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FEUDAL TIMES;

OR,

TWO SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.

A Romance of Daring and Adventure.

(Translated especially for the FAVORITE from the French of Paul Duplessis.)

CHAPTER LVIII.

CAIN AND ABEL.

The resistance of the beleagued was by no means yet overcome, however; indeed, the royal troops were hard pressed to maintain the position they had reached.

Suddenly Sforzi's eyes were lit up with an almost superhuman brilliancy, the muscles of his face were agitated by a convulsive trembling, his lips became pale and contracted, and upon his forehead the great veins swelled up like cords—sure indications that he was attacked by one of his dreaded fits of ungodly fury. All his faculties appeared to be concentrated in the gaze he turned upon the leader of a fresh party of rebels advancing to the attack. This leader was the Marquis de la Tremblais.

The sight of Sforzi caused the Seigneur de la Tremblais nearly as much agitation as was felt by Raoul. His hatred of the latter stood him instead of the courage in which he was deficient.

"Miserable bastard!" he exclaimed, "if the baseness of your condition leaves any warmth in your blood, or courage in your heart, come and cross swords with me!"

This provocation completed the young man's fury and swept away all the instinctive scruples that had before restrained him.

"Assassin and infamous wretch!" he cried, hoarsely, "it is heaven that sends you to your doom."

They sprang upon one another. This monstrous duel—for none of those who witnessed it were ignorant of the blood-ties of the combatants—this monstrous duel caused hostilities to be suspended for a moment, and afforded great relief to the fatigued royal troops.

Sforzi, with bare head, was at an extreme disadvantage against the marquis, who was cased in steel. The certainty that their master could not fall to be the conqueror led not a little to the voluntary inactivity of the rebels. Twice Sforzi lunged at his antagonist, and twice the point of his sword was blunted against the impenetrable armor of the marquis.

"Death of my life!" muttered De Maurevert, springing from the royal ranks, and placing himself within two paces of the combatants, "it is impossible this sacrilegious and unequal struggle can be allowed to go on. The moment has come to act, I think. To work! To leave Raoul to be massacred at the moment of his making his will in my favor would be scandalous."

The Grand Prévôt of Auvergne moved quietly nearer to the marquis, until, finding himself within a proper distance, he sprang forward, seized him, lifted him in the air and then threw him heavily on the ground, and placed his knee upon the prostrate man's chest. With such rapid impetuosity were all these movements executed, that the point of his dagger was already at the marquis's throat before one of the men-at-arms could come to his assistance.

"Companions!" cried De Maurevert, turning



SFORZI ADVANCED FROM THE CROWD TO WITHIN THREE PACES OF THE KING.

towards the stupefied rebels, "if one of you advance a single step, I will pin this villainous owl to the ground! Take my word for it, this event is the most fortunate that could happen for you. I pledge my word as a soldier, as a captain, that as many of you as at once throw down their arms shall be absolved from their crime of rebellion, and allowed to go, safe and sound, wherever they please, without being further incommoded or molested. It is simply your lives which I offer you; for in ten minutes the château will be in the power of the royal troops, and you will all be massacred or hung. As to the marquis's vengeance, you need not trouble yourselves about that—his account is settled! If you are so mad as to decline to accept my generous pardon, I at once withdraw it, and hand as many of you as remain to be dealt with to the speedy justice of the Royal Commissioners. Decide at once!"

The deliberations of the rebels lasted barely half a minute.

"Monseigneur," said one of the chiefs, stepping from the ranks, "everybody knows that Captain de Maurevert has never failed in one of his engagements. We thank you for our pardon, and lay down our arms. Besides this, be assured, monseigneur, that but for the fear inspired in us by the cruelty of the marquis, not one of us would ever have consented to fight against his gracious majesty, our Seigneur Henry III., King of France."

"Death, companions!" cried De Maurevert, "your submission is made just in time. Do you hear those trumpets sounding the assault? Five minutes later you would every one of you have been put to the sword. Stay near me; but for that, I will not be answerable for your safety."

De Maurevert spoke the truth—scarcely a quarter of an hour passed before the royal troops over-ran the château, mercilessly massacring all the enemies who fell into their hands.

