the Marchioness. "In a manuscript left by Colonel Plouernel under the title of 'Instructions to His Son' a most extraordinary fact was recorded. In reminding his son of the antiquity of his family, which goes back to the time of the conquest of Gaul by the Franks, the colonel added the natural observation that there are no conquerors without conquered, and that the

Franks, from whom we of the noble race claim to descend, despoiled and then enslaved the Gauls. He then proceeded to say that a family of the Gallic race, a descendant of whom the colonel became acquainted with at the siege of La Rochelle, handed down to its own members from age to age, first, from the time of the conquest of Gaul by the Romans, and then, from the conquest of the country by the Franks, a series of legends that chronicled the trials and misfortunes undergone by the several and succeeding members of that family, which, strange coincidence! on the occasion of the frequent uprisings of the enslaved Gauls, more than once fought arms in hand and victoriously against the seigneurs of our own Frankish house! Our ancestor, the colonel, approves and extols the right of conquered peoples to rise in insurrection.

"Towards the end of the last century," Mademoiselle Plouernel proceeded as in a revery, "during the siege of La Rochelle, Colonel Plouernel became strongly attached by bonds of friendship to one of the descendants of that Gallic family, an armorer by occupation, and one of the bravest soldiers of Admiral Coligny. The armorer being, at the close of the religious war, ardently desirous of returning to Brittany and establishing himself there, in the ancient cradle of his family, which, according to the chronicles of his kin, owned their fields not far from Karnak, and Colonel Plouernel, on his part, wishing to do a kindness to his friend, the armorer of La Rochelle, our ancestor offered the brave Huguenot a long lease of the farm of Karnak, which he owned and which he transmitted to his descendants together with the domain of Mezlean. But, according to the feudal custom, 'use' and 'habitance' change after a certain number of years into 'vassalage,' and so it has come about that the descendants of the armorer, they never having left the domain of Mezlean, are to-day vassals of my brother. My mother obtained the certainty of this fact by ordering the bailiff of Plouernel to communicate with the bailiff of Mezlean and inquire whether a family named Lebrenn, that is the family's name, lived on the farm of Karnak. The bailiff answered that in the year 1573 a man of that name had taken the farm in lease and that the farm was still cultivated by the descendants of the same family. I doubt not that, owing to the proximity of the port of Vannes, the elder brother of the present farmer of Karnak took to the sea, a calling that carries with it enfranchisement from vassalage. Struck by the circumstances mentioned in the manuscript of Colonel Plouernel, my mother arranged an excursion to Mezlean in order to make the acquaintance of a family in so many ways interesting to know. We were to make the journey only shortly before the fatal illness that separated me from my mother—until the day when I shall live again at her side in the world that she now inhabits," added Bertha with a sigh, and she relapsed into pensive silence.

"But, in short, what conclusion did that Huguenot colonel, and do you, draw from the, I must admit, extraordinary facts registered in that manuscript? I find myself unable to follow your reasoning."

"The conclusion is simple and touching, it serves as the moral to the manuscript left by Colonel Plouernel; he closes it with these words to his son: 'My child, the death of my dear brother has made me master of the immense domains of our house in Auvergne, in Beauvoisis and in Brittany; thousands of vassals inhabit those domains. But never forget this—our vast acres and large wealth as well as our nobility have for their origin an iniquitous and bloody conquest; these lands that to-day are ours and over which we lord it, once belonged to the Gauls who, from being free, were dispossessed, subjugated and reduced to a frightful condition of slavery by the Franks, our ancestors. Our present vassals are the descendants of that disinherited race which has been successively the slaves, serfs and vassals of our ancestors. Show yourself, accordingly, charitable, compassionate, equitable, fraternal, benevolent, obedient to the humane law of the Christian faith. Alas! however generous your conduct may be towards them, never could it expiate the wrongs to which our conquering race has subjected the Gallic generations for now more than ten centuries. To the end that you may know and entertain a just horror for so much iniquity and all the sufferings that it entailed, I shall subjoin to these pages several fragments of the history of a family of Gallic origin, the family of Lebrenn of Karnak—'"

"Niece!" cried the Marchioness indignantly, "I can no longer listen to such enormities!"

The Marchioness of Tremblay was interrupted in the flow of her indignation by the entrance of Abbot Boujaron, her confessor, intimate friend, and, in short, her paramour.

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST LETTER

Abbot Boujaron's worried looks, the disorder into which his wig, his neckerchief and his cloak were thrown, threw the Marchioness of Tremblay into such alarm that, wholly forgetting the subject of her conversation with Mademoiselle Plouernel, she cried: "My God, Abbot, what has happened? You are all upset; you seem to be in great excitement; you look as if you had just come out of a scuffle."

"I have good reason to be uneasy, dear Marchioness. I have mislaid the letter that we wrote this morning to your nephew—the confidential letter that you know of."

"What!" replied the Marchioness visibly terrified. "Was not the letter put carefully folded in the pocket of your coat? I put it there myself. It can not have been mislaid."

"I was on my way to the house of the person whom, as we decided, I was to call upon in order to obtain some further information from him and add it to the letter, on which account it was left unsealed, when, crossing a large square, I was overtaken and soon found myself surrounded by a big crowd clamoring for the death of the De Witt brothers and the French."

"What De Witt brothers?" asked the Marchioness. "Are they the two intractable republicans whom Monsieur Estrade spoke to us about when he returned from his embassy to this country?"

"They are both of them men cast in the mold of Plutarch, to judge by what Monsieur Tilly, our host, was telling us of them yesterday," observed Mademoiselle Plouernel, emerging from the revery in which she was steeped since the arrival of the Abbot; "I could not tire of hearing him speak of the domestic virtues of the two brothers, whom he considers to be the greatest living citizens of Holland, and men of distinguished probity."

"My dear daughter," answered the Abbot, "our host belongs to the same political party as those De Witts; as such he has his reasons to give them a high place—in your estimation."

"But the letter," put in the Marchioness with increasing anxiety, "how comes it to be mislaid, perhaps lost?"

"Swallowed up, as I found myself, by that loudly vociferating mob that was rushing towards the prison where one of the two De Witt brothers is confined; pushed, hustled, shoved about, and almost suffocated by that plebeian flood, the current of which was carrying me away despite all that I could do, I made frantic efforts to extricate myself from the surging crowd; in my struggle my frock was unfastened, and I suppose the letter dropped out as I was being whirled about—unless I inadvertently pulled it out myself when I took my handkerchief to wipe the perspiration that streamed down my forehead, after I had finally succeeded in getting clear of the bawling, threatening and swearing mob."

"I am distracted at the loss of that letter. It may fall into the hands of and be read by some indiscreet fellow—you understand me, Abbot?—that would be most disagreeable and compromising."

"I understand you but too well, Marchioness! Only too well! I therefore went twice over the road that I traveled, but all in vain; I could not find the letter! Most unfortunately it was unsealed. The most scrupulous man would have been justified to cast his eyes over it—and thus inform himself upon its contents."

"Truly, aunt," put in Mademoiselle Plouernel, "I fail to understand the deep anxiety that the loss of a letter, that seems to have been written to my brother in order to inform him of the delay in our arrival in England, can cause you and Monsieur the Abbot. The matter is a trifle; it can have no serious results; cease to fret about it."

"There are things, my niece, the wide bearings of which you can not understand," answered the Marchioness of Tremblay sententiously; "it is enough that you know that the loss of this letter is most regrettable."

At this moment the Marchioness's lackey entered the room after announcing himself with a rap at the door, and said to his mistress:

"Madam, there is a man who asks to see Monsieur the Abbot without delay on an important matter."

"Who is he?"

"He is a Frenchman, madam."

"Does he seem to be noble?"

"Yes, madam, he carries a sword."

"Marchioness," said the Abbot excitedly as if struck by a sudden thought, "it may be this individual found the letter, and is bringing it back to me. God be praised! our alarm will be at end! Oh, I hope it may be so!"

"But how could the stranger know your address?"

"Did I not write to Raoul that we were stopping with Monsieur Tilly?"

"In that case, Abbot," replied the Marchioness with an accent of extreme apprehension, "the stranger must have read the letter! We would have a stranger informed upon our plans! We must have light upon this, and quickly."

And addressing the lackey:

"Introduce the stranger immediately, and then withdraw."

"The more I think upon it," said Mademoiselle Plouernel to herself, astonished and pensive, "all the more unexplainable does my aunt's and the Abbot's uneasiness seem to me."

The personage whom the lackey introduced into the salon was a man of about forty-five years of age; he was simply dressed, without lace or embroidery; for all sign of rank he wore on his shoulders a scarlet knot of the color of the feather in his grey felt hat, and the ribbon of his sword that hung from a leather baldric. The tawny complexion of the stranger, his quick, penetrating eye, black as his moustache, seemed to indicate a southern extraction. Of middle size, robust and sinewy, resolute in his port and endowed with a physiognomy in which intelligence and wit vied with boldness, everything about him revealed a man of energy and decision, but so completely master of himself that nothing, except what he had no interest in concealing, would be allowed to rise to the surface. The new personage presented himself in the salon with complete ease, bowed respectfully to the Marchioness and her niece, and looked from the one to the other in silence with so marked, so fixed a gaze, that the Marchioness of Tremblay felt embarrassed and said to her niece:

"Come, Bertha, let us withdraw to my chamber, and leave Monsieur the Abbot with monsieur."

Bertha of Plouernel was preparing to follow her aunt when, after having again contemplated the young maid, the stranger bowed once more to the Marchioness, and said:

"If Madam the Marchioness will allow, the interview that I desire to hold with her and with monsieur, Abbot Boujaron, will take place in the presence of Mademoiselle Plouernel. It is proper, it is even necessary that this should be."

"You know us, monsieur?" said the Marchioness, not a little astonished. "You know our names?"

"I have the honor, madam; and my little knowledge extends further than that," answered the stranger with a singular smile, again casting a penetrating glance at Mademoiselle Plouernel, as if he sought to judge her mind by the expression on her face. On his face, in turn, the evidence of a heightening interest in the girl could be detected. But as these manifestations passed unperceived by Bertha, she felt hurt by the persistence of the stranger's gaze, she blushed, and taking a step towards the door of her aunt's chamber said to the Marchioness:

"Excuse me, aunt, if I go and leave you with the gentlemen."

"Mademoiselle," said the stranger warmly, as he divined the maid's thoughts, "I conjure you, do not impute the obstinacy of my gaze to a disregard of the respect due you, and with which I am profoundly penetrated; I sought to read and I did read on your features the uprightness and nobility of your heart; I doubly congratulate myself on being able to render you a service, a great service."

"Me, monsieur?" answered Mademoiselle Plouernel in great astonishment, yet struck by the accent of unquestionable sincerity in the stranger's words. "What service can you render to me, me whom you do not know, and whom you now see for the first time? Be kind enough to explain yourself more clearly."

"Monsieur," said the Marchioness haughtily to the stranger, as he was about to answer Bertha, "you introduced yourself into this house under pretext of soliciting an interview, which Monsieur Abbot Boujaron has condescended to grant you. That notwithstanding, you have hitherto addressed mademoiselle only—a violation of propriety towards me and Monsieur the Abbot."

"Moreover, monsieur," added the Abbot, "we are wholly in the dark as to who you are. Your language is as strange as your visit."

"I am your obedient servant, Monsieur Abbot," answered the stranger, bowing with sardonic courtesy, "and I shall, if you please, answer

Mademoiselle Plouernel, who has done me the honor of asking me what the service is that I am happy enough to be able to render her. The service is summed up in this simple advice: Mademoiselle, go not to England; refuse to undertake the voyage."

A tremor ran over Bertha's frame; for an instant she remained dumb with stupefaction, while, scarlet with confusion and apprehension, both her aunt and the Abbot exchanged significant looks that betrayed their embarrassment. Struck speechless for an instant, Mademoiselle Plouernel turned to the stranger and asked:

"And why, monsieur, do you warn me against the journey to England?"

"For two reasons, mademoiselle, two important reasons—"

"Monsieur," the Abbot interrupted the stranger with, in an icy tone, "I wish to call your attention, first, to the fact that you have committed a breach of confidence; secondly, that you have not understood a word of the letter that you found and that you took the freedom of reading—an indiscretion that a man of good breeding would have carefully guarded against."

"And I, in turn, will call your attention, Monsieur Abbot," retorted the stranger, "first, to the fact that to read an unsealed letter, found on the pavement of a public thoroughfare, is no breach of confidence; secondly, that, without priding myself on being gifted with extraordinary intellectual power, yet am I intelligent enough to understand the value of words. For that reason I have advised mademoiselle not to go to England, and resolutely to refuse to undertake the journey."

"Monsieur," broke in Bertha with profound feeling, as she yielded to a sudden and painful sense of danger that flashed through her mind. "I ask it as a favor of you, explain yourself clearly. Be good enough to give me your reasons for the advice."

"One moment, my dear child," the Abbot hastened to interpose, in order to parry off the stranger's answer; "I am the writer of that letter; it is for me to speak intelligently upon it. I can tell monsieur that the despatch which he read is addressed to an envoy of his Majesty Louis XIV at the court of his Majesty Charles II, and that it deals with very delicate affairs of state. Now, then, I must add, that unless one be the most reckless of men, which I certainly am not, one does not conduct a correspondence upon matters of such a nature, except in cipher, or by means of enigmatic phrases, that bear a double sense, both of which seem perfectly logical on their face, but the

real purport of which remains secret between the correspondents themselves, who are alone able to interpret it. It will be well for monsieur to understand that."

"If that is the case, Monsieur Abbot, there will be nothing left to me but to admit a mistake," replied the stranger with mock humility, "a mistake, however, that was quite excusable, and of which I request Mademoiselle Plouernel herself to be the judge," he added, taking the letter out of his pocket, "from the terms in which this interesting missive is couched."

"Monsieur, the reading of the letter is wholly superfluous, it being established that the letter no wise concerns mademoiselle."

"No doubt," replied the stranger, "mademoiselle is not touched upon in it except in an enigmatic and mysterious manner. Accordingly, when Monsieur the Abbot writes to Monsieur the Count of Plouernel:

"We have all reason to hope that your sister's matchless beauty will produce a lively impression upon the King of England when she is presented to him, and may induce him to decide—"

"But, monsieur, that is intolerable!" cried the Marchioness, "you are outrageously abusing our patience—you compel me to request that you leave our presence!"

"Monsieur, I listen to you," observed Mademoiselle Plouernel, "and believe me, I shall never forget the service that you will have rendered me. Be kind enough to continue the reading of the letter."

Recognizing the futility of any further objection to the reading of the despatch, the Marchioness and the Abbot crossed their arms, raised their eyes to heaven and assumed the appearance of resigned innocence. Addressing himself to Bertha the stranger proceeded:

"I shall pass over the details of the incident at sea that obliged the vessel on which you, mademoiselle, had embarked, to put in at the port of Delft. I now come to the interesting portion of the letter:

"You informed us, my dear Raoul, that the influence is on the wane of Mademoiselle Kerouaille, who is now the Duchess of Portsmouth and was taken to Charles II by his sister, Madam the Duchess of Orleans, at the beginning of this year in order to urge the libertine King more effectively, by means of the charms of the beautiful Krouaill and a present of a few millions, to sign the treaty of alliance between England and France against

the Republic of the United Provinces; you add that, in even measure as the influence of the Duchess of Portsmouth wanes, waxes the ascendency of my Lord Arlington, a bitter partisan of the alliance between England, Spain and the United Provinces, over the vacillating and profligate Rowley, as the familiars of Charles II call his Majesty, and that the said my Lord Arlington has for his assistant and agent a certain Nell Gwynne, a low-lived creature, an incarnate she-devil, who swears, curses, drinks and gets drunk like a trooper, but whose sprightliness, noisy hilarity and brazenness seem greatly to delight his Majesty. From all of this it may hap, as you indicate, that, aided by the nymph and the doubloons of Spain and the Republic, King Charles, after having tired of Mademoiselle Kerouaille and dissipated the present of several millions bestowed upon him by our own master under the pretext of catholicity, may go so far as to break the alliance with France and return to the alliance with Spain and the Republic of the United Provinces. Meditation upon those grave possibilities suggested the thought to you, my dear pupil, that the magnificent eyes and challenging beauty of our own Bertha might operate a salutary change in the now unfavorable disposition of old Rowley, counterbalance the influence of Nell Gwynne, and confirm King Charles in his alliance with our master. Struck by the importance of your suggestion, over which madam your aunt and I have long reflected, the expedient seemed excellent to us and also so pressing, that, without answering you, and resorting to an innocent ruse, we have persuaded your sister that you were taken so seriously ill as to induce her to proceed with us to England. We prepared the agreeable surprise for you, but the violent storm of which I gave you a sketch compelled us to put in at Delft. I am now writing to you from The Hague, in order that you may not feel uneasy at the prolonged delay in our answer.

"So then, my dear pupil, at our speedy arrival in England you are expected to have so completely recovered from your sickness, with the help of God, that there will be no trace of it left to be seen. You will then hasten to present at the court of London Madam the Marchioness of Tremblay and Mademoiselle Plouernel. So that, unless our justified expectations should unhappily be dashed, King Charles, dazzled by the matchless beauty of our Bertha, will be set aflame as usual. We have all reason to hope that your sister's matchless beauty will produce a lively impression upon the King of England when she is presented to him, and may induce him to decide to continue the alliance with France against the United Provinces.

"I must admit, my dear boy, that I contemplate with no less delight than yourself the huge satisfaction that such a result must afford our master; and I can well understand how in your letter you judiciously passed in review the prodigious favors that were showered upon Monsieur Vivonne

from the time that his sister, the Marchioness of Montespan, was honored with the attention of the King, and had the august honor of presenting him with progeny. Accordingly, if our project succeed as we wish, although the affair will have to happen in England, you will not therefore, my dear pupil, in what concerns the favor of our master, be any less the Vivonne of our beautiful Montespan.

"I wish to add that, having put my sojourn at The Hague to good use, I have come to the conclusion, arrived at upon my own observation and after certain conversations that I had with a member of our Society, who is not suspected of belonging to us, A. M. D. G. (conversations, the import of which I shall add at the post-script of this letter, which I shall seal at the house of the good father) I have come to the conclusion that a formidable blow can be dealt to this bedeviled Republic, this hot-bed of heresy, by—"

But the stranger broke off his reading of the letter, and addressing Mademoiselle Plouernel:

"The rest of the missive only refers to some confidential communications from a member of the Society of Jesus, to which Monsieur the Abbot has the privilege of belonging, or, rather, with which he is affiliated. These confidential communications, mademoiselle, are of no interest whatever to you, since they only refer to the affairs of the Republic. When I read this letter, which fell into my hands by the merest accident, I revolted at the thought of the unworthy role prepared for a young girl who was ignorant of such machinations, and was, perhaps, worthy of profound respect. Accordingly, I decided to enlighten her upon the dark plot that was being concocted against her. Such, mademoiselle, was the only purpose of my visit to this house; and when I read in your face the nobility of your heart, and the loftiness of your sentiments I applauded myself doubly for having been able to inform and warn you concerning the disgraceful projects of your aunt, and to enlighten you upon an odious intrigue."

An interval of silence followed the communication of Abbot Boujaron's diplomatic missive and the last words of the stranger. Although nailed to the floor with consternation, both the Marchioness and the Abbot were astonished at seeing Mademoiselle Plouernel listen to the reading of the letter without the slightest interruption. Indeed, the young girl remained speechless, overwhelmed; her eyes were fixed in space, her bosom heaved, and her lips were contracted in a desolate smile.

"Monsieur," she finally said, addressing the stranger with an accent of profound gratitude, "it goes beyond my power to express to you my gratitude

for having judged me favorably, and I shall, in your presence, declare my thoughts in full upon this affair to my aunt, the Marchioness of Tremblay." And addressing her aunt in a collected voice she proceeded deliberately: "I now know, madam, how you and my brother proposed to exercise towards me the guardianship with which you were entrusted; I shall spare you my reproaches; they could not be understood of you; you lack the moral sense; but this much I here declare to you—I shall not go to England, and I am resolved no longer to live with you, madam, neither at Paris nor at Versailles; I shall henceforth never leave Brittany; I shall reside at Plouernel or at Mezlean, having the right to live in my father's house."

"My God, mademoiselle," replied the Marchioness with sardonic bitterness, "your virtue is strangely resentful and savage! Why such a display of anger? Your brother considered that your presence at the court in London might be of some service to the King our master. Where is the harm in that, I ask you to tell me? Would you not remain free, at full liberty to encourage or reject his Britannic Majesty's advances? If not to you, then there will be others to whom King Charles may address his homage."

"Monsieur, did you hear?" said Mademoiselle Plouernel, turning towards the stranger and unable to conceal the disgust that her aunt's words caused her. "Could the infamous thought be expressed more discreetly—the thought that my dishonor should subserve the violence, the cupidity, the ambition and the vainglory of princes bent upon oppressing the people!"

"Mademoiselle," said the stranger, deeply affected and struck with the admirable expression of the young girl's features as she uttered the lofty words that he had just heard, "some day, perhaps, I may remind you of your brave malediction of the oppressors."

Not a little surprised at these words, Mademoiselle Plouernel was about to ask the stranger for an explanation, when Monsieur Tilly entered the salon. The new arrival seemed a prey to overpowering emotion. His face looked haggard, his gait was almost tottering. The moment, however, that he noticed the presence of the stranger, he hastened to him, saying:

"Monsieur Serdan, do you know what is going on in the city?"

And taking him aside Monsieur Tilly spoke to Monsieur Serdan for several minutes in a low voice, after having politely excused himself with the Marchioness for holding in her presence a private conversation, the gravity and urgency of the subject being his apology for such discourteous conduct.

"That bad man's name is Serdan. Do not forget it, Marchioness," whispered the Abbot; "he must be one of our King's enemies—and also an enemy of the holy Society of Jesus. Forget not his name—Serdan."

"I shall remember it well, my dear Abbot; and there will be others to learn it also. Oh, if we only were in France! A lettre de cachet would throw the insolent fellow into the Bastille, he would sleep there this very night, and he never would come out again."

Mademoiselle Plouernel relapsed into her own painful train of thoughts, while her aunt and the Abbot exchanged a few words in a low voice, and Monsieur Tilly continued to impart the news of the day to Monsieur Serdan, who, after hearing him to the end, exclaimed: "But that would be monstrous! No! No! Impossible!"

"After what I have just learned, there is hardly any room left to doubt the execrable iniquity that is about to be perpetrated," put in Monsieur Tilly. "For the rest, within an hour, I shall know all—we shall then take council together."

"But what does John De Witt think of all this?"

"Relying upon his brother's innocence and upon the justice of the tribunal, can he remotely suspect such barbarity? I shall proceed to his house after issuing orders to the cavalry of The Hague, which I command and with which I can count, to keep themselves ready to take horse. I anticipate a serious riot."

"I shall meet you at John De Witt's house. There are two of my countrymen from Brittany whom I wish to introduce to him. Until you deny or confirm the horrible tidings that you have just imparted to me, and which I must still doubt, I shall not say a word to John De Witt on the subject," answered Monsieur Serdan.

And making a profound bow to Bertha of Plouernel: "Should I never again have the honor of meeting you, mademoiselle, I shall ever preserve the most touching remembrance of the loftiness of your sentiments. But should I meet you again, I shall allow myself to remind you of the noble words that you uttered in favor of the downtrodden."

As he was about to leave the room, Monsieur Serdan said to Monsieur Tilly: "I shall await you at John De Witt's residence. Do not delay."

"I shall be there shortly, so soon as my dispositions are taken," answered Monsieur Tilly.

Upon Monsieur Serdan's departure, Madam Tremblay assumed her most smiling expression and observed to Monsieur Tilly:

"What an amiable man this Monsieur Serdan is! Tell us, I pray you, monsieur, where is he from? where does he belong? who is he? what is his rank? We feel particularly interested in him. We should be pleased to be edified on that subject."

"Please excuse me, Marchioness," answered Monsieur Tilly, "at this moment I am pressed for time and have no leisure to post you fully upon Monsieur Serdan. He is an honorable man and close friend of mine. I came in haste to impart to you, madam, some rather disagreeable news—terrible things that our city is just now the theater of."

"What is the matter, monsieur?" inquired the Marchioness. "This morning the Abbot noticed considerable excitement among the populace. Are matters assuming a grave aspect?"

"Yes, madam, there is an intense excitement in The Hague. It is the result of two circumstances—one, the manoeuvres of the agents of the Prince of Orange, the head of the party opposed to that of the De Witt brothers; the other—pardon, madam, the frankness of my words—the other circumstance is the report of the atrocities committed in our country by the armies of Louis XIV. There are letters circulating in The Hague to-day from several of our provinces which the royal troops have invaded. The atrocities that those letters report the French army guilty of have exasperated our people. Our party is charged with connivance in these deeds, and even with complicity in the treachery of Louis XIV towards the Republic; and we are referred to as the French party because our party sustains the policy of the De Witts in the matter of a French alliance. I enter into these details, madam, in order to inform you that, such is the popular effervescence at this moment, you would run grave risks if you were to be seen on the streets and recognized as French. I therefore take the liberty to impress upon you, as well as upon Mademoiselle Plouernel and the Abbot, the wisdom of remaining indoors to-day. Finally, should there be any serious disorders on the streets, do not show yourselves at the windows. Even so, I pray to God that the house may be respected in case popular passion becomes inflamed, as I much fear it will be. I need not add, madam, how painful it is to me to find the hospitality, that it has been my honor to tender to you, disturbed in such a way!"

Mademoiselle Plouernel listened in silence to this conversation, and seeing both her aunt and the Abbot turn pale, even tremble and exchange frightened looks, the young girl said to them with bitter irony: "What else do you expect? We are not here at the court of Versailles! Here the perjury, the iniquity, the deeds of violence of your master appear in their true and horrible colors. Who knows but this very day the deserved execration, inspired by 'Louis the Great' for himself, may cost us our lives! Oh! Thank God, it is only with joy that I would at this hour leave this world, to reunite myself with my mother!"

Mademoiselle Plouernel owed to her mother her virile hatred of wrong, her independent spirit, her opinions so wholly at variance with those that prevailed at court. To her mother also she owed her firm faith in immortality, the faith of our own Gallic forefathers. Brought up in the Reformed religion, Madam Plouernel was forced to embrace Catholicism when still quite young, and yielding to the importunities of her father and mother, she espoused the Count of Plouernel. At the bottom of her heart, however, she preserved, her abjuration notwithstanding, that "Huguenot leaven," the generous ferment of which imparts to the character sooner or later a spirit of independence, and of free inquiry. Madam Plouernel's marriage was far from being a happy one. After she presented two sons to her husband, he, feeling certain of the continuance of his stock, ceased to pay any regard to his wife. Intent upon indulging his scandalous amours, he left her in Brittany in the Castle of Plouernel, where she was thenceforth to live in absolute seclusion, with no other care or happiness than the education of her youngest child Bertha.

The Countess had a brother, who was tenderly devoted to her. Bold and of an adventurous disposition, he devoted himself to the navy. When still a young man he commanded a royal frigate. Having remained a Huguenot, like his admiral, Duquesne, he detested the despotism of Louis XIV, and never made his appearance at court. Dearly loving his sister, and well acquainted with the immoral character of the Count of Plouernel, he sought, though in vain, to dissuade his family from a marriage the sad consequences of which he clearly foresaw, and he embarked upon a long and distant cruise. Kept far away from France by a variety of events, he learned, upon his return home, of the sort of exile that his sister was doomed to, and of the excesses of her husband. Sorrow and indignation carried away the impetuous mariner. He proceeded to Versailles, and there, in a crowded gallery, in plain view of all the courtiers, he stepped straight toward the Count of Plouernel, overwhelmed him with bitter reproaches, and forgot himself to the point of exclaiming: "Monsieur, the infamous cynicism of your conduct and your shameless acts of adultery are an outrage to my

sister and a flattery to your master!" This allusion to the amours of Louis XIV was speedily carried to the despot's ears. He flew into a violent rage, and that same day the Count of Plouernel's brother-in-law was taken to the Bastille and thrown into one of its unhealthiest dungeons, where he was left to languish for the space of two years, at the end of which he died. Her brother's imprisonment and death afflicted Madam Plouernel profoundly, and steeped her heart in irreconcilable detestation for Louis XIV. This fresh sorrow increased her domestic infelicity. She divided her time between Bertha's education, study and reading. The library of the castle, established a generation before by Colonel Plouernel, consisted in part of works imbued with the spirit of the political and religious independence of the Reformation. The Countess nourished her mind with the virile substance of those writings. Her favorite books were those which breathed the strictness of morals, the loftiness of thought, the inflexible love of justice, the austerity of honesty that the avowed enemies of the Huguenots themselves give them credit for. Among the books collected by Colonel Plouernel she found an admirable treatise on the druid creed and traditions, "thanks to which the Gauls were freed from the evil of death," inasmuch as they looked upon death as the signal for a complete re-birth towards which the soul winged its way radiant and reclad in a fresh garb. This faith in the immortality of our being, in spirit and matter, the passionate curiosity kindled by the thought of incessant migrations through unknown and mysterious worlds, in short, that creed, so consoling to hearts that are crushed under the weight of present sorrows, soon became the faith of Madam Plouernel, and imparted a powerful impulse to the development of her noble qualities. Brought up in almost complete seclusion by a mother who adored her, and in whom she, in turn, reposed absolute faith, Bertha of Plouernel could not choose but imbibe the maternal convictions and opinions. In what concerned the recent ignoble action of her own family, Bertha's sentiments flowed also from the philosophy of her training. Her aunt and Abbot Boujaron, thrown into consternation by the tidings brought to them by Monsieur Tilly with regard to the popular indignation in The Hague against Louis XIV and the French, remained a prey to distressing apprehensions, while Monsieur Serdan hastened away to the residence of John De Witt, the Grand Pensionary of Holland.

CHAPTER V

JOHN DE WITT

Cornelius and John De Witt were the sons of Jacob De Witt, a citizen illustrious by his patriotism and his learning, and formerly one of the principal leaders of the Lowenstein party. That party, representing as it did the republican traditions of the Low Countries, as contrasted with the military spirit, tended above all to promote the maritime preponderance that the confederation of the United Provinces was entitled to enjoy by reason of her geographic position and the mercantile genius of her population. Accordingly, the Lowenstein party had, for half a century, been opposing the influence of the Orangemen, partisans of the military and hereditary principle of government represented by the Princes of Orange. The hereditary Stadtholdership, coupled with the functions of captain general of the military and naval forces, was in reality a sort of royalty, qualified, it is true, yet dangerous to the people's liberty. Accordingly, the Lowenstein party caused the States General to enact a decree which disqualified the Princes of the house of Orange from holding the Stadtholdership and at the same time the supreme command of the military and naval forces, and provided, furthermore, that the said offices were not to be hereditary. Cornelius De Witt, the elder of the two brothers, was born at Dortrecht in 1623, and, at the age of twenty-three was elected a deputy of his city and ruart (inspector general of the dikes) in the district of Putten—an office of great importance in that country where the dikes protect agriculture, and may, at a critical moment, become an important means of defense by being broken down—a redoubtable piece of strategy in the event of a foreign invasion. Cornelius De Witt, a man of antique virtues, and, like his brother, endowed with wide attainments, did not confine himself to affairs of state. Having since earliest boyhood applied his mind to nautical science and become a skilled mariner, he contributed powerfully with his advice during the present war to the successful attack made by the fleet of Holland upon the English port of Chatham, a victory that was at once disastrous and shameful to the British navy. Finally, on the occasion of the naval battle delivered this very year to the British and French fleets by Admiral Ruyter in the roadstead of Solway, Cornelius De Witt, seated in his capacity of commissioner of the admiralty of the Republic, in an ivory chair at the most perilous post, the rear castle of the admiral's ship, faced with heroic calmness the murderous fire poured upon him by the enemy, and thus witnessed impassibly the glorious combat, the plan for which he laid down in concert with Ruyter.

John De Witt, his brother's junior by over two years, excelled Cornelius as a statesman, and equalled him in civic virtues and courage. Elected about

1662 Pensionary of Holland, or the executive agent of the Republic, and thus placed at the head of the government, John De Witt's love for his country assumed a religious character. He looked upon his office as a ministry. Inaccessible by the natural loftiness of his nature to the intoxicating allurements of power, that great man's simplicity and modesty never were belied by his acts; neither did ever his respect for justice, for duty and for pledged faith falter before the pretext of 'necessities of state.' Charged with the diplomatic relations of the United Provinces, he balked the snares, the perfidies and the underground manoeuvres of the foreign ambassadors by the mere rectitude of his character and the penetration of his judgment. One instance among many, in this great citizen's life, may suffice to depict him. He inspired such confidence even in his adversaries, that the Princess of Orange entrusted to him the direction of her son's education, aware though she was of John De Witt's hostility to the hereditary Stadtholdership in the house of Orange. The only descendant of that family, destined to become the head of the Orangemen's party, was thus entrusted by the most enlightened of mothers to the care of John De Witt. He watched over the child with paternal solicitude, endeavoring to attune the youthful soul to sentiments of generosity, to inspire him with a love for the Republic that he was to serve as a citizen, and disclosing to him the misfortunes he would conjure up upon his country if he ever became the instrument of the party that used his name for a flag. Alas! the efforts of John De Witt failed before the consummate dissimulation of the morose, frail, sickly, nervous lad, who seemed ever to be wrapped in himself, who concealed his ardent aspirations under an impassive exterior, and who, when he arrived at man's estate, was this year to repay John De Witt's paternal kindness with the blackest ingratitude.

The following was the sequence of events: About six weeks before, John De Witt spent a part of the night in considering affairs of state in his cabinet at the palace of the States General. Towards two o'clock in the morning he left for home, preceded by a valet bearing a torch. Unexpectedly a band of men, armed with swords and knives, leaped from ambush and fell upon him. He received a saber cut over the neck; although unarmed he struggled bravely and received three more wounds, the last of which was so serious that he fell down upon the pavement. Believing him dead the assassins took to their heels. De Witt succeeded in rising to his feet and reaching his residence. The assassins were four in number—the two brothers Van der Graeff, Adolf Borrebugh, the Post Office Commissioner of Maestricht, and Cornelius De Bruyn, an officer in The Hague militia. Only one of the two Van der Graeff brothers could be arrested. The other brother and his two accomplices succeeded in fleeing to a place of safety—the camp of the young William of Orange, who was appointed commandant of the land forces when the war

broke out against France and England. The Prince was summoned to deliver the murderous assailants of John De Witt. He refused.

From that moment suspicions of William of Orange's complicity in the crime gathered against him. Only he and his party had an interest in the death of John De Witt, who, notwithstanding the disorder that the government was thrown into by the misfortunes of the war, was striving to avert the dangers with which the Prince of Orange threatened the Republic from within, while Louis XIV was attacking it from without. But it was not enough for the Orangemen to have armed assassins against John De Witt; his brother—Cornelius De Witt, the ruart of Putten—was also to be disposed of. A horrible scheme was concocted.

Notwithstanding his high office of Grand Pensionary of Holland, John De Witt, a modest man in his tastes, lived with the utmost simplicity, seeking in the company of his wife and his two daughters Agnes and Mary sweet distractions from the cares that weigh upon a statesman. At the period of this narrative he was close to his forty-eighth year. His tall stature, his kind yet grave face, his thoughtful mien, imparted to him an imposing appearance. On this occasion he was writing, alone in his cabinet, a spacious room the walls of which were concealed behind long shelves loaded with books. Above the mantlepiece hung the picture of the father of the two De Witts—an austere face, painted after the manner of Rembrandt. A table, heaped up with papers, stood in the embrasure of a tall window with little square panes of glass held in a lozenge-work of lead, on either side of which were shelves with instruments of physics; for the Grand Pensionary was, like his brother, a lover of the sciences.

Seated at the table, pensive and sad, John De Witt was writing to his friend, Admiral Ruyter, the following remarkable letter that bore the stamp of antique simplicity, and in which the plot, concocted by the Orangemen against Cornelius De Witt, was unveiled:

TO ADMIRAL RUYTER:

My dear Sir and good friend:—I have received the letter that you did me the honor of writing on the 25th of last month to express to me your deep sorrow at the wounds that I received. Thanks to God, I am now almost completely healed: Three of the wounds are closed; the fourth, and most painful of all, is on the way to be likewise closed. The envy with which certain malignant people pursue our family has reached such extremes in these unhappy days, that, after attempting to rid themselves of me by assassination, they are now seeking to rid themselves of my brother, the

ruart of Putten, through legal process. You will surely have learned that the fiscal attorney has caused him to be arrested by order of the States of Holland, and had him brought here, where he is at present under arrest at the castle. We could not at first surmise the cause, or at least the pretext, for his imprisonment. To-day we know the plot that has been concocted against my brother. It is this: A surgeon named William Tichelaar accused my brother with unheard of brazenness and impudence of having endeavored to corrupt him with a large sum of money to assassinate the Prince of Orange! My brother, being incapable of conceiving so execrable a scheme, and less still of executing it, I am firmly convinced that, seeing it pleased God to deliver me, as if by a miracle, from the murderous hands that sought to assassinate me, He will not allow innocence to fall a victim to slander and calumny. My brotherwill doubtlessly escape the snares that are spread against him, as I escaped the daggers of my implacable enemies.

Tichelaar, the informer against my brother, was a short time ago summoned by him, in his capacity of ruart of Putten, before the court of that district to answer the charge of attempted rape. Tichelaar was convicted and a sentence was pronounced fastening upon him the stain of moral turpitude. That man, now branded with infamy, sought to revenge himself against my brother by a horrible calumny. Furthermore, we know from reliable sources the following details: Three weeks ago Tichelaar went to my brother's house at Dortrecht, and requested a private interview with him. My sister-in-law, his wife, having opened the door to the man and admitted him to the house, but fearing (after what had happened to me) that he might have evil designs against the ruart, ordered one of the servants to keep near the door of the room, and to be on the alert, should Tichelaar attempt violence against my brother. The servant testified under oath before the court commissioner that having been posted near the door, he heard Tichelaar offer to reveal certain secrets to the ruart, to which my brother, knowing Tichelaar for a dishonorable character, answered:

"If what you have to say is something proper, I shall be ready to hear you and give you help; if, however, it is something improper, do not mention it to me; it would be better for you, because I would immediately notify the regency or the court."

