

"and, to begin, I must own that the nearer we approach Paris the more I feel my heart oppressed—I know not why. Our good people at Croissi would say that it is a foreboding, and that some great misfortune doubtless awaits us at the close of our journey. Indeed, sir," continued he, with a melancholy smile, "I blush to own a weakness like this, but I am unable to surmount it."

Albert regarded him fixedly.

"And what could you have to fear with me?" asked he, somewhat haughtily. "Am I not here to aid you with my experience and protect you from peril? Besides, I should think," he continued in a mocking tone, but yet one at which Fabian could not take offence, "you are about to resume your acquaintance at Paris with one whose image ought to give a happier turn to your thoughts. Come, come, Fabian! though I have lived at a distance from you, I am not the less acquainted with the pretty little romance which you commenced at Croissi with the fair shepherdess of Montglat. You are not perhaps aware, brother, that I had not abandoned you altogether to yourself at my manor, and that there were around you people who kept me privately informed of all your actions. I thus watched from afar over a brother who had been recommended to my care by the late Baron de Croissi on his death-bed; and be assured that in the reports which I received, this love-fit of yours was not omitted."

"I do not know, sir," answered Fabian with a blush, "who could have told you —."

"Seek not to deny the fact," interrupted the Baron, in a kind and courteous tone; "the suddenness with which you decided to accompany me, after reading that scrap of paper, would have been sufficient proof, even had I not been assured of it from the lips of Mademoiselle de Montglat herself."

"What!" exclaimed Fabian joyfully; "she has spoken to you of those happy days that passed, alas! too quickly! Ah! my brother! speak to me of her, I beseech you. You know her? you see her often? Oh! for pity's sake, tell me what you know of my dear Elizabeth! Why has she so long permitted me to imagine that she had forgotten my very name?"

"I can add nothing to the details I have already given you. I see the young Countess very rarely; her office retains her almost constantly near the person of the Queen, and it was only from peculiar circumstances that I had recently an occasion of conversing with her. My name of Croissi quickly gained her confidence, and I had not much difficulty in inducing her to

enter into my views, with respect to the important enterprise about to be entrusted to you."

"An important enterprise! To me?" enquired the young man, with astonishment. "You have already given me to understand, Baron, that you intended employing me at Paris on a matter of some moment; but in what can I—a simple and ignorant countryman—be of any service to you?"

"It is not yet time, Fabian, to reveal to you the enterprise in which you are called to take part; suffice it to know, for the present, that if, in spite of the dangers you may encounter, you conduct yourself worthily, a speedy and brilliant fortune will be yours."

CHAPTER IV.

COURT INTRIGUES.

FOR some time the brothers proceeded in silence; Fabian lost in reflection, while Albert stealthily examined his features, as if to note the impression made by his previous words.

"Excuse me, Baron!" at length resumed the former, hesitatingly; "but I have often heard our late father say, that it was impossible to make a speedy and brilliant fortune at court, by honorable means —."

The Baron drew himself up proudly.

"What mean you, sir?" he demanded, in a tone of irritation. "Do you think that any enterprise upon which I have entered can be dishonorable? Do you forget so soon the consideration and submission you owe me? *Ventrebleu!* I know not what ridiculous fancies—to give them no harsher name—have wrought upon your mind, so as to cause suspicion of my intentions towards you. If it is so, Monsieur de Croissi, there is still time to retrace your steps, and to bury yourself in idleness and obscurity at my paternal castle. I will not trouble you farther, sir! and shall take care that Mademoiselle de Montglat be informed how much dependence she can place on her chosen cavalier."

At these words the Baron drew rein abruptly, as if, in his wounded dignity, he seriously expected a separation from his brother. But Fabian, far from taking this step, drew up alongside of him, and said, with eager warmth:

"Pray excuse me, Albert! if I have offended you by any inconsiderate expression. I am not accustomed to give my thoughts that delicacy of utterance in use at court, and I speak, it may be, with the rudeness of a rustic. Do not put so unfortunate an interpretation on words which I could never mean to apply to you. Distrust *you*, my brother! why should I do so? Have you not