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THE SIGN OF THE CROSS.

A Story of the Robbers of Jourville Forest.

BY A KNIGHT OF CYPRUS.

(Concluded from last month.)

The inn was on the edge of the village toward the forest, and though of ample dimensions, our three friends were the only guests at the supper table. Later in the evening, however, other wayfarers arrived, four of them, well-dressed, middle-aged men, whom, the host said, were gentlemen from Auxerre, come to hunt in the forest. And when our hero came to view them more closely, he found their garbs to be such as well-to-do sportsmen usually wore. But they did not give him an opportunity to question them. As soon as they had eaten their supper, they called for lights and pipes, and went to their chambers. It was here that Girard had thought of having guards, to go with him through the forest, but upon consulting with his companions they declared that there was no need. They were well armed and did not apprehend danger.

On the following morning the four hunters sat down to breakfast with Girard and his attendants; for, on the road the young man had admitted the two serving men into his companionship completely—both in eating and in sleeping. So, at the breakfast table, the seven of them sat together, and the four gentlemen

from Auxerre very soon made themselves jovially familiar with the young Secretary. In fact, it was a jolly company, and not only did the meal pass off pleasantly, but the huntsmen had planned to pursue the same road that the three men from Paris were to take; so they would all ride together, at least, as far as they went.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when they set forth. Half an hour earlier Girard had seen a boy ride away in the same direction, mounted upon a strong, fleet horse; and on asking the host whither he was bound, he was answered: "To Mirabeau, with the post." It seemed strange to the youth that such a boy should be entrusted with the king's post; but he made no remark.

Very shortly after leaving the inn they entered the forest, within the limits of which they were to ride for the greater part of the day. Here and there in the broad spreading wood were small settlements; but the wild-wood was darksome and gloomy nevertheless. Near the middle of the forenoon they came to a small hamlet of charcoal burners,—a squalid, miserable set,—and beyond that they struck the deepest, and darkest part of the forest. At noon, they had ar-