

When Mademoiselle de Heilley entered, Francis was compelled to acknowledge that she was not the lady who had used her name. He was evidently chagrined at the discovery, complained of fatigue, and permitted the ladies to withdraw.

When the Duchess of Alencon came to visit her royal brother the next day, she was pale and sad, and her countenance bore the traces of mortification.

"The object of my journey to Madrid has been frustrated," said she. "Donna Eleanora, your promised bride, has left Madrid, and undertaken a pilgrimage to Gaudaloupe, as an excuse to avoid seeing me, or it may be that she has taken umbrage at something you have said of her to your mysterious visitor, who was doubtless some practised syren whom that wily dissembler, Charles of Spain, sent hither to bewitch you, calculating on the great defect in your moral character."

"I will stake the fairest province in France, that she with whom I discoursed last night was not less chaste than beautiful," exclaimed Francis; "though with regard to my own conduct, I believe I was foolish enough to make love to her."

"Oh! doubtless you acted with your usual want of discretion; but upbraidings are unavailing. It is enough that you have mortally offended your affianced bride, and frustrated all my plans for your deliverance."

"Have you tried your influence with Bourbon, Marguerite?" asked Francis, eagerly.

A deadly paleness chased the lively bloom from the cheek and lip of the royal widow, as she replied mournfully:

"Even to that degradation have I stooped for the sake of my king and brother."

"And—and the traitor?"

"Is willing to renounce his treasons, to sue for pardon on his bended knee, to his captive liege lord, and to place his sword, his fortunes, his life, his honour even, at my disposal; but, Francis, he is powerless. Like yourself, he has been the dupe of Charles of Spain, and he has not the means of repairing the mischief he has wrought."

"Not if I reward him with my pardon, and your hand, Marguerite?"

"The terms on which you would purchase his good offices have been made known to him," replied she, mournfully; "had they been offered previously to the battle of Pavia, you had been now on the throne of France, and master of the Milanese."

"Impossible; you were not then a widow, Marguerite, and from the moment that our mother plighted your reluctant hand to Alencon, Bourbon became my deadliest foe."

"Such, indeed, has been the result of my mother's cruel policy, and your unkind acquiescence in the sacrifice of one who deserved better things at your hands, Francis of Valois. But I spare reproaches; you are reaping the bitter harvest of your own sowing."

"But, my sweet Marguerite, you are now released from your weary bondage to the poltroon Alencon, and are free to wed with the object of your earliest affections, Bourbon."

"No, Francis; Bourbon cannot now repair the wounds he has inflicted on his country. He has explained to me, in the bitterness of his vain repentance, the impossibility of his rendering you any assistance. He is neither trusted nor respected by his new allies the foes of France. Would that he had died on the blood-stained field of Pavia, when his rebellious sword severed the last link that bound him to the heart of Marguerite of Valois!"

"You have, then, told him this?"

"No: he told me that thus he read my feelings,—that he was unworthy of me, and being unable to repair his crimes, he dared not sue for reconciliation. We have parted to meet no more on this side the grave, and all I now live for is my country. I still hope to be the means of restoring to France her king, if he will be true to himself."

The Duchess of Alencon then unfolded to her royal brother a project for his escape from prison, into which Francis eagerly entered. The plan failed through the treachery of one of his attendants, who, having quarrelled with his colleague, La Rochepot, who was more fully trusted than himself, he, out of revenge, denounced the plot to the Spanish authorities. Francis was, in consequence, subjected to a more rigorous confinement than before, and the Emperor Charles, understanding the share which the Duchess of Alencon had taken in arranging the matter, took measures for arresting her person as soon as the date of her safe conduct had expired; and Marguerite, while bending all the energies of her ardent character to the great object for which she had entered Spain, the deliverance of her royal brother, had been so insensible to the lapse of time, as to have arrived within two days of the limits of this period.

She received a hasty warning of the emperor's design from Bourbon, and having taken a hurried farewell of Francis, and received from his hands an instrument whereby he abdicated the throne of France in favour of his son the dauphin, she left Madrid privately, and travelled with such expedition, that before Charles had received certain intelligence of her flight, she was beyond the reach of his power.

