

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PILGRIMAGE

From far and near the peasants and the people of the towns and villages, joined in the customary annual descent upon--or ascent to--the Mount. None was too poor, few too miserable, to undertake the journey. A pilgrimage, was the occasion called; but although certain religious ceremonies were duly observed and entered into by some with fanatical warmth, many there were, who, obliged to pay tithes, nourished the onerous recollection of the enforced "ecclesiastical tenth" to the exclusion of any great desire to avail themselves of the compensating privilege of beholding and bowing before the sacred relics. To these recalcitrant spirits, license and a rough sort of merrymaking became the order of the hour.

Early in the morning the multitude began to arrive--in every manner of dilapidated vehicle, astride starved-looking donkeys and bony horses, or on foot. Many who had camped out the night before, by wayside or in forest, brought with them certain scanty provisions and a kitchen pot in which to boil thin soup, or some poor makeshift mess; others came empty-handed, "pilgrims" out at the elbow and shoeless, trusting to fortune for their sustenance, and looking capable even of having poached in one of the wide forests they had traversed, despite a penalty, severe and disproportionate to the offense, for laying hand on any lord's wild birds or rabbits.

Savage men; sodden men--good, bad and indifferent! Like ants thronging about the hill, they straightway streamed to the Mount; took possession of it, or as much as lay open to them; for around the top, chosen abode of the Governor, extended a wall; grim, dark and ominous; bristling with holes which seemed to look blackly down; to watch, to listen and to frown. Without that pretentious line of encircling masonry, the usual din, accompaniment to the day and the presence of so many people, prevailed; within, reigned silence, a solemn hush, unbroken by even a sentinel's tread.

"I shall be glad when it's all over!" Standing at the window of her chamber the Lady Elise had paused in dressing to look out upon the throng--a thousand clots upon the sand, dark moving masses in the narrow byways, and motionless ones near the temporary altars.

"Oh, my Lady!" Her companion, and former nurse, a woman about fifty years of age, ventured this mild expostulation.

"There, Marie! You can go!"

"Yes, your Ladyship--"

"One moment!" The slender figure turned. "This fastening--"

In an instant the woman was by her side.

"Have you heard anything more about the prisoners, Marie?" abruptly.

"Those who were tried, I mean?"

"Nothing--only Beppo said they are to be hanged day after to-morrow--when the pilgrimage is over."

"Day after to-morrow!" The brown eyes looked hard and bright; the small white teeth pressed her lip. "And the man my fa--the Governor had--whipped from the Mount--you have heard nothing more of him--where he has gone?"

"No, my Lady; he seems to have disappeared completely; fled this country, perhaps, for those islands where so many like him," half bitterly, "have gone before!"

The girl looked up in a preoccupied manner. "Poor Marie! Your only sister died there, didn't she?"

"Yes, my Lady; I never saw her after she left France with her husband and baby girl. He was an unpatriotic fellow--Pierre Laroche!"

"No doubt," said the Governor's daughter absently, as the other prepared to leave the room.

Alone, the girl remained for several moments motionless before the

great Venetian mirror; then mechanically, hardly looking at the reflection the glass threw back at her, she finished her toilet. This task accomplished, still she stood with brows closely drawn; afar the flute-like voices of the choir-boys arose from different parts of the Mount, but she did not seem to hear them; made a sudden quick gesture and walked toward the door in the manner of one who has arrived at some resolution.

Passing down a corridor, she reached an arched opening whose massive door swung easily to her touch, and let herself out by a private way, which had once been the ancient abbot's way, to an isolated corner of a small secluded platform. From this point a stairway led up to a passage spanning a great gulf. Below and aside, where the red-tiled houses clung to the steep slope of the rock, fluttered many flags; yet the girl did not pause either to contemplate or admire. Only when her glance passed seaward and rested on the far-away ocean's rim of light, did she stop for an instant--mid-way on the bridge--then, compressing her lips, moved on the faster; down the incline on the other side; up winding stairs between giant columns, reaching, at length, that bright and grateful opening, the cloister. With an unvarying air of resolution she stepped forward; looked in; the place was empty--silent save for the tinkling of the tiny fountain in the center.

"Are you looking for some one, my Lady?"

The voice was that of Beppo, who was regarding her from an angle in the

cloister walk.

"I am looking for his Excellency. I suppose he is--"

"In the apartments of state, my Lady. But--"

The girl frowned.

"But, but!" she said. "But what?"

"His Excellency has left word--he was expecting a minister from Paris--that no one else was to be admitted; the matter was so important that he wished no interruptions."