The servant further testified that thereupon several words were exchanged, and Tichelaar closed the interview saying:

"Seeing that monsieur does not wish me to reveal my secret to him, I shall keep it for the present, and shall later disclose it to others."

My brother has confirmed the deposition, and Tichelaar's testimony being the only one against my brother, I can not see that there is room to apprehend aught in this affair. I do not doubt that he will be soon set free. There is nothing left to regret but the disturbed condition of the times and the wickedness of our enemies.

For the rest, the capture of the cities situated along the Rhine; the swiftness of the motions of the armies of Louis XIV; their invasion of our territory up the Yssel—all this without hardly meeting any resistance, in fact encouraged by unheard of cowardice, or even infamous treason, have more and more brought home to me the truth of what used to be said of old of the Roman Republic—Prospera omnes sibi vindicant, adversa uni imputantur.[1] That is what I am now experiencing. The people of Holland blame me for the disasters and calamities of our Republic, notwithstanding I have never been otherwise than a faithful servant of the country. For these reasons I decided to resign my office of Grand Pensionary. The States had the kindness to grant my request, as you will see from the extract which I forward to you. I have thought it my duty to inform you of my resignation, in order that you may not continue to address me on matters that concern the state, and that you forward all such matters to the Pensionary of Holland and West Friesland, or to his present substitute.

John De Witt was about finishing this letter to Admiral Ruyter when a maid servant entered the room and announced to the ex-Grand Pensionary of Holland that Monsieur Serdan, together with two other persons, asked to speak with him.

"Let him in!" answered John De Witt. "Never more so than at this moment was the company of a friend welcome to me."

Monsieur Serdan and his two companions were brought in. One of the latter was a man of mature age and grey of hair; the other, his son, was the young and bold mariner who saved the brigantine St. Eloi, on board of which was Mademoiselle Bertha of Plouernel, and, a singular accident that she was still ignorant of, both men belonged to that old Gallic family of Breton extraction of whom Colonel Plouernel made mention in his manuscript, that Lebrenn family which, successively slave, serf and vassal since the conquest of Clovis, transmitted its own plebeian annals to its descendants from generation to generation.

Salaun Lebrenn and his son Nominoë, who followed close upon the heels of Monsieur Serdan, could neither restrain nor conceal their emotion at the sight of John De Witt, the great citizen whom they admired and venerated

even more than before, after they learned from Monsieur Serdan a thousand intimate details concerning the illustrious man.

"My friend," said John De Witt to Serdan after affably responding to the respectful greetings of the two Frenchmen, "these are, I suppose, your two countrymen in behalf of whom you asked me to communicate with the college of the admiralty, in order to obtain a secret order and safe conduct, in the event of their vessel's being boarded by one of our cruisers?"

"Yes, my dear John. As French sailors they have nothing to fear from the royal squadrons. The pass is only to protect them from the cruisers of Holland. When day before yesterday I handed you the notes concerning Brittany, confided to me by Monsieur Salaun Lebrenn, the captain of a French merchant vessel and resident of the port of Vannes, I informed you under what circumstances I became acquainted with Monsieur Lebrenn at Nantes, three years ago. Identity of views, religion and hopes bound us together since then. A frequent exchange of letters drew us still closer together. Monsieur Lebrenn, better than anyone else, is qualified to speak upon conditions in Brittany. Both his family and his mercantile connections enable him to be aware of and to apprise me of the evidences of discontent in his province, analogous to those that my friend and I observed when we crossed Languedoc, Dauphiny, the Vivarais, Guyenne and Normandy. Struck with the significance of the tide of popular discontent invading the larger part of France, I induced Monsieur Lebrenn to come to The Hague in order to confer with you, and I placed in your hands his report of the grave events of which Brittany is just now the theater. I need not add that you may place perfect reliance upon all he says."

"I doubt not. It agrees at all points with other reports that have reached me concerning the political situation in France," answered John De Witt.

And addressing himself to Salaun Lebrenn:

"Yes, monsieur, I have read your report with close and scrupulous attention. The distressing and often horrible facts in which it abounds are, I am sure, in no way exaggerated. The acts of pillage, of rapine and numerous other unheard-of atrocities which the troops of Louis XIV are at this hour committing in our own provinces, attest but too clearly the violent and disorderly habits that your armed forces have contracted at home. In short, monsieur, your report proves to me incontestably that the popular discontent, the progress of which is so glaring in Brittany, is to be attributed to the following causes: to the taxes, the imposts and the levies raised upon their vassals by the seigneurs and the clergy; to the ill-treatment, the

imprisonment and even the executions mercilessly inflicted upon the vassals, and against which these have no redress, seeing that a large number of seigneurs are vested with supreme powers in their own domains;—to the exactions, the unbridled licence of the seigniorial soldiery, to which the people of the cities and the country are alike exposed;—to the profound irritation of the bourgeoisie of such large cities as Rennes and Nantes, who, whelmed every day with new imposts, find themselves threatened with imminent ruin;—finally, to the no less profound irritation of the Breton parliament, which feels itself outraged by the promulgation, without its sanction, of fiscal edicts which it refuses to register, and which are so burdensome that poverty, distress and misery weigh down upon all classes in the province. Such, monsieur, is the succinct summary of your report, which is supported with facts that are painfully real. You add—do you not?—that, according to your own observations, the discontent brought on by the despotism of Louis XIV has reached such a point that a general uprising is imminent, and may break out at any moment?"

"Yes, monsieur," answered Salaun Lebrenn; "that is my conviction, which rests upon a careful study of the people and of affairs."

"Your conclusion seems to me well founded. And yet," observed John De Witt, "allow me to remind you that at such serious junctures one must always be on his guard against illusions—illusions that are all the more excusable, and therefore all the more liable to mislead us, seeing they are born of generous hopes, of the legitimate desire to put an end to crying abuses."

"You may be certain, monsieur, my wishes do not carry away my judgment," answered Salaun Lebrenn. "The present state of public opinion in Brittany does offer to our common cause and that of humanity strong chances of success. But I am far from being blind to many an unfavorable possibility in the event of the impending uprising. Nevertheless, it has seemed to me opportune to profit by the state of general discontent, and, even if we may not succeed in overthrowing, at any rate seek to check the tyranny which is exhausting the energies of France, is degrading and oppressing the land, and reaches beyond our own borders, inflicting painful blows upon your own Republic, our natural ally. The times are once more proving that, seeing Kings, without consulting their peoples, declare war upon whoever interferes with their ambition, or wounds their pride, the people, in their turn, have the right to ally themselves with those who will aid them to break the yoke. Is not that your opinion also, monsieur?"

"Yes, indeed," replied John De Witt; "all oppressed peoples have the right, in the name of eternal justice, to ask for help and support from a friendly people against tyranny. To revolt against Kings and to look for foreign support is a legitimate act, provided that the support do not hide either on the part of those who accord, or those who receive it, any project hostile to the integrity of the territory, or the independence, or the honor of the country. It must be in the interest of the freedom of all."

"Yes; and for that reason eternal shame fastens upon the League!" exclaimed Serdan. "The Catholic League in France sought for Spanish support in order to exterminate the Protestants, and dethrone Henry IV, who, his vices and deplorable defects notwithstanding, at least represented the French nationality."

"While the League, the Catholic Union, on the contrary, represented the foreigner, the party of Rome, of Spain and of the Inquisition," added Salaun Lebrenn. "In its hatred of the Protestants and of the spirit of liberty, the League aimed at a crushing despotism that was to be exercised in the interest of its own members. Did they not nurse the parricidal thought of dismembering France? Did they not scheme to offer the throne to Philip II, that bigoted monarch whose bloody tyranny stupefied the world? All honor to your ancestors, Monsieur De Witt! By dint of their sacred revolt they dealt the first blow to the Spanish monarchy, and they raised, heavily paying therefor with their own blood, this Republic whose existence is now threatened by Louis XIV."

"Your observations are just, monsieur," answered John De Witt. "Yes, to the eternal glory of Protestantism, which is my faith, the Protestants, having been placed outside the pale of common rights and kept in constant dread of death, were driven, in the course of the last century and of this very century also, to ask for help from their coreligionists of other countries, in order to defend their families, their hearths, their faith and their threatened lives. But never was their action stained with any project of aggrandizement at the cost of France! Their request for help always had for its purpose only the triumph of the Reformation and the freedom of all! In short, when, oppressed in mind, when physically trampled upon, when plundered of its property, when deprived of its rights, when persecuted in its faith, a people invokes against its tyrant the help of a friendly and disinterested nation, it is not, then, upon the foreigner that it calls but upon its own brothers in the human family."

"My son," said Salaun Lebrenn to Nominoë, "you are still young; we live in evil days; you will no doubt take a part in struggles that are as grievous as

any that our ancestors experienced in past ages, during which they were alternately vanquishers and vanquished. Never forget the noble sentiments you have just heard uttered by one of the greatest citizens who can do honor to a republican people. Kings are outside of the pale of the law, outside of common rights!"

"Father," answered Nominoë in a moved and serious voice, "the sentiments I have just heard will forever remain graven in my memory, and likewise will the memory of the illustrious man that I to-day have the honor of seeing. I pledge undying hatred to tyranny and royalty."

And, in response to what appeared to him a movement of embarrassment on the part of John De Witt at the crudity of a praise that seemed exaggerated, the young mariner added:

"Oh, monsieur! Your mind is too lofty, your knowledge of men too sound to mistake for base flattery the sincere enthusiasm that one feels at my age for genius and virtue. If you only knew with what avidity I have listened to our friend, Monsieur Serdan, when he told us of the simplicity of your life, which, for so many years, has been consecrated to the service of the Republic, to the defense of its rights, to the promotion of its power, and to the solidification of its conquered freedom! If you only knew how sweet, how wholesome to the soul is the religious adoration one entertains for great and upright men! how fruitful such admiration is of generous aspirations and brave resolutions! how it redoubles in one the love of justice and the horror for iniquity! Oh, Monsieur De Witt, if my admiration wounds your modesty, allow me at least to express to you my gratitude for the noble thoughts that your words and your presence inspire me with, for the good that you have done to me!" Nominoë uttered these words in a voice tremulous with emotion, and eyes glistening with tears.

"God forfend, young man, that I should question your sincerity," answered John De Witt touched by the language of Nominoë. "Yes," he proceeded, extending his hand to the young sailor, "yes, you are right—admiration, if not for men, then at least for the principles that they represent, is wholesome and fruitful of good! You have expressed that noble sentiment in such terms that I can not but congratulate your father in having such a son. Preserve your vigorous hatred for all tyrants."

Yielding to an involuntary impulse of enthusiasm, instead of clasping the hand that John De Witt offered him, Nominoë bowed down and, with a motion of almost filial veneration, approached De Witt's hand to his lips. The

act was so natural and so touching that his father, Monsieur Serdan and John De Witt felt solemnly impressed.

His eyes moist with tears and filled with ineffable happiness, Salaun Lebrenn said to the ex-Pensionary of Holland: "Yes, monsieur, I am a happy father."

"And now, my friend," resumed Monsieur Serdan addressing John De Witt, "if you entertained any doubt upon the reliableness of the information transmitted to you by Monsieur Lebrenn concerning the popular sentiment in Brittany, the lofty sentiments of my worthy friend and his son should cause you, I hope, to place full confidence in them."

"Their straightforwardness and nobility of character do, indeed, deserve my full confidence," answered John De Witt. "I shall listen with interest to any further information that your friends may have concerning the political affairs of your country."

"Well, monsieur, this is the actual state of things in Brittany: A strong portion of the bourgeoisie of Rennes and Nantes, belonging to the Reformed religion, favors a federative Republic, agreeable to the Protestant traditions of the last century. The majority of the members of the provincial parliament, of the officeholders, and even a portion of the bourgeoisie, although they execrate Louis XIV, do nevertheless hold to the monarchic form of government, but desire to subordinate the same to the States General, the sovereignty of which was proclaimed in the Fourteenth Century by Etienne Marcel. This element desires to reduce the throne to the functions of an executive agent of the national assemblies. The nobility and seigneurs are royalists, but they are not numerous. As to the urban population, you know, monsieur, in what a state of subjection and of calculated ignorance they are held. Weighed down with taxes, they would rebel against misery and tax collectors sooner than against the King, or the monarchy. The rustic population, which consists mainly of vassals and is exploited and oppressed by the clergy, the seigneurs, the tax collectors and the armed forces quartered upon them, would also, driven to extremities by misery, revolt against their sufferings, against the seigneurs, against the priests, against the tax collectors and against the soldiers, but would remain no less indifferent to the form of government than the city folks. You see, accordingly, Monsieur De Witt, that I yield to no illusions. As certain as I am of an imminent uprising in Brittany, am I also of its consequences. No doubt, the republican form of government, to which your provinces owe so much of their power, their prosperity, and greatness, is, in my opinion, the ideal government; but I entertain no hopes of seeing the same prevail in my

country for the present. In fine, I shall go so far as to say, it is possible, it is even probable that, in case the insurrection triumph, and that Brittany reconquer, arms in hand, her freedom and ancient franchises, the victory will be thwarted the very next day, and she will lose again almost all the fruits of her triumph, owing to the lack of organization and of oneness of view, of abnegation, or of intelligence on the part of the victors themselves. This notwithstanding, the insurrection in Brittany will have favorable consequences to progress. The King, the nobility and the clergy, frightened by the violence of the popular movement, will feel constrained, out of fear of new reprisals, to lighten the yoke that to-day they cause to bear heavily upon our people in general. Such relief would be a modest conquest, but it will be sure. Experience will justify my words. My conviction upon this head is so firm, that neither I nor my son will hesitate to take part in a struggle in which he and I will probably be the first victims, as were so many of our ancestors, who embarked in similar undertakings. But what does that matter? A step will have been taken towards the day of ultimate deliverance. This is the reason, Monsieur De Witt, that I have come to you, in the name of the discontented elements of Brittany, to request the moral and financial support of the Republic of the United Provinces, in order to combat the execrable Louis XIV, who is both your enemy and ours."

"My friend," replied John De Witt after listening attentively to Salaun Lebrenn's presentation, "last year, at about this time, our friend Serdan returned from a journey through France. Before him, Monsieur Roux Marcilly, a Huguenot captain, an active and observing man, who has many friends among the independent members of the British House of Commons opposed to the French alliance, noticed, just as our friend did, the sprouting germs of the uprising that is to-day imminent. Both asked me at the time whether, in case of an outbreak, it would receive the support of the Republic."

"You answered me in the negative," interrupted Monsieur Serdan, "on the ground, as you expressed it, that the Republic was bound to Louis XIV by a treaty concluded at a time when there was nothing to indicate that that prince would become an oppressor. I foretold you that the alliance would be observed by you only, but would be trampled under foot by Louis XIV. Have not events confirmed my foresight?"

"It is true—but I would have considered it criminal to forestall one act of treason by another. The face of things is changed to-day. In violation of his oath of renunciation, taken at the time of his marriage with the Infanta of Spain, Louis XIV has invaded Flanders without cause, broken the alliance by declaring war upon us without the shadow of even a pretext, and

suborned England to his aid. The Republic finds itself now legitimately entitled to take up arms, and it thereby does an act that is at once generous and politic, by affording help to the oppressed people of France. By these means dangerous complications can be conjured up against Louis XIV within his own kingdom, and furthermore, we would be aiding the French people in their effort to break his yoke, at least to render it less galling. I therefore give you my formal promise to induce my friends in the Assembly of the States to lend the moral and material aid of the Republic to the people of France. If they rise against Louis XIV, I promise you arms and funds."

"Oh! father," cried Nominoë with the enthusiastic ardor and presumptuous confidence of his age; "we shall deal the death blow to despotism! The Republic is with us! Commune and Federation!"

Without sharing his son's confidence of success Salaun Lebrenn said to John De Witt solemnly: "In the name of so many oppressed people, who will see, if not the finish, at least a relief of their sufferings, a blessing upon you, monsieur! Once more you show yourself faithful to the principle that has guided your whole life. Perhaps our success may turn out greater than I expect, if the Republic gives us a helping hand. Its moral and material support, at this season, may now be considered certain. Your powerful influence as Grand Pensionary of Holland will be determining and decisive in the Assembly of the States."

"Pardon me, monsieur, if I interrupt you. I am no longer the Grand Pensionary of Holland."

Serdan, Salaun Lebrenn and Nominoë looked at one another in astonishment. For a moment they stood dumbfounded. Serdan was the first to recover his speech: "What, my friend! Is what you say possible? Did you resign your high functions?"

"Just as you came in with your two friends I was finishing this letter to Admiral Ruyter," said John De Witt pointing to the letter on the table. "I informed the admiral of my resignation from the office of Grand Pensionary of Holland. Nevertheless, the interview I was to have with you and your friends was of such importance that, although I no longer filled my former office, I thought it well to hear you in order that, should it seem wise to me, I could assure you of my co-operation as a member of the Assembly, where I have numerous friends. You may rely upon my support."

"Oh! monsieur," said Salaun Lebrenn sadly; "sad presentiments assail me; your withdrawal will prove fatal to the cause of freedom. Your resignation is a public disaster."

"But what is the reason for your resignation?" asked Serdan. "What, John! The state is in danger!—and at such a moment you resign the high office with which you were clad?"

"My friend, so far from serving the Republic, my activity at the present juncture would be fatal to it. Be frank," John De Witt proceeded after a pause; "you have been back in The Hague only a few days; nevertheless, the change in the public mind regarding myself can not have escaped your quick eye. Answer me frankly. What is the opinion entertained about me to-day by the people?"

"Well—I must admit it! Your popularity, once unbounded, has been somewhat impaired—but it is still strong."

"You deceive yourself, my friend; my popularity is completely destroyed. A month ago, when divine providence snatched me from almost certain death, those who a short time before would have cursed my assassins, saw in the crime nothing but a providential punishment. They called me traitor—and said the hand of God smote me! These charges of treason unchained public hatred against my brother and myself. A short while ago my father's house was torn down by a furious mob at Dortrecht; and my brother—my brother!—one of the most virtuous citizens of the Republic, is at this hour held in confinement, imprisoned as an assassin, upon the mere word of a wretch who is smarting under the brand of infamy. I nevertheless hope that, despite the inveterate hatred of our enemies, my brother's innocence will baffle the infamous calumny."

John De Witt's confidence in the happy issue of the process instituted against his brother saddened Serdan's heart. It reminded him of the alarm Monsieur Tilly expressed for the life of Cornelius De Witt. Serdan was still hopeful, and preferred not to disturb the peace of mind of the ex-Grand Pensionary of Holland with the latest tidings. The painful state of agitation into which the mind of Nominoë was thrown increased by the second. He suddenly turned his moist eyes to his father and said:

"The De Witt brothers accused of treason to the Republic! Good God, it is enough to make one despair of humanity! Oh, blind people! Or are you stupid and cruel? Are you ever to be a foe to your most generous defenders? Will you ever allow them to be dragged to the scaffold?"

"My son, we must never despair of humanity. The people must never be flattered. To do so is to debase it, and to debase oneself. Its errors must be condemned but excused—when they are excusable," put in John De Witt addressing Nominoë with affectionate reproach. "The people believes me a traitor. I deplore, I pity its blindness more than I condemn it. It is to be excused—on account of its ignorance."

Nominoë, his father and Serdan contemplated John De Witt in astonishment. The young mariner resumed:

"What, monsieur!—is the people to be excused when it charges you with treason? Should it not judge you by your acts?"

"And if my acts seem to-day to turn against me overwhelmingly, would not that explain the people's error with regard to me?"

And John De Witt, responding to a questioning look from Nominoë, added: "Listen, my son, the lesson is grave and instructive—listen. My friends, my brother and myself (we are given the name of the 'French party') now about ten years ago, in 1662, used all our influence with the Assembly of the States to bind the Republic in a close alliance with France, our natural ally, as we considered her. Louis XIV was then quite young; if he exhibited certain foibles of youth, I considered him gifted with their reciprocal virtues—honesty, generosity, faithfulness to his pledged word. The King pledged himself to assist the Republic in the event of a war with England, and to respect the territory of Spanish Flanders, in accord with the act of renunciation of the treaty of the Pyrenees. But what happened? The increasing prosperity of our commerce, which extends from one end of the world to the other, our maritime preponderance and our wealth awakened the jealousy and cupidity of our neighbors; besides, the very existence of our Republic, ever more and more flourishing, seemed to Louis XIV a dangerous example to his own people. Accordingly, winning England to his side with bribes, he drove her to declare war against us, and, so far from keeping faith with us, and assisting us with his fleets, he not only did not furnish us a single ship—no, I err, he did send us one, a fire ship—but he left us isolated to struggle with England single-handed, and capped the climax by finally dropping his mask, and also declaring war upon us, in concert with England."

Perceiving the indignation marked upon Nominoë's face, John De Witt added:

"I told you a minute ago, the people was wrong to believe me guilty of treachery, but the error is pardonable. My acts seem to bear witness against me. When the Republic saw me, my brother and my friends exert all our power to induce it to ally itself with Louis XIV, offering ourselves as a guarantee of the prince's good faith in his promises, the Republic placed confidence in us, and the alliance was concluded. To-day, we but suffer the consequences of the treason of Louis XIV." John De Witt paused for a moment and then proceeded:

"But however great the iniquity of which I am a victim, do not pity me. My conscience is clear; I know I have lived the life of an honorable man and a good citizen. Should God call me to Him to-morrow, I shall go, serenely, and await his judgment. That, my son, is the moral of the lesson."

As John De Witt was uttering these last words, listened to devoutly by Nominoë, Monsieur Tilly entered precipitately into the apartment.

CHAPTER VI

CORNELIUS DE WITT

Monsieur Tilly, dressed in full uniform, wore the distinctive signs of his rank—a high collar and a scarf. He was pale, and so visibly disturbed that, struck by his appearance, John De Witt asked with alarm:

"My friend—you must be the bearer of tidings that portend some public calamity?"

"A great calamity!" answered Monsieur Tilly with a faltering voice. "An irreparable calamity!"

"What has happened?" inquired John De Witt. "What are the frightful tidings that you bring me?" And looking towards Salaun Lebrenn and his son he added: "These friends are countrymen of Monsieur Serdan's. You may speak freely before them."

"My friend," said Monsieur Tilly, hardly able to control his emotions, "you must leave The Hague this very day—you must depart within an hour, if possible. You must flee!"

"Flee!" cried John De Witt astounded. "Flee like a criminal! And why should I leave The Hague?"

"You must leave! Go quickly, I implore you, in the name of your wife and daughters. Depart!"

"Tilly," replied John De Witt. "I am not devoid of courage. I should at least know the cause of your alarm!"

"Yes; you have a strong soul; yes, you sustain the blows of adversity with the serenity of an upright man—but however strong your soul, it is at the same time susceptible of great tenderness for the objects of your affection—you feel the smart of the blows that strike them—and—"

"My brother!" cried John De Witt turning pale and breaking in upon Monsieur Tilly. "It is about my brother!"

"Ask me no more questions—embrace your wife and daughters—and leave The Hague on the spot—you must not delay an instant!"

"But my brother—my dear and good brother—what has befallen him?"

"In God's name, spend no time with questions—depart—a few minutes more and it will be too late."

A tremor ran over John De Witt's frame. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and overpowering his emotion, bowed to Salaun Lebrenn and his son, saying to them in a firm voice: "You will have to excuse me, my friends, if I leave you. I can not remain any longer in this painful uncertainty regarding my brother's fate. I shall hurry to the castle, where he is confined."

"John!" broke in Monsieur Tilly, throwing himself in the way of the Grand Pensionary of Holland. "You shall not go there! By God! You shall not go to the castle—I shall tell you all—"

"They have killed him!" cried John De Witt in heartrending accents. "Unhappy me, they have killed him!"

"No," replied Monsieur Tilly in despair; "no, I assure you, Cornelius is not dead!"

This assurance allayed the poignancy of John De Witt's anxiety. But still staggering under the blow of his terrible apprehension, he felt his knees give way under him, and he leaned on the edge of the table, unable to articulate a word. Salaun Lebrenn and his son stood in consternation, dreading some great misfortune, and looked at Monsieur Tilly with uneasy curiosity, while Serdan said to him in a low voice: "Alas! A moment ago John De Witt felt perfectly at ease on the score of the charge against his brother. I dared not mention to him the fears that you expressed to me this morning."

Serdan broke off as he heard John De Witt say to Tilly in a calm voice: "Pardon my weakness, my friend. There are unexpected blows that take one by surprise, and floor him. Thanks to God, my brother still lives. Speak, I listen."

"As late as this morning I was as certain as yourself of the worthlessness of the charges preferred against Cornelius. I was in that frame of mind until I met an officer of the bourgeois militia that guards the prison, and who is of our party. From him I learned of the wild popular exasperation against yourself, your brother and the French party, who are considered accomplices in the ferocities committed by the troops of Louis XIV, and that this exasperation was assuming such a violent aspect that the tribunal, before which Cornelius was to be tried and which consists of bitter Orangemen, decided, with a view of satisfying the blind popular rage,—

decided," repeated Monsieur Tilly with a shudder, "to submit your brother to the torture, and compel him to confess his crime. The atrocious project has been carried out!"

"Good God!" cried John De Witt, raising his hands and eyes heavenward. "What frightful tidings!"

Serdan, Salaun Lebrenn and his son could not restrain a cry of indignation and horror.

"But perhaps my brother is expiring from the consequences of the torture!" exclaimed John De Witt in despair.

"Notwithstanding the sufferings he has undergone, your brother's life is safe," answered Tilly. "I pledge you my word."

"The infamous wretches! To believe that the torture could wrest from a De Witt the admission of a crime which he is guiltless of!" exclaimed John De Witt in a smothered voice. "I am certain my brother underwent the ordeal of the torture with heroic serenity. Proceed, my friend, I feel strong enough to listen."

"I have my information direct from the court registrar who witnessed the horrible scene," continued Tilly. "Cornelius was tied down upon a table. His hands were placed by the executioner between two iron plates, held together by screws, the slightest turn downward of which would break the patient's bones."

"Oh!" cried Serdan, horrified. "These are shocking details!"

"Tilly," said John De Witt in a firm voice, "conceal nothing from me. I want to know everything. Oh, my brother! Poor, dear victim!"

"During the preparation for the torture, the face of Cornelius was pale and impassive. One of the judges approached him: 'Are you ready to make a confession?' he asked your brother. 'I have nothing to confess,' was his answer. 'Then you persist in denying that you plotted to assassinate the Prince of Orange?' 'Monsieur,' replied Cornelius, 'had I desired to assassinate the Prince of Orange, I would not have employed another's arm.' 'Prisoner,' rejoined the judge, 'torture may compel you to confess what you now refuse to admit.' 'Monsieur, you will cut me to pieces before you can make me confess an act that I never even thought of.' 'Then you deny?' 'I deny.' Upon a sign from the judge, the executioner gave the screws a turn; the plates drew closer together, and crushed Cornelius's hands. His

suffering was cruel, yet he remained silent, impassive. Suddenly a wild clamor from the mob that was gathered at the foot of the tower, reached your brother's ears. 'Death to the French party!' 'Death to the accomplices of Louis XIV!' 'Death to De Witt!' Upon hearing these cries, the registrar informed me, your brother raised his head and turned his inspired eyes to the ceiling of the prison; his features were transfigured; they were serenely resplendent; a divine smile flitted over his lips; his moral courage dominated the agonies of the body; and, as the mob without redoubled its cries for his death, Cornelius recited in a powerful ringing voice this strophe from Horace:

"'Neither the unjust clamor of the people, nor the angry frown of a tyrant, is able to dethrone the mind of a man upright and true to his cause.'"[2]

"Oh! my noble brother!" cried John De Witt breaking the silence of admiration that followed the narrative of Monsieur Tilly. "Often did you make the remark—the dark iniquity of the guilty but causes the virtue of the just to shine forth with all the greater luster!"

"Yes!" continued Monsieur Tilly. "And at this very moment that beautiful sentiment is approved true. The executioners and judges were seized with respect and admiration for the grandeur of soul of Cornelius De Witt, and they gazed upon one another in a sort of stupor, as if the absurdity of the hateful process had broken its way into their vision. The judges conferred. The ignominy of submitting one of the greatest citizens of the Republic, one of the victors of Chatham and Solway, to the torture, and upon no stronger grounds than the word of a noted wretch, smote their consciences. Even paler than the patient himself, the registrar informed me, the judges ordered the torture to cease, and, addressing Cornelius in a faltering voice said to him: 'So, then, monsieur, you insist upon making no confession?' 'Save me and yourselves the trouble of such questions,' was Cornelius's answer; 'you have the power to proceed with the torture; my body belongs to you.' Recoiling before the thought of repeating the barbarous act, the judges ordered the executioners to untie their victim. Your brother was taken back to his prison, where the registrar of the States announced to him a few minutes later the decree that was pronounced upon him. It is as follows:

"'The court of Holland, having considered and examined the documents, submitted to it by the attorney general of the court, against and in accusation of Master Cornelius De Witt, former burgomaster of Dortrecht and ruart of the district of Putten, at present a prisoner of the said court, as well as examined him, his confrontations, and all that was said by himself, declares the prisoner forfeit of all his offices and dignities, banishes him

from the provinces of Holland, never to return again under pain of still severer punishment, and sentences him to pay the costs of the trial.'"

"But this very decree proves the innocence of Cornelius De Witt," cried Salaun Lebrenn. "Devoted Orangemen though the judges are, they have recoiled before their own iniquity. They did not even dare to mention the alleged crime of the prisoner. If the crime were mentioned, the death penalty would be the necessary punishment. Oh, the miserable, the infamous fellows!"

"You are correct," replied Monsieur Tilly. "After hearing his sentence read, Cornelius De Witt said to the registrar: 'Monsieur, if I am an assassin I deserve death; if I am innocent I should be set free, and my accuser punished. I appeal from this sentence to the Supreme Council.' 'If so, monsieur,' said the registrar, 'be kind enough to formulate your objection at the foot of the decree and to sign the same.' Cornelius De Witt cast a bitter smile upon the registrar, and raising his two hands mutilated by the torture and bandaged in blood-stained wrappages: 'I can not write, monsieur, I shall dictate to you my objections to the sentence.' So saying, Cornelius formulated his objection in the following terms: 'In the face of God and of man, I must be pronounced an assassin or innocent: death or freedom.'"

"Oh!" cried John De Witt. "I shall devote all the power left to me, all my life, to seek and obtain the rehabilitation of my brother! I shall not falter in the task."

"Do you now understand," asked Tilly, "why I consider that you would be lost, without profit to your brother, if you were now to be seen at the prison? The agents of the Prince of Orange quickly spread among the mob the news of Cornelius's banishment, and stirred up the popular rage at his not having been put to death. These moves have raised the popular exasperation to a still higher pitch, and incited the mob's cravings for vengeance. The crowd has threatened to tear down the gates of the prison in order to take your brother and do him to death. The registrar having hastened to notify me of these events, I ordered The Hague cavalry to the spot. It is now drawn up before the castle. Our horsemen are not Orangemen, as you know; the prison will not be broken in so long as they are allowed to remain on guard. You see, you may feel at ease, for the present, on the fate of Cornelius. I conjure you, my friend, renounce the purpose of proceeding to the prison. You are known by the whole city. To cross its streets at this moment of ferment, is uselessly to challenge the greatest risk. Think of your own dear family."

"John," added Serdan, "we join Tilly in urging you to flee as soon as possible. Who knows but that your own house may be invaded at one moment or another by that senselessly furious mob, as your father's house was invaded in Dortrecht!"

"Preserve yourself for your brother's sake, Monsieur De Witt," put in Salaun Lebrenn. "Leave The Hague."

"Live for this people which is more blind than it is ungrateful. Maybe the day will come when it will implore you to save the Republic!" said Nominoë with tears in his eyes, as he saw John De Witt receive the urgings of his friends with a silent impatience that betrayed his inner resolution to go to his brother.

Monsieur Tilly made a last effort, crying: "Is it your purpose to risk your own life, as well as that of Cornelius, by proceeding to the prison?" And answering an impatient wafture of John De Witt's hand, he added: "It is horrible, but it is a fact—the first blood that a mob sheds throws it into a savage intoxication. So far from being allayed by your death, the hatred of those furious men will then become so unbridled that it will be impossible any longer to restrain them. They will then force the prison gates and slaughter your brother!"

"Enough! Enough, my friend!" said John De Witt with a shudder, and almost overcome by the insistence of his friends. He seemed to hesitate in his first determination, when he saw Madam De Witt step into the apartment.

"My friend," said she to her husband handing him a note that she held in her hand, "one of the grenadiers of the prison has just brought you this letter from our brother Cornelius. It is urgent, says the man. He is waiting for your answer. He says there is considerable commotion in The Hague, and that, should you wish to proceed to the castle, he offers to lead you through the closed Borlek Alley, and thence to Vivier Alley, of which he has the key. But he says you must not delay."

John De Witt hastened to take the note, ran his eyes over it, and cried: "My brother writes to me that he wishes to see me immediately."

"It is a trap!" exclaimed Serdan. "You seem to forget that Cornelius is not in a condition to write! Crime and treachery!"

"Why should he not be in a condition to write?" asked Madam De Witt, ignorant of the circumstance that her brother-in-law's hands were crushed.

An embarrassing silence followed upon Madam De Witt's question, a silence which Monsieur Tilly broke:

"Madam, your brother is suffering with an abscess on his thumb. It would be difficult for him to hold a pen."

"Mary, my cloak, my sword, my gloves; quick, I pray you," said John De Witt to his wife.

Madam De Witt left in quest of the articles demanded by her husband. No sooner had she withdrawn than Tilly, Serdan, Salaun Lebrenn and his son cried in alarm: "Give up the thought! Do not go to the castle! You will be marching to your death!"

"The letter is a forgery!" added Serdan. "They are laying a snare for you, and the jailer is in the plot!"

"First of all, hear what Cornelius writes to me," said John De Witt to his friends, and he read:

"Dear brother, I am obliged to help myself with a stranger's hand to write to you. I urge you earnestly, come to me to the castle without delay. Your presence is indispensable. One of the jailers is devoted to me. He will lead you by a circuitous route, where you are not likely to meet anyone. Come, come."

"Treachery!" repeated Serdan. "I tell you once more, their purpose is to lead you into a trap, an ambush!"

"Cornelius has heard from his prison the clamor of the people for his life, and for yours," added Monsieur Tilly. "There is even fear that the maddened mob may succeed in breaking into the prison, and do you suppose that your brother would call you to his side at such a moment? No, no! There is treachery in all this!"

"But suppose this letter was truly dictated by my brother!" cried John De Witt, interrupting Tilly. "Suppose that, finding himself about to die as the result of his torture, he wishes to die in my arms! Suppose he awaits my presence as a supreme consolation! Should I hesitate before a sacred duty? No, never!"

As John De Witt was uttering these last words Madam De Witt re-entered accompanied by her two daughters, Agnes and Mary, one thirteen, the other fifteen years of age. They brought their father's cloak and sword. Their

candid and smiling faces presented so painful a contrast to the dangers that threatened their father, that the witnesses of the scene felt their hearts wrung.

"Father," said Mary, handing John De Witt his cloak, and helping him to put it on, "since you are going to see our dear uncle in that horrid prison, that I am sure he will soon be free to leave, tell him for me that, although he was away from us, we always had him in mind."

"But, better still, father," added Agnes gaily, giving her father his sword, "bring us our dear uncle back soon. And while we wait for his return give him this kiss for me—"

"And this one from me," said Mary, embracing and kissing her father.

With a superhuman effort John De Witt controlled and concealed his afflicted thoughts, tenderly answered the caresses of his daughters by covering their young foreheads with kisses, and addressing his wife, said: "Adieu, my faithful friend; brave companion in evil days, adieu! I hope shortly to bring you better tidings of my brother," and he left abruptly, followed by Monsieur Tilly, Salaun Lebrenn, his son and Monsieur Serdan.

"The die is cast!" said Tilly to his friends in a low voice while John De Witt descended the stairs of his house. "Follow him! Guard him! My horse is waiting for me near by; I shall rejoin my company. We shall defend the prison with all our might."

"Rely upon us," answered Serdan; "all that three resolute men can do shall be done by us. May we be able to save John De Witt, and, with him, the Republic."

CHAPTER VII

MOB-VERDICT

In the near vicinity of the palace, where the States General of the Republic of the Seven Provinces held their sessions, rose a vast edifice blackened by years and pierced with narrow, iron-barred windows. This ancient castle now did the services of a place of detention. Its principal façade, pierced with an ogive gate that was led up to by a few stairs, was separated from Buytenhoff Square by a closed iron-barred gate, before which, on this particular day, stood drawn up the cavalry troop of Monsieur Tilly. Up to that moment the troopers had, thanks to their coolness and the closeness of their ranks, prevented the mob that crowded the square from forcing the iron gate of the prison in which Cornelius De Witt lay. The tumultuous gathering that at first had been emitting furious howls and threats of death against the French party, now crowded in silence around several citizens of The Hague who, mounted upon posts, or standing upon the stairs, or upon carts, read aloud and commented on to the gaping mob letters recently received from the provinces that the armies of Louis XIV had invaded. Among the more fiery of the orators a rich goldsmith of The Hague was prominent. His name was Henry Weroeff, who until recently was one of the most active members of the French party. Accordingly, when he jumped upon an unhitched wagon and announced that he wanted to speak, his voice was drowned under a volley of hoots. Weroeff held a letter in his hand, and motioned for silence while he shouted:

"My friends, deceived and misled like so many others, I belonged up to now to the French party—but I have come to apologize for my error, and to declare in the face of heaven and of man that the brothers De Witt, the heads of the party, deserve public execration. Either as accomplices, or the dupes of Louis XIV, they are responsible for the horrible deeds that the armies of that King are now committing in our provinces. Listen to this letter, which I received this morning from a relative who lives in Bodegrave:

"My dear friend, I write to you in haste. I owe my life to a miraculous accident. Our two burgs of Swamerdam and Bodegrave, each consisting of over six hundred houses, have just been reduced to ashes by the army of the King of France. Only one house is left standing—by the merest accident. The soldiers were especially bent upon destroying the Protestant churches. Not one escaped. The school houses and the City Hall, where the court met, were set on fire. In order to carry out their detestable work, the soldiers furnished themselves in Utrecht with torches of readily combustible material. This is a sight that I saw—a father, mother and children were

locked up in their house, and then the place was forthwith set on fire. Those who sought to escape the flames were massacred by the soldiers and transfixed with pikes—"[3]

An explosion of furious yells, born of the indignation aroused by Weroeff's letter, interrupted him at this point. A butcher of herculean stature, with red hair and beard, blood-shot eyes, and livid with rage, rushed forward, and jumping upon the cart from which the goldsmith was speaking, cried out in a stentorian voice that rang above the din: "The letter tells the truth! My sister lived in Swamerdam. Her two children were burnt to death in her house. She herself was violated—and then murdered by the royal soldiers!"