After her departure, Francis sunk once more into a state of listless melancholy. His appetite failed; he refused to take air

exercise, or recreation; sleep forsook his pillow, and a dangerous relapse of fever, brought on by agitation and anguish of mind, succeeded. Gattinara, the honest chancellor of the Emperor Charles, to whom the state of the royal captive was reported by the physicians, thought proper to announce it to his imperial majesty in the following blunt terms:—

"Will it please your majesty, that the last consolations of the church be administered to the King of France?"

"The last consolations of the church to Francis of Valois!" repeated the emperor, in surprise; "what next will he require?"

"Embalming and interment, if it be your imperial pleasure to grant him the favour of royal exequies," replied Gattinara.

"The fact is, my lord, you have delayed the fulfilment of your promises so long, that in all probability Francis of Valois will get his release to-night from a higher power than yours, and you will be regarded by Europe in the light of his murderer."

"Nay, then," cried the emperor, "he shall be espoused to our royal sister, Donna Eleanora, to-morrow."

"It is the opinion of six physicians, that Francis of Valois will be wedded to another spouse before morning."

"In that case no time is to be lost," cried the emperor, "or we shall not be able to claim any benefit from the treaty he has signed, not even a dowry for my sister. Lannoy," pursued he, turning to the viceroy of Naples, with whom he was engaged in a game of chess; "go to the Queen of Portugal, and tell her to repair, with her ladies, to the Alcazar."

"Your majesty forgets that Donna Eleanora is still absent on the pilgrimage which you compelled her to undertake."

"That is an unlucky circumstance, but not without remedy: the parties must be espoused by proxy."

"Where shall we find a lady who can prepare herself for so important a ceremony on so short a notice?" asked Gattinara, coolly: "Your majesty's imperial consort, and the ladies of her court, are not at Toledo, consequently you cannot select a noble maiden for the purpose of representing your illustrious sister, without great difficulty and loss of time, to say nothing of the pride and importance of the Spanish nobles in their family arrangements. And this is so extraordinary a business."

"What is to be done, Lannoy?" said the emperor.

"Something, or nothing, it is plain," replied the viceroy, with a sarcastic smile; "and if I did not fear giving offence to her Majesty Donna Eleanora, I would ride off to Madrid, and receive the nuptial ring from King Francis, in her name."

"And as her proxy?" asked Gattinara, drily.

"Why not? a proxy only means a representative who expresses the consent of an absent person, which, as we all know Donna Eleanora has no objection to this alliance, I will venture to do, with regard to her marriage with Francis of Valois."

"Ride, then, with all the speed you may, Lannoy, that we may claim a dowry for my sister as his widow," cried the emperor.

In an incredibly short period after this conversation, the feverish slumbers of the royal captive were interrupted by the entrance of a priest, who, approaching the bed, with his breviary in his hand, asked, "if his Majesty of France were disposed to enter into the holy state?"

"Not much, I confess," replied Francis; "however, God's will be done.—Are you about to administer the last sacrament, Father?"

"There are two others which, in your majesty's case, must precede that consoling ordinance, namely, matrimony, and penance; and for the first of these I am come to prepare your majesty."

"Matrimony!" cried Francis, in a feeble voice; "will you be pleased to produce the bride?"

"Don Ferdinand Alarcon," said the priest, "I charge you, in the name of the emperor, to introduce the proxy of that illustrious lady, Donna Eleanora, the Queen Dowager of Portugal, into this chamber, and to arrange every thing for the immediate celebration of her majesty's nuptials with the King of France."

"How now, Lannoy!" exclaimed Francis, as the viceroy, booted and spurred, defiled with dust, and breathless with hard riding, entered the chamber; "is it from your hands that I am to have the honour of receiving my Spanish bride?"

"No: it is Alarcon who is to act as the deputy of our imperial lord, on this occasion, and I am to have the honour of representing the illustrious bride," replied Lannoy; "your majesty will be graciously pleased to excuse my whisks and spurs, I hope."

"C'est egal," muttered the astonished bridegroom, with an expressive shrug. The bearded representative of the bride gave an authoritative nod to the priest to commence the spousal rite, and Francis, supported in his bed with pillows, allowed his trembling hand to be guided, by his page Pepin, to place the nuptial ring on the huge finger which Lannoy thrust forth to receive the symbol of union between the imprisoned monarch of France, and the sister of his imperial master. At the conclusion of this farcical solemnity, Francis sunk back on his pillow in a state of exhaustion, so nearly resembling death, that the proxy of his future queen rode back to Toledo, with fiery speed, to an-

nounce to Charles V. that the prediction of the physicians would assuredly be verified.

