

arches spanning the roof above his head, the grinning corbel ornaments gazing down upon him, and faintly heard the echoes, as one person after another entered or departed.

The shadows of evening had already closed around, the lights shone out from the silver-smith's little shop on the other side, and the last worshippers had left the cathedral. The great folding-door was not yet closed, and the hum of voices in the street was very tempting to the imprisoned man. It made him the more deeply sigh for freedom, and he wondered whether he might not glide forth into the open air, unperceived. He slowly and cautiously dragged himself along towards the door. The way seemed clear of enemies, and, with a heart full of hope, he took a step into the street. At the same moment, a single figure started forth from a neighbouring buttress, with dagger drawn. At a whistle, others emerged from retired corners, and the fugitive beheld eight sturdy, armed men, prepared to dispute his flight.

Baffled in his attempt, Hugh Martelle re-entered the building, which never appeared so gloomy as after that faint touch of the soft evening air.

He saw a man sitting outside the rail at the altar. How he had come there Hugh Martelle did not know, for he had not seen any stranger enter; but that he was not a devotee, nor yet an officer of the cathedral, was evident, for the man was clothed in coarse, torn garments, and held a stout club at his side, as though it were a tried companion. He thought the man had been secretly dispatched to slay him, regardless of the church's sanctity, but at the first word his fears all vanished.

"Ho, comrade!" said the man, leaning leisurely upon his club and looking him in the eye. "Have you come out to take me in? Whatever I may have done, I am poor game for cavaliers, such as you are, to seek. No, no; you have come hither on no such errand, for you are unarmed, I see, and no man ever yet dared try to capture me single-handed. Why, man, where is your sword? Birds of such fine feathers should have their pretty fighting toys, I think."

There was something offensive in this familiarity; and Hugh Martelle was uncertain whether it would be becoming in him to answer. But there was something so very pleasant in the sound of a friendly voice, that he determined to waive his rank, and condescend to partial intimacy. None the less, perhaps, as he reflected that the huge, rough man might be brought to lend him fair assistance to escape.

"My sword?" he answered. "You must ask old Father Ambrose where that is. He would not let me have sanctuary here, unless I remained unarmed; and so I was obliged to strip me of my weapon."

At this the man burst into a hearty, careless shout of laughter.

"Good! Your hand, comrade! Ha! ha! to see the like of this! That we two—birds of such different feather—should meet here to save our necks from being stretched a day or two before they ought. What have you done?"

"It matters not."

"What! afraid to tell? You need not be, comrade. I blab no secrets of the confessional; not I. But I have no fear that others should know what I have done. My trade is a good one while it lasts. Money is plenty, with only the assurance that some day my luck must fail, and I adorn a tree. Well, what of that? After all, a short and merry life is the best. Perhaps I have now nearly run my course; perhaps, with a little cunning, I may get out of this, and take to the road again. In either case I can try to be content. Do you comprehend who I am now, comrade?"

"I do."

"Good. I have eased many a fat priest and old dowager of their purses. Many a yeoman, coming home from the fair, with his gold coin in his pouch, has emptied his pile into my hands. To-day, I broke into the house of a rich burgher. I was nearly taken in the act, and have only had time to fly hither for safety. Now, then, that you know me, comrade, tell me who you are. Sit here with me while you talk. I have about me a morsel of cheese and a flask of wine, and will share them with you."

The flask which the robber drew forth was tempting to one suffering such agonies of thirst, and Hugh Martelle felt all his aversion to the strange companionship disappearing. He eagerly sat down, and waited to be questioned.

"Well, comrade, your profession?"

"A courtier."

"Ah! I see. You have conspired against the King, perhaps; or else made too free with some of the Queen's attendants. And your name?"

"Hugh Martelle," was the hesitating answer.

"What?" roared the robber, drawing to one side. "Not he who, they say, met his enemy in a dark lane and stabbed him in the back? Then you are no comrade of mine, and must go elsewhere for a meal. None but honest men do ever share the loaf with me."

"Honest men, did you say?" repeated Hugh Martelle, contemptuously, stung to the quick by the sneer of the robber. "You talk about honest men, indeed!"

