

A Man of His Age

king? Besides, she flouted me. As for you, in these rotting times of peace a man must still live like a gentleman, and ruffle it with the rest, though he earn his hire on carrion. You were worth a hundred crowns to me, and there you have the truth."

"Why not have claimed your blood-money by a glib lie?" said I, scornfully. "Not knowing you as I do, your widow would have been none the wiser."

"What?" and he brushed aside the point from his throat, and in his indignation made as if to struggle to his feet, but tumbled back again, groaning anew. "'Tis a brave thing to insult a broken man, and you with a sword to his throat! Am I a thief? Kill me, coward," then he added, slowly, and staring me straight in the eyes, "if you can."

But the time had gone by, and I could not, and he read in my face that I could not, for in spite of the suffering a light crept into his dull eyes.

"Have I kept you in talk long enough?" he cried, in a triumph. "By the saints, I guessed there was a weak spot in your nerve. Bah! what a pitiful rogue you are after all, De Bernauld, that you cannot kill a man without a sickening of conscience."

"Man, man!" I cried, "hast thou no fear—"

"Neither of thee, nor God, nor devil," he answered, not waiting for me to finish. "I know your sort, and I know this—you could no more kill me now than you could put a knife to your own throat."

Sullenly, half-repentant, and ashamed of my repentance, I sheathed my sword and turned to where my horse stood cropping the herbage, twenty feet away.

"Take your life for this time," I said. "God for-