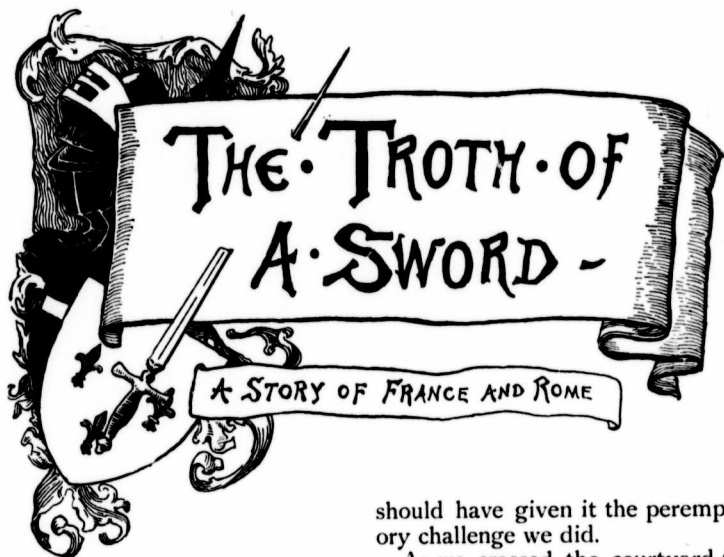




IV.

WHOEVER takes it upon himself to account for the mind of a woman must needs be of a small mind himself, or he must be of great hardihood and withstand easily the discredit of others. I know now it was by reason of his sister's complaint that Henri showed discourtesy so marked towards the Lord of Rimini. It crossed my mind even then that something of the kind must be the truth, else how, after an absence of years could he leave his new met guest smarting under the sting of a servant's defiance, and now fretting and fuming anew over so marked an evidence of his host's disregard? It may be that the manner of the times has changed with me, and it may be that the stiffening of the bones and too great ease of body have left me out of knowledge of the motives of younger men, and men more in the way of adventure. But when I think of the power de Rimini was conceded to exercise for good or ill wherever he was, I marvel that even a pair of fresh young soldiers

should have given it the peremptory challenge we did.

As we crossed the courtyard to pursue the inspection of the castle, I more in particular to learn the common disposition of affairs, and Henri to arrange for the approaching obsequies, the bell in the chapel turret tolled out its message to the peasants on the adjoining domain.

It was well upon an hour before we were returned to the main hall, and when we arrived there it was to find de Rimini with his esquires, their horses furnished and equipped, all standing in silence awaiting the coming of the Lord of Aulnac. I could see that this was not unexpected, for after a moment's parley between the leaders we all alike moved to the outer wall, the drawbridge was let down, and the dozen men rode forth gloomily into the night.

There was a sharpness about it as the bridge swung back to its place that stirred anew the pulses of war, so keen for moving sounds. It think it must have been this that caused a seeming return of spirits to my companion, for he was appreciably better pleased with himself when at last we made ready to