"Ay, and indeed," shouted the robber, gathering up his few poor articles of coarse food, and removing himself, as though from fear of contagion. "I, at least, never struck a man down in secret. I never took a coin upon the road without standing face to face with my man, and giving him a chance to defend himself. Purse-drawer and cut-throat as I may be, no man can convict me of such scoundrel cowardice as thine. I sit down to share a meal with such as you? I tell you," and the robber, advancing, shook, in the face of the other, a huge, knotted fist, "I tell you this, that if you ever dare come near me, or say a single word to me, I will brain you like an ox."

Going to the other side to eat his meal by himself, Hugh Martelle was left once more alone. For a moment, he remained transfixed, almost sinking to the earth for shame, that he, who had been once the most honoured noble of the Court, was now not even judged worthy of the companionship of a common felon. Then his resentment kindled up, and he wished he could have his sword again, that he might chastise the fellow. Even at the altar's foot he felt that he could pour out the low blood, which had been moved to heap such insults upon him. Once, in his rage, he glanced upon one of the bright, metal candle-sticks within the rail, and he half resolved to strike down his insulter with its twisted end. But, looking over, he saw that the robber was distrustful, and, while eating the homely fare upon his lap, was still watching out of the corners of his small, quick eyes; so he retired to his corner, and gnawed his fingers in all the shame and misery of conscious self-abasement.

The great cathedral doors had long been closed, and the two criminals seemed left alone for the night; when, suddenly, the grating of a key was heard in the lock, and three or four men, in cloaks, and with lanterns, entered. At first, Hugh Martelle believed that his enemies were wearied with watching, and had determined to inflict their vengeance upon him, regardless of the sanctity of the place. So thought the robber regarding himself, and he straitened up his athletic figure for a deadly conflict.

"Do you want me?" he cried. "Then come and take me, if you can. Or do you want Hugh Martelle? There he stands. You can have him, if you will. I shall not interfere to prevent it."

The men did not answer, since they did not understand the purport of the words. For the cathedral was so long and deeply arched, that what was spoken at one end reached the other in merely a confused, unmeaning manner. The men, supposing the sound to be a complaint for assistance from some pent-up prisoner, scarcely turned their heads. They traversed half the length of the nave, and then turned into one of the transepts. Here, beneath a low arch, which spanned one corner, they stopped, set down their lanterns, and threw off their cloaks, disclosing shovels and crowbars. With these they proceeded to tear up part of the pavement, and throw up the earth beneath it.

Relieved of his fears, Hugh Martelle now stealthily approached to watch the work; for the lights, dimly as they burned, enlivened that portion of the cathedral, and he feverishly desired to listen to the sounds of the human voice, even though he might take no part in the conversation. So he glided from pillar to pillar, until he approached one from which he could easily watch the men at their work.

The men toiled steadily, without a word, or giving utterance to any sound, excepting their quick, deep breathing, and in a few moments a pit of considerable extent was excavated. As it became deeper, two of the men got into it, and still threw out the earth until their heads alone appeared above the level of the floor. They then stopped, wiped the perspiration from their faces, and one of them said:

"Truly, the old fellow can rest now safe enough, without being put any deeper, I think."

"Yes," said a second. "And here is the coffin of another of the family, just where we put it last. Listen!"

Pushing a crowbar down, it gave out a hollow sound, as it struck the half-rotten wood. Then the men jumped out and prepared to go away; when Hugh Martelle, moved with curiosity, stepped out and confronted them.

"Whose grave is that you are opening, my men?"

One of them raised the lantern, and, seeing the rich dress of the person before him, commenced a respectful answer; when another tapped him upon the arm, and whispered something into his ear. At this the face of the speaker changed to a sort of ferocity, and his voice became harsh and guttural, and placing the lantern close to one of the pavement stones, he said:

"Read for yourself, Master."

With a thrill of dismay, Hugh Martelle deciphered the name "De Bracy." This, then, was the family tomb, and he had been watching the digging of his victim's grave.

"How like you it?" muttered one of the men, in a scornful tone. "Is it deep enough? You should know."

"If not, let him dig it deeper himself," cried the robber, suddenly advancing. "By the mass! he should be made to dig it all; for it is he that has prepared the filling of it."