The Marquis de la Tremblais, firmly bound,

like a vulgar criminal, had been placed by De Maurevert in charge of a company of pikemen. The excellent Grand Prévôt had eagerly discharged this responsibility, so as to afford himself entire liberty to pillage.

As to Raoul, with cheeks bathed in tears, he held aloof in one of the embrasures.

"Oh!—why," he said to himself—"why has my presentiment not been realized? Wretch that I am, I have dared to threaten the life of my own brother—of my older brother, the head of my family. I regard myself with horror! But I will expiate my fault—my crime! Never, while I live, shall his head fall upon the scaffold! Let the Royal Commissioners condemn him—they have the right to do so; but I have the power to pardon him, and will employ it. Monsieur de Harlai may accuse me of perjury; the king may withdraw his favor from me, may banish me; Diane may demand of me an account of the blood of her mother; the many victims of the Marquis de la Tremblais may curse me; I may become to all an object of contempt and horror; but I shall rather endure these reproaches and disgraces than the voice of my conscience which, if I give up the marquis to the hands of the executioner, will incessantly cry to me: 'Cain, what have you done with your brother?'"

The work of slaughter at length ceased. Of four hundred men who had defended the château, only those who had laid down their arms at De Maurevert's call were saved from pitiless massacre.

At midnight, when the camp had settled down in stillness, Raoul sought De Maurevert, whom he found stretched upon the earth and sleeping soundly after the terrible fatigues of the day, but at a spot apparently the most ill-chosen for repose—that is to say on the threshold of the door of the guard-room in which the Marquis de la Tremblais was confined.

"Ah!—it is you, is it, dear companion," said

De Maurevert opening his eyes on rising from his recumbent position. "I expected you."

"Expected me, De Maurevert?"

"Undoubtedly—and, in proof of it, I laid myself down on one instead of in my own bed. Your intention in coming here is to save the marquis. Do not attempt to deceive me—you have not the least faculty for telling falsehoods."

"Well, suppose my intentions were such as you say, captain?"

"Then, my beloved Sforzi, I should oppose the accomplishment of the said intentions," interrupted the Grand Prévôt, coolly.

"Take care, De Maurevert! If you dispose of force I have the power of right. You might have to pay very dear at some future time for your present disobedience!"

"Threats from you to me, my dear Raoul!" said the captain, with a pained expression; "that would constitute the crime of breach of friendship. Dear companion, before going into a passion, at least do me the favor to explain yourself."

He paused for a moment; then, taking the chevalier's silence for acquiescence, he proceeded:

"That his majesty has conferred on you the right to pardon is nothing to me. I only know, and only care to know, one thing—that in my capacity of General-in-Chief of the royal troops, I am sole master in my camp.

There cannot be the shadow of a doubt that if, after all the blood and money that has been spent to get possession of the marquis's person, I were to set him at liberty, the Royal Commissioners would bring me to trial and condemn me to be beheaded. Now you can hardly imagine, dear Raoul, how disagreeable it would be to me to be wholly decapitated. I cannot in reason sacrifice the pleasant remainder of my days in favor of such a man as the Marquis de la Tremblais. It is better to kill the devil than be killed by him, as the saying is. Besides, dear companion, even though I were willing to aid you in saving the marquis, the thing would be impossible. Enraged by the crimes of this monster, the army would defy my will and enter into open rebellion; the marquis would immediately be despatched—hewn in pieces—and something else would happen, for which nothing would ever console me—you would be destroyed with him! Beloved companion, take my advice: return to your tent, and leave to time and circumstances the care of events."

The reasons given by De Maurevert were so logical, so irrefutable, that Sforzi made no attempt to combat them.

"Captain," he replied, "the strongest of all the consideration you have put before me is the last; I see that to set the marquis free to-night would be to send him to death. I will await a more favorable moment. Now, De Maurevert, let me pass; I must see my brother."

"Your brother?" repeated the captain, in a tone of mingled pity and reproach. "How can you continue to call this hideous monster by that sacred name? Your brother—who sent you to the gibbet! Your brother—who did not hesitate to lay brutal hands upon your chaste Diane! Your brother—who, in the face of all, and knowing the bonds by which you were united to him, stigmatised you with the name of bastard! Your brother—who, at this very moment, when you are so insanely seeking to