The infuriate man then drew a long knife from his belt, and brandishing it, cried:

"Massacre and death! In default of the King of France himself, I shall cut the throats of his good friends in Holland!"

"Death to the De Witts!" "Death to the accomplices of Louis XIV!" echoed the mob, whose exasperation rose to fever heat. "Death to the traitors!" "Upon them the blood that has flowed!"

Silence being restored by degrees, the goldsmith proceeded to read:

"Yesterday, when, upon the departure of the enemy, we returned to our burgs, and removed the ashes of our homes, we found everywhere charred bodies of men, women and children, the women often holding the lifeless and partially burnt corpses of their infants in their own charred stumps. Acts of unheard-of ferocity were committed in cold blood by the soldiery of Louis XIV. A blind and crippled old woman, the object of our people's compassion, was killed before the eyes of her four children, and then thrown, together with them, into the flames. A number of little children were found horribly mutilated. The soldiers took a cruel delight in cutting off their limbs; others would throw them up in the air and receive them on the points of their bayonets!"

"Little children! Poor little children! Massacre and death! These atrocities must be revenged!" cried the butcher, whose voice broke the first silence caused by the stupor and consternation produced by Weroeff's reading. The butcher's cries were immediately followed by a volley of imprecations that it is impossible to reproduce. "Death and extermination!"

"Listen!" said Weroeff. "There is worse yet:

"Girls were violated before the eyes of their mothers, wives before the eyes of their husbands. The only act of charity on the part of the soldiers was to spare the victims of their brutalities the shame of surviving their dishonor—they drowned them in the canal, or murdered them on the spot—"

At these words, which reminded him of his sister's fate, the butcher, instead of breaking forth anew with violent imprecations, covered his face in both his hands and began to weep. The sight of this rough and rude man's tender sorrow produced a deep impression upon the crowd. The frightful ferment of a revengeful, inexorable and blind hatred caused even the coldest hearts to boil with indignation. The goldsmith finished his letter amid a mass of humanity that was panting for revenge, and impatient to slake its ire upon the partisans of the French:

"Greed, besides cruelty, animated both the French captain and his soldiers. They hanged men by the feet in the chimneys of their own houses, and lighted a fire under them in order that, suffocated and singed by the clouds of smoke that rose upward and the flames that licked their faces, they be driven to disclose where they had hidden their money and valuables. Often the victims possessed none of these, and they perished, the prey to barbarous greed. Other soldiers stripped the last shred of clothing from the women and girls whom they outraged, and drove them naked into the fields where they were left to die of hunger and cold. One officer (in justice to him be it said) finding two young ladies of the upper class in this condition, took pity upon them, gave them his cloak and some linen that he had with him, and, before returning to his post, recommended the unfortunate girls to the care of another officer. The latter, however, violated both the girls, and thereupon turned them over to his soldiers, who, after subjecting them to further and extreme outrage, mutilated them frightfully.[4] Their shapeless corpses were found day before yesterday near the dike that leads from Bodegrave to Woerden.

"From Nymwegen I learn that one of those butchers, who do not deserve the name of soldiers, and who was wicked enough to cut off the breasts of a lying-in mother and to sprinkle gunpowder upon her wounds, died yesterday in the agonies of a frightful delirium, caused by remorse for his crime. He believed he saw the distracted woman pursuing him, and heard her cries of pain. A boatman, the brother of my father's tenant farmer, was nailed by both his hands to the mainmast of his barge, while, under the very eyes of the poor fellow, the soldiers indulged their depravity upon his daughter. Not even the dead are respected. Two funerals were stopped on the way to the graveyard, the corpses were stripped of their shrouds by the soldiers of Louis XIV, and then thrown into the canal."

The recital of such sacrilegious profanation—doubly abominable in the eyes of a Protestant people, who religiously guard their dead—caused the popular fury to boil over. It wanted instant victims to slake its thirst for revenge and for reprisals. Such victims were at hand—the brothers De Witt and the other chiefs of the French party, considered either the dupes or the accomplices of Louis XIV, as the mob declared with pitiless logic. The popular rage reached its highest pitch. An ear-rending cry went up from all throats—"Death to De Witt! To the prison! To the prison!"

By a spontaneous movement the whole mass of enraged humanity rolled against the prison, the approaches to which Tilly and his troopers had up to that moment managed to keep clear. So spontaneous was the rush against the prison, and so resolutely was it executed, that Tilly's horsemen, finding themselves assailed by a shower of stones, were constrained in self-defense to draw their sabers. They were on the point of falling upon their assailants when, with drums beating and amid the glad acclaims of the multitude, an infantry company of The Hague militia, known by the name of the "Blue Flag," and consisting exclusively of Orangemen, debouched upon the square. The captain of this militia corps informed Monsieur Tilly that, in order to avoid an effusion of blood in a conflict with the populace, the Council of State had ordered the company of the Blue Flag to mount guard at the castle, and relieve the cavalry posted there. Monsieur Tilly had no choice but to obey and yield the place to his substitutes, although he had no doubt that the prison would now be speedily invaded by the delirious mob. The cavalry, its retreat covered by the infantry corps, withdrew from the square amidst the hootings, the vociferations and even the threats of the mob which now had reached a pitch of delirious paroxysm.

"After De Witt, to the others, and Tilly shall have his turn. We know where he lives!" yelled a bitter Orangeman. "He has taken a lot of French people into his house. Some of them are grand dames! I saw them yesterday on the balcony."

"Massacre and death! May lightning strike me if I do not take revenge for my sister upon those French women!" bellowed the butcher. "But forward, now! First bleed the De Witts. The prison is ours!"

The butcher's threats, directly alluding to Mademoiselle Plouernel and her aunt, were heard by Serdan, Salaun Lebrenn and his son, who, having returned to the square, and being driven by the current of the mass, found themselves pushed in the direction of the prison. Vainly had they sought to keep their promise to Monsieur Tilly of protecting the life of John De Witt. When the venerable man left his house under the guidance of the jail

grenadier, Serdan and his friends requested him to allow them to escort him. He consented. Together they crossed several narrow and quiet streets and presently an almost deserted lane. When, at the end of the same, they arrived before a gate that barred further passage and opened upon a corridor leading into the castle, the grenadier declared to the companions of John De Witt that they could go no further, his orders being to allow admission only to the Grand Pensionary of Holland. John De Witt urged his friends to withdraw, clasped their hands, and entered alone, the door being unlocked, then closed and re-locked after him by the grenadier who was furnished with a key. John De Witt was taken without delay to his brother, and there discovered the trap that was laid for him. His brother had not sent for him, and was greatly alarmed at what he considered a most inopportune visit, in view of the general popular excitement, and the riot at the prison gate. A heartrending scene took place between the two brothers. John sought to induce his brother to leave the prison, the doors of which, he argued, had to be opened to him, seeing he was sentenced to banishment. Cornelius declined, on the ground that he had appealed from the decree of proscription. He insisted that the judges pronounce him either innocent or guilty of conspiracy to commit murder. To quit the prison would be to accept the sentence which put a blot upon his name, and against which he protested. Unable to induce his brother to flee, John De Witt declared he would not leave him, and would share his fate. While this debate, a struggle of fraternal generosity, was proceeding in the prison of Cornelius, two officers and four militiamen of the Blue Flag company forced themselves into the chamber in which the two brothers were conversing, and assailed them with violent threats.

Alas! son of Joel; I shall let an eye-witness of that lamentable event narrate it in his own words, and let us transmit the report to our descendants:

"The officers and the militiamen found Cornelius De Witt lying on his couch in a morning gown, and his brother seated near the head of the bed reading to him out of the Bible. The Grand Pensionary sought to awaken some sense of humanity in the maddened men who entered the room. They only redoubled their threats, and compelled the two brothers to rise and leave the room, saying they were to be taken to the place where criminals are executed. The De Witts embraced each other tenderly at the head of the stairs which led out of the castle, and bade each other their last adieus. Cornelius De Witt, who, in consequence of the torture, was very weak, descended leaning upon his brother's arm. The latter, preserving a most heroic calmness in sight of so imminent a danger, exhorted in kind language those who led him and his brother not to commit so great an iniquity as they threatened to be guilty of. 'My friends,' he said to them as he continued

to descend the stairs, sustaining his brother, 'we are innocent, we are not traitors to the Republic; take us wherever you please, but take us to judges.' 'March! March!' the officers answered, brutally pushing him forward and causing him to trip and stumble over the lowest steps of the staircase; 'You will soon know where you are taken to, traitors!'"

The iron gate that served as a defense to the castle had been forced open. A portion of the mob penetrated into the outer yard which separated the square from the façade of the castle, and where a low stoop led up to an ogive door. The shadow, into which the vault of the door threw the inside, allowed but an indistinct view of the lowest steps of the staircase by which John and Cornelius De Witt descended. The instant the two brothers appeared at the top of the stoop, whither they were pushed by the militiamen of the Blue Flag, yells of hate and vengeance broke forth from all sides.

"There they are!" "We got them both!" "Death to the De Witts!" "Death to the traitors!" "Death to the French party!"

Separated from the two victims, and hemmed in by a compact mass of people, Serdan, Salaun Lebrenn and Nominoë were as impotent to bring the slightest help to Cornelius and John as to flee from the spectacle that they were about to witness. In that situation, and justly fearing to be recognized as Frenchmen and massacred on the spot, they controlled their grief and indignation, and only exchanged looks of despair as the tragedy was enacted before their eyes.

The moment the two De Witts, John sustaining his brother, stepped out upon the stoop, one of the militiamen raised his musket, holding it by the barrel, and dealt Cornelius De Witt a furious blow upon the head, shouting at the same time:

"Die, traitor! The blood, shed by the soldiers of Louis XIV, shall fall upon your head! Death to all the accomplices of the French King!"

Stunned by the blow, Cornelius staggered and reeled. Instantly the butcher seized him by the hair, and dragged him down to the bottom of the stoop, brandishing his knife. John De Witt rushed forward to his brother's help, but before he could descend two steps, a notary, Van Soenen by name, barred his way, and, exclaiming: "Die, traitor! Your friends the French murdered our prisoners at Swamerdam! Die, traitor, renegade!" hurled his pike into the face of the Grand Pensionary, transfixing it.

Blinded by the blood that spurted from his wound, John De Witt dropped on one knee. He immediately endeavored to rise, crying: "My brother! My brother!" But at that moment a man named Van Valen gripped him by the throat, threw him to the ground, and planting his foot upon De Witt's chest, discharged his pistol into the head of the prostrate man, loudly vociferating: "Die, wretch! You betrayed your country! So shall all the accomplices of Louis XIV die! Death to all papists!"

The corpse of John De Witt was dragged under the Buytenhoff Arcade beside his brother's, whom the butcher killed. The mob pounced like tigers upon the two bodies, riddled them with shots, stripped them naked, mutilated them beyond recognition—and, Oh, frightful reprisals that the two martyrs were the innocent victims of! each act of sacrilegious profanation was accompanied with a thousand imprecations intended to recall the atrocities committed by the soldiers of Louis XIV, who crowned their acts of pillage, of incendiarism, of iniquities perpetrated upon women, and of murder, by outraging even the corpses which they stripped of their funeral robes, and deprived of burial!

Finally, the shapeless remains of the two great citizens were hung from the gibbet where common malefactors were executed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FLIGHT

Salaun Lebrenn, his son, and their friend, the witnesses to the massacre, stood shuddering with terror, when they were suddenly aroused by the cries of several voices: "And now for Tilly!" "Death to Tilly!" "To the sack of his house!" "Death to the traitors!" "Death to the friends of the French!"

"Vengeance and reprisals!" howled the most infuriated of the mob. "To Tilly's house! to Tilly's house! Sack the house of Tilly!"

The three Frenchmen, who were, until then, wedged in the compact mass of the mob, and compelled, despite themselves, to witness the sight of the popular fury, succeeded by dint of vigorous efforts in cleaving their way in a diagonal line across the press, and finally freed themselves entirely, while the mass of people took the direction of the house of Monsieur Tilly.

Madam Tremblay and Abbot Boujaron, faithful to the recommendations of Monsieur Tilly, kept the curtains of the windows closed, and abstained from showing their faces. Standing near one of the embrasures, and slightly parting the curtain, the Abbot sought to obtain a glimpse of what went on upon the street, and cast furtive looks upon the square.

"Abbot!—no imprudence!" cried the Marchioness.

Mademoiselle Plouernel sat steeped in revery at the opposite end of the parlor. Her mind dwelt indignantly upon the odious designs that her own family had dared to plot, and in which so ignoble a role was assigned to her. She remained an utter and indifferent stranger to all that was happening within and without the house.

"Well, Abbot," inquired Madam Tremblay, "do you see anything on the square?"

"Marchioness!" cried the Abbot, turning pale and stepping back from the window, "we are lost! A mob of men armed with pikes and axes is just turning into the square. They yell: 'Death to the French!' Listen! Listen! Do you hear them? The mob is running this way, howling and vociferating!"

Indeed, at that moment, a formidable clamor that drew ever nearer was heard on the square, and distinctly could be made out the furious cries:

"Death to Tilly!" "Death to the French!" "Sack the house!"

"They are coming to murder Tilly!" stammered the Abbot, livid with terror. "It is done for us! We are lost!"

"Abbot, you are losing your senses," replied the Marchioness endeavoring to allay her own alarm. "Matters are not at such an extremity."

"Madam, do you not hear those furious cries: 'Vengeance and reprisals!'" asked Mademoiselle Plouernel. "These people are coming to take vengeance upon us for the atrocities committed by the troops of your master, at the instigation of your infamous Catholic clergy!"

The danger grew ever more threatening. Hurried steps were heard in the house, where the frightened servants were running about crying out to one another and precipitately and noisily closing and bolting the main door on the ground floor. The door, though thick and strong, and studded with iron nails, could not long resist the assailants. Already it shook under the repeated blows of axes and the butts of muskets, while a volley of stones, thrown from the street, broke with a crash the window-panes in the parlor. The shattered windows allowed the clamor from without to reach the parlor with distinctness. "My sister was violated and disemboweled by the soldiers of Louis XIV," cried the butcher in his stentorian voice; "Vengeance and reprisals! French women are housed in Tilly's residence! Fire upon the door and windows! We will get in! Massacre and fury!"

The sound of a discharge of musketry fire followed almost instantly upon the butcher's words. The house seemed to rock to its very foundations. The fusilade continued uninterrupted. At the same time the main door, already half broken down, was attacked with renewed blows of axes, and a lever was applied to its hinges.

Suddenly the ceiling of the parlor shook with the vibrations of heavy blows given with iron maces and by dint of which the main street door finally fell in with a great crash. The vociferations of the assailants, who irrupted into the house, reached the ears of the Abbot, the Marchioness and Mademoiselle Plouernel. They stood petrified with terror. At that instant a little door, that communicated with, and was concealed by the drapery of the parlor flew open.

"The assassins are here!" stammered the Marchioness, almost dead with fright. "We are lost! Mercy! Mercy!"

"We are saved!" cried Bertha of Plouernel, as she recognized in the new arrivals Serdan and his two friends. "These are our liberators!"

The uproar and the distinct rush of hurrying and tumultuous steps announced that the assailants were mounting the staircase. Serdan ran to the principal door of the parlor, closed and double barred it. "Mademoiselle," he said hurrying back to the young lady and pointing to her the issue through which he had just entered, "flee by that door—the corridor leads to a concealed staircase."

Already the parlor door cracked under the repeated blows from without. Bertha, seized with a sort of vertigo, followed Serdan mechanically; the Abbot pushed the Marchioness before him, and disappeared after the two women in the corridor. The hall was left empty.

The parlor door, attacked with heavy axes, was rent and dashed into splinters, giving a passage to the butcher, who rushed in followed by his band. The Frenchwomen had vanished, but he saw the little door through which they escaped hurriedly closed. He ran forward to open it, or break it down with his fists. It resisted his efforts. Not having had time to bolt the little door from the inside, Nominoë had placed his back against it, and held it closed with his feet firmly planted against the side-walls. Finding himself unable to force his passage, the butcher called out for a hatchet in order to break down the obstacle that now barred his progress.

"We can do better!" exclaimed one of the assailants. "Let us discharge our muskets against the door. The balls will pierce the wood and kill the man. Death to the traitors! Death to the French!"

Three muskets were lowered and fired.

While these incidents were following one another with the rapidity of thought, the fugitives had crossed the corridor and descended the steps of a masked staircase that led to a little inside yard, which opened upon a narrow lane, into which a number of dark and vaulted passages, common in The Hague, ran out. Serdan, being long familiar with the entrances to Monsieur Tilly's residence, and bent upon endeavoring to snatch Mademoiselle Plouernel from the frightful peril that threatened her, the means of escape offered by these devious passages, of which the assailants knew nothing, occurred to him. Through the same secret passages the servants of Monsieur Tilly's household now took flight.

"Monsieur," said Bertha to Salaun in a fainting voice, "I implore you, acquaint me with the name of the man to whom I owe my life and honor! Give me the name of my generous deliverer!"

"Nominoë Lebrenn, my son, a mariner of the port of Vannes as is his father, mademoiselle."

At that moment the detonations of the shots, fired upon the door which Nominoë defended, resounded through the narrow corridor which the fugitives had just left. The reverberations were immediately followed by the distant and expiring cry of the young mariner: "Adieu, father! Flee! Flee!"

"Unhappy boy! They have killed him!" cried Salaun Lebrenn in a heartrending voice. "They have killed my dear Nominoë!"

Leaving Mademoiselle Plouernel to the care of Serdan, who just returned after exploring the lane, Salaun Lebrenn re-ascended the flight of stairs and ran to his son's aid.

"Come! Come, mademoiselle," said Serdan. "The lane is deserted. Night is upon us. I answer for your safety the moment we have entered the first vaulted passage."

Mademoiselle Plouernel did not seem to hear the words of her guide. She stood motionless; her eyes roamed about bewildered; she murmured to herself: "I am the cause of his death. They killed him! They killed my liberator! Woe is me!"

"Make haste, madam; cross the yard, then the alley and enter into the first passage to your right; then wait for me there," said Serdan to the Marchioness and the Abbot, whose terror inspired them with the strength to follow Serdan's instructions.

Serdan himself speedily joined them, sustaining, in fact carrying Mademoiselle Plouernel, who had lost consciousness.

As Salaun Lebrenn was rushing to the assistance of his son, he ran in the corridor against the butcher. "Wretch! You killed my son!" he cried; and seizing the tall fellow by the throat threw him down. The two men struggled on the floor. The obstruction of the narrow passage by the two combatants impeded the advance of the butcher's companions. That instant a ruddy glow projected itself into the corridor. It was the first flickering flames of the conflagration that the men who remained in the parlor had started. Salaun Lebrenn leaped up; the butcher, finding himself free, fled back through the parlor, before escape from the fire were too late. The Breton discovered his son lying prone and bathed in his own blood. He took him on his shoulder, hastened to the masked staircase, to the yard, to the alley, and, only then considering himself safe, laid down his precious burden, ignorant as yet

whether his son lived or was dead. God be praised! Salaun Lebrenn felt the heart of Nominoë beat.

Mademoiselle Plouernel having returned to consciousness, she could be supported by Serdan to a carriage, and conveyed, together with the Marchioness and the Abbot, to the port of Delft. Before leaving The Hague the young girl had at least the consolation to know that, although serious, the wounds received by Nominoë were not mortal. The guide to whom Serdan entrusted the three fugitives inquired, upon his arrival in Delft, after any outgoing vessel. A captain of Hamburg, a neutral city whose merchant vessels had, consequently, nothing to fear from the French, the English or the Dutch squadrons, agreed to convey the three passengers to Havre-de-Grace. That same day the vessel set sail for France, where it calculated to arrive safely after a short passage.

On the same day of the double murder of the De Witts the Assembly of the States of Holland despatched a courier to the young Prince of Orange, then encamped with his army at Alpen on the banks of the Rhine, between Leyden and Woerden. The courier arrived as the Prince was about to sit down to table. He opened one of the two despatches brought to him, read it and said: "Gentlemen, I have good news to announce to the friends of Fagel, who is greatly endeared to me. He was appointed yesterday Grand Pensionary of Holland in consequence of the resignation of John De Witt. Let us drink to the health of Grand Pensionary Fagel."

The Prince thereupon opened the second despatch and read it. His face remained impassive; not the least emotion did his features betray. He refolded the despatch, and sitting down where the cover was laid for him, remarked: "I learn that both De Witts were yesterday massacred at The Hague by the populace. May God pardon them, if it is true that they betrayed the fatherland!" And turning to his chaplain, the Prince added with unction: "You will order prayers to be read for the repose of the souls of the two De Witts. May God be merciful unto them!"

These were the only words that the young Prince vouchsafed to the memory of Cornelius and John De Witt.

PART II

>BRITTANY

CHAPTER I

NOMINOE

The burg of Mezlean, situated on the coast of Brittany and at about equal distances from the port of Vannes and from the druid stones of Karnak, was inhabited mainly by Protestant families. Their ancestors, at the time when the Reformation invaded and spread over Brittany, and subsequently during the religious wars of the Sixteenth Century, had quitted Vannes and founded, so to speak, this burg, in which they raised a temple. This temple, destroyed in the reactionary days of the League, of which lower Brittany was the last hot-bed, was replaced by a Catholic church, and was later again rebuilt after the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes by Henry IV. Upon that event, and for a long time after, the reformers of Mezlean were not disturbed in the exercise of their faith. The revival of the spirit of intolerance, however, which later caused the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV, speedily manifested itself in Brittany also, and the Bishop of Vannes claimed the right of restoring the temple of Mezlean to the Catholic cult. In pursuit of the Bishop's designs, a thousand difficulties were thrown in the path of, and a thousand vexations inflicted upon, the Protestants of the burg. The rectors and curates of the neighboring Catholic parishes took the hint, and rekindled religious animosities among their flocks by pointing at their neighbors of Mezlean as stiff-necked heretics.

One day, towards the end of the month of May, in the year 1673, the burg of Mezlean was, since early dawn, in great bustle over the preparations for a wedding. The curious blocked the neighborhood of the shop of Paskou the Long, so nicknamed for his thinness and tall stature. Paskou the Long was a tailor by trade, besides being renowned for miles around as a poet. His songs and plaintive love ditties caused him always to be chosen for the function of "Baz-valan," or messenger of love, to the girls of the place. Thanks to his good-heartedness, his witty sallies and his irresistible humor, Paskou the Long was greatly beloved by the people of Mezlean. The man's personal qualities, coupled with his poetic talents, rendered him a matchless "Baz-valan." When, mounted upon a white horse with braided mane gaily decked in ribbons, Paskou the Long departed to negotiate some marriage, holding in his hands the symbolic twig of broom in bloom, the emblem of love and unity, the lover was almost certain to see the "Baz-valan" return the bearer of happy tidings, unless, on his outward trip, he

encountered a magpie, or saw a crow perched upon a tree—sinister auguries that would cause Paskou the Long to turn back his horse's head. If, on the contrary, a turtle dove, nestled among the leaves, cooed on the passage of the messenger of love, the Baz-valan felt certain of the success of his mission. It was a treat to hear him sing the praises of his client, set into relief the good points of the swain's personal appearance, laud his character, enumerate the cattle in his stables, the bushels of garnered wheat in his granary, readily and gaily meet the objections of the parents of the demanded girl, in short, exhibit his matchless skill at cheering the most morose, or at proving to the most incredulous that his client would be the Phoenix of all husbands.

On that particular day, the curious of the burg of Mezlean thronged around the door of Paskou the Long's house, which was contiguous to an inn, the yard and outlying stables of which were crowded with wagons hitched to the oxen or horses of the peasants who were to join the nuptial procession charged with fetching the bride from her paternal house, about a league away. The bridegroom, Nominoë Lebrenn, and his father, Salaun Lebrenn, were in an upper chamber of Paskou the Long's house. Nominoë seemed to be a prey to some secret anxiety. His pale and haggard face bore the stamp of concentrated grief. Seated near a table with his elbow resting upon it, he reclined his care-worn forehead upon his hand. Standing beside his son, Salaun contemplated him with amazement, and said to him considerately: "Verily, my son, I can hardly believe that I heard you rightly. What! our relatives, our friends, all assembled in the neighboring house, are waiting to join you in the procession to your cousin Tina's house, and to bring her to Mezlean where your wedding is to be celebrated in the temple—and all of a sudden, without any reason therefor, you appear to waver before this marriage that has been decided and agreed upon for so long a time!"

"Father," answered Nominoë with an effort, "I am not irrevocably engaged until the Baz-valan has gone and taken my betrothed from her house—not until after that last ceremony has been performed, is it forbidden to me unless I am ready to be taken for a faithless man, heartless and without honor, to retract my word."

Salaun listened to his son with increased amazement and replied: "Am I awake, or am I dreaming? Is not this union, so much desired by your mother's brother and me, and planned, I may say, since your and Tina's birth—is it not also the constant aspiration of you two? Did you not exchange rings shortly after our voyage to The Hague? Finally, was it not in concert with your uncle, his daughter and yourself, that recently, upon our return from our cruise along the coasts of Saintonge and Guyenne, the day

for your marriage was fixed? And, now, you mean to pretend that, in the absence of an insignificant formality, you would still be free to break an engagement that you voluntarily accepted and remained true to for so many years! I seek in vain for the cause of this change, an inconceivable change, a change that is so unexpected!"

Nominoë answered without raising his eyes to his father: "I was weak; I failed in sincerity; but, I still can draw back before a fatal final step. Brought up with Tina, habituated to see in her the future companion of my life, I believed I loved her. I mistook for that sentiment the fraternal affection that I entertained for her since childhood. But little by little the truth dawned upon my heart, and I discovered that Tina was not and never could be aught to me but a sister. Unfortunately I did not have the courage to destroy the poor girl's illusion. I recoiled before the thought of the grief that the rupture of this alliance between our two families would cause you and my uncle. I admit it—I recoiled before the declaration that, however tardily, I now feel forced to make, at last. Now, when the hour is approached in which I was to unite my fate with Tina's, I interrogate myself with the inexorable severity of a judge, and I declare to you, father, that I fear, were I to marry Tina, I could not render her as happy as she deserves to be. Finally, there is another grave reason for my decision not to contract this union: At any moment now, the insurrection, that has so long been brewing in Brittany, may break out with fury. I hold it would be an act of imprudence on my part to wed Tina on the eve of a civil war, in which I may be killed. Looked at from any side we choose, it is preferable that the wedding do not take place."

The face of Salaun Lebrenn grew sadder and more serious. His son's embarrassment, and the weakness of the reasons that he adduced to justify his sudden change, clearly betrayed the fact that the young man was but beating about for pretexts for a rupture, the real reason for which he sought to conceal.

"My son," replied Salaun in a firm and grave tone, "this is the first time in your life, I think, that you have lowered yourself before me by resorting to a ruse, to equivocation, and even to untruth! You dare not look me in the face, and you stammer out your pretended reasons for a rupture that you feel ashamed of!"

And the father, taking pity upon his son's prostration, softened the severity of his tone by adding: "Nominoë, I shall now address myself to your loyalty of heart. I wish to believe, I do believe that your scruples, so tardily expressed, are sincere. You fear you may not render Tina as happy as the good girl deserves. You fear to plunge her into mortal anxiety for your life,

perhaps into the mourning of widowhood, should the insurrection of Brittany break out to-morrow. To all that my answer is: You would have to be a man of selfish heart before I could believe you capable of rendering unhappy a creature who loves you with all her heart and soul. But you are what you are. Now, then, I swear to God, whatever the nature may be of your affection for your wife, she will have nothing for which to envy the happiest of wives. My conviction on that head is complete, absolute. Do you imagine that, if I believed otherwise, I would fail to be the first to wish, in fact, to order you, however late the hour, to break off the match? No, no, my son, I have more confidence in you than you seem to have in yourself. There, then, remains this one objection—the imminence of an uprising in which we would take part, and, consequently, Tina's anxiety for your safety. As to that, you are right, my son; your apprehensions are well founded; but the sorrows that you foresee for your bride are not pressing, while, on the other hand, I see a certain sentence of death for the poor girl in your refusal to marry her."

"Great God!" exclaimed Nominoë with a shudder, unable to prevent himself from sharing his father's fears.

"Listen to me. At this very hour that I am speaking to you, Tina, surrounded by her girl companions, her head decked with the bridal ribbons, is awaiting you from minute to minute, with her eyes upon the Mezlean road, her heart beating with joy and tender impatience. Instead of the nuptial procession, preceded by the radiant Baz-valan holding in his hand the twig of broom in bloom, she is to see him from a distance on the road, coming to her sad, alone and with the twig broken. The poor girl will understand the symbol, the ruin of her hopes. She will feel herself deserted, considered by you unworthy of being your wife. She will not complain. Not a single reproach will escape her lips. She will even endeavor to appease her father's indignation. She will say to him: 'Nominoë is master of his own heart; he has loved me; he loves me no more; I was his promised wife, but am not to be his wedded wife. What did I do to be deserted? I know not, and am resigned. May he be happy. As children we were put to sleep in the same cradle. He always was the friend of my youth. My only wish is that he may be happy. It is my last wish!' And as she utters these words," Salaun proceeded to say in a shaken voice, "tears will wet the pale and sweet countenance of Tina. In silence the poor girl will untie her bridal ribbons, will put off her wedding robes, and returning to her household work, will resume her distaff—all without expressing one bitter word. She will suffer without complaining. The period of her sufferings will be more or less prolonged, and then," added Salaun, tears beginning to interfere with his speech, "and then, at the end of this month, perhaps before the end of this week, the people of the burg of

Mezlean will say: 'You know little Tina, the daughter of Tankeru the blacksmith? Well, she died!'"

At these last words, pronounced by Salaun with poignant simplicity, Nominoë could no longer hold back his tears. The natural kindness of his heart triumphed over his indecision, and he cried:

"Oh, father! You are right. My desertion of her would cause Tina's death! I shall not be guilty of the murder. You shall live, dear child! You shall live! Hap what hap may, I shall make you happy. Let my destiny be fulfilled!"

"And you also will be happy!" replied Salaun with joy, as he took his son in his arms. "Come, dear boy! My insistence is the presentiment of the bliss that awaits you two. You are worthy the one of the other. You will both be happy, dear children!"

Saying this, Salaun ran to the door that opened upon the staircase of the tailor's shop, opened it and called down from the banister: "To horse, Paskou the Long! To horse, joyful Baz-valan! Call our relatives and friends! Worthy herald of nuptial ceremonies, take your gay sprig of broom in bloom, and to horse!"

"It is done!" said Nominoë to himself while his father was calling to the Baz-valan. "Adieu, insane hopes! Adieu, deceitful, senseless visions, yet so dear to my heart! Adieu, gilded dream, a dream as distant from reality as heaven is from the pit! This morning, when I learned of the arrival of Mademoiselle Plouernel at Mezlean, I intended to break off this match. Poor fool! Return to your senses, to earth! Your marriage will put an end to the visions that led your mind astray!"

"Let us depart, my son! Make haste! Poor Tina must have begun to feel uneasy," observed Salaun to his son. "All our relatives and friends are waiting for us. Quick, to horse!"

A moment later the nuptial procession, headed by the Baz-valan and Nominoë, left the burg of Mezlean and took the road to the house of Tankeru the blacksmith, the father of Tina, the bride.

CHAPTER II

A BRETON WEDDING

Tankeru was both blacksmith and wheelwright. After having long resided at Vannes with his mother and daughter, he moved with them and settled down in an isolated house situated about a league outside of Mezlean in a hollow, at the crossing of two roads one of which skirted the forest of Mezlean. Several reasons had combined to determine Tankeru's choice of the lonesome locality. The first was that the house stood at the foot of two bluffs which rose over a granite soil, rough, rocky and uneven, where the horses and oxen that drew the heavy wagons over the road could not choose but lose some nails of their shoes as they climbed the steep ascent; the blacksmith would be on the spot ready to repair the damage. In the second place, Tankeru counted upon indulging in the hunt in the forest of Mezlean, a sport to which he was passionately addicted. In the teeth of all the punishments decreed against illegal hunting—the prison, the whipping post, the galley, even the gallows—Tankeru gave a loose to his controlling passion in full security of conscience, claiming that the wandering beasts of the forests belonged to the best marksman, and that, moreover, it was a good office to keep down the number of wild beasts. Game belongs to all—to the villein as to the nobleman.

On this day there was great animation in Tankeru's home. His smithy and wheelwright shop were full of relatives, friends and vassals of the neighborhood—a pale and haggard crowd, pinched by privation, all dressed in their best rags, and, for a moment, oblivious of their misery as they came to rejoice over the wedding of Tina and Nominoë. They emptied the pots of cider, ate the bacon from the salt-tub, and the cakes of black bread. The daughters and wives of the invited guests, congregated in the upstairs room of the house, were lending a hand in the last touches of the bride's toilet. Tankeru was a man of about forty years of age, of an open and resolute face, tall of stature, and endowed with an athletic strength that often won for him the prize in the wrestling matches at the rustic festivals. The host was fulfilling at his best the duties of hospitality.

"Friends," said the blacksmith, "let us empty the barrel, the salt-tub and the bread-bin. Whatever is eaten and drunk escapes the clutches of the King's men, the seigneurs and the clergy!" And Tankeru added sardonically: "Fire and flames! The devil take the armed troopers and the tonsured gentry! Comrades, we are honest folks, may Satan take the Pope!"

"If we are honest folks, Tankeru, we are also poor folks!" replied a white-haired peasant. "Very poor folks! The royal taxes, the seigniorial imposts, the tithes of the church are ever on the increase—and still I hear rumors of fresh taxes. Why, they took almost everything away from us. If they take still more, what will be left to us?"

"Why, our skin will be left to us—and who knows but they may want that also to turn it into hose for themselves!" put in Tankeru. "Listen, by force of forging, shoeing, mending wagons and saving from my daily bread for twenty years and more, I laid by a little sum for my daughter's dower. In less than twenty months three-fourths of the sum has passed into the bag of the tax collectors. Fire and flames! We are honest folks! Let us empty the barrel, the salt-tub and the bread-bin! What has been drunk and eaten is not seized! The devil take the tonsured fraternity and the troopers!"

"Tankeru, you are always saying—'We are honest folks,'" again put in the old peasant. "You mean by that, I suppose, that we are a lot of fools to allow ourselves to be plucked to the quick. But what would you have us do, otherwise than repeat with you—'The devil take the troopers and the tonsured fraternity!'"

Tankeru's eyes fell upon a yoke used for oxen. Its nails had fallen out, and it stood against the wall. He took it up, showed it to the vassals, broke it over his knees, and throwing the pieces at his feet said: "The devil take the tonsured fraternity and the troopers! That's what's to be done!"

These short words, together with the energetic expression of the blacksmith's countenance, produced upon the vassals an instantaneous effect. They all rose simultaneously, clenched their fists threateningly, and some of them stamped angrily with their heels upon the fragments of the yoke that Tankeru had broken. Desirous that his guests remain under the sway of the thoughts that the incident had awakened in their minds, Tankeru said to them:

"I am going upstairs to see whether my daughter is ready with her toilet. It will not be long before her bridegroom will be here."

Tina, the betrothed of Nominoë, surrounded with her friends and relatives who joined her grandmother in prinking up the girl, was seated in their midst in the old dame's bedroom. It would be hard to depict to oneself a more charming and dainty girl than "Little Tina," as she was commonly called by her companions. Her blonde hair shone like gold in the sun; her eyes, bluer than the cornflower, reflected the sweetness of her angelic

disposition. Everything breathed gladness around her, and yet her delicate features, full of candor and grace, were expressive of profound sadness. Alas! Her moist eyes, piercing the glass in the leaden frame of the narrow window in the room, wandered far away, vainly expecting for a long time to see the nuptial procession at the head of which her betrothed was to appear. Tina's friends exchanged a few words in a low voice, while the grandmother held in her hands the nuptial ribbons—white, signifying the innocence of the bride; red, her beauty; and black, her sorrow at leaving her family. As the grandmother was about to tie the symbolic bunting on Tina's head, the girl emerged from her revery, took the knot of ribbons in her hand, gazed upon it in silence, and pointing with her finger to the black, said with a heartrending sigh:

"Grandma, this should be the only color of my nuptial ribbons—black, like the wings of a crow."

"Still harping on the memory of that presage of evil!" said the grandmother in a voice of affectionate reproach. "To entertain such sad thoughts on such a beautiful day is to offend God."

"It is to listen to God, grandma! In His goodness He sends us omens in order to prepare us for misfortune," answered Tina pensively. "Early this morning I stood at the window. The sun had hardly risen, but already my eyes wandered in the direction of Mezlean. From that quarter I saw flying towards me, with wings outstretched—a crow. He flew over my head and circled over our house emitting his lugubrious screech. A little turtle dove, nestled among the leaves of the large apple tree that shades our well, was at the time cooing its song of love and tenderness. The moment she heard the cawing of the crow she hid herself from sight among the foliage. The crow detected and pounced down upon her. In her attempt to escape she fluttered about, and happening to stumble near the edge of the well, fell in and was drowned," Tina mused aloud to herself. "God sends us omens to prepare us for misfortune! Black should be the only color of my nuptial ribbons, grandma! Only black! Nominoë does not come. The hour has passed—he will not come."

