

Chapter 73

PAUL-EMILE.

"Oh! silence, gentlemen," said, the prince, "do not be more content than I am at my good fortune. I am enchanted not to be dead, you may well believe; and yet, if you had not recognized me, I should not have been the first to boast of being alive."

"What! monseigneur," cried Henri, "you recognized me--you found yourself among a troop of Frenchmen, and would have left us to mourn your loss, without undeceiving us?"

"Gentlemen, besides a number of reasons which made me wish to preserve my incognito, I confess that I should not have been sorry, since I was believed to be dead, to hear what funeral oration would have been pronounced over me."

"Monseigneur!"

"Yes; I am like Alexander of Macedon; I make war like an artist, and have as much self-love; and I believe I have committed a fault."

"Monseigneur," said Henri, lowering his eyes, "do not say such things."

"Why not? The pope only is infallible, and ever since Boniface VIII.

that has been disputed."

"See to what you exposed us, monseigneur, if any of us had given his opinion on this expedition, and it had been blamed."

"Well, why not? do you think I have not blamed myself, not for having given battle, but for having lost it."

"Monseigneur, this goodness frightens me; and will your highness permit me to say that this gayety is not natural. I trust your highness is not suffering."

A terrible cloud passed over the prince's face, making it as black as night.

"No," said he, "I was never better, thank God, than now, and I am glad to be among you all."

The officers bowed.

"How many men have you, Du Bouchage?" asked he.

"One hundred, monseigneur."

"Ah! a hundred out of ten thousand; that is like the defeat at Cannes. Gentlemen, they will send a bushel of your rings to Antwerp, but I doubt if the Flemish beauties could wear them, unless they had their fingers

pared by their husbands' knives, which, I must say, cut well."

"Monseigneur," replied Henri, "if our battle was like the battle of Cannes, at least we are more lucky than the Romans, for we have preserved our Paulus-Emilius!"

"On my life, gentlemen, the Paulus-Emilius of Antwerp was Joyeuse; and doubtless, to preserve the resemblance with his heroic model to the end, your brother is dead, is he not, Du Bouchage?"

Henri felt wounded at this cold question.

"No, monseigneur, he lives," replied he.

"Ah! so much the better," said the duke, with his icy smile. "What! our brave Joyeuse lives! Where is he, that I may embrace him?"

"He is not here, monseigneur."

"Ah! wounded?"

"No, monseigneur, he is safe and sound."

"But a fugitive like me, wandering, famished, and ashamed. Alas! the proverb is right--'For glory, the sword; after the sword, blood; after blood, tears.'"

"Monseigneur, I am happy to tell your highness that my brother has been happy enough to save three thousand men, with whom he occupies a large village about seven leagues from here, and I am acting as scout for him."

The duke grew pale.

"Three thousand men! he has saved three thousand men! he is a perfect Xenophon, and it is very lucky for me that my brother sent him to me. It is not the Valois who can take for their motto 'Hilariter.'"

"Oh! monseigneur," said Henri, sadly, seeing that this gayety hid a somber jealousy.

"It is true, is it not, Aurilly?" continued the duke; "I return to France like Francois after the battle of Pavia; all is lost but honor. Ah! ah!"

A sad silence received these laughs, more terrible than sobs.

"Monseigneur," said Henri, "tell me how the tutelary genius of France saved your highness."

"Oh! dear comte, the tutelary genius of France was occupied with something else, and I had to save myself."

"And how, monseigneur?"

"By my legs."

No smile welcomed this joke, which the duke would certainly have punished with death if made by another.

"Yes, yes," he continued; "how we ran! did we not, my brave Aurilly?"

"Every one," said Henri, "knows the calm bravery and military genius of your highness, and we beg you not to distress us by attributing to yourself faults which you have not. The best general is not invincible, and Hannibal himself was conquered at Zama."

"Yes, but Hannibal had won the battles of Trebia, Thrasymene, and Cannes, while I have only won that of Cateau-Cambresis; it is not enough to sustain the comparison."

"But monseigneur jests when he says he ran away."

"No, I do not. Pardieu! do you see anything to jest about, Du Bouchage?"

"Could any one have done otherwise?" said Aurilly.

"Hold your tongue, Aurilly, or ask the shade of St. Aignan what could have been done."

Aurilly hung his head.

