

Chapter 71

THE TWO BROTHERS.

A quarter of an hour after, Henri returned; he had seen a considerable detachment of French troops intrenched on a hill at some distance. Excepting a large ditch, which surrounded the place occupied by the gendarmes of Aunis, the water had begun to disappear from the plain, the natural slope of the ground in the immediate neighborhood making the waters run toward the sea, and several points of earth, higher than the rest, began to reappear. The slimy mud brought by the rolling waters had covered the whole country, and it was a sad spectacle to see, as the wind cleared the mist, a number of cavaliers stuck in the mud, and trying vainly to reach either of the hills. From the other hill, on which the flag of France waved, their cries of distress had been heard, and that was why the trumpets had sounded. The gendarmes now sounded their cornets, and were answered by guns in joyful recognition. About eleven o'clock the sun appeared over this scene of desolation, drying some parts of the plain, and rendering practicable a kind of road. Henri, who tried it first, found that it led by a detour from where they were to the opposite hill, and he believed that though his horse might sink to a certain extent, he would not sink altogether. He therefore determined to try it, and recommending Diana and Remy to the care of the ensign, set off on his perilous way. At the same time as he started, they could see a cavalier leave the opposite hill, and, like Henry, try the road. All the soldiers seemed trying to stop him by their

supplications. The two men pursued their way courageously, and soon perceived that their task was less difficult than had been feared. A small stream of water, escaped from a broken aqueduct, washed over the path, and little by little was clearing away the mud. The cavaliers were within two hundred feet of each other.

"France!" cried the one who came from the opposite hill, at the same time raising his hat, which had a white plume in it.

"Oh! it is you!" cried Henri, with a burst of joy.

"You, Henri! you, my brother!" cried the other.

And they set off as quickly as their horses could manage to go, and soon, among the frantic acclamations of the spectators on each side, embraced long and tenderly. Soon, all--gendarmes and light horse--Huguenots and Catholics--rushed along the road, pioneered by the two brothers. Soon the two camps were joined, and there, where they had thought to find death, nearly 3,000 Frenchmen cried, "Thank God!" and "Vive la France!"

"Gentlemen," said a Huguenot officer, "it is 'Long live the admiral,' you should cry, for it is to M. de Joyeuse alone that we now owe the happiness of embracing our countrymen."

Immense acclamations followed this speech. The two brothers talked for some time, and then Joyeuse asked Henri if he had heard news of the

duke.

"It appears he is dead," replied Henri.

"Is that certain?"

"The gendarmes saw his horse drowned, and a rider, whose head was under water, dragged by the stirrup."

"It has been a sad day for France," said Joyeuse. Then turning to his men he said, "Come, gentlemen, let us not lose time. Once the waters have retired we shall probably be attacked. Let us intrench ourselves until the arrival of news and food."

"But, monseigneur," said a voice, "the horses have eaten nothing since four o'clock yesterday, and are dying with hunger."

"We have corn in our encampment," said the ensign, "but what shall we do for the men?"

"Oh!" said Joyeuse, "if there be corn, that is all I ask; the men must live like the horses."

"Brother," said Henri, "I want a little conversation with you."

"Go back to your place; choose a lodging for me, and wait for me there."

Henri went back.

"We are now in the midst of an army," said he to Remy; "hide yourselves in the lodging I will show you, and do not let madame be seen by any one."

Remy installed himself with Diana in the lodging pointed out. About two o'clock the Duc de Joyeuse entered with his trumpets blowing, lodged his troops, and gave strict injunctions to prevent disorder. He distributed barley to the men, and hay to the horses, and to the wounded some wine and beer, which had been found in the cellars, and himself, in sight of all, dined on a piece of black bread and a glass of water. Everywhere he was received as a deliverer with cries of gratitude.

"Now," said he to his brother, when they were alone, "let the Flemings come, and I will beat them, and even, if this goes on, eat them, for in truth I am very hungry, and this is miserable stuff," added he, throwing into a corner the piece of bread, which in public he had eaten so enthusiastically.

"But now, Henri, tell me how it happens that I find you in Flanders when I thought you in Paris."

"My brother," said Henri, "life became insupportable to me at Paris, and I set out to join you in Flanders."

"All from love?" asked Joyeuse.

"No, from despair. Now, Anne, I am no longer in love; my passion is sadness."

"My brother, permit me to tell you that you have chosen a miserable woman. Virtue that cares not for the sufferings of others is barbarous--is an absence of Christian charity."

"Oh! my brother, do not calumniate virtue."