The belief in omens was so general in Brittany that, however singular or unreasonable in appearance, Tina's persistency in her presentiments impressed her companions. Nevertheless, Janik, the dearest of her friends, sought to reassure the bride and said, forcing a smile upon her own lips:

"That you should take the sweet little turtle dove to personify yourself, I agree to, little Tina; but to see your betrothed, Nominoë, so handsome, so

good and so enamoured a youth—aye, to see him in that ugly and wicked crow—fie, little Tina, fie! How can such a thought occur to you!"

"Janik is right," put in the grandmother. "Your cousin has loved you since your childhood. You have been long betrothed. As late as yesterday he was here. Did he not say, as he was taking leave: 'Till to-morrow, my sweet Tina. Fools are they who are often seen to look for happiness at a distance when they can have it near at hand. Happiness to me consists in joining my fate to yours. Till to-morrow, my sweet Tina!' And after such words, you foolish child, and simply on account of a delay of perhaps an hour in the arrival of the nuptial procession, you begin to have evil dreams and to talk to us of black ribbons, crows and birds of death! Come, cast off such mournful thoughts!"

"In the crow I see bad luck, grandma," persisted Tina, more and more absorbed in her sad presentiments, and her eyes ever resting on the desert road of Mezlean. "I see in the crow the bad luck that threatens, and perhaps is to punish me."

"Punish you!" replied the grandmother no less surprised than the bride's companions. "What harm have you ever done to anybody, dear, innocent creature, as pure and innocent as a dove?"

"I had the vanity and pride of imagining myself beloved of Nominoë. Alas! I know it; I am his own cousin; often did we sleep together, as children, in the same cradle; but I am only a poor, ignorant girl, while Nominoë is clever and cultured like a clerk. He has traveled and seen distant countries. He and my uncle Salaun Lebrenn are the best mariners of Vannes. They own their own vessel. They are rich, compared to my father, who only has his forge and a few gold coins that he deprived himself of for my sake." Tina paused and then proceeded in a tone of bitter self-reproach: "Oh, what I have just said is not right—it is a wrong to Nominoë. He desert me out of avarice! No! no! His heart is too generous for that. Seeing how much I loved him, he took pity upon me. He feared to grieve me if he did not love me. He is so good! Yes, last night, as he thought of his coming here to-day to take me for his wife, he must have realized that he loved me only out of compassion. That is the reason of his absence!"

"Nominoë to put such an affront upon you! upon your father! upon your family!" cried the grandmother interrupting Tina. "My child, you are losing your senses! What nonsense, to imagine such cruel things simply because your bridegroom is a little late in coming! Return to your senses!"

"Why," remarked Janik, "I can easily guess the reason of his delay. It must be the fault of the Baz-valan. That Paskou the Long, the longest and most talkative of all tailors that I have ever seen, must have had the notion of composing a new song in honor of your wedding, and he is trying to commit it to memory. That is the reason of the delay. But they must now be on the way."

Suddenly Tina, who, unmindful of the consoling words with which her grandmother and friends strove to allay her fears, did not remove her fixed and moist eyes from the deserted Mezlean road—suddenly Tina seemed electrified; she rose, uttered a slight cry of joy, and, transfigured and radiant, stretched out both her arms towards an object in the distance. The shock of joy, the sudden revulsion from despair, caused her to turn pale and stagger. She leaned upon her grandmother, embraced her effusively, and muttered in a voice that gladness seemed to choke: "Nominoë is coming! There he is now! There he comes!"

The bride's friends crowded to the window. At a distance they saw the front ranks of the nuptial procession descending the slope of the highway, preceded by the Baz-valan, who bestrode his little white horse and held aloft the sprig of broom in blossom. Tankeru entered at that moment, announcing gaily:

"Attention! There comes the procession! Are you ready, my little daughter? What! Your nuptial ribbons are not yet tied in your hair!"

Only at that moment did the blacksmith notice the pallor of Tina's face, and the traces of recent tears in her eyes. Turning to the grandmother, uneasy and even alarmed, he inquired: "Mother! What has happened? The girl has been weeping. She weeps—and on such a day as this! What is the cause of her grief?"

"Good father!" answered Tina to whose plump and chaste cheeks the roses were rapidly returning, "I was crazy! A sad presage oppressed me this morning, despite myself. The procession was delayed so long in coming—I thought Nominoë had deserted me!"

"Fire and flames!" cried the blacksmith, his face assuming an ominous appearance. "Such an outrage!" But immediately interrupting himself he addressed his daughter in a tone of affectionate reproof: "It is you, dear child, who, surely without intending it, wronged Nominoë and his father, the husband of your mother's sister, in believing them capable of breaking faith."

"Friend Tankeru, they are waiting for you!" said one of the peasants, stepping into the room. "The Baz-valan has alighted. He has knocked twice at the house door. Cousin Madok, in his capacity of 'Brotaer,' is going to answer the summons of Paskou the Long. The one is as pert as the other. The answer will match the demand."

"Quick, quick, little Tina!" said the grandmother. "Let me adjust the ribbons in your hair. The Brotaer will call for you in a minute. Come! Make haste! We must be ready when called!"

"Oh! Grandma," said Tina, bending to her grandmother her virginal forehead, "the Brotaer will not have to call me twice!" And radiant with joy and pink with agitation, she raised to heaven her limpid eyes, that a moment before were veiled in sadness, but now shone sweetly, like a cornflower glistening in the morning dew.

When the nuptial procession was near the house of the bride it stopped. The guests alighted from their rustic wagons and formed a circle. Paskou the Long leaped to the ground, entrusted his mount to one of his apprentices who officiated as a page, and holding in his hand his fresh sprig of broom, and swaying his long body with the conscious importance of a personage upon whom all eyes are centered, the Baz-valan stepped alone to the house door, which was kept closed, and knocked. The door opened; a relative of Tankeru, a miller named Madok, a pert and jolly fellow, appeared at the threshold. He was to fill the office of "Brotaer," or god-father to the bride, and meet and answer the Baz-valan, the bridegroom's messenger. Paskou the Long began his oration, modulating his voice to a slow rythm, that imparted to his sentences the sound of a measured recitative:

"In the name of the Lord God—peace to this house, and blessings upon its roof-tree—and greater bliss than I enjoy on earth."

"What is the matter with you, friend?" mischievously interrupted Madok the Brotaer. "Why should not your heart be glad—the heart of one who causes others to laugh so much—to laugh at your long neck and your long legs, and your long arms! Paskou the Long, my friend, what is the grief that you nurse at your heart?"

"Tut! Tut! Tut! my friend Madok," the Baz-valan replied, "very long are my legs; still, they do not prevent the King's men from catching me, from grabbing me by the neck and saying: 'Pay! pay! pay!—pay over again! pay all the time!' Very long are my arms, but the arms of the bailiff of our seigneur, and of the tithes-collector of the curate are longer still! They are so long that

they can reach down to the very bottom of my pockets, even if they were as bottomless as the wells of Melusine! Quite long is my neck—and yet, Monseigneur the Governor of Brittany could stretch it out still longer—aye, my poor long neck! That is the reason, my friend, why I am not among the most gladsome of earth."

"Oh! how true is the proverb—how squarely the proverb hits the nail upon the head when it says: It takes nine tailors to make one man. The proverb is applicable to you," replied Madok.

"It takes just as many asses to make one miller, friend Brotaer—or, I should rather say, Seigneur Windmill!" returned Paskou the Long. "Go to, and grind your grain!"

"Well answered, Seigneur of the Needle and Thread!" said Madok. "And yet, I repeat it—what a poor, inconsequential one-ninth of a man you are! There you are, whimpering and all in a fright as you speak of monseigneur, of monseigneur our Governor. Aye, your long face frowns and becomes still longer. And yet, just tell me, when you start to speak of a good fat pig, good and fat, a pig with such a belly that he can hardly move his body, so club-cheeked that one can no longer see his little peepers, hidden under three folds of fat—tell me, is it not true that then your long face grows longer still—so much do you rejoice, so brimful of admiration are you when you speak of such a fat and incomparable pig? How comes it, then, my friend, that you do not likewise rejoice when you speak of monseigneur—of monseigneur our Governor? Answer my question."

The wedding guests received with loud outbursts of laughter the allusion of Madok the miller to the enormous obesity of Monseigneur the Duke of Chaulnes, the Governor of Brittany, whom the people nicknamed the Fat Pig, and whom all classes execrated on account of his severity, his haughtiness and his merciless exactions. Paskou the Long waited until the hilarity of the audience subsided, and then proceeded:

"Certes, friend Brotaer, I rejoice greatly at the thought of a big and honest pig—provided his profitable body is intended for the salt-tub. But, Lord, when I think of a huge boar, wicked and unprofitable, who fattens, pastures and wallows upon and in my own meager pittance, in return for which the gormandizer grunts, steps upon my feet, turns me black and blue butting against me, and bites me—is it at all astonishing if then my long face should grow still longer and look sad? But that is not the cause of my grief."

"What may be the cause of your grief? Speak! Let me know it, friend Baz-valan," demanded the Brotaer.

Instead of answering the Brotaer's question, Paskou the Long replied: "I had in my dovecote a beautiful pigeon—its plumage turned to all imaginable colors. I also had a little white dove, the constant love of my handsome pigeon. But, alas! my dove flew away—she flew away from my dovecote. Did you, perhaps, see her around here?"

"No, my friend; I have not seen your dove. I do not care for such small birds. A fine hen suits me better."

"But some neighbors informed me that she alighted in your yard. I entreat you, friend, go in and inquire after my little dove. If I do not find her, I assure you my poor pigeon will die of sadness in my dovecote."

"In order to satisfy you, friend, I shall inquire after your dove."

Saying these words, the Brotaer went back into the bride's house, closed the door after him, and reopened it after a short interval holding in his hand and leading out a little girl of about five years. He presented her to the Baz-valan and said:

"I went into my yard. I did not see your dove there, but I saw a large number of fresh buds of eglantine. Here," pointing to the child, "is one of them. She will gladden the eyes of your pigeon, and he will feel consoled for his loss. I make you a present of the little bud, in the place of your dove."

The Baz-valan embraced the child and answered: "Fresh and charming is the little bud—but my pigeon is too sad—too sad is he over the loss of his dove—too sad to forget her at the sight of a little flower, however pretty it be. Go in again, my friend, and look and see if perhaps my dove did not fly into your garret."

"Be satisfied—but as true as every time that he sets out—the good old mother of the ferocious Marquis of Guerrand—rings, with tears and shudderings—the alarm bell of the castle—to warn the vassals of the Marquis to be on their guard against her merciless son—just so stubborn are you in the search of your dove—as stubborn as the taxcollectors in pursuit of the poor folks."

With these words Madok the Brotaer re-entered the house of the bride, and speedily reappeared, leading by the hand a buxom matron of about thirty years of age, saying: "I climbed into my garret. The tithes, the taxes and the

imposts extorted from us by the King, the castle and the curate, leave nothing for us to glean but wisps after the harvest. Nevertheless, in my garret did I find, escaped by accident from the rapacity of the tax-gatherers, this beautiful ripe ear of tasteful and golden wheat," and he pointed to the matron. "This beautiful ear of wheat will console your pigeon, and he will cease to pine for his dove. I give you my ripe ear of wheat to replace your dove. Take it with you."

"However tasteful, however golden they be, the grains of that beautiful ripe ear will never tempt my pigeon. Alas, with the loss of his little white dove he lost the taste for both eating and drinking. Friend, friend, I entreat you, go down into your cellar. See if, perchance, my white dove did not seek refuge there. Search in all the corners of your cellar, you may find my white dove there."

"Be at your ease, but, by heaven! the men of the royal fisc, when they pounce upon our poor houses, in pursuit of taxes and imposts, even they are not skilful as you inrummaging a dwelling from the cellar to the garret. I shall go look again, and see whether, by accident, your dove has fled into my cellar."

For a third time Madok the Brotaer re-entered the bride's house, whence he soon again emerged holding by the hand a very old and venerable looking woman, and said: "Into my cellar I went; I did not see your dove there. But I did find a good old fruit," pointing to the old grandmother, "that was gathered long, very long ago. Despite its wrinkles, however, it has preserved its taste and flavor. Good fruit gains with time. I offer it to you for your pigeon."

"Certes, my friend, the wrinkles of good fruit do far from hurt its quality. Always nourishing and wholesome, such fruit ever seems more precious, and sweeter, when, winter having come, the summer fruits are gone. But, alas! my pigeon cares not either for your good fruit, or for your beautiful ear of ripe wheat, or for your fresh bud of eglantine. Go, if you please, and sow your pearls before monseigneur our Governor. What my pigeon wants is his own white dove. She is here; I know she is. You only refuse to return her to me. I shall go in and look for her myself. I must have my dear white dove, and I shall have her."

"Friend, I shall save you the trouble. Come with me, Baz-valan, come. Your little dove is not lost. I kept her safe myself, for you. I kept her in an ivory cage, a cage with bars of gold and silver. Yes, your dove is here. She is here,

gentle, beautiful, and decked quite gaily. Your handsome pigeon need not die."

Saying this, the Brotaer opened the house door to the Baz-valan. The latter beckoned to Nominoë to alight from his mount, took him by the hand, and led him into the house of his bride, followed by his relatives and friends. Tina soon appeared, led by the Brotaer and accompanied by her father and grandmother. The first looks of the young girl were for Nominoë; and he, seeing her so charming, above all so radiant with happiness, no longer regretted having overpowered his reluctance to contract the marriage. He thought to himself: "My father was right—my refusal would have been death to her!" Beside Nominoë stood Salaun and his brother Gildas Lebrenn, a vassal of the Count of Plouernel on the farm of Karnak. The more distant relatives and friends ranked themselves along the wall of the blacksmith's shop, leaving an empty space in the middle in which the bride and bridegroom were placed by the Baz-valan and the Brotaer. The faces of these two officials looked no less roguish than jovial, yet serious and solemn. The touching expression on the face of Paskou the Long caused his ridiculous thinness to be for a moment lost sight of. Tankeru and Salaun each delivered a silver ring to the Baz-valan, which he put upon the fingers of Nominoë and Tina. After this ceremony the Brotaer said to them:

"On your knees, my children!"

The couple knelt down upon the bare floor, and the Brotaer proceeded:

"Exchange the rings given to you by the Baz-valan, in token of your indissoluble alliance."

The bride and bridegroom exchanged rings, and the Brotaer added in a grave voice:

"Nominoë Lebrenn, Tina Tankeru, do you swear to be joined on earth, the one to the other as your finger to your ring?"

"Oh, I swear!" answered Tina with an expression of celestial bliss, and she approached to her lips the ring which her bridegroom had temporarily carried on his finger.

"I swear!" responded Nominoë.

At the moment of binding his life to his cousin's, Nominoë was constrained to wrestle for a last time with his irresolution. Before pronouncing the irrevocable oath he was silent for an instant. The interval was imperceptible

to all except Salaun Lebrenn. The father of the bridegroom realized that, at that solemn moment, his son underwent a supreme struggle with himself. His heart was gripped with pain.

"Tina Tankeru, Nominoë Lebrenn," resumed the Brotaer, "be you two for evermore united, as the ring is to the finger. We live in evil days, oppressed and harassed as we are by the men of the King, the seigneurs and the clergy. Lean upon each other in your journey through these sad times. May your children see better days. And now, let us proceed to the temple. The Lord will bless those whom man has united. Let us all proceed."

The ceremony being over, Paskou the Long took Nominoë's horse by the bridle and led the animal to the door of the house. A lighter saddle, provided behind the principal one, enabled the husband to take his wife on the crupper of his mount. The two were considered married with the exchange of rings. Nominoë leaped upon his horse. The Brotaer, in the exercise of his office, raised Tina, light and supple as a child, in his arms, and placed her behind her husband. The nuptial procession again put itself in motion, now back to Mezlean, whither it was preceded by a band of Armorican bag-pipers, playing lustily. Behind them came Paskou the Long, cantering on his little white horse, and Madok the miller astride of his ass. They were followed by Nominoë with little Tina behind him—happy—Oh, as happy as one may think, at having her arms around the waist of her well-beloved husband. Salaun Lebrenn and Tankeru rode behind the married couple upon hired horses, while Gildas Lebrenn, his wife, and all the other relatives and friends were seated in wagons drawn by heavy Breton oxen. A large crowd of men, women and children on foot brought up the rear.

CHAPTER III

THE RED-COATS

The nuptial procession wended its way slowly. All thought to themselves, and freely expressed the view to their friends, that a better matched couple could not be. She was sweet and charming, and he of a virile bearing which was enhanced by his Breton costume—round hat with wide brim; long black waistcoat and upper vest; wide, white, floating hose that descended to the knees and were held around the waist by a broad belt of scarlet serge; and grey cloth stockings, displaying Nominoë's well-shaped calves, which were glued to the sides of his strong grey horse. Tina, whose fresh and rosy countenance was framed in her coif surmounted with her nuptial ribbons, wore a corsage of green cloth embroidered with white thread and cut square over her linen gorgerette which betrayed the coy pulsations of her virginal bosom, seeing that, in order to keep her balance, one of her arms encircled Nominoë. The sweet child had been silent since her departure from the paternal roof. Now she spoke, and, blushing, said timidly to Nominoë:

"Nominoë—I have a confession to make to you—"

"A confession of what, dear Tina?" answered the young man affectionately, turning his head to his wife in order to see her over his shoulder.

But Tina, foreseeing the move, put in: "I beg you, do not look at me! If you do I would not dare to say a word!"

"It shall be as you desire, sweet girl;" and smiling, he added: "What can be that redoubtable secret that you fear to confess to my face? Speak, my dear Tina; reveal your secret to me."

"A sad secret—that I am ashamed of, very much ashamed. I pray to God you may pardon me for it. I have been very guilty."

Tina's voice was so moved as she spoke these words, that Nominoë was surprised, and involuntarily moved in his saddle in order to turn around to his wife. But once more she stopped him, saying:

"I entreat you, do not look at me," and she proceeded after a short pause: "I am your wife—you must not be ignorant of any of my thoughts, be they good or bad. No! nothing must remain hidden from my husband."

"A bad thought in your mind, you angelic creature! That is impossible. You surely exaggerate some trifle, my dear Tina."

"And yet it is so, Nominoë. I doubted you—I doubted your love."

"And why? And when was that?"

"This morning, seeing you delayed in arriving, I said to myself: 'Nominoë does not want me for his wife'—'Nominoë does not love me'—"

And noticing that an involuntary shudder ran over the young man's frame, Tina interjected, almost alarmed:

"Do you feel hurt at my mistrust? I knew you would! I deserve your reproof. That is the very reason that I accuse myself. I prefer to be blamed by you, rather than to conceal aught from my husband. May the sincerity of my confession earn your pardon for me."

The young man remained silent, surprised and struck by the correctness of Tina's presentiment. To himself he thought: "What a fatality hovers over this marriage! My union is consecrated before man, it will shortly be before God. Let me at least reassure the poor child."

Nominoë was about to answer his young wife when an unexpected incident suddenly changed the course of his thoughts. His attention being at first turned to Tina's words, and being immediately afterwards absorbed in his own meditations, Nominoë had not noticed the approach of a detachment of soldiers that seemed to be hastening to meet the nuptial procession. Suddenly the captain of the troop waved to the peasants to stop.

"Fire and flames! Let us face these red-coats!" said Tankeru to Salaun.

"We are unarmed, and we have women and children with us," answered Salaun. "No imprudence—let us wait till the hour shall have come. I shall ride forward and ascertain what these soldiers want."

"Father," said Nominoë overhearing Salaun's words, "I shall accompany you. You must not go alone."

"You forget that you have your wife on your crupper. Both of you remain near Tankeru," answered Salaun, and making his horse jump forward, he rode towards the soldiers.

Paskou the Long and Madok the miller, the one in his capacity of Baz-valan, the other of Brotaer, both official representatives of the wedding, joined Salaun Lebrenn. The three trotted briskly towards the armed force in order to ascertain the reason for the hold-up.

The King's soldiers, fifteen in number and commanded by a sergeant, belonged to the Crown Regiment, and wore the red uniform. The sergeant in command of the detachment had an assumed military name. He called himself La Montagne. He was an athletic man, tall of stature and in the prime of life. His uniform consisted of a scarlet coat embroidered with alternate blue and silver threads. His hose, his stockings and the lining of his cloak were blue and of the color of his shoulder knot. His sword hung from a white baldric that matched the cockade in his three-cornered hat, which was surmounted by red and blue feathers, gallooned in silver, and challengingly tipped on his hair which, agreeable to the new military regulation, was dressed in the fashion called cadenette. His hair was curled on his temples, and was twisted behind his neck in a thick queue, tied with a leather thong. The face of the weather-beaten soldier—clean shaven, except for his moustache, and furrowed by a deep scar—bore the stamp of hardihood, daring and insolence. In his hand he carried a long cane with an ivory head. His soldiers, clad in a uniform like his own, except that a simple galloon of white wool ornamented their coats and hats, were armed with a new pattern of guns that replaced the old muskets. A triangular and pointed blade of steel, resembling the long poniards used by the people of Bayonne, and therefore called abayonet, was attached to the muzzle of these guns.

A drummer and a man clad in a blouse, who carried on his back a ball of rope and in his hand a bell which he rang when the drum beat, preceded the troop. The sergeant marched at its head; behind him came two men clad in black. One was the bailiff of the Seigneur of Plouernel and Mezlean, the other the usher of the fisc. Salaun Lebrenn, the Baz-valan and the Brotaer, the last mounted on his ass, and his two companions on their horses, reined in a few paces from the detachment. Obedient to the suggestion of Salaun, and anxious to avoid a collision, all three alighted, and approached the sergeant, holding their mounts by the bridle. The soldiers had halted upon the command of their chief, and, drawn up in a semi-circle, they leaned upon the barrels of their guns.

"Messieurs," said Salaun courteously, "we are peaceful people; we are celebrating a wedding; I am the father of the bride; our company consists of our relatives and friends."

"And I," put in Paskou the Long with an air of importance, "I am the Baz-valan of the wedding, the master of ceremonies."

"And I," added Madok the miller without lowering his eyes before the piercing looks of the sergeant, "I am the Brotaer. You ordered our procession

to stop—it obeyed—what do you want? Speak. We shall be pleased to accommodate you."

"By God's death! Here is a pack of inquisitive rustics!" observed Sergeant La Montagne to the bailiff and the usher, after measuring Salaun, Paskou the Long and Madok the miller with his eyes.

And addressing his two acolytes over his shoulder, La Montagne added, pointing with the tip of his cane at those whom he was referring to: "Are not these the ragamuffins whom you are looking for?"

"No," answered the bailiff and the usher. "The delinquents, whom we are after, are among the other people of the wedding."

"Soldiers, load your guns—and fire upon the woolen caps if they but budge!" ordered the sergeant. "Drummer, beat the march, and forward! Soldiers, fire upon these peasants at the slightest resistance!"

"And you, ring the bell—and forward!" said the usher to his subaltern. "The bell is to the civilian what the drum is to the military. Forward, and ring loud, so that those ragamuffins may hear you, and be notified of our approach."

Grieved and alarmed at seeing their pacific intervention so rudely brushed aside, the three Bretons exchanged a few words in a low voice, and when the troop was about to resume its march, Salaun Lebrenn addressed the sergeant, the bailiff and the usher in carefully measured words: "Messieurs, I do not know the purpose of your coming here. But be your purpose whatever it may, I entreat you to postpone until after the marriage ceremony the measures that you intend to take. Do not alarm and throw our relatives, friends, wives and children into a fright. Are you in quest of any one? I give you my word of honor that no one will attempt to escape. I invite you to escort us back to the burg of Mezlean—"

Salaun Lebrenn broke off. He noticed that he and his two companions had fallen into a sort of ambush. While simulating great attention to what was being said to him, the sergeant had whispered a few words to his corporal, and the latter, obeying the orders given him, had disposed his soldiers in such manner that the three Bretons found themselves surrounded from all sides, and unable to rejoin their friends. Addressing himself thereupon to Salaun Lebrenn, who, no less surprised than his two friends at finding himself obviously treated as a prisoner, looked at his companions in amazement, the sergeant said sneeringly:

"Your promise notwithstanding, that none of those woolen bonnets will be allowed to run off, I prefer something more substantial than a promise, rather than to have to chase all over this devilish country that is so cut up with moats and hedges. I shall hold you as hostages, you and your two companions. You are the chiefs of the band. You will be a guarantee for the rest. If any one of them escapes, you will go to prison, and stay there until each of you will have paid me two gold louis—besides six pistoles for my men. That's the end of it. I want no answer or further remarks from you. Forward!"

"So, then, you arrest us?" observed Salaun calmly. "Besides, you place us under ransom. But what do you charge us with? What crime are we guilty of, sergeant?"

"You double rustic! I charge you with speaking when I order you to hold your tongue! Head and bowels! Forward, or I shall knock you down!" cried the petty officer brutally, raising his cane; and stroking his moustache he proceeded:

"Oh, there is the wedding! The bride may, perhaps, be worth rumpling! Bah! She probably is but one of their big flat-footed wenches! And yet, who knows! We shall see! Drummers, beat the march!"

When Paskou the Long heard the sergeant's allusions to the bride, he raised his two long arms to heaven; Madok the miller, a resolute man, clenched his fists, and casting a defiant look at the soldier, was about to explode, when he was restrained by a sign from Salaun. Madok yielded to his friend, realizing that it would be an act of madness to attempt, under the circumstances, a struggle against the armed men. Surrounded by these, the three Bretons resigned themselves to move forward, leading their mounts by the bridle. The detachment resumed its march, drums beating and bell ringing, towards the nuptial procession. The sergeant walked ahead.

Such was the terror with which the soldiers of Louis XIV inspired the poor folks of our country districts, that at the first sight of the red-coats the children threw themselvesweeping into their mothers' arms; the young girls drew timidly close to their parents; and a good number of the vassals began to tremble, while the blacksmith and other determined men of his stamp could hardly control their anger. At this place the road was narrowed between two bluffs topped with brush. The detachment divided in two. One-half halted at the head of the procession in order to bar its passage, should it attempt to proceed; the other half marched on to the rear in order to cut off the retreat.

Kept as hostages in the midst of the rear guard platoon, Salaun Lebrenn, Paskou the Long and Madok the miller were unable to approach their friends. Nominoë, with his wife on the crupper of his horse, saw with as much surprise as anxiety his father a prisoner of the soldiers.

"Let none of you budge or breathe, ye rustics! If you do, by God's death! my men will open fire, and will rip you open with their bayonets!" cried Sergeant La Montagne, stepping with his cane raised towards the peasants, who crowded back upon one another in order to make room for him.

Turning thereupon to the bailiff and the usher:

"Do your work! I shall in the meantime step over to the bride and inspect her," added the swash-buckler, looking to the right and to the left.

It did not take the sergeant long to discover the charming face of the bride, who, moreover, was recognizable by the nuptial ribbons, and was all the more in evidence being on horseback behind Nominoë.

"God's blood! The handsome girl! The lassie is too dainty a morsel for that clod-hopping husband!" exclaimed the sergeant, and he took several steps to draw nearer to Tina.

A heavy roll of the drum, accompanied by the repeated ringing of the bell, drowned the last words of the impudent soldier. After that signal for silence, the bailiff of the very high, very powerful, very honorable and very redoubtable Seigneur Justin-Dominic-Raoul Neroweg, Count of Issoire in Auvergne; Baron of Nointel, Valdeuil and other places in Beauvoisis; Seigneur of Plouernel and Mezlean in Brittany, etc., etc., announced:

"That the said Gildas Lebrenn, vassal and lease-holder of the fief of Mezlean, having, with evil intent and for other reasons, put off, beyond the only and last term, the payment of the taxes, imposts and duties, which it had pleased the very high and very powerful and very redoubted seigneur, etc., etc., to assess upon his vassals of Mezlean, therefore, the furniture, crops, cattle, domestic and field animals, household utensils, etc., etc., of the said Gildas Lebrenn are hereby ordered to be seized and sold by virtue of military constraint. And if the said goods and chattels of the said Gildas shall not suffice to meet his obligations, then action shall be instituted against a house, to him belonging as the property of his wife, and the said house, in default of a purchaser in block, shall be demolished, and its doors, windows, beams, rafters and other debris shall be sold to the highest bidder at the option of the said bailiff, who, having presented himself at the said farm,

called Karnak, in order to execute the orders herein contained and to effect the seizure, found the house closed and the stable empty, the latter of which should have contained especially two yokes of white and orange oxen, the which, being exposed by the malignity of the said Gildas to being kept out of the farm in the evening and to being surreptitiously sold during the day, the said usher now came to seize them bodily, hic et nunc, without prejudice to the other seizures which he reserves the right of operating on the said farm, including the materials that may proceed from the demolition of the house above referred to.[5]

"The bailiff, being also vested with the powers of the very respectable, discreet, pious and venerable curate of the parish, shall collect by force of the same seizures, an arrear of tithes due to the said venerable person by the said Gildas Lebrenn and other vassals herein below named, etc., etc.

"The said bailiff also comes to proceed against one Tankeru, a blacksmith, charged with and convicted of having poached in the confines of the forest of Mezlean, in order, wickedly and of deliberate purpose, to interfere with the pleasures of the very high, very redoubted and very powerful seigneur, etc., etc., by killing his game, notably a ten-pronged deer, in the course of the night of the 5th day of the present month, as appears from the deposition of one of the forester-watchers of the said seigneur, etc., etc. By reason of the said crime, the said Tankeru, a blacksmith, is ordered to be apprehended in body, and taken to the seigniorial jail, in order there to undergo the preliminary punishment of the whip, without prejudice to further imprisonment and fines to be paid, etc., etc."

The complaints of the bailiff having been made known amid the mournful silence of the nuptial party, the drum was once more beaten, the bell was once more rung, and then the usher of the fisc spoke in turn:

"A requisition against the same Gildas Lebrenn and five other leasehold peasants, hereinbelow named, etc., etc., who, with evil intent, or for other wrongful cause, having paid neither the taxes, nor the tithes, nor the capitation, etc., etc., furtively left their houses before the said usher could present himself there this morning, taking with them their spans of oxen, their wagons and their horses, the same being the most important part of the havings of the said peasants; and, fearing lest they may profit by the market day of Bezenek, which is to begin early to-morrow morning, and surreptitiously make away with their said oxen, wagons and horses, the said usher now comes to operate illico the seizure of the said animals and wagons, without prejudice of other recuperations, etc., etc."

The peasants listened to the reading of the preceding jargon with increasing consternation and rage, but without astonishment, similar seizures being matters of daily recurrence in Brittany and in all the other provinces of France. But what, on that day, drove the indignation of the peasants to the point of rage was the insolence of Sergeant La Montagne. While the bailiff and the usher reeled off their legal jargon, the insolent swash-buckler approached Tina, and, with his plumage dangling over his ear, stretching out his legs, arching himself in his gallooned coat, and stroking his moustache with one hand, while with the other he caressed the hilt of his sword, he pursued the young bride with his brazen looks. Tina turned her head away, and took shelter behind the back of Nominoë, who, outraged by the soldier's audacity, was livid with anger. Nevertheless, he restrained himself; in order to preserve his self-control all the more fully, he sought to move a little further to the rear; but the moment he made his horse take a few steps backward, the sergeant seized the bridle rudely and kept the animal motionless. The peasants who saw the sergeant's conduct, began to grumble. But he, casting a disdainful look at them and brandishing his cane, shouted:

"Head and bowels! Meseems these rustics are raising objections! By God's death, I'll know how to bring you to your senses!"

"Think of your wives—your daughters—your children! Patience! patience!" cried Salaun Lebrenn in a loud voice from among the platoon of soldiers who held him, Paskou the Long and the miller at a distance. "All keep cool, and have patience, my friends!"

The wise warning of Salaun Lebrenn was hearkened to. The grumbling ceased. La Montagne, attributing the resignation of the peasants to the fear that he inspired, redoubled in audacity. Brutally placing one hand upon Tina's knees, who sat upon the crupper of Nominoë's horse, he said to her:

"God's blood! Look at me, my pretty lassie! Fear not, my pretty maid—my moustache causes only men to tremble," he added, fastening a look of contempt upon Nominoë.

Thereupon, carrying outrage to its climax, the sergeant raised himself on tip-toe, passed his arm around Tina's waist, and drawing her to him, said: "Give me a sweet kiss! God's death! it is the meed of the brave!"

Nominoë was without arms; but with a movement that was swifter than thought, he drew his foot from the stirrup, and with a kick of his heel, vigorously planted in the sergeant's chest, he hurled him reeling upon

Tankeru, who was rushing to the defense of his daughter. The blacksmith gripped the swash-buckler by the neck and threw him flat upon the ground.

"Help, soldiers!" bellowed the sergeant as Tankeru threw him down. "To the rescue!"

Those of the soldiers who happened to be near their chief sought to rush to his aid, but finding themselves quickly surrounded and closely hemmed in by the more resolute of the peasants, they were unable to ply their bayonets.

The blacksmith cried:

"Let us disarm the red-coats!"

The cry, being repeated by the other peasants, reached the ears of the platoon of soldiers that blocked the head of the procession. These rushed back to the aid of their comrades, driving aside the women and children with the butts of their guns. The mass of people, thus pushed back and crowded closely in the middle of the road, emitted shrieks of fright. All was confusion.

At the thickest of the turmoil a lackey on horseback rode up from the direction the procession was headed in, preceding by about twenty paces two other personages, also on horseback. The lackey reined in his mount, cracked his whip and cried:

"Room! Room for Mademoiselle Plouernel! Room for the sister of Monseigneur Neroweg of Plouernel! Make room! Make room, there!"

CHAPTER IV

DESERTED!

It was, in fact, Mademoiselle Plouernel, who, coming from the manor of Mezlean, was approaching the spot of the tumult. She wore an elegant riding habit—a long skirt and closely fitting jacket of a pearl-grey material, trimmed with knots of ribbon of the same azure-blue color as her shoulder knot and the feathers in her broad-brimmed black felt hat. She rode with ease a palfrey white as snow, and richly caparisoned with a saddle-cloth of blue velvet trimmed in silver. An old equerry with grey hair and dressed, like the lackey, in the Plouernel livery—green, orange and silver—accompanied Bertha. Her beautiful, yet pale and delicate face, revealed the ravages of a protracted illness from which she was only recently recovered. The thinness of her cheeks imparted the appearance of abnormal size to her black and feverishly brilliant eyes. The melancholy of her physiognomy, coupled with a slight suggestion of despondency in her bearing, gave an irresistible charm to her person. Surprised at the cries and the clamor which she heard proceeding from the concourse ahead of her, from which she was still some hundred paces distant, she sent her equerry forward to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. He obeyed, and, arriving near a group of weeping women, was acquainted by them with the events that preceded. The equerry returned to his mistress and informed her that the bailiff of the Count of Plouernel had come to seize the teams and wagons of several peasants who were on their way to the temple in order to celebrate a wedding; that the bride's father was to be arrested for poaching; and that a quarrel had broken out between the peasants and the soldiers of the Crown Regiment who came to support the demands made by the Count's bailiff and the usher of the fisc. Seized with pity, Mademoiselle Plouernel whipped up her palfrey, and rode at a gallop towards the very center of the crowd, despite the humbly expressed apprehensions of her equerry.

Succumbing to the influence of the terror which they felt for the soldiers, most of the peasants had responded but hesitantly to Tankeru's call of "Let us disarm the red-coats!" The consequence of their irresolution was that the three or four soldiers, who were at first disarmed, were able to recover their weapons, to charge upon the Bretons, several of whom they wounded with their bayonets, and immediately to disengage their sergeant. Seeing the turn affairs were taking, Tankeru yielded to the entreaties of his daughter and friends, clambered up the bluff that bordered the road, glided through the hedges, and took flight across-field. He was out of danger.

The bailiff and the usher, on their part, had, since the start of the melee, endeavored to escape. They were in full flight when they encountered Mademoiselle Plouernel as she arrived at a gallop on her palfrey, which she immediately reined in upon recognizing them by their black habit and short cloak.

"Bailiff!" cried Bertha, warmly, "I order you, in the name of the Count of Plouernel, my brother, to renounce the seizure which you have effected. I order you to set at liberty the poacher whom you arrested!"

Aware of the recent arrival of Mademoiselle Plouernel at the manor of Mezlean, and seeing her accompanied by an equerry in the Count's livery, the bailiff did not question the young lady's identity. Respectfully bowing before her he answered:

"Mademoiselle's orders shall be executed."

"And you are the usher?" added Mademoiselle Plouernel, addressing the man of the fisc. "You also are to make a seizure against a poor family of peasants?"

"Yes, mademoiselle—"

"You shall relinquish your pursuit. How much is due you?"

"Item, three francs; item, sixty-seven francs; item, seven francs, eight sous and six deniers; item, two hundred—I can state each item with costs and accessories."

"Enough! Du Buisson, pay this man," said Bertha to her equerry, passing to him a purse which she took from her pocket.

And turning again to the usher:

"Having received the money, you shall discontinue your pursuit of these people."

"Certainly, mademoiselle, and I shall immediately notify the sergeant who is charged to exercise the military constraint that I no longer need his services, and that he can return to his quarters with his soldiers."

Judging Mademoiselle Plouernel's generous nature by these first evidences, and anxious to ingratiate himself with his master's sister by seeming also to take an interest in the peasants, the bailiff put in:

"I feel bound to inform mademoiselle, in all justice, the vassals of monseigneur are not wholly to blame in the matter of the scuffle with the soldiers of the Crown Regiment. The reason of the trouble was a joviality of the sergeant's, who wished forcibly to embrace the bride. His joviality was altogether foreign to his office."

"Oh! These men of war—they always take themselves to be in a conquered country," observed Mademoiselle Plouernel bitterly.

And addressing the bailiff:

"Go and fetch me the sergeant—I wish to speak to him;—instantly!"

The bailiff departed to execute the order. A group of women and children, witnesses of the scene, and as touched as they were surprised by the generosity of Mademoiselle Plouernel—alas! the seigneurs and their families usually showed themselves harsh and contemptful towards the poor—showered blessings upon the young lady; they surrounded her horse; and, in the effusiveness of their gratitude, asked her the favor of allowing them to kiss her hands. Moved to tears by the attitude of the good people, Bertha answered them by pointing to the little girl who had performed the role of the "eglantine bud" at the nuptial ceremonies, and saying:

"Bring yonder little girl to me."