"Ah! you do not know the history of St. Aignan. I will tell it to you. Imagine, then, that when the battle was declared to be lost, he assembled 500 horse, and, instead of flying like the rest, came to me and said. 'We must attack them, monseigneur.' 'What! attack?' said I; 'they are 100 to one.' 'Were they 1,000 to one, I would attack them,' replied he, with a hideous grimace. 'Attack if you please,' said I; 'I do not.' 'Give me your horse, and take mine,' said he: 'mine is fresh--yours is not; and as I do not mean to fly, any horse is good for me.' And then he took my white horse and gave me his black one, saying, 'Prince, that horse will go twenty leagues in four hours if you like.' Then, turning to his men, he cried, 'Come, gentlemen, follow me--all those who will not turn their backs;' and he rode toward the enemy with a second grimace, more frightful than the first. He thought he should have met men, but he met water instead, and St. Aignan and his paladins were lost. Had he listened to me, instead of performing that act of useless foolhardiness, we should have had him at this table, and he would not have been making, as he probably now is, a grimace still uglier than the first."

A thrill of horror ran through the assembly.

"This wretch has no heart," thought Henri. "Oh! why does his misfortune and his birth protect him from the words I long to say to him?"

"Gentlemen," said Aurilly, in a low voice--for he felt the effect these words had produced--"you see how monseigneur is affected; do not heed

what he says, for since his misfortune I think he has really moments of delirium."

"And so," continued the duke, emptying his glass, "that is how St. Aignan is dead and I alive. However, in dying he did me a last service, for it was believed, as he rode my horse, that it was me, and this belief spread not only among the French, but among the Flemings, who consequently ceased their pursuit; but reassure yourselves, gentlemen, we shall have our revenge, and I am mentally organizing the most formidable army that ever existed."

"Meanwhile, monseigneur," said Henri, "will your highness take the command of my men? It is not fit that I should continue to do so when you are here."

"So be it; and, first, I order every one to sup, particularly you, Du Bouchage--you have eaten nothing."

"Monseigneur, I am not hungry."

"In that case return to visit the posts. Tell the chiefs that I live, but beg them not to rejoice too openly until we gain a better citadel, or rejoin the army of our invincible Joyeuse, for I confess I do not wish to be taken now, after having escaped from fire and water."

"Monseigneur, you shall be strictly obeyed, and no one shall know excepting ourselves that we have the honor of your company among us."

"And these gentlemen will keep the secret?" said the duke, looking round.

All bowed, and Du Bouchage went out.

It only required an hour for this fugitive, this conquered runaway, to become again proud, careless, and imperious. To command 100 men or 100,000 men, was still to command.

While Du Bouchage executed his orders with the best grace he could, Francois asked questions. He was astonished that a man of the rank of Du Bouchage had consented to take the command of this handful of men, and of such a perilous expedition. The duke was always suspicious, and asked, therefore, and learned that the admiral had only yielded to his brother's earnest request. It was the ensign who gave this information--he who had been superseded in his command by Henri himself, as Henri had been by the duke.

The prince fancied he detected a slight irritation in this man's mind against Du Bouchage; therefore he continued to interrogate him.

"But," said he, "what was the comte's reason for soliciting so earnestly such a poor command?"

"First, zeal for the service, no doubt."

"First!--what else?"

"Ah! monseigneur, I do not know."

"You deceive me--you do know."

"Monseigneur, I can give only, even to your highness, public reasons."

"You see," said the duke, turning to the others, "I was quite right to hide myself, gentlemen, since there are in my army secrets from which I am excluded."

"Ah! monseigneur," said the ensign, "you misunderstand me; there are no secrets but those which concern M. du Bouchage. Might it not be, for example, that, while serving the general interests, he might have wished to render a service to some friend or relation by escorting him?"

"Who here is a friend or relation of the comte? Tell me, that, I may embrace him."

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, mixing in the conversation, "I have discovered a part of the secret. This relation whom M. du Bouchage wished to escort is--a lady."

"Ah! ah! why did they not tell me so frankly. That dear Henri--it is quite natural. Let us shut our eyes to the relation, and speak of her no

more."

"You had better not, monseigneur, for there seems a great mystery."

"How so?"

"Yes, the lady, like the celebrated Bradamante, about whom I have so often sung to your highness, disguises herself in the dress of a man."

"Oh! monseigneur," cried the ensign, "M. du Bouchage seems to me to have a great respect for this lady, and probably would be very angry at any indiscretion."

"Doubtless, monsieur; we will be mute as sepulchers--as mute as poor St. Aignan; only, if we see the lady, we will try not to make grimaces at her. Where is this lady, Aurilly?"--"Upstairs."

"Upstairs! what, in this house?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but hush! here is M. du Bouchage."

"Hush!" said the prince, laughing.