Contrary, however, to their opinions, the crisis of the fever terminated favourably, and Francis slowly, but surely, recovered from his perilous sickness. The Emperor Charles paid him friendly visits during his convalescence, and the arrangements for his restoration to liberty were soon after completed. Hostages were, however, demanded by the emperor, for the fulfilment of the hard conditions of his release, and the payment of his enormous ransom. These hostages were to be either the heirs of twelve of the noblest families in France, or his two sons, the dauphin, and his brother Prince Henri.

Tears rushed to the eyes of the royal victor of Marignan, when the bitter alternative was submitted to his consideration; but he replied, without hesitation, "Mine own fair sons must be the victims, then; I cannot ask any of my peers to resign a father's fondest hopes to break my chains." The young princes were accordingly conducted to the frontier town of Andaye by Marshal Lantre, and on the 18th of March, 1526, the memorable scene of the exchange of these royal children for their father, took place. Francis, guarded by Alarcon and Lannoy, and fifty horsemen, appeared on one bank at the moment that Marshal Lantre, with the dauphin and his brother, reached the other.

A barge had been moored in the mid-stream of the Bidassoa, which formed the bound of demarcation between the hostile realms of France and Spain. On the deck of this vessel, the long separated father, and his sons met, and exchanged a hasty embrace, as a prelude to a yet longer parting. "It is not meet that the foes of France should behold me in my hour of weakness!" exclaimed Francis, dashing the rebel moisture from his eyes; and straining his children once more passionately to his throbbing breast, he tore himself from their caresses, leaped into the boat which had brought them to the barge, and springing to the shore, mounted his royal charger, which was in waiting for him there, waved his hand, and shouting, "Once more a king!" rode off at head-long speed, not trusting himself to cast a backward glance towards the Bidassoa, where the boat, containing the precious pledges whom he had given for the fulfilment of the hard conditions of his release, was rapidly gliding towards the hated shores of Spain.

The first use which the enfranchised monarch made of his freedom, was to protest against the whole tenor of the treaty to which he had been induced to affix his signature, while labouring under an excess of feverish excitement; and regardless both of the matrimonial engagements into which he had entered with Donna Eleanora of Austria, and the perilous position in which his children were placed, he allied himself with his former enemy Henry VIII. of England, and took an early opportunity of declaring war against Charles. Three years of harassing campaigns, equally ruinous in their effects to the prosperity of France and Spain, succeeded; and during this period the sons of Francis were confined to the custody of Donna Eleanora, the affianced bride of their father, and by her they were cherished with not less than maternal tenderness. She superintended their education with the same care which she bestowed on that of her young daughter the infanta of Portugal, and fully succeeded in winning the affection of the youthful hostages; while she gently, but unweariedly, exerted the influence which her virtues and talents had acquired for her in her own family, in endeavouring to compose the differences between her imperial brother, and her affianced husband.

The destiny of Francis was, from the cradle to the tomb, peculiarly affected by the power of female influence. Left an orphan at the early age of three years, he was educated by his widowed mother, Louise of Savoy, whose ascendancy over his affections was at times perniciously enough exercised after he came to the throne; but, on the other hand, the bright genius and energetic spirit of his high-minded and accomplished sister, Marguerite of Valois, which were ever exerted for his good, were productive of the happiest effects, both on his fortunes and his character. It was from the clear head, and brilliant imagination of this amiable princess, that the felicitous idea first emanated, of referring the differences between those irreconcilable foes, Charles and Francis, to a female congress, composed of the emperor's aunt, that veteran states-woman, the Lady Marguerite, regent of the Low Countries, Louise of Savoy, the mother of Francis, Eleanora of Austria, and herself. It was to the mildness, patience, and good feeling, exhibited by these royal *diplomates* extraordinary, that the exhausted realms of Austria, France, and Spain, were indebted for that happy termination of their hostilities which is emphatically styled, in history, "THE LADIES' PEACE."

It was on the 5th of August, 1529, nearly three years and a half from the day when Francis I. regained his liberty at the price of resigning his sons into the hands of his ungenerous rival, that a scene not less interesting than that which we have previously described, took place on the bosom of the watery boundary between France and Spain, where the constable Montmorenci gave the sealed cases containing the money stipulated for the ransom of Francis I. in exchange for the betrothed bride of Francis and his sons. The illustrious party landed at Bourdeaux, and Eleanora,