And leaning forward on her saddle and stretching out her arms to receive the child, she added:

"In embracing this child, I am embracing you all, my dear women."

The radiant mother raised her little girl up in her hands. Bertha took her, placed her on her pommel, and tenderly kissed the child's rosy cheeks. Charmed by these caresses, the child threw her arms around the neck of Mademoiselle Plouernel, who responded to the affectionate familiarity by embracing the child again, and again.

Bertha then turned to her equerry:

"Is there any money left in my purse?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, there are seven louis left."

Bertha took the purse, and putting it in the hands of the little girl, said: "Take this, dear child; the gift will alleviate the misery of your parents. Give them this purse."

Giving the child a parting kiss, Mademoiselle Plouernel returned her to her mother, who, breaking into tears, knelt down upon the ground, and clasping her hands, cried:

"Oh, our demoiselle! Blessings upon you! We shall ever love you!"

"Yes, yes; blessings upon you, our demoiselle! We shall ever love you! Blessings upon you!" repeated and re-echoed a large number of women, their voices tremulous with admiration at the scene they had just witnessed.

Little by little, and from mouth to mouth, the report of Mademoiselle Plouernel's magnanimity, and the charitable orders that she issued to the bailiff, spread among the peasants. Many of these, having joined their wives and children, stood in a circle around the young lady as the bailiff returned, followed by Sergeant La Montagne, who was pale with rage. The man's insolent brutality did not seem to be ready to bend before the rank of Mademoiselle Plouernel. No sooner had he arrived in her presence than he ejaculated:

"By God's death, mademoiselle, I am neither a bailiff nor an usher! I am a sergeant in the Crown Regiment. I receive orders from my colonel only. Several of the rustics have dared to lay hands upon me, and to disarm me! They are now in the hands of my soldiers, who will take them to Vannes. If you love pretty sights, mademoiselle, I shall afford you the pleasure of seeing the brigands hang by the neck. It is the will of Sergeant La Montagne that those rustics be hanged!"

Among the "brigands" whom the sergeant destined for the gallows, and whom his soldiers held prisoner a little distance from where Mademoiselle Plouernel was looking down from her horse upon La Montagne, but too far away to be seen by her, were Nominoë, Salaun and Madok the miller. Shocked at the swash-buckler's words, the young lady sat up erect in her saddle, haughty, angry, threatening, and her eyes sparkling with so much indignation that, despite his brazenness, the sergeant lowered his gaze.

"Listen well to me," said Mademoiselle Plouernel incisively. "Your colonel, the Marquis of Chateauvieux, is now stopping at the Castle of Plouernel, with my brother. Your colonel is a man of honor. He will not tolerate the insulting of women by his soldiers, as you had the impudence to do a short time ago."

"Mademoiselle," stammered the sergeant upon learning that his colonel was the guest of Mademoiselle Plouernel's brother, "I was only joking with the peasant girl."

"You lie!" replied Mademoiselle Plouernel with severity. "You profited by the fear that your soldiers inspire in these good people to outrage the bride of this wedding. Remember this well—I shall send this very day one of my men to the Castle of Plouernel with a letter to your colonel; I shall inform him of your unworthy conduct, and shall request him to punish the same as it deserves to be. He will not deny me that satisfaction."

"Oh! Mademoiselle will surely not seek to bring misfortune upon the head of an old soldier!" pleaded the sergeant, frightened at the threat. "These rustics tried to disarm me!"

"They were in the right to avenge the outrage! Set them free—repair your fault. Only upon that condition shall I consent not to demand your punishment at the hands of the Marquis of Chateauvieux."

La Montagne bit his moustache with repressed rage. It wounded his pride and his covetousness to free the prisoners who had disarmed him, and from whom he reckoned upon a ransom, before having them hanged. Moreover, he knew from a thousand precedents that he had nothing to fear from his colonel, who was utterly indifferent, as so many other seigneurs, heads of regiments, to the acts of violence committed by their soldiers upon bourgeois and peasants. But the sergeant also knew that the Marquis of Chateauvieux was a great gallant. It was impossible that he should refuse to punish an inferior officer if requested to do so by so beautiful a woman and one of such high rank as Mademoiselle Plouernel. These reflections caused the sergeant to raise his hat, and, bowing respectfully before Bertha, he said:

"I shall obey the orders of mademoiselle. I shall liberate the peasants."

The sergeant again bowed respectfully before Mademoiselle Plouernel, and said to himself in an undertone:

"Breton brigands! You are about to triumph over my humiliation—but patience! I shall yet be revenged! Each one shall have his turn."

La Montagne returned to the detachment which held Salaun, his son and Madok the miller prisoners, along with several others. When the scuffle with the soldiers began, Nominoë jumped off his horse, and leaving Tina in charge of his uncle, had disarmed one of the soldiers. Afterwards, seeing the struggle ended, he took his father's advice, and allowed himself to be

pinioned. A short while after, the name of Mademoiselle Plouernel and the benedictions showered upon her by the peasants reached his ears. Nominoë grew pale; he rose on the tips of his toes and saw Bertha at a distance on horseback. His eyes filled with tears—soon his head drooped, and growing ever paler he stood as one petrified. From this spell he was awakened by the voice of a soldier, who said to him:

"I am going to untie you—you are free—go to the devil!"

"God be praised! You are given back to us!" murmured Tina, hardly able to restrain her joy and stepping toward her husband. "Oh! I feel reborn! A minute ago I thought I would die!"

"My son, mount your horse, take your wife on the crupper, and let us depart! We have escaped a double danger," said Salaun, who was just set free, and who led by the bridle both his own mount and Nominoë's. But Nominoë, instead of obeying his father, fixed upon Tina a look of utter distress, and cried in heartrending accents:

"Adieu! Adieu to you all! Never will you see me again!"

With these words Nominoë leaped upon his horse with a bound, turned its head in the opposite direction, and, belaboring its flanks with his spurs, dashed up the bank at a gallop. He cleared the hedge, reached the skirt of the forest of Mezlean with mad rapidity, and disappeared within the wood.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERY AT PLOUERNEL

The Castle of Plouernel is located not far from Nantes on one side nor from Rennes on the other, and is one of the most magnificent residential palaces of France. It dates back to the Renaissance period, and presents a finished specimen of that style of architecture, the fancy of which is infinite and charming. Here, cupolas, elegant as Oriental minarets, contrast vividly with the pointed angle of high roofs; yonder, wide-arched galleries, resembling aerial bridges thrown over space, join one set of buildings to another; here, balustraded terraces seem embroidered in the living stone. It is a mass of richness and diversity, a dazzling efflorescence of architectural ornamentation from the exterior of the chimneys, each of which is a masterpiece of execution, down to the chimerical gutter-spouts and the stone setting of the doors and windows, sculptured in human figures, flowers, birds and the heads of monstrous animals, real and fabulous. And yet, Oh! prodigy of art, the inexhaustible variety of details, the fantastic irregularity of the different parts of the edifice merge into a whole that is instinct with loftiness and grace. Finally, about half a league away from that dazzling fairy palace—the façade of which runs over with sculptured designs gilded by the slanting rays of the sun, and brilliantly harmonizes with the azure of the sky above and the verdure of the woods round about—the eye catches on the crest of an arid and rocky ridge that rises almost perpendicularly, the ruins of the ancient feudal manor of Plouernel, semi-hidden under a vast wrappage of ivy. The indestructible dungeon only has defied the tooth of time. Its square bulk, blackened by the ages, rises to a height of over a hundred and twenty feet, still crowned by its old crenelated battlements and machicolations, and flanked at either angle with a turret from which the men on watch kept an eye upon the road and the river, the former of which wound its way to the right, the other to the left of the foot of the rock, at the summit of which, perched like a vulture's nest, rose the seigniorial lair.

An avenue of centennarian elms, planted in four files, led up to the façade of the Castle of Plouernel, which rose from a wide and semi-circular "court of honor," surrounded by a colonnade surmounted by terraces. The elegant architectural hemicycle masked the stables, the kennels, the falcon cages and other out-buildings of the castle, and was, in turn, surmounted by an impost on which, woven into implements of war and of the chase artistically sculptured, was seen the coat-of-arms of Plouernel—three eagle's talons sable on a field gules—and, rising from among gracefully executed ornamentations, the lettering "Guy de Plouernel," the builder of the palace in

the year 1559, according to the lapidary date graven above the armorial bearings.

On this day, the bustle among a large number of valets, grooms, cooks and huntsmen who scurried over the court of honor on their way to one or other of the out-buildings, announced that the seigneur of the place was in the castle. Several soldiers dressed in the red uniform, and two sentinels on guard at the foot of the winding staircase, further indicated that the Marquis of Chateauvieux, the colonel of the Crown Regiment, was the guest of the Count of Plouernel, the latter having offered to his friend the colonel to quarter two companies of his soldiers in the numerous dependencies of the castle. Finally, at a distance, stablemen were seen putting some horses through their paces upon the fine grass of a lawn, beyond which, and as far as the eye reached, extended the tree-covered park, dominated to the east by the rocky ridge, at the top of which the imposing ruins and black dungeon of the ancient manor of Plouernel contrasted strikingly against the blue of the sky.

The interior of this modern castle corresponded with its sumptuous exterior. Numerous servitors in livery crowded the marble-slabbed vestibule, to the left of which ran a gallery containing the portraits of the Seigneurs Neroweg of Plouernel. The oldest of these paintings, belonging to the Eighth Century, bearing unmistakable mark of Byzantine stiffness of execution, represented a Neroweg lady, Meroflede, the Abbess of Meriadek in Plouernel, of the days of Charles Martel. But seeing that the origin of this family harked back to the conquest of Gaul by the Franks, the father of the present Count, yielding to his pride of race, had supplied the lack of authentic portraits antedating the Eighth Century, by consulting his genealogy, and causing the lineaments of those of his ancestors, who lived during the first five centuries of the Frankish monarchy, to be retraced. Though not accurate portraits of their subjects, these paintings at least reproduced the several costumes of those past epochs. The first Neroweg, a leude of Clovis and count of the country of Auvergne by right of his sword, was represented in all the barbarism of the savage accoutrement of that Frankish warrior—hair of a coppery hue tied at the top of his head with a leather thong, and falling down loose over his back like the tail of a horse; long, red moustaches; clean shaven chin; and savage mien. The bust was half covered by a sort of dalmatica made of an animal's hide, and the warrior leaned his hand upon his "framee," or battle weapon. Among this long succession of portraits was one empty frame wrapped in black crepe. The absent picture was that of Colonel Plouernel, an honorable man, and one of the most valiant captains in the Protestant armies of the Sixteenth Century. But the colonel's great-grandson had struck him out of the family line, meaning thereby to brand in

his person the Huguenot, a rebel to his King and to the Church of Rome. The portrait gallery led to a salon, on the other side of which was the apartment of Madam Tremblay, the aunt of the Count of Plouernel.

The Marchioness was still the woman of the court which she was at the time of her journey to The Hague. She was conversing confidentially with Abbot Boujaron, who seemed to be deeply preoccupied. The two had not yet wholly gotten over the experiences of what they called their "accursed journey to Holland," where they came near being torn to pieces, but where they had, they said, "at least the satisfaction of knowing at first hand of the massacre of the two republican heretics, those De Witt brothers."

It was a narrow escape, but the worthy pair succeeded in eluding the popular fury that exploded against the French party by leaving The Hague, again reaching the port of Delft—thanks to Serdan, who, nevertheless they held to be a fellow of felonious instincts—and there embarking on a neutral vessel bound for Havre, where they landed without further incident. From Havre the two went to Versailles, Mademoiselle Plouernel's flat refusal to accompany them to England having put an end to their project of a voyage to that country. Besides, the young lady's health was so much impaired that they would have been compelled to give up that journey even had she not opposed it. They took her along to Versailles.

Upon their arrival there the Marchioness summoned Monsieur Fagon, Louis XIV's leading physician. That illustrious doctor declared that the young woman's illness was a mystery to him. Despite all his assiduous care, despite all the resources of his art, Bertha of Plouernel remained between life and death, her strength being undermined by a slow fever that rendered her almost unconscious, and that reduced her to the point of being but the shadow of her former self. In fact, she was taken to be at death's door, when an unexpected but favorable crisis set in, as unexplainable as the disease itself, according to Monsieur Fagon, and restored her to health. Her convalescence lasted more than six months. In the spring of the year Monsieur Fagon advised Bertha's aunt to send her to Brittany, assuring her that the girl's native climate would complete the cure. Accordingly Bertha was sent ahead to Plouernel under the escort of one of her brother's equerries, two of her aunt's women, and an old nurse, Marion, who had cared for her from childhood. When the Marchioness and her Abbot arrived there themselves, they found Bertha greatly restored. Her cheeks had resumed their rosy hue.

It was about this very illness and recovery that the pair were anxiously conversing. "We now feel reassured on the score of your niece's physical

condition," said Abbot Boujaron; "but—and this is the important point—what is your opinion concerning her moral condition? To me it seems there is much to be wished for."

"The turn of her mind and nature has always been more than bizarre, as a consequence of the detestable bringing up that she received from her mother. But, since her illness, my niece's oddities have grown daily more marked so that, were it not for the reasons you know of, my nephew and myself would long ago have decided, with the consent of the King our master, to lock up in a convent the wayward minx who insists that our priests are imposters, that people do not die, and that we are re-born in flesh and bone to live onward in the stars!"

"All of which, my dear Marchioness, is heresy, pure and simple; and worse yet—paganism of the first water. Besides that, there can be nothing more disorderly than Bertha's conduct. She receives with open arms the first tramp who presents himself at the castle's gate, under the pretext of giving alms; at the burg she is called the good demoiselle, a sort of indirect insult to her brother. It often happens that she mounts her horse in the morning, and does not return until evening, accompanied, it is true, by an old lackey and old Du Buisson, one of the Count's equerries. Other times she leaves alone on foot upon interminable promenades. To make a long story short, a few days ago, Bertha took the notion of going to the manor of Mezlean, that has long been uninhabited, and of remaining there forty-eight hours at a stretch. Since she returned from that excursion day before yesterday, she has not left her room nor her bed, claiming indisposition, and refusing to admit you, as well as her brother. All this, Marchioness, is more than odd; it verges on mental derangement. For that reason, your own and the Count's tolerance seem to me regrettable and unpardonable. An end must be put to this situation."

"You know very well why we must seem tolerant. We are hoping to secure Bertha's consent to marry the Marquis of Chateauvieux, then her brother Raoul will be able to wed Mademoiselle Chateauvieux, in turn. My nephew attaches extreme importance to these matrimonial projects—the old Duke of Chateauvieux, the Marquis's father, enjoys an immense influence with the King. Due to the inheritance left to her by the Viscountess of Morincourt, Mademoiselle Chateauvieux is one of the richest matches in France. Now, then, however considerable Raoul's property may be, he is prodigal and luxurious to a degree. The bailiffs of his domains of Auvergne, of Beauvoisis and of Brittany make his vassals sweat, as they humorously express it, all that it is humanly possible to sweat them of. Two hundred and fifty-three thousand livres, good year or bad—more than a third in excess of what the

same estates yielded at the time of his father—and yet my nephew is often reduced to such straits that he must resort to the money-lenders. From all this it follows that, if the King, as the Duke of Chateauvieux has formally promised us, confers upon my nephew the embassy to Spain immediately after his marriage, nothing less than the inheritance of the Viscountess of Morincourt will be needed to enable the Count worthily to represent his royal master at the court of Madrid."

"No doubt, there is nothing more desirable or more opportune than that marriage, my dear Marchioness. But, you know what is the express condition for its fulfilment. It is a condition that only raises fresh perplexities."

"Yes, the Duke of Chateauvieux—a duke only by brevet, and, be it said among us, of poor material, considering his origin, seeing that his great-grandfather was only a domestic servant—the Duke of Chateauvieux, despite his influence with his Majesty, and his brevet title of duke, feels that he limps on the leg of birth. In order to dip his descendants in the antique luster of our house, he stipulates as an express condition of Raoul's marriage with Mademoiselle Chateauvieux, Bertha's consent to marry the Marquis. That, as you know, is the reason why Raoul and I, to put it plainly, are dependent upon my niece, and why we wink at her follies."

"Well, Marchioness, do you know what, in my opinion, appears clear from all this?"

"I listen, Abbot; open your mind to me!"

"It will happen with the marriage of Bertha to the Marquis of Chateauvieux as happened with the contemplated mission to England."

"How can you say that! My niece receives admirably the advances of the Marquis. She has given Monsieur Chateauvieux good cause to hope. She has said to him that she recognized the advantages of that double marriage, only she desired time to reflect more fully before deciding upon so important a step."

"Oh! Marchioness, your niece is but doubling and twisting to the sole end of gaining time! She will not give her consent to the marriage."

"Gaining time! Gaining time! And to what end? Can she expect a better match than the Marquis? Is he not, barring his obscure origin, an accomplished nobleman, and wealthy, besides? Is he not at home at court? Is he not, thanks to the favor that his father enjoys with the King, a colonel

at the young age of twenty-five, and able to aspire even to a Marshal's baton? Think of it, Abbot—a Marshal's baton!"

"Your niece snaps her fingers at Marshals' batons, and the wealth of the Marquis, to boot! Don't you yet know her? And, by the way of wealth, a certain occurrence comes to my mind. Did not Bertha, planting herself upon the custom of Brittany which insures to the daughters a part of the paternal and maternal inheritance, demand not only to know the amount of her share, but also to be put in possession, immediately, of her mother's jewels, which are valued at more than forty thousand ecus? Did she not, furthermore, cause the Count's intendant to deliver to her a thousand louis in advance, and does she not keep the money locked up in her casket together with the precious stones? These several proceedings have set my mind a-thinking."

"Mere whims, to which we felt constrained to yield out of fear lest the brainless body decline the marriage!"

"Well, Marchioness, what you consider the whims of a brainless body—in other words, this determination of having a considerable sum of money in her possession—is, in my opinion, on the part of your niece, an action that denotes thorough reflection, and the consequences of which may, perhaps, prove most disastrous, if, as I much fear, a thought that flashed through my mind last night has actually put me on the right track. That thought obsesses and pursues me."

"What thought is that? Come, Abbot, be more explicit. Do not speak in riddles."

"It is my opinion that Bertha is in love—crazily smitten!"

"Bertha in love! Crazily smitten! Come, your mind is wandering!"

"Oh, Marchioness! In that, I hold, lies the mystery. You may ask who the object is of her love—"

The conversation between Madam Tremblay and the Abbot was interrupted by the blustering arrival of the Count of Plouernel.

Raoul Neroweg, Count of Plouernel, then about thirty years of age, in no manner resembled his sister. In consequence of one of the most mysterious of the laws of nature, the Germanic type of the Frankish race reappeared in him as, repeatedly across the ages, it had reappeared in all its pristine purity in several of his ancestors. This son of the Nerowegs had hair and

beard of a fiery red, white skin, sea-green eyes, and an aquiline nose, hooked like an eagle's beak. His rude and haughty nature was tempered by the gracefulness of the accomplished courtier. He was a sample of so many seigneurs of our times—greedy and prodigal, vainglorious and luxurious, without shame or heart, consumed by ambition and more still by the desire of drawing upon himself publicly the eyes of his master, and capable, in order to attain that purpose, of committing the vilest crimes. Accordingly, the Count had seen nothing but a natural expedient, and profitable to his own career, in the project of prostituting his sister to the King of England. This notwithstanding, the Count of Plouernel carried high his head with the pride of his name. Yet such is the moral aberration of the folks of the court that, in their eyes, the adulterous love of Kings, so far from soiling their sisters, their wives, or their daughters, honors, exalts, crowns, consecrates them. From that instant prostitution becomes august, infamy a sacred thing! The royal leman becomes a Madonna!

Monsieur Plouernel was horrified at Bertha's ill will, and at her carrying her indifference to the fortune of her brother and to the service of her King to the point of refusing to give herself up to his Majesty Charles II of England. The young girl, already a conundrum by reason of the manner in which she looked upon the things of her times, was, after that latest performance, nothing but an insane woman in her brother's eyes, and fit to be locked up for the good of his house—a step that he would at one time undoubtedly have taken, were it not for the involuntary compassion he experienced at the sight of Bertha almost dying of a languishing malady. Later, when the Duke of Chateauvieux made overtures of a double alliance between the two families to Raoul, he did not hesitate an instant to pledge his sister to the young Marquis. Accident willed it that the Marquis was a young and handsome nobleman, although a debauchee, a drunkard and a gambler, neither worse nor better than so many others of his caste; but had he been old, ugly, a cripple, rotten of body and soul, the Count's action would not have been otherwise, nor would he have recoiled before any measures to compel his sister to submit to the marriage.

When the Count of Plouernel entered Madam Tremblay's salon he was laboring under a violent irritation, caused by the information transmitted to him by his Mezlean bailiff in a letter that he had just received, advising him of Bertha's intervention in behalf of the vassals of his seigniory. He was pressed to meet the enormous financial obligations required by his ostentatious living at Versailles—his equipages, his jewelry, his banquets, his splendid balls, without taking into account his reckless gambling. Seeing the courtier's fortune consisted almost exclusively in his seigniorial domains, there was no way of increasing his revenues except by

overwhelming his vassals with exorbitant imposts. The Count of Plouernel, as almost all the other members of his caste, neither felt, nor was able to feel, any pity for his vassals, whom he had the right to tax at pleasure. Were they not a conquered and disinherited race? an inferior species, standing midway between man and the brute? bent, broken and deformed by a ceaseless round of sorrows and toil? condemned by fate to labor and produce wealth for the benefit of their seigneur? The Count of Plouernel approved himself consistent with his race, his traditions and his times by exhibiting inexorable severity towards this species, which he sincerely and naïvely looked upon as an inferior race, and at all points unlike his own. Accordingly, in an angry voice, with flashing eyes, and holding out to the Marchioness the letter which he had just received, and that he crumpled with rage, he said:

"Do you know, madam, what my sister was up to during her short sojourn at Mezlean? My Mezlean bailiff informs me that he was about to execute a seizure upon several teams belonging to certain recalcitrant vassals who were evading payment of the taxes that it pleased me to impose upon them, when my sister, happening to ride by along the road, took it upon herself to forbid my bailiff to carry out his orders, or even to arrest a scamp of a poacher who deserves to hang!"

"That is unheard of! That is downright impudence!" cried the Marchioness.

"Wait, madam, that is not yet all—my bailiff and an usher of the fisc, who also had a process against those clowns, being aware of their malignant disposition, secured the escort of a squad of soldiers from the regiment of the Marquis, who has set up his headquarters at Vannes, since the Duke of Chaulnes apprehends some trouble in the province. Well, madam! Would you believe such an excess of audacity possible? The clowns dared to rebel against the escort of the bailiff, and tried to disarm them!"

"Why nephew! that is a very alarming piece of news. It is grave!"

"The sergeant of the escort, a resolute man, soon had the upper hand of the canaille. He seized three of the ringleaders in the mutiny, and had them pinioned tightly by his soldiers. And what do you imagine my sister did? No, you will not believe such audacity possible!"

"I suppose she begged mercy for them. Oh! I doubt not that she interceded in their behalf also—"

"Worse than that, Abbot! She demanded their immediate liberation, and threatened the sergeant with the anger of the Marquis of Chateauvieux!"

"Steps have to be taken in the matter of this poor insane girl."

"I am all the readier for that, madam, seeing that, according to what my bailiff writes, my sister's intervention in these matters has produced detestable effects. My vassals, finding themselves encouraged in resisting the payment of the taxes, are now loudly clamoring that the imposts are exorbitant, and will not pay them! Finally, the most lawless of them, feeling encouraged by immunity, are no longer afraid to declare that the hay-fork of a Breton does not fear the bayonet of a soldier of the King; that if the latter are well armed, the peasants are more numerous; and that the fury of their despair will render them a match for the soldiers when the hour of revolt shall have sounded! It is a call to insurrection! To a popular revolt!"

"An insurrection! A revolt!" cried the Marchioness, alarmed. "How dare the wretches talk of insurrection and revolt!"

"We are relapsing into the Jacquerie!" put in the Abbot, raising his hands heavenward. "Jacques under Louis XIV! Under the Grand Monarch! In the Seventeenth Century! It must be the end of the world! Woe is us!"

"Prompt and terrible punishment will, I still hope, my dear Abbot, bring these clowns back to their duty," answered the Count. "But my sister has encouraged the scoundrels. Her insane generosity has chosen for its object the very worst elements of all my vassals. The poacher and the recalcitrant vassal belong to a certain Lebrenn family, that numbers among its members two mariners of the port of Vannes—a brace of active and intriguing adventurers, who are strongly suspected of aiming at sedition, and of even having secret understandings with the republicans of Holland! They are both men of thought and action—most dangerous fellows!"

"Marchioness," observed the Abbot, casting a meaning look at Madam Tremblay, "what did I tell you about that family, which our venerable Society of Jesus over a century and a half ago entered in its secret register as one of the most dangerous? My information evidently was most correct and accurate. An eye will have to be kept upon those people."

"What do you refer to?" asked the Count of Plouernel. "What information can you have had concerning these people?"

"We shall go over that more at our leisure, my dear Raoul. The details of the matter would now lead us too far away. Only be certain that you can not

have a more pernicious family among your vassals than this identical Lebrenn family. We shall talk over the matter later. Suffice it now to say that they are the sort of people that must be suppressed. I may be able to render you some assistance in that direction; but I consider that the most urgent thing just now is to place your sister where it would be absolutely impossible for her to pursue the course of her eccentricities and follies."

"Oh! Abbot, do you not know there is an obstacle, a serious one in the way?"

"I know full well that your projects of a double marriage compel you to humor the brainless creature—but, one thing or the other: Bertha is either willing, or she is not willing, to lead the plan to a successful issue. Now, then, it is my opinion that she is not willing. Her determination is made."

"You are in error, Abbot," said the Count of Plouernel. "Bertha does not object to the marriage."

"But she demands time—to reflect! Not so, my dear Raoul? Well, then, all her delays have but one object in view: Bertha seeks to gain time in order to deliver herself without restraint to her follies, perhaps to—it is this that, above all, frightens me for the honor of your house—the bare thought frightens and terrifies me—"

"What is the cause of your fear? Come, explain yourself!"

"My dear Raoul, our poor Abbot thinks Bertha is in love."

"Good God!" broke in the Count, stupefied. "Do you think so, madam? Bertha in love! Impossible!"

"Everything leads to the belief that her love is an unworthy love, since Bertha surrounds it with profound mystery," the Abbot proceeded to explain. "Neither the Marchioness, nor yourself, nor I—I admit it—have until now been able to suspect, or even remotely guess who the object can be of this evidently monstrous passion. That such a passion does exist I make no doubt. All signs point in that direction."

"Thinking the matter over, and recalling certain circumstances that now rise vividly to my mind, I share the Abbot's opinion," added the Marchioness. "Bertha must have availed herself of the freedom that we allowed her to abandon herself to some disgraceful choice. One of these days she will flee with her lover, and the honor of our house will be tarnished forever! A scandal, dishonor, shame to our family!"

"The devil take it!" cried the Count of Plouernel. "If my sister should ever carry her disregard of all duty to the point of refusing a marriage that secures such great advantages to me, I swear to God! if the cause of her refusal be some disgraceful love, I shall immediately go and throw myself at the feet of the King, and request him to have the wretch locked up in the Prison of the Repentant Women where she will be treated with the utmost rigor."

"Mademoiselle Plouernel consigned to the Prison of the Repentant Women! Oh, my dear boy, you can not mean that!" said Abbot Boujaron with devout unction. "No; no; that is out of the question! But what is sensible and proper is that your sister take the veil, and that the share of the inheritance due her according to the custom of Brittany, be assigned to the community that may receive the great sinner, to aid it in exercising its charitable works. Besides, believe me, my dear boy," added the Abbot, smiling, "it is not necessary that our sinner be confined in the Prison of the Repentant Women in order to be treated with the uttermost rigor, and be severely chastised in the flesh and in her pride—for the salvation of her soul."

The Count of Plouernel lent but an inattentive ear to the prelate's words, and resumed in a towering rage:

"My sister in love with some vulgar fellow! My marriage, upon which I raised so many hopes, thwarted by the ill-will of the wretched creature! Malediction! Let her tremble before my anger!"

"My dear boy," said the Abbot to the exasperated Count, "there is a way of putting an end to these perplexities. Demand to-day, instantly, from Bertha a categoric answer—yes, or no—on her marriage with the Marquis."

"Zounds! Abbot—I know beforehand she will say neither yes nor no."

"That may be. But after you shall have urged her a last time, entreated, implored her in the name of your most cherished interests to decide this very day, would not her persistence in further delays prove to you that she is determined not to marry the Marquis, and that it is certain she is sacrificing him to some unworthy love?"

"In that event—malediction! a curse upon her! A dungeon cell will overcome her resistance."

"My dear boy, we must not curse anybody," remarked the Abbot piously; "but it is necessary that, without flinching, you perform the duties that devolve upon you, the head of your illustrious house. It is urgent that to-

morrow, yes, not later than to-morrow, you prevent your sister by prompt and rigorous measures from dishonoring your name and herself. You have plenty of cells and dungeons."

"I swear to God!" cried the Count of Plouernel, "if Bertha refuses to decide to accept the marriage—I shall be pitiless. Yes, and to-morrow we shall take the steps that may be necessary to safeguard our honor."

The Count was interrupted in the flow of his threats by the entrance of a lackey who said to Madam Tremblay:

"Monsieur the Marquis of Chateauvieux has presented himself at the door, and requests to be admitted before madam. May I introduce him, madam?"

"Beg Monsieur the Marquis to enter," answered the Marchioness of Tremblay. "The dear colonel! How happy we are that he comes to pay us a visit!"

And immediately after the lackey withdrew she added hurriedly:

"Raoul, not a word to the Marquis about what we have been saying, before we have heard from Bertha."

As the Marchioness addressed these words to the Count of Plouernel, who answered her with an affirmative nod, the Marquis of Chateauvieux appeared at the door of the salon, and saluted the company with the graceful ease of a courtier. Nevertheless, the colonel seemed troubled in mind; he held a letter in his hand.

"Madam," he said, addressing the Marchioness, "I have news for you that grieves me doubly."

"What about, my dear Marquis?"

"This despatch that I have just received by a courier from Monsieur the Duke of Chaulnes, Governor of Brittany, orders me to join him immediately with the two battalions of my regiment which I am to collect on the way thither. A sedition, believed to have been fomented by the parliament, has broken out in Rennes. The King's authority is assailed; the citizens are up in arms; the whole populace is in rebellion. The Duke of Chaulnes does not feel safe."

"Great God!" cried Madam Tremblay, no less alarmed than the Abbot. "What you are telling us, Marquis, is a most grave event."

"All the graver," interjected the Count of Plouernel thoughtfully, "seeing this sedition seems to coincide with the recent rebellion of my own vassals of Mezlean. Would you believe it, Marquis, that canaille had the audacity of resisting your soldiers; the woolen caps tried to disarm your men!"

"I have been informed of that occurrence by a letter from one of my subaltern officers, who was compelled on that occasion to release his prisoners upon orders from Mademoiselle Plouernel. As a consequence, I have had to recall that detachment, it being impolitic to leave my soldiers in a region where they had to submit to an outrage left unpunished. They will arrive here this evening. The honor of the regiment is compromised until the guilty parties are punished."

"Believe me, my dear Marquis, I feel grieved at my sister's rash interference on the occasion."

"Without stopping to consider the consequences of her act, Mademoiselle Plouernel yielded to a generous impulse for which I would not dare to blame her. But since I did myself the honor of pronouncing her name," added the Marquis of Chateauvieux, "allow me, my dear Count, and you Madam the Marchioness, to address a request to you. I must leave the Castle of Plouernel within two hours; however insignificant may be the revolt of the ill-intentioned people of Rennes, whom I expect to chastise severely, civil war has its risks. The bullet from an old musket fired by a bourgeois not infrequently hits its mark as unerringly as that of our own soldiers. I do not know what fate awaits me in the conflict that is about to take place. Before taking leave of you, my dear Count, I entertain the liveliest desire not to be left in doubt concerning the favorable or unfavorable success of a double marriage that is the highest aspiration of myself and my father."

"Dear Marquis," answered the Count of Plouernel with emphasis, "my aunt, the Abbot and myself were just considering the urgency of obtaining this very day a final answer from my sister, which I doubt not will be in accord with the desires of our two families. The untoward events that hasten your departure render the necessity for her answer all the more urgent. If she is what she should be, and what I doubt not she is, our chaplain will betroth you to-day to my sister in the chapel of the castle. It will be your induction into the family. I had so decided."

"And after you shall have chastised the insolent bourgeois of Rennes, a thing that will be easy to do and will be done promptly, thanks to you and your soldiers, my dear Marquis," put in Madam Tremblay, feeling more at ease, "you will return to us. Monsieur the Duke your father and Mademoiselle

Chateauvieux as agreed before our departure from Versailles, will come to Plouernel, where the festivities of the double marriage will be held with so much splendor and magnificence that they will be the admiration of all Brittany."

"Above all, Monsieur the Marquis, induce the Duke of Chaulnes to hang high and dry as many bourgeois as he can," added Abbot Boujaron, who seemed less sure than the Marchioness of the speedy quelling of the sedition. "The minds of the scamps must be struck with terror. The repression must be merciless."

"The customary severity of the Duke of Chaulnes should be an ample guarantee to you, Monsieur Abbot, that he will not flinch before the populace," was the Marquis of Chateauvieux's answer. "He will be inexorable."

And, proceeding to address the Marchioness and the Count:

"I can not express to you how touched I feel at your words! I can now hope for the best—unless the health of Mademoiselle Plouernel should prevent our betrothal. She has not left her room for two days, a circumstance that has desolated me; it prevented me from presenting to her my homage upon her return from Mezlean. I hope you can give me a favorable report of her health."

"Reassure yourself, my dear Marquis; my niece's indisposition was caused only by the fatigue of the journey. It will in no wise prevent her from proceeding to the chapel to solemnize her betrothal, if, as I do not doubt, any more than my nephew, she consents to hasten the conclusion of the marriage. I shall immediately visit Bertha. I shall tell her that her brother and myself wish to converse with her; and I doubt not, dear Marquis, that the issue will fully meet your wishes and ours."

Saying this the Marchioness of Tremblay proceeded immediately to Bertha's apartment. Mademoiselle Plouernel occupied the chamber that her mother formerly inhabited,contiguous to the library of the castle. As the Marchioness crossed this vast room she met Dame Marion, Bertha's nurse, who was devotedly attached to her. Madam Tremblay ordered her to notify her mistress that she wished to speak to her shortly.

"She is probably still in bed," added the Marchioness. "She must rise without delay and dress herself to receive her brother, myself and Monsieur the Abbot. We have to speak to her upon matters of the highest importance."

"Oh! Mademoiselle has risen and dressed herself more than two hours ago, madam."

"That being the case, go and request Monsieur the Count and Monsieur the Abbot to come and join me in my niece's chamber."

"Madam the Marchioness will not find mademoiselle in her chamber."

"Where is she?"

"Mademoiselle went out for a walk in the park, as she often does."

"What! Gone out! And yesterday and this morning she pretended to feel so ill that she could not receive me?"

"The weather is so beautiful that mademoiselle believed a walk would do her good. She went down and walked towards the park."

"You lie! My niece did not go out!"

"Madam the Marchioness can ascertain the truth for herself by walking into the room."

"This sudden going out looks highly suspicious. Toward what part of the park did my niece go?"

"I could not say as to that, madam; mademoiselle took her gloves, her mask[6] and her taffeta hood to protect herself from the heat of the sun—and she left. That is all I know."

"There is some mystery in this—you are hiding something from me."

"I am telling madam all I know."

"You are an accomplice in all the follies of Mademoiselle Plouernel, and it may happen that you will have reason to feel sorry for it!"

"I obey the orders of mademoiselle the same as I obeyed the orders of Madam the Countess, her mother. That is my duty."

"It is impossible that my niece, who only this morning claimed to be ill, can have gone out without some particular reason. You know the reason. Answer! What caused my niece to leave her chamber?"

"I have already told madam. The weather is so beautiful that mademoiselle believed a walk would help her."

"Enough!" ordered Madam Tremblay angrily, and casting a threatening look upon old Marion. "I shall remember your obstinacy. I shall find out the truth."

The Marchioness hastened to rejoin the Count of Plouernel and the Abbot, who were no less surprised, alarmed and angry than herself at Mademoiselle Plouernel's unexpected outing. The Marquis of Chateauvieux could prolong his stay at the castle only a couple of hours, so that, if Bertha did not return before his departure the marriage would have to undergo a further postponement. Accordingly, not satisfied with sending several of his men in quest of his sister in all directions through the park, the Count himself took horse together with the Marquis of Chateauvieux in the hope of meeting Mademoiselle Plouernel; while, anxious not to be themselves idle in the search, Abbot Boujaron and the Marchioness of Tremblay went out in a carriage.

CHAPTER VI

BERTHA AND NOMINOE

As has already been told, the ruins of the ancient feudal manor of Plouernel rose on the crest of an abruptly rising ridge that once was wholly stripped of vegetation, but that was since planted with trees, seeing it was one of the views from the new castle, the park of which it bounded from the north. The antique dungeon, like all fortified seigniorial castles of the middle ages, had a secret and subterranean issue which opened at a considerable distance from the manor itself. Thanks to this issue, the seigneur, who was always involved in feuds with his neighbors, could flee and elude his enemies if he found his lair on the point of being forced. The subterranean passage of the dungeon of Plouernel which was cut through the living stone by the labor of serfs, communicated, at its near end, with the floors that were constructed below the level of the ground, where were located the prison cells, the torture rooms, and the oubliettes of the manor, and, at the further end, with a precipitous slope at the foot of the mountain, at the top of which rose the dungeon itself. This outer issue opened just outside of but close to the park. One of the numerous gates of the park, the one nearest to the modern castle, opened on the outside upon an avenue, cut through the forest that belonged to the domain of the Count of Plouernel. To the right of the avenue, which ran into the highroad to Rennes, extended a thick wood of old trees, and about two hundred paces from the edge of the same, where the wood grew thickest, was the location of the outer issue of the underground passage from the dungeon. This issue, obstructed in the course of many centuries by underbrush and the slow rise of the soil, bore marks of having recently been cleared, although a curtain of ivy and wild trailing vines, that fell over a natural platform formed by a rocky projection upon which the tangled vegetation had taken root, was left to mask the entrance. Thanks to his family archives, Salaun Lebrenn was aware of this entrance to the dungeon, and he and his son having put themselves in touch with some of the Count's vassals—resolute men and leaders in the projected uprising—he had acquainted them with the secret passage that communicated with the open country, and which offered a safe place for the deposit of arms and munitions of war. The mouth of the passage, partially masked by the vines, lay about twenty paces from a clump of old trees that surrounded a little clearing carpeted with grass. In the middle of the clearing rose an enormous oak, so old, so very old, that, crowned with age, as foresters say, its sap had dried out, and not a leaf greened its immense spread of branches. A living spring furnished a natural reservoir at the extremity of the clearing. A narrow path, worn across the copse of the wood by the hoofs of the does and

stags who came during the night to drink at the spring, ran out into the road.