"Good!" exclaimed the men, not displeased at the hit. "And who are you?"

The robber coolly mentioned his name—one which, for deeds of daring upon the King's highway, and for a wonderful combination of lucky escapes, had been sounded throughout all that quarter of the kingdom. Upon hearing the name the men crowded around, shook him by the hand, and asked him for a narration of his adventures. Then, in a moment, while Hugh Martelle was tauntingly driven from the company of the gravediggers, the robber was seated among them in familiar intercourse. They listened greedily to his stories. Some endeavoured to plan an escape for him; but this could not be done without danger to themselves, and the idea was abandoned. But they tried to add to his comfort as much as possible by contributions—one giving him a flask of wine, another some dry bread, and a third a little money. Hugh Martelle, burning with envy, saw the robber—who had enjoyed the pleasure of friendly social intercourse—rapturously taking leave of his newly gained friends.

All that night, Hugh Martelle was tortured by horrible visions. At times he saw the murdered man lying before him. Upon the breast lay the stone inscribed with the name of De Bracy; and the corpse, which, in its appearance of life, seemed yet no corpse, was continually struggling to arise from beneath the weight in order to attack its murderer. When, at last, he awoke, and found the morning light streaming in upon him, he arose more worn and haggard than ever.

The robber, being coolly bent upon enjoying himself, even in his hours of adversity, had left the main building, and had climbed up into the belfry-tower, where, with the solace of his social flask of wine, he sat down upon a projecting cornice and enjoyed the prospect. But Hugh Martelle did not perceive that the man was absent; for his sufferings had so frightfully worked upon his mind that, at times, his powers of reasoning seemed swept away.

Toward noon the silence was suddenly broken by the chanting of many priests. Now it rose high upon the hair in prolonged strains, and now it sank into a low, subdued melody—a hushed tone of wailing. Nearer and nearer it came, and then was heard the grating of the slow footsteps of a gathered multitude. As the sounds increased, Hugh Martelle lifted up his head, confusedly parted his tangled hair from his haggard brow, and strove to listen. At length, when the swelling chant was at the very door, remembrance returned, and he convulsively shook and frightfully gnawed his hand, in the desperation of his misery. In terror and shame he aroused himself from his corner, and sought to flee from observation. There was but one place where he could be completely out of view. It was a confessional, that stood at the side of the transept, near the open grave. Into this he retreated, and pulled down the curtain before it; and there, while he would have wished to shrink back into the farthest corner, some inward fiend continually urged him to peep forth at the side, and witness the funeral pageant.

First came the choristers, in long, white scarfs, followed by men bearing candles which feebly flickered and fruitlessly strove against the clear light of day. There were priests, in their richest vestments, bearing crosses and incense; the

bearers, carrying the coffin between them; the relatives and members of the house of De Bracy, bowed down in all the agony of grief; richly dressed nobles of the Court, manifesting sympathy by their presence; servants and attendants, flaunting in mourning badges; assistants, carrying the arms and armorial bearings of the deceased, and last, the usual number of strangers. All these Hugh Martelle saw, as the procession slowly advanced along the nave, and now, the death-chant still ringing mournfully through the arches of the great cathedral, turned into the transept. The bearers deposited the coffin at the edge of the grave; the priests gathered closely around; the relatives of the house stood near, gazing upon the face of the deceased; the spectators sought places upon projecting cornices, or clung around the bases of the great pillars, in attempt to gain a full view of all that might transpire, and, amid the tolling of bells and the wafting of incense, the priests commenced the burial service.

All this while, actuated by the same strange fascination, the slayer remained in the confessional, with the eye closely fastened to the curtain-chink. This was apparently punishment enough, for none can realize the hell that burned in the man's breast as he watched. As the rites proceeded, and the mourners crowded around to take their last look, a strange, ungovernable fancy seized upon the watcher's soul. It was a desire to see for himself how his victim looked; and, under that diabolical prompting, Hugh Martelle emerged from the confessional like a ghost, and slowly faltered toward the body.

