

were we in leafage we scarcely heard the rustle. From the right, not far off, came the short, gasping bark of a fox ; that, with the *pa-lop, pa-lop, pa-lop*, of the hoofs on the hard, sound road, was the only life.

So dark was it we dared not touch a bridle, but with a loose rein plied whip and spur in our race for a man's life.

"Are we on time ?" I cried to Lesellè, who led the way.

"Please God !" he cried back across his shoulder, and stooping low to avoid the downward thrust of the branches, rode on.

Please God ! When a man says, Please God ! he doubts. Little by little the strain of the gallop on the rising hill began to tell on the horses, and their speed slackened. The smooth, easy motion shortened to a lumpish gait, and at a very sharp rise they stopped, half stumbling.

"How far to Poitiers ?"

"Five leagues, Mademoiselle"

"And the hour ?"

All Lesellè's boyish ardour was gone. He rode like an old man, slouching in the saddle, his chin sunk on his breast. At my question I saw him raise his head and look at me, his face white against the overhung blackness of the night.

"Mademoiselle, I have done my best."

"The hour, Monsieur, if you please ?"

"Gone four, I think."

"Oh !" and with a savage lash I brought down the whip on my beast's sweating flank. "Dawn in an hour ! Lesellè, Lesellè, is there nothing will drive them on ?"