At the hour when Mademoiselle Plouernel's family was searching for her in the park, Nominoë Lebrenn, standing with his back against the dead oak tree in the middle of the clearing, was a prey to profound anxiety. Pale, worn, with his head drooping, his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his arms crossed on his breast, he was saying to himself:

"No, she will not come! Oh! now that this desperate attempt has been made, I recognize how insensate it was! To write to Dame Marion, to beg her to place in the hands of Mademoiselle Plouernel the letter that accompanied my note, to entrust the package to the gateman at the castle with the words: 'For Dame Marion,' and then run back to wait for her at this place! To believe that she would come! It is a crazy man's dream! No, she will not come."

After a short pause Nominoë resumed:

"Who knows but she may have lost her way! But the directions in my letter were accurate—'Take, to the right of the avenue, that runs from the park, the first path that leads to a clearing where rises a big dead oak near a running spring of water.' Oh, I know this wood! For the last two days I have prowled around it like a bandit! I also know that underground passage," added Nominoë, turning his head in the direction of the issue masked by the ivy and wild vines. "In that underground place have bleached the bones of one of my ancestors—a serf of a sire of Plouernel." With a start Nominoë continued: "Strange fatality! Woe is me! It is for a daughter of this race—a race that mine has so often cursed across the ages—it is for a daughter of the Nerowegs that I am consumed with delirious love—and soon, perhaps—but no! Go to! Set your hopes at rest, poor fool! She will not come. No, however generous her heart may be, she cannot forget that she is of noble origin, and that my family are vassals to her brother! No! she will not come—and if she did—would I dare to meet her gaze! Have I not virtually imposed this rendezvous upon her gratitude! Did I not write to her: 'He who at The Hague saved your life and your honor—waits for you—you will come if you have preserved the remembrance of the service he rendered you.' If she does come, will it not be with a haughty front and a severe mien?"

Suddenly, as he turned his ear toward the wood, a tremor ran through Nominoë's frame. He quickly straightened up. His heart, that before heaved heavily, now stopped beating. His strength failed him. He attempted to take a step, but fell upon his knees on the grass and clasped his hands as in

prayer. Mademoiselle Plouernel entered the clearing, holding her silken mask in her hand.

What was his surprise and joy! The features of Mademoiselle Plouernel, so far from expressing the sentiment of wounded pride, revealed profound tenderness. She advanced with steady step towards Nominoë, who remained on his knees; pulled off her glove, and extended to him her charming hand that illness, alas! had thinned. Presently, her beautiful face suffused with a slight blush, she said without attempting to restrain the tears that enhanced the brilliancy of her large black eyes:

"Thanks to you, Monsieur Lebrenn. You afford me at last the opportunity of telling you that never have I forgotten that on the coast of Holland you saved my life—and in The Hague you saved my honor! Yes, thanks to you," repeated the young girl in an accent of ineffable tenderness, while sweet tears slowly rolled down her cheeks. "I owe to you the only happy moment that I have tasted for a long time."

Mademoiselle Plouernel's emotion, her words, her tone, the cordiality of her gesture as she extended her hand to Nominoë, threw him into such confusion that, remaining on his knees and contemplating the young girl with a sort of adoration, he tremblingly received the hand which she offered him, wet it with his tears, and pressed his burning front upon it. Sobs smothered his words.

Bertha gently withdrew her hand from Nominoë's, saying in a moved voice:

"Monsieur Lebrenn, rise—"

And noticing a few steps from where they were a rock covered with moss, a sort of natural bench, the young girl added:

"I am barely convalescent—my weakness is still great. I feel tired; allow me to repose on that rock."

Nominoë rose, and obeyed a sign of Mademoiselle Plouernel, who, after seating herself, invited him to a place beside her. The girl remained silent for a moment and then proceeded:

"Situations that seem difficult, and even false, become, I think, easy and right, thanks to straightforwardness of conduct. I shall be frank. You also will be sincere, Monsieur Lebrenn. You will answer all my questions."

"I feel grateful to you, mademoiselle, that you judge me so favorably," answered Nominoë. "You will find me straightforward and sincere in all things."

"First of all, in order to render intelligible what may otherwise seem inexplicable to you, Monsieur Lebrenn, I must inform you that even before I owed my life—and then my honor—to you, I already felt a deep interest, if not in you personally, at least in all the members of your family."

And in response to a gesture of surprise on the part of Nominoë, Bertha added:

"I am acquainted with a part of your family legend."

"You, mademoiselle! You are acquainted with our plebeian legends!"

"Yes; thanks to a manuscript left to us by Colonel Plouernel, one of my ancestors."

"Does that manuscript date back to the last century?" inquired Nominoë, struck by a sudden recollection. "Colonel Plouernel, a Huguenot, intended those pages for his son. Yes, indeed, our family narrative mentions the fact."

"My mother discovered the manuscript in the library of the castle. My mother suffered a great deal, Monsieur Lebrenn; she was a woman of great understanding and of a large heart. Therefore, so far from embittering her disposition, her sufferings rendered her still more generous. Herself acquainted with sorrow, she sympathized all the more with the sorrows of others. A victim of iniquity, she felt tender compassion for the victims of all iniquity, and a vigorous hatred for all oppression. Although she was of patrician origin, and although the wife of the Count of Plouernel, my mother, ripened by misfortune and by reflection, being instructed by the revelations contained in your family narratives, embraced the convictions of the Huguenot colonel who was the friend of your ancestor Odelin Lebrenn, the armorer of La Rochelle. Oh, I have not forgotten a single incident of that interesting narrative."

"What, mademoiselle! You remember that obscure name?"

"That obscure name was the name of an honorable man and one of the brave soldiers of Admiral Coligny, wrote Colonel Plouernel in the pages that he destined for his son. You seem surprised at the accuracy of my memory, Monsieur Lebrenn," added Bertha with a melancholy smile; "and yet my recollections are not circumscribed to that incident alone. At this moment

there is present to my memory the name of another of your ancestors—Den-Brao the mason, who, assisted by other serfs, cut the underground gallery, one of the issues of which you can see yonder." With these words the young girl pointed to the orifice of the vault cut in the rock, and added, with a shiver, "It is a mournful history, that history of your ancestor Den-Brao! He was starved to death in the passage his own hands had built."

Nominoë and Bertha looked at each other in silence. Bertha proceeded:

"Do you know why I now recall those narratives? It is that you may understand what a deep impression was bound to be produced upon my mother—and then upon myself—by the account contained in the manuscript of Colonel Plouernel. Yes, judge what we must have felt, especially when we learned that one of the descendants of that Gallic race was in our own days among the vassals of the seigniory of Plouernel, on the domain of Mezlean. 'Oh! my child,' my mother would say to me, 'is not this revelation of the iniquities and barbaric acts committed from century to century by your father's family upon the family of this poor vassal, a providential revelation? Should not such a revelation induce us to step upon the path of expiation for so many iniquities and barbarisms committed from century to century? Alas! Had I any power in this place, I would call around us the descendants of that family, who are to-day our vassals; I would strive to appease their resentment with acts of kindness, and with delicate consolation. I would be their protectress, their friend.'"

"Oh, generous heart!" exclaimed Nominoë, touched to tears. "How else could it be, but that, brought up by such a mother, Mademoiselle Plouernel, you should prove worthy of her!"

"Never shall I forget her lessons and her example. Finally, at the time that a sudden illness carried my mother away, she and I were on the point of going to Mezlean, in order to visit the leasehold peasant Gildas Lebrenn, who, as I subsequently learned, is your father's brother. That excursion never took place. I lost my mother, I had to leave Brittany. I went to Versailles with my aunt. Perhaps you learned from your friend, Monsieur Serdan, the object that, without my being made privy to the plot, was contemplated by those who were taking me to England?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; it was that which enabled Monsieur Serdan to discover the loftiness of your sentiments and the grandeur of your nature."

"The oddness of our meeting has caused you extreme surprise; is it not true, monsieur? Well, imagine what my feeling must have been when, at The

Hague, I, Bertha of Plouernel," the young girl proceeded, fixing her beautiful eyes upon Nominoë, "learned that he who had saved my life, and who, subsequently, at the price of his blood, saved my honor, was descended from that very family to whom mine had so much to atone for—when I discovered that my savior's heart was as great as his courage—when it was granted to me to know—to appreciate you."

The accents of Mademoiselle Plouernel's voice, and the expression of her face as she uttered these last words, denoted such tenderness, such nobility, such affection—the silence into which she immediately relapsed seemed so significant to Nominoë, that a sudden thought flashed through his mind. Despite his own modesty, despite his diffidence in himself, despite the seemingly insane improbability of the hope that caused his heart to bound—he believed himself loved. The intoxication of bliss emboldened him. In a tremulous voice he cried:

"And you, mademoiselle, imagine what my feelings must be at this moment, when I hear you recall to my memory the running conflict between our two families across the ages—and then to hear you pronounce the words of atonement and reparation! In what can that reparation consist? Despite myself—an insane hope enters my heart. Alas! I know but too well that my hope is insensate! Pronounce my sentence!"

"What do you hope?" asked Bertha in a firm voice.

"No; I should never have the courage to tell you—I dread to arouse your just disdain—your mockery—your anger—"

"If I could disdain you, would I now be near you? The future of us both is too somber for me to think of mocking! You promised sincerity to me."

Nominoë grew paler than he was before; he lowered his head; he murmured in a trembling, desperate, passionate voice:

"I love you! I love you to distraction!"

"I also, Nominoë, love you!" answered Mademoiselle Plouernel solemnly. "Yes," she proceeded, holding her head high, and serene; "I love you—with all my soul—I fear not to make the admission."

"Oh, joy in heaven!" cried the young man, falling upon his knees and clasping his hands before Bertha. "You love me! I am not the sport of a dream! You love me?"

"Yes, I love you; I tell you so without blushing, because I hold you worthy of such a love, Nominoë! 'Joy in heaven!' did you say? Oh, you spoke truly. Our joys will be celestial—our future looks dark here on earth—but yonder—yonder, where, according to the belief of your fathers, we shall live anew, body and soul—yonder our future will shine in splendor. You seek to fathom the meaning of my words, Nominoë! Rise, sit down here beside me, listen to me! You shall be made acquainted with all my thoughts."

Racked by doubt and hope, intoxicated by the confession of Mademoiselle Plouernel, discouraged, almost frightened by her last words, Nominoë rose silently, approached again the moss-covered bench, and sat down beside Bertha, who proceeded:

"The first time I saw you was in the midst of a storm that threatened to engulf our vessel, and dash it against the coast of Holland. I preserved my self-possession despite the threatening danger—because I do not fear death. Thus I could follow your manoeuvres with inexpressible interest. I admired your devotion. I was touched by your youth. Shortly after, as our vessel rode safely at anchor, I had the opportunity of appreciating your nature and the dignity of your character by the answer you gave to the offer of remuneration made to you by the Abbot, our traveling companion. I then thought I would never see you again, Nominoë! Nevertheless, I felt happy at being bound to you by the bond of gratitude. Since that day your image took its place in my heart!"

"Oh! Since that day also, your image has been ever present in my thoughts. How was I ever to forget the moment when, as I approached your brigantine in the hope of saving it, I saw you at the poop of the vessel so beautiful, so calm, smiling at the tempest! It was to me a dazzling vision! Alas! often did the vision reappear in my dreams! Finally, when on that same day, I read in your eyes the grief it caused you to see the humiliation that I had to suffer—I divined the benignity and the nobility of your heart! Your remembrance became still dearer to me! Oh! I loved you passionately!"

"I believe you, Nominoë! Why should not the feelings that you experienced have been as strong as the feelings experienced by myself? Then came that unhappy, that frightful day when, wounded by gunshots, you came near perishing in order to shelter me from dishonor," continued Mademoiselle Plouernel with a tremulous voice and eyes moist with tears; "in short, the day when I learned—Oh, providential coincidence!—that my savior belonged to that vassal family whose history I knew. The discovery, coming, as it did, upon the heels of the shocks of that same day, quite overthrew me; it dealt me a last blow. Nevertheless, when, after Monsieur Serdan had furnished us

with the conveyances to leave The Hague, he gave me warrant to entertain the hope that your wounds would not prove fatal, and with a few heartfelt words praised you in a way that filled my soul with bliss, I recovered heart. I swear to you, Nominoë, had I not at that moment felt prostrated by the first symptoms of a grave illness that was to prey upon me for a long time; had my mind not been upset and my strength exhausted by so many violent emotions, I would not have left The Hague that night without first seeing you—without expressing to you all the gratitude and admiration that your generous conduct evoked in me. But all the springs of my spirit had snapped; I could only weep—sterile, cowardly tears!—in that I left you in that city; dying, perhaps; a victim of your devotion to me! We departed for France. The fatigues of the journey, coupled with a slow fever, left me in an almost desperate condition when we arrived at Versailles. For two or three months I hovered between life and death. Thanks to the care of able physicians and to my youth, I finally emerged from the desperate state in which I languished. It seemed to me that I awoke from a frightful dream—by little and little the events in The Hague and of my return to France came back to me. Those recollections, rendered as they were doubly dear to my heart by our separation, awoke within my breast a sentiment towards you more tender than mere gratitude. I loved you, Nominoë! In doing so I yielded above all to the irresistible attraction of the thought that I loved in you the descendant of that family that had so long been persecuted by my own. My love became an atonement for the past! I saw something providential in the events that had thrown us together! Did I not owe life, honor, to you, the descendant of those vassals who had themselves been so often smitten in their lives, in the honor of their daughters and of their wives, by my ancestors! Oh! Nominoë, if you only knew with what fervor I thanked God for having inspired me with the desire of taking for my husband, I, a daughter of Neroweg the Frank, a son of Joel the Gaul! Was not the atonement of the daughter of the oppressors a just one to the son of the oppressed? Was not the marriage, that would consecrate the union of the conquered race with the conqueror, a natural one? Was not that love celestial that had its source in justice? I felt happy at the thought of that fusion of our two races!"

Words are impotent to express certain emotions. His visage bathed in tears, Nominoë remained silent. Suddenly a voice from afar, fresh and pure—the voice of a young girl—began to sing or rather to recite to a slow and melancholy rythm, one of those bardings or national Breton songs, some of which, popular still in these days, go back to the oldest possible antiquity. The singer was taking her sheep to pasture upon one of the shaded slopes of the ridge, at the crest of which rose the ruins of the feudal dungeon. The sweet voice, thinned by the distance, seemed to descend from the skies. At

the sound of the first lines of the song, despite his emotion, Nominoë felt thrilled; he listened a moment, and said to Mademoiselle Plouernel:

"Strange coincidence! That chant, traditional in Brittany for centuries and centuries, recounts the death of a young girl of our family in the days of the conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar."

"The death of a young girl!" echoed Mademoiselle Plouernel with an indefinable smile.

The last couplet of the song barely reached the ears of Bertha and Nominoë because the shepherdess was climbing the slope as she sang, and soon her voice was lost in space. Mademoiselle Plouernel had listened to the chant with profound attention, clasped hands, and eyes raised heavenward.

Awaking from her revery and addressing Nominoë with an agony, the cause of which he was unable to explain, Bertha said to him:

"Is the legend of the brave and sweet Hena, the Virgin of the Isle of Sen, the daughter of your ancestor Joel, also preserved in your family? The virgin who sacrificed herself to appease the anger of Hesus?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; it is one of the legends of our family. To the narrative is attached a little gold sickle, a sort of symbolic and sacred piece of jewelry that female druids wore in their belts."

"So it is, Nominoë! I remember that in his manuscript Colonel Plouernel says that to each of your family narratives there is attached some trinket that is almost always symbolic and was left by the author of the story, and that, in that way, from generation to generation, the humble and antique collection of your family relics was gathered. Monsieur Plouernel mentions among others a little silver cross, left by your ancestral grandmother Genevieve, who witnessed the execution of Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem! What mementoes! What magnificent mementoes!"

Bertha relapsed into a pensive mood, and then asked:

"Tell me, Nominoë, are the sacred stones of Karnak, mentioned in the ballad of Hena, the Virgin of the Isle of Sen, the same that are seen to this day?"

"They are the same; and already in the days of Julius Caesar their origin was lost in the night of remote ages."

"I visited those stones during my recent trip to Mezlean. They are gigantic; their colossal avenues extend to the very edge of the sea, which breaks at their feet! Their granite ribs have defied the ages! They are at this hour what they were on the day when your ancestress offered her innocent life to the gods, in order to appease their anger, and save Gaul from the foreign invader! Sublime devotion! Its memory is perpetuated down to our own days! Oh, Nominoë! My proud family boasts of the antiquity of its stock and the nobility of its origin! How much older and truly noble is yours! It is you, my friend, it is you who would stoop low, as they say, if this union, that I have dreamed about—"

And answering a gesture of the young man, Bertha added:

"Did I not tell you, Nominoë—our joys will be celestial, not terrestrial! Providence so wills it—you must submit to the providential decree. We must know how to resign ourselves, my friend."

"Bertha, I implore you, have mercy upon my feverish brain. What is happening to me hurls me into a sort of vertigo. I know not whether I am dreaming, or whether I am awake. I doubt what I see, what I hear, what I feel! A moment ago you pronounced the word marriage. Despite myself I yielded to the intoxication of an insane hope. Oh, truly insane!"

"I have not yet finished my confessions to you, Nominoë. That ballad, the thoughts it awakened in me; the memories that it recalled to your mind, interrupted our conversation. Listen further. I saw in our marriage an atonement, a reparation of the wrongs that your family suffered from century to century at the hands of mine. In the measure that my health improved, that project grew to a rooted thought. But doubts and misgivings assailed me. First of all, you might not love me—perhaps, on learning that I was a daughter of the Nerowegs, you might entertain an instinctive aversion for me, one of those racial antipathies that often are invincible, and, unhappily, but too well justified. I often doubted whether you could love me. Again, when I considered this marriage in the light of the world's prejudices, deep abysses of difficulties seemed to yawn before my eyes. Nothing frightened me away—I continued to love you bravely, Nominoë. Long did I cudgel my brains in the effort to overcome so many obstacles, above all to ascertain whether you remembered me at all. Finally my ponderings arrived at the following conclusions: I would, first of all, make certain of the nature of your feelings towards me, by addressing myself directly to you with the tranquility of a straightforward heart and a pure soul. You were a sailor of the port of Vannes, your father told me; other members of your family were vassals of the domain of Mezlean, and leasehold peasants of Karnak.

Consequently, I had to return to Brittany. There I would be certain of an opportunity to meet you. My fate and yours would then be ascertained and determined. This decision put an end to the anxieties that had long beset me, and operated a wholesome reaction in my health. My recovery made rapid progress. In the spring of this year, the physician to whom I communicated my desire to return to Brittany not only approved, but added that my native climate was alone able to finish my cure. As my aunt and my brother could not then leave Versailles, they let me depart for Plouernel in the escort of an old equerry and accompanied by my old nurse Marion, a good and worthy woman who never left my side. She is honest, faithful, devoted and of Breton extraction; her family lives in Vannes. Immediately upon my arrival at Plouernel I ordered Marion to write to one of her relatives and beg him to inquire, whether Monsieur Lebrenn and his son, mariners of the port of Vannes, were still residents of the town. Marion received answer that you and your father were away, but were soon expected back. I waited. At about this time—I must conceal nothing from you—my brother came to Plouernel. The plans he had formed concerning myself, at the time of our projected journey to England, had extinguished all the affection, all the esteem I entertained for him. I told him so one day; since that, self-esteem and a sense of personal dignity prevented me from again touching upon the subject with him. But court people are so constituted that they speedily forget one unworthy act in the commission of another. Although all the new plans of my brother were honorable, compared with the first, yet were they stamped with his characteristic and profound selfishness. He wished to marry me off. The ambition and greed of Monsieur Plouernel saw considerableadvantage in the marriage that he now proposed. However great the strain upon my candor, I did not formally reject his new projects. Thanks to this seeming readiness on my part, my brother showed himself tolerant towards what he calls my eccentricities. In that way it happened that, learning of your return to Vannes from Marion's relative, I could, without encountering the Count's opposition, undertake a trip to Mezlean, accompanied by my nurse and the old equerry. It was on the road to the burg that I saw you again for the first time—when—when—I met—"

Mademoiselle Plouernel could proceed no further. Tears streamed from her eyes. Her tears, her silence, the heaving of her bosom, betrayed such painful emotions that Nominoë turned suddenly pale and shuddered. Only then did he remember what in the confusion of his thoughts he had forgotten until that moment—that he was leading Tina to the altar as his bride when he met Mademoiselle Plouernel, and that she could not choose but be informed of his wedding. Overwhelmed at that thought, he dared not raise his eyes to Bertha; he felt his last hopes melting away! He dropped from heaven to the earth.

After a pause Mademoiselle Plouernel recovered control over her emotions, wiped her tears, and proceeded:

"Nominoë, this was my purpose in going to Mezlean: I meant to write to you and request you to come to the manor. The wish, so natural a wish, of expressing my gratitude to you for the services you had rendered me, justified the step. I expected you to respond to my invitation, I relied upon my sincere and penetrating love to discover at our very first interview whether you shared the sentiments that you inspired in me, and whether the loftiness of your heart was equal to my expectations. If so, I was to make to you the admission that I made to you so shortly ago, and I meant to add: 'Nominoë, I am master over my person—my family's unworthy conduct towards me has forever snapped the bonds that held me subject to its wishes, it has snapped all the bonds of deference to them; I offer you my hand; I know that, in France, a pastor may fear to consecrate our union, dreading the resentment of so powerful a house as mine; let us pledge ourselves to each other to-day; let us exchange our pledges in the presence of God and of your father; to-morrow we shall depart with him from Vannes for England on board of the vessel that he owns; once in London a magistrate will marry us; I shall not speak of my property; it may be confiscated from me; but I have my mother's jewelry and a sum large enough to secure to us a modest comfort; we shall live in England in case we should think it too risky to return to France; would you prefer to face such risks rather than expatriation? I love you, I am brave, your wishes shall be mine, Nominoë'—That was my plan, such were my ardent wishes! Accordingly, on the day following my arrival at Mezlean, I was on my way to the burg for the purpose of ascertaining your residence and addressing my letter to you, when I encountered a nuptial procession which the soldiers of the King had stopped—and—the very moment when I learned that that nuptial procession was yours, Nominoë—yours—I saw you fleeing at a distance, distractedly fleeing, to the painful astonishment of your father and your bride. The cause of your flight was unexplainable to me; but that did not matter; your heart was no longer free—the charming beauty of the young girl whom you are to marry justifies your love for her! I returned to Plouernel the day after our meeting. I arrived broken with grief. I had not left my room since my return when, this morning, Marion delivered to me your letter—and I came. Now you know it all, Nominoë. Perhaps, in the course of this interview, I wrongly reproached you with insincerity when you protested the constancy of your love for me. You are an honorable man, incapable of having meant to deceive the young girl who is to be your wife. And yet, you claim to have always loved me! Well! I believe you! Did I not believe you, my confession would have remained forever buried in my heart! Yes, the human soul is at times so strange a mystery, that another affection may have found

its place beside your love for me—a love that you looked upon as a dream. But, at least, the remembrance of your love will remain sweet and dear to you, because it will have been noble and pure. On my part, Nominoë, the remembrance of you will also remain ever dear to me, because it was you who inspired me with a generous thought, a thought of justice and reparation. Yes, when, according to our common belief, we shall meet again in yonder other worlds, we shall meet with countenances radiant with celestial bliss. I said to you, my friend, our joys are not to be of this world."

Nominoë raised his face bathed in tears, and, making an effort to steady his voice:

"Listen to me, in turn—above all, mademoiselle, I implore you—believe in my sincerity—"

"Nominoë, call me Bertha. The fraternal familiarity will be in the nature of a consolation to me."

"Oh, God! Is it your purpose to render my despair still more distressful by reminding me, with such a token of familiarity, of the happiness that I have forfeited!" exclaimed Nominoë amid heartrending sobs. "Pardon, Bertha, pardon me such an answer to the touching proof of your affection; but if you only knew, alas! how much I suffer! Since that journey to The Hague I have loved you, loved you passionately! Do you know, Bertha, what it was that rendered that love irresistible? It was an attraction exactly the counterpart of that which drew you to me. Yes, however singular, however unexplainable it may seem, I loved in you, above all, the daughter of the Nerowegs! Yes, that hopeless love, that insane love, promised only disappointment, grief, suffering, and annihilation to me! And yet it had for me the fatal charm of the void, that drags us to an abyss! I felt at once I know not what sad and tender sentiment by loving in you the descendant of the race that, since earliest childhood, I had learned to curse! You were in my eyes an angel of pardon and of concord! Oh, Bertha! However legitimate hatred may be, it is so bitter, and pardon so sweet! In you I spoke your ancestors free from guilt! So far from considering you one with their iniquities, I considered them one with your virtues! Yes, you redeemed the wicked of your race, as Christ redeemed the world by his virtues, his kindness, his evangelical grace!"

"Nominoë! How proud I am of my love for you!" cried Mademoiselle Plouernel with indescribable ecstasy, and moved to the profoundest depths of her soul by Nominoë's words and the accent in which they were uttered. "Oh! I was not mistaken when I said to you, our love draws its inspiration from sentiments too celestial, ever to be of this world."

"In this world, as in the next ones where we shall proceed to live, our love, I feel it, will last through all eternity! Its source is too lofty ever to be untrue to itself—it is providential. On the very morning of my marriage, at the moment when I was to proceed to my bride's house to lead her to the temple, I learned of your arrival at Mezlean. I was unaware of, I could not even suspect your intentions. Nevertheless, an invincible presentiment came over me! I wished to break off my wedding! Betrothed to my cousin almost from childhood, I had loved her as the future companion of my life, until my return from The Hague. But ever since I met you I have lived only for the intoxicating passion, the fatal passion, the folly of which I realized but too well. In the meantime the day for my marriage with my cousin approached. I confess it, the fear of dealing a painful blow to the poor child by breaking a union that was planned so long, the fear of grieving my father, then the further thought that surely I would never again see you—finally, the hope of finding in the sweet delights of the family hearth oblivion for an insane love, induced me to consent to the marriage."

"All is now clear to me, Nominoë," put in Mademoiselle Plouernel with a sigh of ineffable relief. "Oh! I believe you; I feel happy in believing you."

"When I saw you again, Bertha, on the road to Mezlean, I lost my head—an irresistible power carried me away—I fled demented. During that night I wandered like one insane in the forest. Presently my agitation subsided, I contemplated the reality. My marriage with my cousin was no longer possible—it was absolutely impossible."

"Impossible?" echoed Mademoiselle Plouernel with a tremor. "Why impossible, Nominoë?"

"Because I am a man of honor! Because no human power could now induce me to marry that poor child, now that I know, Bertha, that you love me. I therefore left Mezlean without seeing my family; I had not the courage to face their indignation. I came to Plouernel, obsessed with the hope of an interview with you, and then, Bertha, I swear before God, who hears and judges me—"

"Nominoë, before God, who hears and judges us, answer me," said Mademoiselle Plouernel solemnly, so to speak transfigured with the radiance of unutterable hope. "Are you firmly resolved to persist in the rupture of your marriage?"

"No human power can compel me to a marriage that would render my cousin and myself wretched."

"And are you resolved to expatriate yourself?"

"Yes. I never again would dare to see my father, who would curse me—who, perhaps, has already cursed me!"

"When do you propose to leave?"

"To-day," answered Nominoë swallowing a sob. "I shall engage myself as a sailor at Nantes, on some vessel sailing to the Indies. We shall never again meet here below, Bertha!"

Mademoiselle Plouernel remained steeped in silent reflection. Presently she asked abruptly:

"Is there near Nantes, along the coast, any small and little-frequented port where one may embark secretly?"

"Yes, St. Renan," answered Nominoë, raising his head and looking at Bertha with surprise; "St. Renan, near the mouth of the Loire."

"Are you sure you could find there a vessel that could attempt the passage to England?"

"St. Renan is a fishermen's port; their vessels are decked, and are excellent sailers; they can cross the channel with ease."

"How long would it take to reach the place from here on a good horse?"

"From seven to eight hours, including stops. The horse would have to be rested on the hills."

"Is the road that leads to St. Renan a frequented one?"

"Very slightly; it is only a cross-road."

"Can one take ship at St. Renan at any tide?"

"No; only when the tide is high."

"At what hour could one embark to-morrow?"

"At this part of the month the tide must be high between eleven and twelve at night. One would have to be at St. Renan at midnight."

"Could you, between now and to-morrow," asked Bertha, "procure a carriage drawn by a good horse?"

"Yes," answered Nominoë, hardly able any longer to resist the intoxication of a hope that caused his heart to beat to the breaking point.

"There will be wanted, besides," said Mademoiselle Plouernel, "two mantles with hoods attached, of the kind worn by peasant women. Nominoë," she proceeded, controlling her voice which, however, vibrated under the strain of the emotions that agitated her soul at that solemn moment, "to-morrow, at three o'clock in the afternoon, wait for me a hundred paces from here, at the road of the Cross, with the carriage that you will drive. Do not forget the two hooded cloaks—one is for me, the other for Marion. The hoods will hide our faces. My leaving the castle at full daylight, and at the usual hour for my promenade, will awaken no suspicion. We shall then start instantly for St. Renan, where we shall set sail for England, and there, Nominoë," added Bertha, giving herself finally over to the impulse of her love and breaking out into tears of celestial sweetness, "our marriage—shall be consummated."

"Your mask! Put your mask on! There is someone coming! Great God, my father!" cried Nominoë, perceiving Salaun Lebrenn and Serdan as they cautiously emerged from the underground gallery that led to the ruins of the dungeon of Plouernel.

Mademoiselle Plouernel hastened to hide her face in the silken mask that she had laid down beside her at the start of her interview with Nominoë. The latter, stupefied at the sight of his father and Monsieur Serdan, remained silent and in consternation, while Bertha, masked, standing motionless, her arms crossed over her palpitating bosom awaited anxiously the issue of the unexpected encounter.

Despite the anger that his face revealed, Salaun Lebrenn could not restrain a sigh of relief at seeing his son, concerning whom he had been racked with anxiety since the day of his disappearance. Serdan contemplated with inquisitive and suspicious eyes the masked woman whom they found in a tête-à-tête with Nominoë, not far from one of the park gates of the Castle of Plouernel. Reassured upon his son's fate, Salaun was about to give a loose to his indignation, but the presence of the unknown masked woman restrained him. While asking himself who the woman could be and what relations she could have with Nominoë, he said to the latter in a peremptory tone, accompanying the words with a gesture of authority:

"Follow us, my son! Your uncle and I must speak with you."

"Father, please let me know where I shall meet you. I shall place myself at your orders at sunset."

"Follow me instantly!" replied Salaun imperiously. "Come on the spot! What we have to say to you will brook no delay."

"It is hard for me to disobey you, father—but at this moment I can not accompany you," answered Nominoë, stepping towards Bertha. "I can not leave the lady alone—later I shall obey you. I shall go to whatever place you may please to appoint."

"You dare resist your father's orders—unhappy boy!"

"Father, do not insist—it is useless—I will and must stay here."

"Heaven and earth!" cried Salaun, beside himself with rage at his son's refusal—"man without faith and without honor!"

"Oh! Enough! For mercy's sake, father!" retorted Nominoë in a hollow voice, turning pale with both pain and anger at hearing himself insulted by his own father in the presence of Mademoiselle Plouernel.

But she, taking the young man's hand, said to him in a low and suppliant voice:

"Obey your father!"

"Lebrenn! For heaven's sake, collect yourself!" put in Serdan, continuing to eye Bertha attentively. "It is imprudent to allow yourself to be carried away by your just indignation—before a strange woman."

"That strange woman!" cried Salaun, interrupting his friend. "That strange woman!" And taking with a menacing mien a step towards Mademoiselle Plouernel: "Woman without honor! It is you who corrupted, you who drove my son to perdition! Who are you? Answer me, wretch that you are!"

"Oh! God have mercy! Such an insult to her! to her!" cried Nominoë, and, dashing forward towards Salaun: "Father, you know not whom you are speaking to. Not another word!"

"A threat! And to me!" exclaimed Salaun, exasperated. "A threat, when you should drop at my feet repentant and suppliant—cowardly assassin!"

"Assassin! I!" stammered Nominoë, thunderstruck at Salaun's aspect, while the latter, more and more enraged, addressed Mademoiselle Plouernel:

"Infamous creature—you are the accomplice in the murder!"

"Murder?" repeated Nominoë, stupefied.

"Yes; murder; the murder of Tina, your bride—"

"Great God! Father! What is that you are saying!" cried Nominoë, shuddering with horror. "Tina, my bride—"

"You killed her, wretch! You killed her by deserting her!" answered Salaun in a voice broken with sobs. "She died—the poor child is no more."

"Down on our knees before your father! Let us weep over the dead on our knees, Nominoë!" said Mademoiselle Plouernel, throwing her mask far away. "Let us weep for the ill-starred Tina."

And pale, her face in tears, overwhelmed with grief and almost fainting, she fell down, like Nominoë, upon her knees before Salaun, while Serdan, jumping back a step, cried out:

"Mademoiselle Plouernel! In this place!"

Salaun, recognizing, as Serdan had done, the young girl whom he had not seen again since leaving The Hague, remained speechless. Remembering how he had admired the loftiness of the young girl's sentiments, he now regretted the vehemence of the language he had just used towards her. Now, no longer doubting the love with which she inspired Nominoë, he understood the cause of his son's irresolution on the very morning of the wedding, and why he had fled like one demented, when the nuptial procession was about to resume its march to the temple. Upon these thoughts, this other followed: His son loved a daughter of the Nerowegs! a descendant of that race that the descendants of Joel had so often cursed across the ages! And yet, the beauty and the tears of Mademoiselle Plouernel, now prostrated at his feet, moved Salaun despite himself, especially when Bertha said to him in heartrending accents:

"I was not aware of the death of Nominoë's bride, when, a minute ago, I say it without blushing, I offered my hand to your son."

"You?" cried Salaun, hardly believing what he heard. "You, mademoiselle! A Plouernel!"

"This union of one of the descendants of Joel with a daughter of Neroweg was, in my estimation, to repair the iniquities that for centuries my family whelmed yours with."

"Noble and generous heart!" cried Serdan.

Salaun remained silent and pensive. Nominoë, still upon his knees beside Bertha, and overcome with sorrow by the death of Tina, dared at this moment to raise his moist and suppliant eyes to his father. His looks seemed to say:

"Do you still deem me so guilty for loving Mademoiselle Plouernel?"

"It is upon my knees, monsieur, that I expected to confess to you a love that I, nevertheless, feel proud of! But, alas! this love has caused the death of an innocent girl! Therefore, also, it is upon my knees that I wish to ask your pardon for that misfortune, seeing that, although unwittingly, yet, Oh, just heavens! I am not a stranger to it! Now, Nominoë, rise!" added Bertha, herself rising with dignity. "Your father, I doubt not, has restored me to his esteem. For this esteem I am grateful to you, monsieur; I shall not be unworthy of it," observed the young girl, answering a gesture of approbation from Salaun.

And turning towards Nominoë, who had also risen from the ground, she proceeded in a trembling and resigned voice, and endeavoring to control the pangs of her soul:

"Our marriage, even with the approval of your father, is henceforth impossible, Nominoë! The remembrance, the shadow of that ill-starred girl would always rise between us!" said Bertha shuddering.

But proceeding with a poignant smile:

"Courage, my friend! Thanks to God, our life is not confined to the life of this world! At this moment, when I take my leave of you, I say to you not adieu! I say till we meet again, Nominoë! Perhaps, although still very young, I may precede you to one of those mysterious worlds where my mother awaits me—and whither that sweet girl, your bride, has taken flight! Oh! At least, I shall be able to meet their eyes without fear, I shall then tell all to them. And the day when, departing from this earth, you will come to join us, the hearts of all us three will fly to meet your spirit! Till we meet, then, my friend! Alas, my presentiments did not deceive me. My love was kindled in sentiments too celestial to be for this world;—having come from yonder, on high, it must

reascend to its divine source!" and Bertha pointed Nominoë heavenward with a mien of sublime simplicity.

Nominoë, his father, and Serdan listened to Mademoiselle Plouernel with inexpressible emotion, while Madok the miller came out of the underground gallery, looking hither and thither with precaution. An instant he remained motionless with surprise at the sight of Serdan and Lebrenn conversing with Mademoiselle Plouernel, whom he had seen on the road to Mezlean on the day of Tina's wedding. Casting thereupon a look of somber reproach upon Nominoë, seeing he now met him again for the first time since the nuptial ceremony at which he filled the role of "Brotaer," the miller beckoned to Salaun to step aside and said to him in an undertone:

"What is the demoiselle doing here? She is as good as her brother is wicked, but—she is a daughter of Plouernel."

"And our men?" inquired Salaun interrupting Madok, and not considering the moment opportune for answering his question. "Have they arrived? Did they bring the arms that were promised us, the pikes, muskets and ammunition?"

"Yes, they brought the last load of arms concealed among faggots and green branches. They went down into the underground gallery through the ruins of the dungeon. They report everything ready for to-night in the parishes. The tocsin is to sound with the rising of the moon. A package-carrier who went through Plouernel left the news that the people of Nantes and Rennes have risen in revolt, and that fighting is going on in the suburbs. The troops are getting the worst of it."