"I do not calumniate virtue, Henri; I accuse vice, that is all. I repeat that this is a miserable woman, and not worth all the torments she makes you suffer. Oh! mon Dieu! in such a case you should use all your strength and all your power, Henri. In your place, I should have taken her house by assault, and then herself; and when she was conquered, and came to throw her arms round your neck and say, 'Henri, I adore you,' I should have repulsed her, and said, 'You do well, madame; it is your turn--I have suffered enough for you--to suffer also.'"

Henri seized his brother's hand. "You do not mean a word of what you say," said he.

"Yes, on my honor."

"You, so good--so generous!"

"Generosity with heartless people is folly."

"Oh! Joyeuse, Joyeuse, you do not know this woman."

"No, I do not wish to know her."

"Why not?"

"Because she would make me commit what others would call a crime, but which I should call an act of justice."

"Oh! my good brother, how lucky you are not to be in love. But, if you please, let us leave my foolish love, and talk of other things."

"So be it; I do not like to talk of your folly."

"You see we want provisions."

"Yes, and I have thought of a method of getting them."

"What is it?"

"I cannot leave here until I have certain news of the army--for the position is good, and I could defend myself against five times our number: but I may send out a body of scouts, and they will bring news and provisions also, for Flanders is a fine country."

"Not very, brother."

"I speak of it as God made it, and not men, who eternally spoil the works of God. Do you know, Henri, what folly this prince committed--what this unlucky Francois has lost through pride and precipitation? His soul is gone to God, so let us be silent; but in truth he might have acquired immortal glory and one of the most beautiful kingdoms in Europe, while he has, on the contrary, aided no one but William of Orange. But do you know, Henri, that the Antwerpians fought well?"

"And you also; so they say, brother."

"Yes, it was one of my good days; and besides there was something that excited me."

"What was it?"

"I met on the field of battle a sword that I knew."

"French?"

"Yes, French."

"In the ranks of the Flemings?"

"At their head, Henri; this is a secret which forms a sequel to Salcede's business."

"However, dear brother, here you are, safe and sound, to my great joy; I, who have done nothing yet, must do something, also."

"And what will you do?"

"Give me the command of your scouts, I beg."

"No, it is too dangerous, Henri; I would not say so before strangers, but I do not wish you to die an obscure death. The scouts may meet with some of those horrid Flemings who fight with flails and scythes; you kill one thousand of them, and the last cuts you in two or disfigures you. No, Henri; if you will die, let it be a more glorious death than that."

"My brother, grant me what I ask, I beg; I promise you to be prudent, and to return here."

"Well, I understand."

"What?"

"You wish to try if the fame of a brave action will not soften the heart of this ferocious tigress. Confess that that is what makes you insist on it."

"I will confess it if you wish, brother."

"Well, you are right. Women who resist a great love sometimes yield to fame."

"I do not hope that."

"If you do it without this hope you are mad. Henri, seek no more reasons for this woman's refusal than that she has neither eyes nor heart."

"You give me the command, brother?"

"I must, if you will have it so."

"Can I go to-night?"

"You must, Henri; you understand we cannot wait long."

"How many men do you give me?"

"A hundred; not more. I cannot weaken my force here, you know, Henri."

"Less, if you like, brother."

"No, I would wish to give you double. Only promise me, on your honor, that if you meet with more than three hundred men, you will retreat and not get killed."

"My brother," said Henri, smiling, "you sell your glory very dear."

"Then I will neither sell nor give it to you; and another officer shall command."

"My brother, give your orders and I will execute them."

"You will only engage with equal, double, or triple forces, but not with more?"

"I swear it."

"Very well; now, what men would you like to take?"

"Let me take one hundred of the gendarmes of Aunis; I have plenty of friends there, and can choose whom I like."

"That will do."

"When shall I set out?"

"At once. Take one day's rations for the men and two for the horses. Remember, I want speedy and certain news."

"I go, brother; are there any other orders?"

"Do not spread the news of the duke's death; let it be believed he is here. Exaggerate my strength, and if you find the duke's body, although

he was a bad man and a poor general, yet, as he belonged to the royal house of France, have it put in an oak coffin and brought back by your men, that he may be buried at St. Denis."

"Good, brother; now, is this all?"

"All! but promise me once more, Henri, you are not deceiving me--you will not seek death?"

"No, brother; I had that thought when I came to join you, but I have it no longer."

"And when did it leave you?"

"Three hours ago."

"On what occasion?"

"Excuse me, brother."

"Of course, Henri, your secrets are your own."

"Oh! how good you are, brother!"

And the young men, once more embracing each other, separated with smiles.

