

great virtues, and I have come expressly to seek a blessing from one who is reputed to be a saint upon earth."

The legate made an effort to preserve a look of humility, but his eyes rose from the ground in spite of him, and his whole countenance betrayed an emotion of supreme vanity.

"My daughter," replied he, meekly folding his hands upon his breast, "I am but a poor sinner."

"Kneel down," whispered Montruel, "and the man is ours."

Agnes obeyed willingly. The bishop could no longer resist—he laid his hands upon her head and blessed her.

Agnes rose, and her joy, which was far from being feigned, was highly flattering to the bishop; and her joy was not diminished that she had joined another partisan without any expense.

Agnes advanced up the centre of the nave, and looked all around her; but she was too much a woman of the world to be an artist, and the marvellous creation of art before her was to her a sealed book. She saw nothing but unfinished columns and broken lines.

"This is a hideous place," she whispered to Montruel, "I expected to see something better;" and then aloud she exclaimed, "How beautiful! I did not look for so much religious splendor!"

Montruel said to himself, "What wit!—what finesse!" without for a moment reflecting that the most abandoned wanton might have sung that song of black and white as well as Agnes de Meranie. The good bishop made a low bow, to express his gratitude; for he loved all those who called his dear church beautiful.

"The day is wearing," said Amaury to his queen, "and our time is getting short."

"Respected sires," said Agnes, immediately to the clergy, "can I be permitted to see the image-cutter, who came from the Saracen country, and who is working on the statue of the holy Mary?"

Maurice de Sully at first made no reply, while the priests looked at each other with embarrassment.

Agnes alluded to Jean Cador and everybody at Notre Dame was obedient to Jean Cador, who had strictly forbidden any one, under whatever pretext, to disturb him at his work.

To disobey Jean Cador was to run the risk of seeing that eccentric artist throw down his tools and leave his block of granite a shapeless stone; and then where in the whole universe could they find the like of Jean Cador?

"Madame," stammered the good bishop Maurice, who was picking his words, not knowing how to frame his refusal, "assuredly I would do anything in the world to please you."

Agnes divined what the nature of this reply was about to be. "I entreat you," said she, "not to refuse my request; before my lord the king gave me the name of Agnes, I was called Marie—and our Lady is my well-beloved patroness. Suffer me, my father, to go and worship my patroness."

Though this was so adroitly put, Maurice still held out; for he had heard nothing that seemed likely to contribute to the success of his work—but the legate came to the aid of Agnes.

"My venerable brother," said he, "let me add my entreaties to those of the illustrious Agnes of France; I beg you to accede to her pious wish."

Agnes reddened with pride; for it was seldom that she received that coveted title—Agnes of France.

Maurice de Sully dared not now resist, for the legate was too direct a representative of the papal family.

"Be it according to your wish, venerable brother," said he, bending before the legate, "may it please God that none of us have cause to repent the step. That staircase, madame, which is before you, leads to the atelier of master Jean Cador; but, pray, do not ask me to accompany you."

Little as Agnes was inclined to giving, she would willingly have paid for those last words that the good bishop had uttered; for her only fear has been that the bishop would desire to accompany her to the workshop of maitre Jean Cador. For this visit which she was about to make to the mysterious artisan was the very ob-

ject of her hazardous passage through the streets of Paris.

Mahmoud el Reis was in his workshop, seated on a bench, with his elbows on his knees, and his head buried in his hands. He was thinking.

The two black slaves, half naked, were streaming with perspiration, and striking heavy blows on the block of granite which was about to become a statue of the holy Virgin.

On the boards of the workshop, there was a sketch traced out in black chalk, which indicated the contour of the image, and which was now lighted up by the last rays of the setting sun.

It was truly beautiful! a Christian artist would perhaps, have put less *abandon* into the pose of the Virgin—more purity in her celestial face; but he certainly could not have endowed her with a larger measure of physical beauty.

It was the beauty of the dream of an Eastern poet or of the divinities of the Persian religion. It was indeed beautiful, but it was not Christian.

The slaves redoubled their blows. Mahmoud was in a profound study—and the name of Dilah, his well-beloved, was dying away upon his lips.

It was, in fact, Dilah, and not the Virgin, that Mahmoud had sketched upon his walls. Dilah, the pearl of Asia. The houri, whose voluptuous form was at once rich and supple—the beloved one that the Prophet would have deemed worthy of ornamenting the eternal dances of his voluptuous Paradise.

Mahmoud was thinking of Dilah, and neither he nor his two slaves heard the door open, and neither he nor his two slaves heard Agnes de Meranie enter, accompanied by the inevitable and useful Amaury Montruel, lord of Anet. Agnes and her chevelier paused at the entrance.

Amaury pointed to Mahmoud, saying, "That's him."

Agnes contemplated the Syrian in silence, for some time, but with an eager look.

"His arms are muscular," muttered she to herself.