"That I knew," answered Salaun. "We must not be found behindhanded. Wait here for me; I shall return immediately."

Salaun walked back to his son and Mademoiselle Plouernel, who said to him in a voice that she strove to render firm:

"Monsieur Lebrenn, I shall now return to the castle; to-morrow I shall depart for the manor of Mezlean, where I desire to live in absolute seclusion. I shall not see you again, Nominoë; but at least I carry with me in my solitary retreat your father's respect, and the remembrance of a love that I am proud of, because it sprang from a generous sentiment. In offering my hand to your son, Monsieur Lebrenn, I meant to do a worthy act."

"Infamy and treason! Her hand to a vassal!" suddenly broke in a voice that shook with rage. "Malediction upon the miserable woman!"

And emerging from the copse behind which they had for an instant lain concealed, there suddenly appeared upon the clearing the Count of Plouernel and the Marquis of Chateauvieux.

After having explored the avenues of the park, the Count had come across several of his forester guardsmen, from whom he inquired whether they had seen MademoisellePlouernel. They saw her, was their answer, about two hours ago, walking in the direction of one of the park gates, which they found open; great was their surprise upon first noticing on the dust of the road the imprint of Bertha's little feet; but their surprise redoubled when they saw the tracks of the young girl running towards the narrow and shaded path that led to the clearing. Agitated by a vague presentiment, the Count alighted from his mount, the Marquis did likewise, and the Count ordered one of the equerries who accompanied him to run back immediately, and by all means to return with the forester guardsmen, whom he had just met. Thereupon the Count of Plouernel and the Marquis of Chateauvieux, leaving their horses in charge of another equerry, dived into the copse, followed the path and, arriving at the clearing, stood petrified at the sight of Bertha conversing with strangers. Finally, as they listened they caught the last words that Mademoiselle Plouernel was addressing to Salaun Lebrenn on the subject of her love for Nominoë. Informed by his bailiff that two members of the Lebrenn family, a vassal family of his own domains, and mariners of the port of Vannes, were pointed out as mutinous and dangerous people, the Count was fired with an incontrollable fury at hearing his sister admit her love for a miserable mariner of the vassal race. The love, at which the Count's family pride rose in revolt, furthermore dashed the projected double marriage that he pursued. He now could explain to himself the cause of Bertha's continuous delays in giving her consent to her marriage with the Marquis of Chateauvieux. The latter, no less wounded in his vanity than the Count of Plouernel felt wounded in his family pride, shared his friend's fury and followed him, when, unable any longer to control himself, the Count dashed into the clearing.

The Count of Plouernel drew his sword and with the flat of the blade struck Nominoë across the face, crying:

"Vile clown! That is for your having dared to raise your eyes to Mademoiselle Plouernel—while you wait to be hanged from the gibbet!"

Such was the violence of the blow that although it was given with the flat of the sword blood spurted out of Nominoë's cheek and forehead. He emitted a terrible cry, and clenched his fists, but noticing a traveling cutlass hanging

at Serdan's side he seized it and precipitated himself upon the Count of Plouernel.

"Count!" shouted the Marquis of Chateauvieux, also drawing his sword, "let us kill the vassal like a dog!"

Salaun ran to the help of his son, who was attacked by two adversaries at once; jumped at the neck of the Marquis of Chateauvieux; threw him to the ground; and, despite all the resistance that he offered, disarmed him; while Nominoë, after dexterously parrying a blow aimed at him by the Count of Plouernel, struck back so heavily with the reverse of the cutlass upon the Count's wrist that his hand was paralyzed and dropped the sword. All this happened with the swiftness of thought. Despite the Count's conduct towards her, Mademoiselle Plouernel emitted a cry of terror at the sight of her brother engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with Nominoë. At the risk of being struck by both in the heat of the combat, she rushed forward to separate them. Trembling at the danger that the young girl ran, Serdan threw his arms around her and held her back. The girl uttered a piercing cry, staggered, became ashen pale; her head fell backward, she fainted away overcome with terror, and would have dropped to the ground but for Serdan holding her up and seating her gently upon the grass with her back supported by the old oak tree. Mademoiselle Plouernel had lost all consciousness. In the midst of the tumult, the forester guardsmen whom one of the Count's equerries had gone in search of as ordered by his master, stepped upon the scene, armed with their muskets and hunting knives.

"To me, guardsmen! Arrest these assassins! Do not kill them, I shall bring them to justice!" cried the Count of Plouernel, whom the blow of Nominoë's cutlass had rendered helpless, and who held his bleeding and mutilated right hand in his left, while Nominoë himself, seeing Bertha lying unconscious at the foot of the old dead oak, flung away his cutlass, and thinking only of Mademoiselle Plouernel, threw himself upon his knees beside the young girl.

At the call of their seigneur, the guardsmen, to the number of eight, rushed upon Salaun Lebrenn and Serdan. Disarmed by Nominoë, the latter could offer no effective resistance to the men who sought to seize him. Salaun, however, drawing his mariner's sword, returned thrust for thrust to the guardsmen who attacked him, and called out to his son, who was on his knees beside Bertha:

"Up, Nominoë! Defend yourself! Let us defend ourselves!"

Salaun's voice expired upon his lips. He was knocked down by a heavy blow, dealt from behind with the butt of a musket by one of the guardsmen while he fought two others in front, one of whom he succeeded in wounding. Serdan was also floored, and then pinioned with the shoulder straps of the guardsmen, the same as Salaun, who had dropped to the ground dazed by the blow which he received. Finally, Nominoë, delirious with grief, was, upon a sign from the Count of Plouernel torn from Bertha by the foresters. His mind seemed to wander. He allowed himself to be bound without offering any resistance whatever.

"Monseigneur," a lackey came and said to the Count of Plouernel, "Madam the Marchioness and Monsieur the Abbot took a carriage to join in the search for mademoiselle; they met the equerry who was bringing the forester guardsmen; their carriage is near by; Madam the Marchioness sent me to receive monseigneur's orders."

"Go and tell Monsieur the Abbot that I request him to come here without delay. We need his services," the Count of Plouernel answered the lackey.

And addressing the Marquis of Chateauvieux:

"My friend, you will have to help the Abbot to transport my sister to the carriage. I shall join you there—I can hardly hold myself on my feet; I am losing so much blood that I am afraid I shall faint."

Then, finally, turning to the three prisoners, who stood with lowering brows, motionless and silent, and firmly bound, the Count cried:

"Bandits! Murderers! I am vested with low and high judicial powers in my seigniory. You shall be tried to-night—and hanged to-morrow."

"Marquis, were there not four of these brigands? I only see three. What became of the fourth?"

"Indeed, it seems to me there were four of them—one of them had a white vest on," answered the Marquis of Chateauvieux, remembering having seen Madok the miller, who, at the approach of the forester guardsmen disappeared in the thickest of the wood.

"Monseigneur," said one of the foresters to the Count, "as we entered the clearing we saw a man flee through the copse; he was probably the companion of the prisoners, the one you are missing."

"The wood will have to be beaten and the bandit found—he shall be hanged with his accomplices."

Abbot Boujaron arrived at that moment. He looked bewildered. He was informed of the tragic adventure and helped the Marquis of Chateauvieux to transport to the carriage Mademoiselle Plouernel, who, pale and inert, seemed dead but for the convulsive tremors that shook her frame from time to time. She was laid down upon the cushions of the carriage near the Marchioness. The Count took a seat beside his sister, and the carriage returned to the castle at full speed.

Bertha was taken to her own apartment and locked up with her nurse. She was not to come out again but to be consigned to a cloister by orders of the King. Before nightfall, Serdan, Salaun Lebrenn and his son, whom the foresters led off, were separately imprisoned in the cells of the manor—the sumptuous Renaissance palace was furnished with its subterranean prisons, the same as the ancient feudal dungeon, seeing that the seigneur of the Seventeenth exercised, like his ancestor of the Eleventh Century, the functions of high and low judicial magistrate. Reassured on the score of the wound received by the Count of Plouernel, the Marquis of Chateauvieux hastened to obey the orders of the Governor of Brittany, who summoned him to Rennes without delay, together with the two companies of his regiment; but he left, however, with the Count, for the latter's security, the detachment of Sergeant La Montagne, which he had summoned to Plouernel the day before.

CHAPTER VII

EZ-LIBR

It was close on midnight. The moon, now on the wane, had just risen in a cloudless sky. Hardly had the silvery crescent lifted itself above the horizon when the parish bells, spread over an area of about ten square leagues round about the burg of Plouernel sounded the tocsin at their loudest. At the signal, a troop of peasants armed with hatchets, hay-forks, scythes and old halberds, and preceded by a sort of vanguard consisting of fifty men armed with muskets, sallied out of the burg of Plouernel. They followed in silence the long avenue that led to the iron gate of the court of honor before the castle. At the head of this vanguard marched Gildas Lebrenn, the leasehold peasant of Karnak, Madok the miller, three leasehold peasants of the domain of Plouernel itself, and Tankeru. Tankeru carried, flung over his shoulder, his heavy blacksmith's hammer into the head of which he had cut the Breton words: EZ-LIBR—To Be Free. His arms were bare; in the pocket of his leathern apron was a roll of paper partly visible above the edge. The light of the moon illumined Tankeru's face. In two nights the sturdy man's hair had turned grey. His features were hardly recognizable since Tina's death. Despair had left its stamp upon them. He stopped at about a hundred paces from the iron gate of the castle, and said to Madok in a hollow voice:

"We swore to Salaun Lebrenn that we would follow his advice and place justice on our side before coming to blows, and to submit the Peasant Code for the approval of the Seigneur Count. Perhaps he has already hanged Salaun; but, dead or alive, Salaun has our word. We shall keep it! Tell our men to stop at the avenue. We shall enter the castle unarmed."

The order was given and executed. The vanguard, together with the troop of armed vassals, halted under the trees of the avenue. Tankeru and his five companions advanced to the iron gate, which closed the entrance to the court of honor and stood between two pavilions, where the gateman or porter was housed. The vestibule and all the windows on the first floor of the castle could be seen brilliantly illuminated. Tankeru drew near the gate and called:

"Halloa! Porter! Porter! Come out!"

The porter, clad in a rich livery, came out of one of the pavilions, and approaching Tankeru, inquired:

"Who goes there? What do you want?"

"We want to speak with your master, and on the spot. Open the gate of the castle."

"You, clown?" answered the porter, with the insolence of a lackey, as he spied through the iron bars the blacksmith and his companions, all of whom were poorly clad. "Go your ways! Go, barefooted rabble! If you don't, I shall take my cane and come out—and then, look to your backs!"

"If you do not open, I shall force the gate!" cried Tankeru to the porter, who started to return to his pavilion grumbling.

Tankeru seized his hammer in both his hands, swung it, and with one blow snapped the lock of the gate. It flew open. The frightened porter ran towards the winding staircase of the castle, shouting:

"Help!"

The six vassals entered the court of honor, and walked across it at a rapid pace. Suddenly Tankeru stopped. His eyes had caught sight of three gibbets, recently reared, as shown by the fresh earth that was thrown up at their feet. He called Gildas's attention to the instruments of death, and said:

"We arrive on time! The gibbets are intended for Salaun, his friend Serdan, and—"

The blacksmith did not mention the name of Nominoë. His features contracted and assumed a frightful expression. The robust man smothered a sob, clenched with convulsive rage the handle of his heavy hammer, and pursued his march a few stops ahead of his companions.

The frightened gateman rushed into the vestibule of the castle where a large number of other lackeys were playing cards. Among the gamesters was Sergeant La Montagne and his corporal. The soldiers of his detachment, tired out with their recent tramp, were resting in one of the adjoining out-buildings.

"A number of vassals have forced open the gate!" shouted the porter as he tumbled in. "They demand to see monseigneur immediately! Go and tell the Count, and ask his orders!"

One of the lackeys ran off to carry the news to his master. The Count was at that moment discussing with his bailiffs, Abbot Boujaron and the

Marchioness of Tremblay the sentence that was to be pronounced upon the three "murderers" early next morning. At first stupefied at the audacity of his vassals, the Count bounded up with indignation, and left the hall, followed by his bailiffs and Abbot Boujaron. As the Abbot crossed the vestibule he perceived Sergeant La Montagne, stepped towards him, and gave him a few hurried instructions in a low voice. The sergeant forthwith called to him his corporal, and both left the antechamber by an inside staircase. With his arm in a sling, followed by his bailiffs, and surrounded by a bevy of gallooned lackeys carrying torches in their hands, the Count of Plouernel presented himself upon the stairway of the castle at the moment when Tankeru was ascending the lower steps. The blacksmith and his friends had reached the middle of the stairs when the Abbot said in an undertone to the young Count of Plouernel:

"Gain time—a quarter of an hour, or if but ten minutes. The sergeant has gone out to wake up the soldiers and arm them, together with the forester guards. We shall bag the whole pack."

The Count of Plouernel nodded with his head approvingly to the Abbot, and addressed his vassals in an angry tone:

"Wretches, who forced the gate of my court! What do you want? What do you come for?"

"You shall know in a minute, monseigneur," answered Tankeru in a firm voice as he drew the scroll of paper from the pocket of his leathern apron. While so doing, he ascended the steps that separated him from the landing where the Count of Plouernel stood, and handed him the writing: "Read this, if you please, monseigneur."

"What is this silly paper that you hand me, rustic?"

"It is the PEASANT CODE, monseigneur. Our code, the code of the poor, of the rustics, as you call us, Count of Plouernel."

"In other words, ye clowns, you presume to discuss!"

"Monseigneur," replied Tankeru, "we here are six honorable men who are delegated by your vassals of Mezlean and Plouernel. In that writing, which contains the Peasant Code, we humbly present our grievances, and we endeavor to lay down, as clearly as is in our power, the rules that it may please you to observe towards us, monseigneur, from this day on. It is in great humbleness that we present our code to you, monseigneur."

"A code! Rules dictated by this rustic rabble!" stammered the Count of Plouernel, beside himself with rage. "The audacity! Is it insolence, carried to a climax? Is it folly? Or are these clowns simply drunk? Go back, rustics! Back to your work!"

"Humor the miscreants," whispered the Abbot to the Count; "entertain them, gain time; the soldiers and the foresters must be here soon—we must bag the whole pack."

"Indeed, my clowns. You present your grievances?" proceeded the Count of Plouernel, thus admonished, with supreme disdain not unmixed with stupefaction. "So you have drawn up rules that it may please me to observe towards you! The grievances of this plebs must be droll to read!"

"We have taken the liberty, monseigneur, to submit our grievances to you. We are at the end of our endurance; this must change! In short, we demand of you no longer to be treated worse than draft animals; we demand of you, monseigneur, no longer to be driven with sticks applied to our backs; we demand of you, monseigneur, no longer to be overwhelmed with taxes imposed at your good pleasure; we demand of you, monseigneur, no longer to be thrown into prison, whipped with switches, sent to the galleys, or hanged if we kill your stags, or your boars, when they enter our fields and ravage our crops; finally, we demand of you—but read the paper, monseigneur, and you will see that all we ask is Justice—read the Peasant Code! Accept it; it will not ruin you—far from it! But then at least, we and our families would no longer die of hunger, neither worse nor better than foundered horses! We shall still continue to work for you from dawn to dusk, monseigneur, you will still have the larger share, we the smaller;—but then you would allow us to live as the creatures of the good God should live! Accept the Peasant Code, monseigneur; sign it; be, then, faithful to your signature, and we will be faithful to our agreement—it will mean peace—a good peace for you and for our families."

"Ho! Ho!" broke in the Count of Plouernel, whom the audacity of his vassals threw into all manner of wrathful transports. "So, then, if I accept your code, we shall have peace? Whence it follows that, in case I refuse—please complete your sentence!"

"'Sdeath! It will then be war, monseigneur! And, take notice, it will then be your fault, not ours," answered Tankeru resolutely. "Finally, in order to cancel the whole bill, we demand of you that it may please you to set free three prisoners whom you are holding in the castle. You intend to have them

hanged. Well, monseigneur, you must deliver them to us, if you please; they must be set free—without further delay. If not—"

"If not?" cried the Count of Plouernel at the end of his patience. "If I refuse to set the prisoners free, what will you do? Please answer, miserable fellow! What will you do? I would like to know!"

"'Sdeath! Monseigneur, we shall set them free ourselves! We shall open the war. It will be you who will have made the choice!"

"This is too much!" cried the Count of Plouernel. But suddenly breaking off and listening to windward, he turned to the Abbot and asked: "Is not that the ringing of the tocsin that I hear from afar?"

"Yes, monseigneur," observed Tankeru in a hollow voice that now waxed threatening. "With the rise of the moon, the tocsin was rung in all the parishes of your seigniories of Plouernel and Mezlean—it is now ringing at Rennes—at Nantes—at Quimper, where the fight is on. Everywhere the revolt is on—war everywhere—in case our seigneurs refuse to accept the Peasant Code. Decide on the spot!"

And pointing with his hand in the direction of the avenue to the castle, where the troop of armed vassals was assembled, the blacksmith added:

"All the people of Plouernel and other parishes are yonder under arms; they are waiting for your answer, monseigneur! It will be peace, if you sign the Peasant Code and deliver us the prisoners; if not—fire and flames!—it will be war! War without mercy towards you, as you have been towards us, merciless and pitiless."

"Sergeant! Kill these rebels with your bayonets, or the brigands down the avenue will hear the fire of your muskets and run to their help!" suddenly ordered the Count of Plouernel addressing Sergeant La Montagne, who, at the head of his men and hidden in the dark, had noiselessly crept along the façade of the castle. "This way, foresters!" added the Count in a ringing voice. "The castle is going to be attacked! Kill, kill the malignant rustic plebs—kill them all!"

"Run the clowns through! Let not one escape! Head and bowels! They tried to disarm us on the road to Mezlean!" cried Sergeant La Montagne. "This is our revenge! Prick them through and through! Death to the rustics!"

At the word of command the soldiers suddenly rushed forth upon the staircase, charging Tankeru and his companions with their bayonets.

While the soldiers turned to obey the order to massacre the vassals upon the stairway of the castle, Nominoë was awaiting death in his cell, whither the forester guards of the Count had taken him. The bailiff of the seigniory, assisted by his registrar, had proceeded to interrogate the prisoner, who was charged with a murderous attempt, followed by wounds, upon the person of the very high, very powerful and very redoubtable seigneur, etc. Nominoë remained silent, declining to answer any of the bailiff's questions. The only words he uttered were to inquire about the condition of Mademoiselle Plouernel. Not considering it fit to impart the information to the prisoner, the officer of justice once more urged him to consider that his refusal to answer the charges against him was equivalent to a confession of guilt on his part, and that the crime, in which he was caught red-handed, was punishable with death. The prisoner was to appear early the next morning at the bar of the seigniorial tribunal, together with his two accomplices, guilty like himself of attempted murder, also followed by serious wounds upon the person of the very high, very powerful and very redoubtable seigneur, etc. The execution of the sentence was immediately to follow the judgment. The three gibbets were to be erected that same night. Nominoë persisted in his silence. Thereupon the bailiff and the registrar took their departure, and he was left alone.

"To die!" pondered Nominoë. "I am about to die. Or rather, I am about to be re-born yonder! Oh! I would greet that new life with a shout of joy, were it not for my sorrow at departing from this world at the very moment when there is about to break out the revolt of which my father is the soul, and which, under his direction, might have led to the overthrow of the royal power itself. This is what attaches me to life."

Absorbed in his meditations, Nominoë had not noticed that for a considerable space of time the sound of a number of bells, though weakened by the distance, reached him through the air-hole of his cell. Suddenly a tumultuous noise that drew nearer and nearer attracted his attention. With the noise of the tumult was speedily mingled the detonations of musketry fire, frequent and well sustained, and but irregularly answered. Little by little the musketry discharges ceased. The turmoil seemed hushed. A long silence ensued—and, presently, a reddish glint of flames penetrated through the air-hole of the cell, reflected itself upon the opposite wall, and speedily threw the same into a flamboyant glare. It was the war upon the castles that broke out! Peace to the huts, war to the palaces!

"The vassals have attacked the feudal manor—they have seized it—they are in the halls! They are now setting it on fire!" cried Nominoë, ecstatic with joy.

But immediately struck by an opposite train of thought: "Good God! What will become of Bertha!"

A prey to distracting anxiety, Nominoë dashed himself against the thick and iron-studded door; vainly he sought to break it down with his shoulders. Presently loud cries reached his ears. They proceeded from a throng of people, who, rushing by the air-hole of his cell, shouted aloud to one another:

"The prisoners must be here! This way! this way! break open their cells! The fire is spreading! Save the prisoners! Save the prisoners!"

"God be blessed! Perhaps I may yet see Bertha—and save her once more!" cried Nominoë.

Encouraged by this thought, Nominoë approached his lips to the key-hole and called out:

"Friends! This way! This way!"

"Here I am!" answered the voice of Tankeru. "I have heard you! I am coming!" And turning the key, which was left by the jailer in the lock outside, he opened the door. The blacksmith stepped into the cell of Nominoë.

Tankeru looked ashen pale. He bled. He had received two bayonet thrusts—one in the arm, the other in the thigh. When, with felled bayonets, the soldiers charged upon the delegates of the vassals, the blacksmith, armed with his hammer, a fearful weapon in his hands, succeeded in beating his way through the soldiers and joined his companions who were waiting for him outside the gate. Immediately placing himself at the head of the vassals' troop, he marched back with them upon the castle and successfully conducted the assault. The forester guards, the soldiers, the Count's hunting men, concealed behind the embrasures of the windows on the ground floor, directed a plunging fire against the assailants. Many of these fell mortally wounded. The survivors rushed up the wide stairway with Tankeru at their head. The door of the vestibule was beaten down; a stubborn and bloody combat immediately ensued inside the edifice. Victory fell to the vassals. Heated and furious with the ardor of the battle, these threw down and smashed whatever they could lay hands upon in the sumptuous castle. Tankeru and several other peasants proceeded immediately to search for Serdan, Salaun and Nominoë. A fleeing lackey who was caught, pointed out the building in which the prison was situated, and tendered his services to the vassals as a guide while he begged for his life.

He led them to the jail. It was then that Tankeru heard Nominoë's voice and stepped into his cell.

At the aspect of Tina's father Nominoë forgot the anxious thoughts that but a moment before were assailing him, and fell back terror-stricken as if a living remorse had suddenly risen before him. With features distorted by fury, the blacksmith bounded forward, raising his hammer, over the head of him whom he held responsible for the death of his daughter.

"Strike!" said Nominoë without moving, and lowering his head with resignation. "Strike! It is your right."

The blacksmith lowered his hammer, remained for a moment steeped in thought, and then said with icy calmness:

"You shall die; but, before you do, you shall know how my daughter died!"

Again the blacksmith paused, and again proceeded:

"Listen, murderer. On the day of the wedding, as you know, I took flight upon seeing that the attempt to disarm the soldiers miscarried. After dark I returned to my house; I knocked at the door; my mother opened it. She was pale; she was sobbing. I asked what was the matter—as yet I knew nothing. She answered: 'It is all over. Nominoë has fled. He said to Salaun and Tina that they would nevermore see him. The child was brought home in a swoon. A short while ago she regained consciousness. She is upstairs. She is spinning at her wheel as if nothing had happened. She does not speak. She does not weep—she frightens me—I fear the poor girl has gone crazy.'"

"Oh, God!" murmured Nominoë, hiding his face, in his hands. "Poor child! Poor—poor child!"

"Upon hearing these words from my mother," Tankeru proceeded without seeming to hear the painful wail that escaped Nominoë, "at these words from my mother, I was at first seized with a vertigo. The blood rushed to my brain; I fell seated upon a bench; my head reeled. Presently I could think again. I said to myself—it is done for my daughter, grief will kill her! I went upstairs. Tina, seated before her wheel, spun. Her eyes were fixed; her cheeks were purple; heavy drops of sweat rolled down her forehead. When I came in, her eyes were turned in my direction—she did not budge—she did not recognize me. I believed she was crazy; sobs choked me. I called to her—'Tina! Tina! My child!' No answer; no look of recognition—nothing! nothing! I left her to my mother's care, and ran to Vannes in quest of a physician. I trembled with fear lest he should arrive too late. I informed the physician of

what had happened. He took horse, and followed me. I ran afoot faster than he on horseback. I knocked again at our door, and entering I asked my mother: 'Is she dead?' 'No,' she answered, 'she had a spell of weakness, but, upon recovering, she recognized me. I wished to undress her to lay her to bed. She wept and begged me not to take off her wedding clothes. She is now on her bed.' We ran upstairs with the physician. We found her lying on her bed with her nuptial headdress and clothes. She had grown so pale that I shivered. This time she recognized and stretched out her arms to me. She endeavored to rise; her strength failed her. I approached close to her pale face; she embraced me—her lips were icy—also her cheeks. I realized on the instant that she was expiring. I felt as if my heart was being wrung—I screamed with actual pain! My mother drew me away. I had forgotten the physician. He contemplated my daughter for a long time; he touched her hand, her forehead; and then he motioned to me to leave the room with him. The sudden shock that my daughter had sustained caused all her blood to rush to her heart; a blood vessel had burst; she was dying. That was what the physician said to me. I returned to Tina's room. She endeavored to smile—what a smile!—and she said to us, to my mother and me: 'Give me your dear hands, and leave them in mine till the end.' She pressed them gently, and a little later said: 'Oh! that warms me up.' Poor dear child, her hands were so cold! her little hands were already so cold that they froze the very marrow in my bones. I sought to comfort her. She shook her head and said to my mother: 'Do you see grandma, do you now agree that heaven does send us tokens to prepare us for misfortune? The black crow of this morning? The little dead dove? Do you remember? No—God did not wish me to be the wife of Nominoë. We exchanged rings'—and she raised to her lips the ring that she wore on her finger—'I was his wife, and see me, now, his widow before his death. He married me only out of kindness, but the Lord God did not want that marriage. May His will be done! May Nominoë be happy! Father, you must pardon him, as I pardon him the sorrow that, despite himself, he has caused us. It is not his fault. Had he been able to love me with a husband's love he would have loved me. Pardon for him—it is the last request of your daughter Tina. She also asks you to bury her in her bridal robe, with her ring and her nuptial ribbons. Good father, adieu! Grandma, adieu. Leave your hands in mine—I die—'"

Tankeru could not finish the sentence. His voice, which trembled more and more as he proceeded, utterly broke down. Sobs convulsed his frame. In the tenderness of his grief he forgot for a moment the revengeful rage that transported him, and he himself repeated the supreme last words of Tina—the pardon that with her last breath she implored for Nominoë! The latter, utterly overwhelmed with the distressful report of Tina's last hours, listened to it in mournful silence. So profound was his grief, so sincere his remorse,

that he never thought of his anxiety concerning the fate of Mademoiselle Plouernel. Suddenly Tankeru's tears ceased to flow. With them also ceased his tenderness. Only his despair now remained. His fury was rekindled; he picked up the hammer that had fallen at his feet, swung it in the air and rushed upon Nominoë crying:

"I have informed you of the sufferings and the agony of your victim—now, assassin, die!"

The heavy hammer of the blacksmith rose to drop upon the head of Nominoë. The latter jumped aside, threw his arms around Tankeru's neck, embraced him effusively, and said in a voice choked with tears:

"I do not fear death! Not that! But, believe me, my death would one day weigh heavily upon your conscience! You loved my mother so dearly! Tina has pardoned me, and she asked you to have mercy upon me! You see my tears, my remorse—you loved me once—your heart is good—uncle! uncle!—do not kill me! Eternal remorse would pursue you for the act!"

The touching words of Nominoë, his tender embrace, the memory of his sister, the last words of Tina, the paternal affection he had always felt for his nephew disarmed Tankeru. The hammer slipped from his hand and fell at his feet.

At that moment Serdan and Salaun Lebrenn, whom the vassals had freed, entered precipitately into the cell. Serdan cried out:

"Flee! Flee! The fire is reaching the building!"

Having overheard his son's words in answer to Tankeru's threat to kill him, Salaun took the blacksmith's hand and pressing it warmly in his own, said:

"Brother, I swear to God! Despite the immensity of the wrong that he has done, Nominoë does deserve, if not your pardon, at least your pity!"

"The fire! The fire!" cried several peasants who had descended into the prison to deliver the captives, and who, having regained the stairs, now ran through the gallery of cells. In view of the increasing danger, the blacksmith, Salaun and his son dashed across the black clouds of smoke, picking their way by the ruddy reflections which the conflagration projected upon the steps of the staircase through the prison gate, that looked like the mouth of a roaring furnace. Nominoë followed close upon the steps of his father and the blacksmith who preceded him. Despite the imminence of the danger that

he ran, the youth's thoughts now returned to Mademoiselle Plouernel. In heartrending accents he muttered:

"Oh, woe! Oh, woe! The fire is consuming the castle. What may have become of her? Where may Bertha be?"

"She is safe!" answered Serdan, who, happening to walk close by the side of Nominoë, had overheard him. "The peasants informed us that, once masters of the castle, their companions took care of their good demoiselle. A carriage was quickly hitched to a team of horses, and Mademoiselle Plouernel departed with her nurse and an equerry to Mezlean. The Marchioness, terror-stricken, died of apoplexy."

Tankeru, Serdan, Salaun Lebrenn and Nominoë made their escape through the underground staircase of the prison building. The building itself was now ablaze, the same as all the out-houses appertaining to the castle. Their roofs fell with crash upon crash within the walls that had partly crumbled in the conflagration, and shot up long streamers of fire and sparkling embers. Seeing that the castle itself did not contain the mass of combustible materials of all sorts with which the out-houses were filled, it offered a longer resistance to the conflagration. Off and on a tongue of fire would be seen expiring in the midst of smoke that was still escaping from the windows on the ground floor; the panes of glass had exploded noisily and the frames were charred black. But the fire spared the upper floors where the vassals still pursued their work of devastation, throwing out of the windows pieces of furniture, looking glasses, bedding, books, pictures. Debris of all kinds was heaped in the center of the court of honor, and the insurgents turned the heap into a huge bonfire that lighted the three gibbets which were erected for Salaun, Serdan and Nominoë, but from which now dangled the lifeless bodies of the Count of Plouernel, Abbot Boujaron and Sergeant La Montagne, all three objects of the implacable hatred of the people—the seigneur, the priest and the King's soldier.

Informed of the death of his brother Gildas who was massacred together with the other delegates of the vassals, Tankeru excepted, Salaun looked for and found the body, and laid it in a grave that he dug with the assistance of Tankeru, Serdan and Nominoë. That funeral duty being fulfilled, Salaun said to them, as he sadly contemplated the scene of wreck and ruin which they had been unable to prevent:

"Oh, my son! my friends! Had we been free, we would have succeeded in preventing these acts of savagery that are so fatal to our cause! Alas, it is now too late! What is the mysterious law that causes the re-vindication of

human rights ever to drag excesses in its wake! The vassals of the Count of Plouernel first submitted their grievances humbly to him, and presented the surely legitimate demands which they formulated in the Peasant Code. Had the Count listened to their claims, he would have done an act of humanity and justice, and he would have preserved his privileges. By yielding to the peasants' wishes, and discontinuing to look upon his peasants as beasts of burden, that man would have shown himself not only just, but also intelligent in his own interest. If these wretched people were spared the homicidal privations that, before taking them to their graves, gradually sap their health, undermine their strength, and render them unfit for continued toil, they would have yielded more wealth to him, and would have rendered more fruitful the seigniorial domains. But no! In his pitiless egotism, the Count of Plouernel answered the peasants' prayers with disdain, with insult, with murder! They thereupon grew furious, enraged. They returned blow for blow, death for death; gave themselves over to frightful acts of reprisal; killed their seigneur; and now ravage and burn down his castle! It will cost the brother of the Count of Plouernel a good deal to repair the disasters of this single night—twenty times more than it would have cost the Count to ease his vassals for a century and more of the taxes that oppressed them. Alas! This is not an isolated instance in history. Did not the seigneurs and their bishops proceed in the same manner during the Middle Ages towards those communes which our ancestor Fergan the Quarryman was one of the most intrepid to defend? The communiers also began with humble supplications to their seigneurs, or their bishops, to alleviate their taxes. But both seigneurs and bishops ordered their men-at-arms to mow down the 'villains' and 'clowns.' And, thereupon, 'clowns' and 'villains' rose in revolt, and, arms in hand, at the price of their blood, and after taking signal vengeance, conquered the franchises and the charters—the safeguards of their freedom! Even during the last century, did not the Reformers first request humbly that they be granted the right to exercise their own cult? But the Church and the Crown answered their prayers with the pyre and wholesale massacres. And thereupon the Reformers in turn, rose in revolt, and, after a half century of bloody religious wars, the Edict of Nantes finally consecrated and confirmed the four edicts of tolerance which the Huguenots had conquered, arms in hand. And yet, as our ancestor Christian the printer said in the days of Francis I, a simple decree of two lines only, recognizing in all the right to exercise their cult, while respecting the cult of others, would have avoided the dreadful catastrophes that Catholic intolerance brought upon France for over fifty years. What is the reason that all civil, political or religious reform can be conquered only at the price of blood and of frightful disasters? Alas! simply because the nobility, the clergy and royalty look upon all attempt to curb or clip the rights, that they consider sacred, as an outrage, as theft, and as the ruination of the land; because they never will

consent voluntarily to curtail their privileges, these being the source of their power and their wealth; because, even did they grant some measure of reform under the pressure of necessity, they would strive to withdraw what they conceded, the moment they thought the danger was over."

"But, at least, however violent the reaction against the reforms that are granted, something always remains; some gain always is left," observed Nominoë. "It is only by this process, slowly, painfully, and step by step, that human progress pursues its course across the ages."

"Oh!" broke in Salaun. "Without this deep-rooted faith in the irresistible progress of humanity, a progress that is as evident as the sun's light, what would man be? A sport of accident, a blind creature, fated to wear himself out with impotent efforts in the midst of eternal darkness! No; no. You did not wish that, Oh, God of justice! You have pointed out a sublime goal to man! His free will chooses the path, be it slow or swift, easy or painful, peaceful or bloody. Your sovereign will is bound to be accomplished, it is in process of being accomplished.—And now, my friends, seeing we were not able to prevent these dreadful acts of reprisal, let us rally the peasants. Our troop will be swollen by accessions from all the parishes that are now in revolt. We shall march upon Rennes in order to bring assistance to the people and the bourgeois there in arms. The other chieftains, at the head of the peasants of the districts of Nantes and of Quimper, will, on their part, carry succor to their respective cities in revolt. From that moment, the victorious insurrection, mistress of Brittany as it is of Guyenne, of Languedoc, of Saintonge and of Dauphiné, will impose the PEASANT CODE upon the clergy and the seigniory, and its national reforms upon Louis XIV!—THE LAND SHALL BELONG TO THOSE WHO CULTIVATE IT."

CHAPTER VIII

THE MANOR OF MEZLEAN

The manor of Mezlean, located at a considerable distance from the burg of the same name, lies about half a league from the druid stones of Karnak, which rise on the border of the ocean in long and wide avenues of gigantic pillars.

About a month had elapsed since the burning of the Castle of Plouernel. It was night. Bertha's nurse, old Marion, was mechanically spinning at her wheel in the spacious lower hall of the manor that was so long uninhabited, and the antique furniture of which dated from the reign of Henry IV. Near Marion, on a table, stood a copper lamp with three jets.

"It is going on three weeks that old Du Buisson, mademoiselle's equerry, has been on the road, and he is not yet back," mused Marion uneasily to herself. "Can he have met with some accident? If not, I wonder what news he will bring from down there! One hears nothing here at Mezlean of what goes on in Brittany. A company of soldiers marched into the burg this morning. They can have found there only women, children and old men, besides some few other people who took no part in the revolt." And shuddering at the thought, Marion added: "Oh, what a night, what a night was that on which the peasants attacked the castle! I thought my poor Bertha's last hour had sounded when I saw them invade our apartment, arms in hand! But not at all. 'You are our good demoiselle, as good as your brother is wicked,' said they to Bertha. 'You have nothing to fear, demoiselle. But leave the place; take along everything you want. We ordered your domestics to hitch up a carriage. They are waiting for you.' And mademoiselle took a little portrait of her mother, a casket containing some money and jewelry, and a manuscript written by Colonel Plouernel. I hurriedly packed up a few bundles, and we left the castle. Alas! They were at that moment hanging Monseigneur the Count, Monsieur the Abbot, and the sergeant. 'Mercy! Mercy for my brother!' cried my poor Bertha piteously, falling upon her knees on the staircase, from the top of which she saw Monseigneur the Count, pale and bleeding, struggling against the vassals who were dragging him to the gibbet! It was too late! Mademoiselle's voice was not heard by the peasants in the tumult. We finally arrived here with a coachman and a lackey. Old Du Buisson escorted us on horseback, riding beside the door of the carriage. Mademoiselle sent the men back with generous expressions of her gratitude, keeping only Du Buisson and myself in her service, besides the porter and his wife. I trembled when I saw my poor Bertha relapse after so many shocks, into a serious illness. But thanks to God, I was mistaken. For a few

days she had a high fever as the consequence of her despair at the horrible death of her brother. But slowly she recovered her health. I must admit that, since her last great illness at Versailles, she never has been better—she is now more beautiful and fresher than I have ever seen her. She seems calm and happy. All that should set me at ease. And yet—sad presentiments assail my heart. I can not overcome them."

At this point Marion broke off abruptly, listened toward the hall door and said:

"I hear steps. Who can it be that is coming in at this hour?"

The door opened, and Du Buisson entered.

"God be blessed! At last you are back, Du Buisson! Well, what news do you bring?"

"Bad news, my dear Marion. Bad news from everywhere!"

"Good God! Then Monsieur Nominoë Lebrenn, the poor young man—?"

"He must have fared like so many others. I found it impossible to discover any traces of either him or his father. Whether he is dead or alive, I can not tell."

"Oh, my poor Bertha! My poor Bertha! How much is she to be pitied!"

"Fortunately mademoiselle is a brave woman. Moreover, she entertained but slight hopes of my succeeding in the mission that she charged me with. I did my best. How is mademoiselle's health?"

"Excellent, my dear Du Buisson!"

"Heaven be praised!"