She had already turned, however; moved on past him without answer. At the inner entrance to the "little castle" or chatelet, which presently she reached, the girl stopped. Here, without, in the shadow of two huge cylindrical towers, that crowned the feudal gate-house, a number of soldiers, seated on the steps, clinked their swords and talked; within, beneath the high-vaulted dome of the guard-room lolled the commandant and several officers on a bench before a large window. Immediately on her appearance they rose, but, merely bowing stiffly, she started toward a portal on the left. Whereupon the commandant started forward, deferentially would have spoken--stopped her, when at the same moment, the door she was approaching opened, and the Governor himself appeared. At the sight of her he started; a shade of annoyance

crossed his thin features, then almost immediately vanished; his cold eyes met hers expectantly.

"I have been told you were very busy, yet I must see you; it is very important--"

A fraction of a moment he seemed to hesitate; then with an absent air:

"Certainly, I was very busy; nevertheless--" he stepped aside; permitted her to pass, and softly closed the door. With the same preoccupied air he walked to his table before one of the large fireplaces whose pyramidal canopies merged into the ribs of the vaulting of a noble chamber, and, seating himself in a cushioned chair, looked down at a few embers.

"I came," standing, with her fingers straight and stiff on the cold marble edge of the table, the girl began to speak hurriedly, constrainedly, "I wanted to see you--about the prisoners--"

He did not answer. Gently stroking his wrist, as if the dampness from some subterranean place had got into it, he evinced no sign he had heard; and this apathy and his apparent disregard of her awoke more strongly the feeling she had experienced so often since that day in the cloister, when he had promised to set free the servant of the Black Seigneur; had kept his word, indeed, but--

"Can't you see," she forced herself to continue, "after what the man

Sanchez thought--suspected about me, what he said that day at the Mount, after what he, the Black Seigneur, did for me"--the Governor started--"that you, if you care for me at all," he looked at her strangely, "at least, should--"

"As I told you the other day," his accents were cold, "why concern yourself about outlaws and peasants clamoring for 'rights!'"

"But it is my concern," she said passionately. "Unless--"

"Neither yours nor mine," he answered in the same tone. "Only the law's!"

"The law's!" she returned. "You are the law--"

"Its servant!" he corrected.

"But--you could spare their lives! You could deal with them more mercifully!"

"The law is explicit. In the King alone rests the power to--"

"The King! But before word could reach him--"

"Exactly!" As he spoke, the Governor rose. "And now--"

"You will not hear me?"

"If there is anything else--"

Her figure straightened. "Why do you hate him so?" she asked passionately. "You have hastened their trial, and would carry out the sentence before there is time for justice. And the man whom that day you ordered whipped from the Mount--after letting me think him safe! After all that his master did for me! Why was he lashed? Because of him he served or of the old Seigneur before that? I heard you ask about him--of his having gone to America? Why did you care about that?"

"You seem to have listened to a great deal!"

"And why did he go to America?" she went on, unheeding. "Did you hate him, too? What for?"

"If you have nothing else to talk about--" He glanced at the door.

"And the lands!" she said. "They were his; now they are yours--"

"Unjustly, perhaps you think."

"No, no!" she cried. "I didn't mean--I didn't imply that. Of course not! Only," putting out her hands, "I try to understand, and--you have never taken me into your confidence, mon pere! You have been



indulgent; denied me nothing, but--I don't want to feel the way I have felt the last week, as if--" quickly she stopped. "No doubt there are reasons--although I have puzzled; and if I knew! Can't you," abruptly, "treat me as one worthy of your confidence?"

"You!" he said with quiet irony. "Who--listen!"

The girl flushed. "I had to, because--"

"And who misrepresent facts, as in the case of--Saladin!"

"But--"

"How long," standing over her, "were you on the island?"

"I--don't know!"

"You don't?" His voice implied disbelief.

"Part of the time I was unconscious--"

"In the watch-tower with him!"

She made a gesture. "Would you rather--"

"What did he say?"

The girl's eyes, that had been so steadfast, on a sudden wavered.

"Nothing--much."

"And you? Nothing, too? Then how was the deception devised--the pact entered into--"

Her figure stiffened. "There was no pact."

"Treason, then? The law holds it treason to--"

"You are cruel; unjust!" she cried. "To me, as you were to him. That old man you had whipped! I wonder," impetuously, "if you are so to all of them, the people, the peasants. And if that is the reason they have only black looks for me--and hatred? As if they would like to curse us!"

He turned away. "I am very busy."

"Mon pere!"

He walked to the door.

"Then you won't--won't spare them?"

He opened wide the door. Still she did not move, until the sight of

the commandant without, the curious glance he cast in their direction, decided her. Drawing herself up, she walked toward the threshold, and, bowing perfunctorily, with head held high, crossed it.