He proceeded, at first, without molestation. The mourners and all those who took part in the ceremonies were either turned away or had their eyes fixed upon the floor, and did not see the intruder. The few who did observe him were of the mere chance spectators, who knew him not; while those who now recognized him parted in silence before him, shunning his contact as though he bore a contagion. Unmolested, he advanced toward the coffin-head; and, just as the son of victim bent over to take his last look in life, the murderer leaned over that son's shoulder.

For a moment, only. Ere he had time to scan a single feature of the pale corpse, a woman's shriek rang through the transept, and Hugh Martelle was discovered. There were loud oaths of men, and a sudden drawing forth of swords and daggers. A moment more, and the sacrilegious intruder would have been slain where he stood, without regard to the rights of sanctuary; for the son of the murdered man already had his dagger gleaming in the air, when one of the priests hurriedly threw himself between.

"Forbear! In the name of the Church!" cried the priest.

"I will have vengeance!" was the determined demand; and a murmur of approbation arose from all around. But the priest was inflexible. He resolutely stood in the way; and, ere the avenger could strike, a few who were anxious to prevent the threatened profanation hurried the intruder away. They passed him quickly to the outskirts of the throng, where he was left to himself. The charm which had led him into such danger was broken, and he was now as anxious to retire as before he had been to advance. He fled across the nave and through a small, open doorway in the side-wall of the porch; and while the priests below were still exerting themselves to repress the angry tumult, he slowly ascended a winding stairway.

The way grew narrow as he advanced, until, suddenly, the stairway came to an end, and he emerged into the light of day. Then he found himself upon the cathedral roof.

A glorious sun was shining down, and, for a moment, Hugh Martelle was too much dazzled by the sudden brightness to realize the prospect before him. At length, however, his eyes became accustomed to the scene, and he gazed around, with a strange kind of pleasure. Below him, a hundred feet or more, lay the great city. It was stretched out like a map, and he could peer into every street and lane. He recognized the parks in which he had loitered; and, at one side, crossing the view, lay the great square, with its fountains and its boundaries of vast palaces, where he had so often helped swell the throng of courtiers.

As he gazed downward his sight grew dizzy, and for the moment he clung firmly to a buttress; but strange temptations assailed him, and he resolved to die: one moment, and he would be at rest, dashed to pieces on the pavement below.

As he approached nearer the edge, intent upon hurling himself down, the robber started up before him.

"Come not here," said the robber, who, throughout all the morning, had been seated upon the very edge of the roof and calmly enjoying the prospect, and who now imagined that Hugh Martelle was approaching to work him an injury. "Dare not to stir a step toward me, thou cowardly assassin, or I will hurl you to the bottom of this wall."

As Hugh Martelle gazed upon the tall, brawny figure of the robber, and saw his arms stretched out in readiness to execute the threat, he trembled. A moment before, and he had felt himself ready to court death. Now, when it was offered by another, he shrank from the trial. The old love of life came back like a flash. With hasty steps he re-entered the tower, descended the staircase, and once more stood within the main body of the building.

There, all was quiet again. The burial rites had been concluded, the mourners had dispersed, and the men who, the night before, had dug the grave, were now shovelling back the earth and replacing the stones of the pavement. Besides them, there was no one in the cathedral; and Hugh Martelle, still tired of life, yet not willing to resign it unless compelled, shrank back to his dark corner, to nurse his pain, and fruitlessly revolve new projects of escape.

Once, in his circuit of the building, he approached the transept where the murdered man lay buried. The sun was down, and a single silver moonbeam glided through the window and fell within. It glanced across the floor, and glinted upon the dark robes of a kneeling female figure. For a moment Hugh Martelle stood behind, and vacantly wondered. Then his recollection faintly returned, and he knew, by the attitude and figure, though he could not see the face, that the sister of the buried man was before him, engaged in prayer for the dead.

His first thought was to fly—no matter where, so long as he could avoid the sight of that living reproach to his violence. There could not be a more improbable suggestion than that of pardon. He only knew that, through the pity of women—a pity awakened by tears, and pleadings, and self-reproaches—a faint hope of life might still be found; and he hastened to attempt the trial.

He turned, and approached the kneeling figure. Still immersed in her devotions, she did not hear him as he drew near. At last, he stood directly by her, and for a moment listened.