"Every day mademoiselle takes a long walk along the seashore in the direction of the stones of Karnak. She seems to have taken a liking for the spot. When she returns home she takes up the manuscript of Colonel Plouernel, and starts to read. Especially in the evening, she remains for hours at a stretch in a revery, contemplating the sky. She looks sad every time the stars are veiled by the clouds."

"She must have been impatient to see me back?"

"Yes. As far as I could judge from a few words that she dropped to me, she is awaiting your return to take some kind of action. What it may be I do not know."

"Perhaps she contemplates leaving France for a while, and traveling abroad."

"I do believe she is thinking of a voyage. More than once did mademoiselle say to me we were here only transiently."

"At any rate, the important point is that she is much less melancholy, and her health is good—not so?"

"Yes, her sadness seems to have vanished, and her health is excellent. And yet, Du Buisson, I often feel greatly alarmed about mademoiselle; it seems to me some misfortune is approaching—sad thoughts assail me day and night."

"What can be the cause of these presentiments of evil?"

"I hardly dare tell you. You would take me for a fool—you would laugh at me, I fear."

"Nothing that concerns our young mademoiselle can cause me to indulge in levity, Marion. Speak out, I pray you."

"Well, shortly after your departure, my poor Bertha, who was barely over her fever, still seemed quite sad. One day mademoiselle was speaking to me with her usual kindness of heart about my family in Vannes, and she asked me whether none of my relatives needed any financial assistance. I answered her that my brother, a small trader, found in his business enough to meet the personal wants of himself, his wife and children; and, in the hope of amusing mademoiselle, I added that my brother and I expected from one moment to another a windfall of incalculable value. Mademoiselle very soberly asked me what I meant. I answered that one of our cousins, an old man almost dotish, was, as so many others have been doing of late years, blowing in order to find the 'powder of projection'—"[7]

"What, Marion! Did this blowing fad penetrate to the very heart of Brittany? Are there here also people who indulge in such vagaries?"

"Unfortunately so. The cousin whom I refer to is one of those fools. He inherited a little patrimony, and sank it all in alembics and chemical retorts. All the while, the old fellow is ever more convinced that he is on the track of that famous powder with the help of which everything, just everything, can

be changed into gold. I was retailing this nonsense to mademoiselle in the hope of amusing her, when I perceived that she suddenly grew quite serious, and said to me there was more truth than people generally thought for in the wisdom of the alchemists; that she was curious to pay a visit to the blower; and she wound up saying that we would go the very next day to Vannes."

"So, then, mademoiselle took the nonsense seriously! That is surprising—but it does not justify your alarm."

"I also was very much surprised, I must confess; and my surprise increased greatly when, just before stepping into the carriage to go to Vannes, I saw mademoiselle open her casket, take out some gold and precious stones, and put them into a little satchel that she carried. We arrived at the suburbs of Vannes. The carriage stopped before an isolated house in which the dotish fellow lives. I found him surrounded by his furnaces, and announced to him the visit of mademoiselle. She went in, told me to wait for her outside, and she remained quite long alone with him. Does not that yet strike you as singular?"

"Go to, Marion! You are trying to hint at magic. To be sure mademoiselle's visit to the old fool is singular. But that does not indicate magic."

"I am coming to the point. I was waiting for mademoiselle in the necromancer's vestibule when suddenly he came out looking wild, ran out to the nearest house, and speedily returned carrying—a big black cat!"

"Oh! Oh! I begin to see! The black cat is the cabalistic animal par excellence! And what became of the black cat?"

"I do not know—but what is quite certain is that about an hour later mademoiselle came out of the blower's den beaming with happiness and joy. Her feet did not seem to touch the ground. In short, the expression on her face had changed to the point that I asked myself, and often ask myself still, whether that man may not have resorted to some witchcraft that could so suddenly metamorphose my poor Bertha. I must also tell you that she did not bring back to Mezlean the gold pieces and precious stones which she took from her casket. Whether it is that, knowing from me that the old man is penniless, she meant to help him, or whether it is that she was made to pay through the nose for some charm—I do not know. But, no. She is too sensible to be duped by such juggler's tricks."

"My poor Marion, all the black cats in the world will not make me believe in sorcery. But I am struck by the change that you say came over mademoiselle's spirits after her visit to the blower, especially if the change has been permanent, as you claim it is."

"And so it is. Since that day, mademoiselle has never looked sad, nor care-worn, as formerly. She seems to await your return impatiently in order to take a decision connected with some voyage. Finally, when she speaks to me of her deceased mother, Madam the Countess, and she does so quite often—that is another matter that perplexes and alarms me a good deal—mademoiselle occasionally expresses herself in language that implies she expects to meet her soon. On such occasions the eyes of my poor Bertha become so brilliant that I cannot face their light; her face radiates celestial beauty; she looks transfigured, as I said to you before, and—"

Marion broke suddenly off and said to the old equerry:

"Hush! Here is mademoiselle."

CHAPTER IX

THE PEASANTS' DEFEAT

Mademoiselle Plouernel entered the apartment walking slowly. She looked fresher, more beautiful than ever. She was dressed in white. The old equerry bowed respectfully and said to her, who upon seeing him, uttered a cry of surprise:

"I did not hurry to present myself before mademoiselle because the tidings that I bring are of the saddest."

"Leave us alone, Marion," said Mademoiselle Plouernel to her nurse. "I must see Du Buisson privately for a moment."

Marion left the room, and Bertha kindly addressed the equerry:

"I am all the sorrier for the trouble I have put you to, Du Buisson, seeing that it was to prove fruitless;" and seating herself, the young girl added: "Do not remain standing; you must feel tired after your long journey."

Out of deference for his mistress the old man hesitated to obey. Bertha repeated:

"Take a seat; I want it."

Du Buisson sat down. Bertha proceeded:

"Then you bring me back my letter?"

"Here it is, mademoiselle," answered the old man. "I could not find the addressee," and taking a letter out of his wallet, he passed it over to Bertha, who laid the folded and sealed paper on a table beside her, saying:

"So then you found it impossible to ascertain the whereabouts of Monsieur Nominoë Lebrenn? Could you gather no information concerning him?"

"None, mademoiselle! When I left Mezlean I learned that the troop of insurgent peasants took the road to Rennes, was greatly augmented by contingents from the parishes which it traversed, and must have numbered about twenty thousand men, more or less well armed. It was a veritable army. Monsieur Nominoë Lebrenn, his father and Monsieur Serdan had brought the body under considerable disciplinary order. Nevertheless, all their efforts to the contrary, not a few disorderly acts were indulged in at the

castles and rectories. The peasant army moved all the while towards Rennes. I hoped to encounter it at Guemenee. But there I learned that envoys of Monsieur the Duke of Chaulnes, Governor of Brittany, had arrived at that town ahead of the insurgents and announced to the inhabitants that the new royal taxes were repealed, that the parliament of Brittany was to assemble at Vannes, that it would register the Peasant Code, that the vassals also were to be exonerated from paying the royal taxes, and that thenceforth they were all to be protected against any further extortions and maltreatment by the seigneurs and the curates. The promises made by the emissaries of Monsieur the Duke of Chaulnes caused great jubilation among the peasants. They declared that, having obtained what they wanted, the war was ended, and they would return home to their respective parishes. So far from sharing the confidence into which the peasants were lulled, Lebrenn and Serdan urged upon them the necessity of not disbanding and not laying down their arms; they assured the peasants that they were being deceived, and that the plan was to dissolve their army by means of mendacious promises, and then to fall upon and crush them. Indeed, the promises were but a snare and a lure. But the lure seduced the peasants, who were homesick for their huts, their wives and their children. In vain did their chiefs urge them to march upon Rennes, the usual place for the parliament to hold its sessions, and support the assembly in its defiance of the King."

"And the advice was not heeded?"

"No, mademoiselle. The vassals, delighted at the realization of their aspirations, answered that it was impossible to suppose Monseigneur the Governor would vilely lie to them. They broke ranks and struck the roads home in separate bands, proclaiming everywhere along their passage that the Peasant Code was accepted by the seigneurs and the curates. Great rejoicing reigned in all the parishes of Brittany. Everywhere bonfires were lighted. Upon learning at Guemenee of the dispersion of the insurgents, I inquired after their chiefs. I learned that Monsieur Salaun Lebrenn, his son and Monsieur Serdan had proceeded to Rennes. I went thither. The masses of the people, especially the bourgeoisie, being less credulous than the peasants, remained in arms, the same as at Nantes, awaiting the opening of the parliament promised by Monsieur the Duke of Chaulnes. While at Rennes I looked for the Lebrenns and Monsieur Serdan. Later I learned they had departed for Nantes. Thither I wended my way. Upon arriving at Nantes I learned that a body of ten thousand troops, commanded by Monsieur De Forbin, had just entered Brittany in order to crush the rebellious parliamentarians—were they bourgeois or peasants. On the following day the town of Nantes was occupied by two regiments of infantry, supported by

artillery and cavalry. The executions commenced. On the first day forty-seven leading bourgeois were hanged, and eleven men of the common people, who were marked as seditious, broken alive on the wheel."

"My God!" cried Mademoiselle Plouernel horrified. "How much blood! How much blood!"

"The city was mulcted of one hundred thousand ecus, the sum to be delivered to the troops within forty-eight hours. Thereupon a decree of the Governor of Brittany was posted pronouncing sentence of death upon all those who would afford refuge to the chiefs of the insurrection. At the head of the list of the chiefs, whose heads were pronounced forfeit, were the names of Salaun and Nominoë Lebrenn."

"I am not surprised," put in Bertha calmly. "And at Nantes neither were you able to find any traces of Monsieur Lebrenn and his son?"

"No, mademoiselle. From that moment it seemed to me there was nothing left for me to do but to return and inform you of the miscarriage of my errand. But, alas! as I crossed Brittany, what a lamentable spectacle! Pillage, desolation, gallows—everywhere! The soldiers treat Brittany like a conquered country, and demean themselves in the identical manner that they did in Flanders. Their acts of rapine and cruelty transcend description. I saw along the roads almost as many gibbets as trees! The peasants are tortured and then butchered. Those who flee to the woods are tracked, hunted and killed like wild beasts by the soldiers! They spare neither old men nor children—the women are outraged. In short, such is the terror that reigns in the country that yesterday, as I crossed Lesneven, which was just occupied by a company of soldiers, I saw a score of peasants throw themselves upon their knees, clasp their hands, and offering their throats, cry out pitifully to the soldiers: 'Cut our throats, if you wish, but do not make us languish in torture!' Finally this morning, at Karer, a lot of drunken soldiers roasted a child alive!"

"Enough! That's horrible!" cried Mademoiselle Plouernel, shivering. "Oh, great century! Oh, Grand Monarch! Blessed be the hour when I shall depart from this land, the scene of so many horrors and so many infamies!"

"Is mademoiselle going on a voyage?"

"Yes," answered Bertha with an indefinable smile; "yes, I contemplate undertaking a long voyage."

"May I hope that mademoiselle will keep me near her? I am old, but devoted."

"I know your devotion, good and faithful servitor. It matches Marion, my nurse's. Nevertheless, I could hardly think of taking you with me, either you, or her."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed the old man, tears coming to his eyes. "What! Are we not to accompany mademoiselle? But, good God! I may ask without presuming too much, where will mademoiselle find more faithful servants, or more devoted to her? We must implore mademoiselle to keep us near her, in her service."

"Can you imagine that, if I were to keep any servants, I would look for others than yourselves?"

"But, mademoiselle," persisted Du Buisson, stupefied, "mademoiselle can not think of traveling alone!"

"Exactly! That surprises you? I can well understand that it does. And yet, it is so. I need not add that I shall provide for your old age, my good Du Buisson."

"Oh, I hope mademoiselle does not think that my private interest—is what concerns me—"

"Your disinterestedness, Du Buisson, is equal to your probity and zeal—I know it. For that very reason it will be an agreeable duty on my part to recompense your long services. That is not yet all. I shall leave you—you and Marion—charged with a mission that, I am sure, you will be thankful to me for entrusting you with. I can entrust it to no worthier hands. The large number of executions, which, by order of Louis XIV will turn Brittany into a vast cemetery, will make many widows, many orphans. Before my departure I shall leave with you a considerable sum in gold and valuables. You and Marion shall use the same towards alleviating the distress of the poor families whose breadwinners will have perished and—"

Marion burst into the room. She was pale and trembling. In a broken voice she said:

"Oh, mademoiselle! What a singular occurrence!"

"What is the matter, nurse?"

"I hardly dare tell you! My God, you will be so much surprised! It will be so strange to you—I am all upset!"

"What is the matter?"

"Margarid, the porter's wife, came up to the house to announce to me that someone knocked at the gate, that she opened, a person appeared and asked to speak—"

"Well?"

"I told Margarid to let the person come in; he did—I saw him. It is—Nominoë Lebrenn."

"Heaven be praised! Thanks, Oh Lord, thanks!" cried Mademoiselle Plouernel, clasping her hands tightly and raising her eyes moistened with joyful tears. Immediately after her first transport of gladness, Bertha said to Marion in a voice that trembled:

"Bring him to me. Let him come."

Marion left, and Bertha returned to her old equerry:

"You will not forget my recommendations regarding the sum that I destine for the widows and orphans—whom the savage soldiers of the Grand Monarch will have made."

"Mademoiselle's wishes shall be carried out," answered the old man, bowing.

He left the room; almost immediately after Nominoë entered the hall. His clothes were dusty; he threw his wallet and traveling stick upon an arm chair. He stood alone before Bertha.

CHAPTER X

UNITED

Mademoiselle Plouernel stepped buoyantly towards Nominoë, reached out her hand to him, and said delightedly:

"At last I see you again!"

"How beautiful she is! My God, how beautiful she is!" the young man murmured involuntarily, standing in ecstasy before the young girl whose hand he held in his own. Never before, not even at The Hague, was he dazzled by the radiant beauty of Bertha as now. For a moment he remained as if in a transport—enraptured—in ecstatic adoration.

Soon the intoxicating emotion was succeeded by a bitter presentiment in Nominoë's heart. He knew himself to be passionately loved by Bertha. She must have suffered a thousand cruel pangs at the thought of the perils that he ran since they last met, above all at the thought of the wreck of the marriage which she had so long looked forward to. And yet, so far from finding her dejected, pale, emaciated by grief and despair, she stood there blooming with freshness and beauty. Love has a penetrating eye. Mademoiselle Plouernel divined the secret thought of Nominoë, and addressing him with a charming smile, said:

"Be frank, my friend, you find me too beautiful, do you not?"

"What is that you say, Bertha!"

"Admit it, pallor would better suit my cheeks than the tint of the rose. Recent tears should dim the brilliancy of my eyes. An expression of despair should compress my lips. Instead—my eyes shine brilliantly, my cheeks are red, and a smile sits upon my lips. Nothing in me betrays the pangs of despair; I look brimful of confidence, of calm and serene hope. What can I say to you, Nominoë?—my face can dissemble as little as my heart. Only a minute ago, before your arrival, I was happy; I see you again, my happiness is doubled. My words, my appearance, astonish you, because you left me broken with grief. Here," added Mademoiselle Plouernel taking from the table the letter which her old equerry had just returned to her; "read this; you will then understand what seems unexplainable to you. I sent to you a man whom I trust; he was to deliver this letter to you; he followed your traces to Guemenee, to Rennes, to Nantes; nowhere could he find you."

The young man took the letter; Bertha stepped out of the hall for a moment and quickly returned carrying a rather heavy casket. She laid the latter upon the table where also stood some writing materials, and traced a few lines with a firm hand. She then folded the two sheets; on the one she wrote—To my dear and good Marion; on the other—To my faithful Du Buisson. While Bertha was thus engaged, Nominoë informed himself of the contents of the letter that she had handed to him. A tremor ran through his frame and his moist eyes turned to Bertha. "What a heart! What courage! As brave as she is beautiful!" he muttered to himself, and resumed his reading. When he finished he carried the letter to his lips. Tears covered his face. He stepped forward, transfigured. His countenance became, like Bertha's, radiantly serene. He raised his head; his tears ceased to flow; a smile flitted over his lips; he collected his thoughts, and said to Mademoiselle Plouernel, who stepped towards him:

"Bertha, the future dazzles me like your beauty; but two words about the past: The insurrection is suppressed; Serdan is dead; my father! my father has gone and now is reborn, and lives yonder—but, alas! I could not bid him my supreme adieu, and close his eyes."

"When did that misfortune happen?"

"At Nantes, where we stopped, together with Serdan, we hoped to be able to rekindle the energy of the population of the town, and counteract the defection of the peasants. But the promises of Monsieur Chaulnes had made their dupes in Nantes also. Hence arose a fatal division between those of the inhabitants who laid down their arms, and those who wished to remain under arms. In the midst of the discord Nantes was occupied by a strong armed force. To attempt resistance would have been folly. The executions started. My father, Serdan and myself were signalled out as the chiefs of the sedition. From the moment the King's troops occupied Nantes the town gates were watched. We could not leave the place. Some devoted friends offered us a place of refuge, but we had to hide separately. I left my father and Serdan. They were discovered in their hiding places. Serdan, who was fallen upon as he lay asleep, was arrested. The next day he was hanged. My father at least escaped such an inauspicious death. Entrenched in his room and well armed, he defended himself until he fell. The next day the Governor's decree was proclaimed to the sound of the trumpet pronouncing sentence of death upon all who thenceforward gave aid or comfort to the heads of the sedition. From my place of concealment I could hear the proclamation distinctly. I wished to surrender myself, in order to free my host from the responsibility that rested upon him. Besides, I was tired of life. The miscarriage of our insurrectionary plans, the death of my father, of

Serdan, of Tina my bride—the certainty of your love, Bertha, the prospect of being reborn in the invisible world, everything drove me toward what is called death. I only regretted not having seen you once more on this earth. Frightened at my determination to surrender myself, my host opposed it warmly. Finding me set upon my purpose, he offered me a means of escape that he considered safe, although singular. The cemetery of the Protestants of Nantes lies outside of the walls, as a sign of contempt. It is now forbidden to the Reformed pastors to accompany a corpse to its last resting place. My host proposed to place me in a coffin. Two men were to transport me out of town, as if they were carrying a Protestant corpse to the grave. The plan was carried out. In that manner I was enabled to leave Nantes. Obsessed with the wish of seeing you I came to Mezlean, traveling only by night, and occasionally stopping at some solitary peasant's hut, or hiding in the forest. In that way I succeeded in coming to you. And now, Bertha, let us forget the past, let us think only of the present. A dazzling future discloses itself to my eyes."

Nominoë was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Marion, who, a prey to violent anxiety, cried out from the threshold:

"An officer of the King! and soldiers!"

"What does the officer want?" asked Bertha without stirring.

"To search the manor, instantly, he says, for a criminal. The porter refused to open the gate without your orders, mademoiselle; the officer threatens to use force."

"Heaven and earth! They will not take me alive!" cried Nominoë, drawing his dagger partly out of its sheath. "The soldiers of the Grand Monarch will not enjoy the pleasure of arresting me—I shall escape their gibbet."

"Keep cool, my friend; keep cool," replied Mademoiselle Plouernel, stepping towards the door of the hall with a tranquil smile. "Come, nurse."

"Bertha," asked Nominoë, "where are you going?"

"I am going to ask the officer whether he has completely lost his senses. What! Armed men demand, at this advanced hour of the night, to search the house of Mademoiselle Plouernel, when she is at home! No, no! I shall induce the noble officer to postpone his search for to-morrow. I feel certain the officer will feel happy to accede to my wishes."

"And suppose the officer should persist in forcing his way in?"

"Mademoiselle, there is a safe way of escape," said Marion anxiously. "The passage that leads from the close to the orchard runs under the path that skirts the walls of the garden; once in the orchard, the fields and the seashore can be safely reached."

"Mademoiselle!" the old equerry in turn ran in crying bewildered: "The soldiers have entered the yard and are trying to beat down the house door with the butts of their muskets."

"The door is thick; the walls of the close are high; we still have the passage to the orchard," observed Bertha calmly, and she added almost mirthfully: "If, contrary to my expectations, and after having heard me—I shall say nothing of after having seen me—the officer should persist in his savage conduct, then I shall return here instantly, and we shall have time to carry out our project, Nominoë. I have penetrated your thought. It is in accord with mine."

As Mademoiselle Plouernel uttered these last words she cast upon Nominoë a glance that intoxicated him. She left the hall followed by Marion and the old equerry and went to the manor door.

Left alone, Nominoë exclaimed in a transport of joy:

"She knows my mind! Oh, God be blessed for having brought me back to Mezlean! The minutes are numbered! I must now hasten to fulfill my father's wishes in the matter of our family narratives and relics. On the eve of the insurrection he deposited them at Vannes with a faithful and devoted friend, the only relative we have left in Brittany."

Nominoë drew a thick package from his pocket, laid it beside him, and rapidly covered several leaves with a fine and close writing. Mademoiselle Plouernel re-entered the hall, and smilingly said to Nominoë:

"We were wholly wrong, my friend, in doubting the gallantry of the officer. 'Is it not true, monsieur,' I asked him, 'that it is not your intention to invade to-night the dwelling of a young lady, who is alone in her house with her nurse and an old grey-headed equerry? To-morrow it will be daylight. The gate of the manor shall be thrown open to you. You shall then search for your criminal. Place your sentries at the gate. Surround the walls, if you fear escape in that quarter. To-morrow I should be happy to express to you my appreciation of your courtesy, and to the best of my powers I shall do you the honors of my house.' Our man," Bertha added, "lost himself in apologies; he postponed for to-morrow his visit to the manor, and asked my pardon for

the liberty he would take of placing sentrymen at the gate and at the wall of the close in order to render all escape impossible. Thereupon I bade the officer good evening—and here I am back again."

"But now, my friend," Bertha proceeded in a more serious tone, after a pause, "in an hour it will be daylight. Before that hour shall have elapsed we must take and carry out a resolution that has been long decreed. You must have been convinced thereof by the letter which I wrote to you. And, once upon this subject, I must say that, even if the death of your bride had not rendered our marriage impossible, it became so by reason of your encounter with my brother. You struck him with a sword; I could not accept your hand, now that it is reddened with my brother's blood. Above all, however legitimate the revolt was, it caused his death, and you were one of the chiefs of the uprising. An abyss separates us in this world, Nominoë. Back in this manor after the burning of the Castle of Plouernel, I faced the reality without weakness. Our separation, the barriers that rendered our union impossible, weakened in nothing my love. That can not be affected by earthly causes. But my existence—sorely tried by so many misfortunes, by so many and cruel disappointments, even in the bosom of my own family—was becoming intolerable to me. Our marriage being broken off, my life lacked purpose. Then came the passionate desire to see my mother again, and shall I confess it to you?—an invincible, a devouring curiosity regarding the worlds where our lives are continued, body and soul: a curiosity that bordered on vertigo, when, back at Mezlean, and seated here in the evening with my eyes fixed upon the sky, I contemplated the myriads of stars, where our re-births are effected, as infinite in number as all eternity. All these reasons determined me to leave this world, to the end of rejoining my mother and waiting for you, Nominoë, there where we shall meet again those whom we have loved. My determination being taken, I wrote to you, I wished to bid you good-bye and receive a word of farewell from you. My emissary departed in quest of you. Soon a metamorphosis operated itself in me. The burning insomnias, the painful anxieties that had so long been undermining my health and exhausting my strength, ceased in the face of the certainty that soon I should meet again my mother, and soon my enchanted eyes will have opened to the marvels of the new worlds! This assurance gave me the needed peace of mind. My health recovered rapidly; my days passed in ineffable reveries while waiting for the return of the messenger who carried my letter to you. And yet, at times, I felt a sort of hesitation with regard to the manner in which I was to undertake that voyage, which seems so distant, and yet lasts but the length of a breath. I went almost every day to Karnak, where your ancestress Hena, the Virgin of the Isle of Sen, immolated herself centuries ago, offering her blood as a sacrifice to the gods of Gaul. I delighted in strolling along that deserted beach that the winds and

waves ever beat against. Occasionally, I clambered up the highest of the Karnak rocks, the top of which offers a sort of platform, and I thought of leaping from there into the waves the foam of which seethes at the foot of the boulder. Other times I thought of imitating your ancestress Hena; I thought of cutting with a firm hand the slender thread that fetters our existence here below. But one day Marion accidentally informed me that one of her relatives blew—besides that he was ruining himself in the attempt to discover the philosopher's stone. I knew that those blowers, being experts in alchemy, often find in their alembics things that they do not look for—subtile poisons, sudden and frightful in their effects, which our sad days have, alas! often seen employed with disastrous results. Among other things these alchemists have discovered what is called the powder of succession. I went with Marion to Vannes, where the good man resides; I promised him a liberal reward if he would prepare me a mortal beverage, one that was certain and that left the victim in full control of his senses up to the last moment. Attracted by the prospect of gain, the blower set his retorts over the fire, and, in order to prove to me the efficacy of his liquid, left the room and quickly returned with a black cat in his arms. 'Just watch the effect of my philter,' said the blower to me, 'watch!' and before I had time to object to the experiment, he poured a few drops of the liquid into the mouth of the poor animal. The cat immediately lay down quietly. Her eyes remained clear, brilliant and alert. She stretched herself out with easy playfulness. But by little and little sleep seemed to overcome her, she lay down on one side; made a few slight motions—and expired peacefully, without the slightest tremor or symptom of pain. The alchemist had told me the truth! I took my newly acquired treasure with me. The certainty of a death that was so easy and sweet capped my sense of security, confidence and safety. Finally, returning to Mezlean this very night, my messenger informed me of the fruitlessness of his search for you, Nominoë. The revolt, of which you were one of the leaders, has provoked frightful reprisals. Brittany swims in blood. I decided to depart before to-morrow from this homicidal earth. I gave my last instructions to my old servitors. Under the pretext of contemplating a long voyage, I enclosed my testament in this casket."

Mademoiselle Plouernel paused. Only then did she notice that Nominoë, who was seated in an attitude of deep meditation, with his forehead resting upon his hand, was writing with the other. Until that moment the casket had concealed from Bertha's eyes the motion of his hand.

"Nominoë!" said Mademoiselle Plouernel in a tone of kind reproach, "I thought you were listening to my words—what are you writing there?"

"I am writing down your words, Bertha."

"Why so?"

"To join them to this," and Nominoë held up the envelope which he had laid upon the table.

"What does that package contain?"

"It contains the account of our love, which we may both be proud of. It is the narrative of what has happened to us, dear Bertha."

"And for whom do you destine that account?"

"For the descendants of the Lebrenn family," answered Nominoë, reading from one of the pages of his manuscript:

"Oh, sons of Joel—you who some day will read these lines traced by me, Nominoë Lebrenn, at this supreme hour, at the manor of Mezlean, under the eyes of Bertha of Plouernel—fail not to remember that angel of goodness and of concord, and, in her name, forget, pardon the injuries that her family has done to ours. Be merciful! Neither vengeance nor reprisals!"

"Noble heart!" answered Bertha with eyes moist with tears, and contemplating Nominoë with an expression of boundless love. "Accordingly, you are resolved, like myself, firmly resolved, to leave this sad earth for another dwelling place?"

"Even if an infamous death, from which only voluntary death could snatch me, did not await me to-morrow, my most ardent wish would be to accompany you, Bertha, upon this mysterious voyage."

"But to whom are you going to deliver the story of your life? To your father's brother, Gildas Lebrenn, the leasehold farmer of Karnak?"

"We dug the grave of Gildas, who was butchered by the King's soldiers on the staircase of the Castle of Plouernel."

"Will you then bequeath it to the father of your bride, your mother's brother?"

"Tankeru, the blacksmith, was arrested day before yesterday in his house, taken to Vannes, and broken alive on the wheel, along with Madok the miller. The inoffensive Paskou the Long, the 'Baz-valan' of my nuptials, was not spared either—he was hanged, like so many thousands of other insurgents!"

Nominoë rose, took up and opened his traveling wallet, and drew from it the iron head of a heavy blacksmith's hammer.

"Look at this, Bertha! This shall be joined to our family relics—sad and painful relics of a serf family."

"What sort of a hammer is that? It carries, cut into the iron head the Breton words Ez-Libr."

"They mean To Be Free. It was the device of Tankeru the blacksmith. He used this hammer as his weapon during the insurrection. I arrived this morning before dawn in the forest of Mezlean, feeling greatly alarmed over the fate of Tina's father. I went to his house early this morning. I calculated upon waiting there for nightfall, not daring to draw near Mezlean by daylight. I found at Tankeru's house only his desolate old mother. Tankeru had been arrested. Distracted with despair she informed me of her son's execution. My eyes alighted upon his hammer which lay near his extinct forge. I took its iron head. The blacksmith's hammer shall be joined to our symbolic relics. The manuscripts and the relic are to be forwarded to a relative, an artisan at Vannes, who will transmit them to his children. One of them will, perhaps, continue our plebeian annals by writing the history of Mademoiselle Plouernel and Nominoë Lebrenn."

Nominoë then proceeded to write and to read as he wrote:

"I, Nominoë Lebrenn, write this on the 17th of July, 1675, at the manor of Mezlean, one hour before dawn. Bertha of Plouernel is standing beside me. In a few minutes we shall leave the manor, which is surrounded by soldiers. The passage that leads from the close to the orchard runs under the road along which the sentries are on watch."

Nominoë stopped writing and asked Bertha:

"I understand it will be easy for us to reach the fields and the seashore after we are in the orchard?"

"Very easy, my friend. The owners of this manor had the vaulted passage dug under the road in order not to have to cross it every time they wished to go to the garden. The high walls that surround it will shelter us from the sight of the soldiers. The door that leads to the fields can be easily opened."

"When we leave the orchard," Nominoë proceeded to write, "we shall hasten to the seashore. The stones of Karnak rise there. The night is clear; the moon shines. Guided by the mellow light of the planet, Bertha and I, holding

each other's hands, will climb the stairs of the ancient rock consecrated to the sacrifices, the druid trysting place, where ran the blood of Hena, the Virgin of the Isle of Sen. When Bertha and I shall have reached the platform of the granite rock, then, in the presence of the immensity of the sky and the ocean, the illimitable expanses of which will spread before our eyes, we shall kneel down, and joining our voices, say to the God of justice:

"'We could not be joined in this world—we decided to be joined in death! in death, the mysterious dawn of our eternal re-birth! This expiatory union of a daughter of the conquering Franks with a son of the subjugated Gauls being impossible in the sight of man, we consecrate it before Thee. Our two souls are merged into one. May it please Thee, Oh, Almighty! that it may be likewise henceforth with our two races which have so long been enemies! May it please Thee to cause the one to regret the iniquities it has committed for these many centuries, and the other to pardon them! May it please Thee to cause this revolt, to which the oppressed were driven by an excess of hardships, to be a lesson to the vanquishers. May it please Thee so to ordain it that this shall be the last time blood is shed in these impious conflicts! May it please Thee that in the future the children, whether of the conquerors or the conquered, be forever equal in rights, equal in duties, equal in justice, and be like brothers in a broad humanity, Oh, God our Father! Freedom, equality, fraternity—the Universal Republic!'

"Having finished our prayer, Bertha and I—"

"Your pen, my friend!" said Mademoiselle Plouernel. "Give me your pen!"

And leaning over the table she wrote at the bottom of the page which Nominoë had begun:

"I, Bertha of Plouernel, close the narrative of what is to happen in a few minutes. Our prayer being finished, Nominoë and I, both upon our knees and filled with confident joy, will approach our lips to the magic philter which is to give us admission to the starry spheres; we shall soon thereupon feel our souls untrammeling themselves from their terrestrial wrappage, and fly radiant towards the Infinite. Death is but the separation of the body from the soul."

As Bertha was tracing these last lines the clock of the manor struck three in the morning.

"Nominoë," said Mademoiselle Plouernel, "let us make haste; it will not be long before daylight. Place this paper and the iron hammer head in your

traveling wallet. We shall leave them upon the table, addressed to the person that you may designate. My old servant will forward it to him, as I shall instruct him by a last word from my hand," she added, as she wrote the instructions to Du Buisson.

While Nominoë placed the papers and the iron hammer head in his wallet, Bertha opened her casket, took from it a little flask filled with a bluish liquid, hid the same in her bosom, wrapped herself in a silk mantle, and reaching out her hand to Nominoë, said with a celestial smile:

"Come, my friend, let us depart for those mysterious worlds that none knows—and which we shall know at the hour of our re-birth!"

"Let us depart, Bertha!"

Mademoiselle Plouernel and Nominoë Lebrenn left the hall of the manor of Mezlean to descend into the underground passage.

The sky above is beautifully serene. The dew of night impregnates the atmosphere of this delightful summer's night with a delicate freshness. The approaching dawn is paling the stars, and tingeing the eastern horizon purple. The silence of the solitude is alone disturbed by the imposing murmur of the sea, calmly and sonorously rolling upon the shore where rise the stones of Karnak, sacred stones of ancient Gaul! gigantic pillars of a temple that has the firmament for its dome! Their ten long avenues converge towards the colossal sacrificial altar. Glory to the God of Gaul!

The horizon is reddened by the first fires of day. The crests of the long stretched waves of the azure ocean become transparently ruddy. The sands of the beach glisten like golden dust. The sun flares up; its rays seem to envelop the sacrificial altar with a dazzling aureola; above, the birds are singing their morning symphony.

On the altar, lifeless, close to each other, their arms interlaced in a supreme and chaste embrace, lie Bertha of Plouernel and Nominoë Lebrenn. Their beauty survives their death throes. With a smile upon their lips and their eyes half shut, they seem to slumber wrapped in peaceful repose. Their immortal soul has left their earthly bodies; it has fled to reincarnate itself in a new body, a body appropriate to the world that is to be their dwelling place, like the traveler who dons lighter clothing when journeying in a milder climate.

EPILOGUE.

Bertha and Nominoë live at this hour, body and soul, spirit and matter, in those starry worlds where none of us on earth has been, where we all will go—after having accomplished our mission on earth.

My son believed I was dead, having, indeed been left for dead at Nantes by the soldiers against whom I defended myself to the utmost. Even my host took me for dead. He was engaged in procuring my burial when a movement that I made revealed to him that I still lived. Nursed by my friend with fraternal care, I recovered from my wounds and remained concealed in my place of refuge until the day when I embarked secretly at Nantes on an English vessel that took me to London. From there I crossed over into Holland, where a shipowner entrusted me with one of his vessels. Finding myself exiled from France, I requested my relative at Vannes, with whom the narratives and relics of my family were left for safe-keeping, to forward them to me by a Breton vessel. I found the relics increased by Tankeru's blacksmith's hammer and the archives by the sheets of paper left by Nominoë. With the aid of the letter and of my own recollections, I, Salaun Lebrenn, completed the preceding story, which I joined to those left to me by my ancestors, and which I shall transmit to my descendants.

Alas! Perhaps I must blame myself for the death of my son. I neglected to fortify his mind against suicide by teaching him that it is not allowed to us to forestall the hour of our deliverance, and that those who endeavor to escape the trials of this life are punished by God either by separating them, if they expected to be united after death, or by condemning them to reincarnation on earth.

Alas! my expiation of the negligence has continued during these many years of exile. May the trials that I underwent disarm the just anger of God, and soften the punishment reserved for my son, before his final union in the spirit world with her who loved him to the point of dying with him.

We are now in the year 1715, and I in the ninety-first year of my life, after having resided here in Holland since the year 1675, and where, in 1680, I married Wilhelmina Vandael, the widow of the shipowner in whose employ I was. In this year Louis XIV, the execrable King of France, died. His reign continued to the end a veritable scourge to the nation. Insurrections followed insurrections, and were smothered in their own blood. Religious persecutions followed upon religious persecutions. The Edict of Nantes by which Henry IV put an end to the religious wars that lasted half a century, was revoked, and the country was again a prey to desolating religious intolerance.

The death of Louis XIV will certainly put an end to the religious persecutions; at least will mitigate them. Thousands of Protestants, banished from France by the reign of terror, will, no doubt, now return to their own country. That pleasure will not be mine. I am too feeble with years to undertake such a voyage. But if, happier than myself, you, my son Alain, should ever return to the cradle of your race, never lose sight of the fact that our family has everything to fear from the Society of Jesus, whose influence seems to be on the ascendant in almost every country.

To you, my son Alain—the son of my old age and my exile—I now bequeath these legends and relics of our family. I bequeath them to you, the younger brother of my son Nominoë, ever lamented, ever wept. Even now my eyes are blurred with tears when I recollect the double suicide of himself and Bertha of Plouernel.

May you, my son Alain, be able to transmit these legends and relics to your descendants! May you soon be able to leave the Republic of Holland, the asylum and refuge of exiles, and return to France. May you witness the realization of the prophecy of Victoria the Great—the downfall of the monarchy, the liberation of Gaul!

May you, son of Joel, live to see the dawn of the day when our country, casting off the foreign name imposed upon her by the Frankish conquest, will re-assume her old name—the Republic of the Gauls, and will shelter herself under the glorious folds of her own ancient red flag, surmounted by the Gallic cock!—Commune and Federation!

Finally, in the event that, having no children, you may be unable to transmit the plebeian legends of our family to your direct descendants, you shall bequeath them to one of the two surviving branches of our family.

The first is that of the Renneponts, an ancestor of whom married at La Rochelle, towards the end of the Sixteenth Century, the daughter of Odelin the armorer, son of Christian the printer. I have had no news from the Rennepont branch of our family for many long years. You will have to inquire after it in La Rochelle, where, until the end of last century I knew them to reside.

The other branch of our family is that of the Gerolsteins, sovereign Princes in Germany, and descendants of Gaëlo the pirate, the grandson of our ancestor Vortigern, who met our ancestor Eidiol, the dean of the Parisian skippers, in the Tenth Century, on the occasion of the siege of Paris by the Northmans. The Princes of Gerolstein continue to reign in Germany, and

have remained faithful to the Protestant religion since the time when it was embraced by Prince Charles of Gerolstein, who was the friend of Coligny, and whose son fought at the battle of Roche-la-Belle by the side of our ancestor Odelin, the armorer of La Rochelle.

Either to the Gerolsteins or the Renneponts our family archives and relics will be left by you, in the event of your not living onward in your posterity.

Along with these legends, I bequeath to you and your descendants our family hatred for the Church and for Royalty.

THE END.