

band, even though a small one, to rob them of their conquest; and were I not soon bound on another enterprise, I would essay, either by stratagem or force, to make them yield up what they have unjustly won."

"Now, by the bones of my father!" cried the merchant, striking the table with his clenched hand, till the drinking cups rung merrily in answer to the blow, "I swear that whoever will achieve this worthy deed, shall be to me as a son, and inherit from me a fortune which a prince might covet; nay, though he crave in guerdon for his prowess, the half of my possessions, I will yield it to his wish. Whatever he shall ask, be it even precious as the apple of my eye, it shall be his."

"Have a care, Master Philip," said Simon de Vaux, with a lurking smile; "thou hast a fair daughter, prithee remember; and young gallants are more prone to covet such toys, than the yellow gold which grey-beards love so well."

"And if such be his aim, why let him tell of it, and none shall gainsay him," said the merchant. "I have a daughter, friend Simon, and I guard her sacredly, that I may be sure to bestow her worthily; and I would ask thee, if one should arise to deliver us from the yoke of our oppressors, dwells there a citizen within the ancient walls of Evreux, who would esteem aught he called his own, even the child of his age and his love, the sole remaining lamb of his flock, a reward too precious for him who has nobly periled life and limb in our defence?"

"We will drink, then, to the health of fair Mistress Gabrielle," said Simon de Vaux, filling his cup; "and may he shortly wed her, to whose valour the strong fortress of Evreux shall yield up its keys."

"So may it be!" exclaimed Master Philip, earnestly, and in pledge of his sincerity he quaffed a huge goblet of Cyprus wine at a single draught.

Sir Enguerrard, with strong emotion, raised the cup to his lips, for at that moment a wild and romantic purpose took root in his heart. It was unformed and vague as yet, but the words of Philip de Rosay had engendered it, and it received strength and vitality from his enthusiastic desire to achieve deeds of glory; and from the remembrances, which now crowded upon him, of all he had heard from time to time, touching the wondrous beauty of the maiden, whom the liberator of Evreux was to win as his reward.

During the minute in which these thoughts were passing through his mind, Master Philip was summoned from the hall—his favourite mare, Brown Griseld, refused her provender, "and was

moaning," so the man said, "like a Christian, though, poor thing, he had rubbed and bathed her till she would bear his touch no longer."

The good merchant, who was as pitiful and kind to the brute creation, as he was benevolent and hospitable to his fellows, instantly obeyed the call, and, promising to be speedily back, left the apartment. He had no sooner gone than Simon de Vaux, referring to the recent subject of conversation, said:

"And so, young knight, if thou hast a mind to essay that deed, thou wilt win as fair a bride as ever plighted troth at the altar."

"I might think otherwise, Master de Vaux," said Sir Enguerrard. "I am hard to please in woman's beauty; and, therefore, had I no other motive, should scarce deem it worth my while to peril life for that which I have never seen, and might not desire if I had."

"Thou must, in truth be over nice, if thou couldstst covet aught fairer than this pretty maiden," said Master Simon. "Why, let me tell thee, young sir, she is to other women what the rose is to the weeds that spring up at its root; and will bring, beside, to him who weds her, the dowry of a queen."

"I care not for her gold," said the knight; "but marvel much that a maiden so modest and discreet, as this fair Gabrielle is said to be, is shut from sight, and treated like a child, who lacks wisdom to conduct herself with due discretion. I would not have deemed, from the frank and kindly bearing of our host, that he could be thus niggard of aught that appertained to him."

"We all have our failings, gentle knight, though perhaps my old friend, Philip, has as few as most men," said Master de Vaux; "but one untoward event so deeply wounded him as a father, that perchance he lacks judgment in some matters touching a father's duty. But, to make a long story short, lest he return before we have ended it, I may tell thee, that a child of his, by a first marriage, deceived him—wedded unworthily, and so brought disgrace, and misery, and finally death, upon herself, by her misconduct. The little Gabrielle was then in her cradle—motherless—and all that was left her sorrow-stricken father in this world to love—and so, in her he centered all those fond affections which had been ruthlessly cast back upon his own heart. Yet, since he could not watch over her as he would, he placed her with the abbess of a neighbouring convent, who was her mother's relative; and there, day by day he saw her, and learned ever of her welfare. Within a year the lady abbess died, and then the maiden returned to dwell with her father, but in a seclusion quite as strict as that in which she had been reared.