"He has the strength and boldness of the lion of the desert," whispered Amaury.

"And he has promised?"

"He has promised."

"What hast thou given him, Amaury?" demanded Agnes, who was not usually in the habit of troubling herself about the expenses of her faithful servant.

"That is my secret," answered Amaury, turning pale.

"And how does he intend to gain an entrance into the Abbey?"

"That is his secret," said Montruel.

The noise of the hammers still drowned the sound of their voices.

"He neither sees nor hears us," said Agnes.

"When we are in love," whispered Montruel, in a tone of bitterness, "we often become blind and deaf, madame."

Agnes would not understand his meaning.

"Messire," said she, "tell me, I pray you, what is the name of the young girl whose memory he treasures up with so much passion?—it may serve me."

"She is called Dilah."

A faint smile was visible on the lips of the Syrian, who repeated the name like a distinct and faint echo—

"Dilah!"

Agnes raised her gorget and put her hand into her bosom, seeking some hidden object there.

"I have not yet given everything to the beggars," said she. "Call that handsome tiger of the desert here, Messire Amaury."

Montruel called "Mahmoud!" in a loud voice.

The Syrian still remained immovable for a moment—then turned slowly towards the voice that he heard so near and so unexpectedly.

It is only for us Europeans to tremble at the first surprise, and thus to betray our secrets, like children. The Khurds of Asia, the Ethiopians, the Kabyles, and the Indians of North America, whose brows are red as blood, are different men from us. They know how to hide their fears—their hopes and their astonishment—their joy and their pain—in such a way that an enemy can never penetrate the secret of their soul.

The two slaves suspended their labours, on a sign from their master.

"What would'st thou?" said Mahmoud coldly, "and why hast thou brought that woman here?"

His eyes turned till they met those of Agnes.

"This is the wife of the king of France," replied Amaury Montruel.

"The queen?" demanded Mahmoud, casting upon Agnes a furtive glance.

Agnes anticipated Montruel and answered in a firm voice.

"The queen."

Mahmoud showed no astonishment, but Montruel, advancing another step into the work-shop, the Syrian rose briskly and whispered those words in his ear—

"This is my house, and we never soil our dwellings. I will not kill this woman neither to-day nor in this place."

Amaury recoiled, appalled—frightened at the consequences that might follow on the execution of such a tragic error.

"This is not her!" exclaimed he; "the woman I named to thee was princess Ingeburge."

"Ah!" said Mahmoud coldly, "I understand. . . this is her rival, who comes to see if I have a resolute air and a strong arm."

"Pshaw!" Montruel was about to say, but Agnes advanced and cut short his speech.

"I love the king," cried she with a pride that made her for the moment truly beautiful. "Thou art right. This woman disputes the king's love with me. Mahmoud el Reis, it is true: I did come to see if thine arm is strong and thine air resolute."

For a moment the Syrian turned from Agnes with an instinctive disgust; and yet that bold avowal pleased him better than deceit.

"Ah!" said he, "thou lovest the king?" in a singular tone.

Agnes knew nothing of the schemes that were working to take the life of the king. We cannot tell if she really loved the king as much as she said she did; but it is very certain that her personal interests were too strictly connected with the existence of Phillip Augustus to render it probable that she would conspire against him. That was where Montruel deceived himself as he deceived the king, and as he deceived every one else.

Agnes believed that Montruel was working with the sole object of making her queen.

She gave no heed to the words of Mahmoud but drew her hand from under her gorget. That hand now held a rich necklace of pearls of the purest water. Her look and smile seemed to say to Amaury, "These are not imitations like those I gave just now to the beggars."

Then making use of the name that Amaury had just reminded her of, she held out the necklace to Mahmoud, with the most gracious air she could assume, saying, in her gentlest tones—

"This is for Dilah, thy well-beloved!" This time the Syrian could not help trembling; he looked in the face of Agnes, for a moment, as in a sort of fright, then slowly extended his hand while his eyes fell upon the ground. The pearls fell into his hand, and he murmured as to himself some expression of acknowledgment.

On descending the narrow staircase which led from Jean Cador's shed to the nave of the cathedral, Agnes whispered to Amaury—"Another gained!"

"Oh! madame," replied the infatuated Montruel, "You have only to wish it, to have the whole universe under your feet."

Mahmoud el Reis remained motionless, with the necklace of pearls laying across his hands. By a sign he ordered the two negroes to discontinue their work and to bring his horse. Night had set in, and as soon as Mahmoud was alone, he turned his eyes to the sketch drawn upon the wall.

"That woman has seen Dilah!" said he; she uttered her name! Why did the name of Dilah, from that month, strike me as a bitter outrage?"

He held up the pearls between himself and the light and the last rays of the sun piercing through them gave them the appearance of large drops of rosy dew.

"The woman was beautiful, and these gems are rich and rare," he continued, "yet why do I despise them?"