

cles of the kingdom, inscribed on the walls and over the doors of my palaces and halls of justice, and interwoven on the borders of the linen of my table and my chamber."

"The second, my lord, is, NEVER LEAVE A HIGHWAY FOR A BYE-WAY."

"I see not the value of this maxim, but to the third."

"NEVER SLEEP IN A HOUSE WHERE THERE IS BUT THE MASTER AND HIS WIFE. These three maxims, if attended to, my Lord, will stand you in good stead."

"We shall see," said the king; "a year and a day for the trial of each, at the end of this time we will settle accounts."

"Good master," said the king's jester, "wilt sell thy chance of the thousand florins for my fool's cap?"

"Wait and see what the end will be," rejoined the merchant; "a year and a day hence I will return to see how my first maxim has fared. Farewell, my Lord."

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The year and a day were nearly elapsed, and yet the first maxim had not been clearly proved. Constantine remained severely just, and the evil-intentioned of his nobles plotted his destruction in the hopes of indulging their vices more freely under the rule of his successor. Many were the plots they concocted to put him to death, but all were foiled by his foresight and prudence.

"Every failure," said the conspirators at a midnight meeting, "brings danger nearer to ourselves."

"Even so, brothers, but this time we will not fail," said one of the number; "do ye mind that I am the king's barber, every day he bares his throat to my razor, it is but one slash, and we are free; promise me the crown: in return for this, I will give you freedom by the king's death, and free license during my reign."

"It is well spoken," cried all the conspirators; "the barber shall be our king,"

On the next morning the barber entered the chamber of his imperial Lord, and prepared to shave his master. The razor was stropped, lather spread upon the royal chin, and the towel fastened round the royal breast. On the edge of the napkin were these words in letters of gold, "*Never begin anything until you have calculated what the end will be.*"

The barber's eyes fell on these words, they arrested his attention, he paused in

his labors. "What am I about to do?" thought he to himself, "to kill the king to gain his crown; am I sure of the crown? shall I not rather be miserably slain, and die amid unheard-of tortures and infamy, whilst those that plot with me will turn against me and make me their scape-goat?"

"Art dreaming, sir barber?" exclaimed the king.

At the king's voice the barber trembled exceedingly; he dropt the razor from his hand, and fell at his sovereign's feet.

"What means all this?"

"Oh, my good Lord!" exclaimed the barber as he knelt trembling at the emperor's feet, "this day was I to have killed thee, but I saw the maxim written upon the napkin: I thought of the consequences, and now repent me of my wickedness. Mercy, my good Lord, mercy!"

"Be faithful, and fear not," replied the king.

"The merchant, my lord the king," announced the usher, who entered at that moment, followed by the venerable merchant.

"Thou art come at a good time, sir merchant; the first maxim has been proved; it has saved my life: it was worthy of its price."

"Even as I expected, my lord, a year and a day hence, expect me again."

"We will trust no more to a single hand," said one of the conspirators, when they met again after the barber's repentance: "this time we will all share."

"I propose," said one of the rebel lords, "an ambush on the road to Naples. Every year, on the day after Christmas, the king journeys thither; the bye-path near the city gates is the nearest road, peradventure he will go that way."

When the Christmas night was over, the king prepared to journey to Naples; a great company of nobles, knights and men-at-arms went with him. Not far from the city he came to the place where the highway and bye-path diverged.

"My Lord," said an old noble, "the day is far spent, the sun sinks fast in the horizon; will not my lord turn by the bye-path, as it is far shorter than the high-road?"

"Nay," said the king, "it's a year and a day since the merchant's first maxim saved my life; now will I test the second admonition, '*Never leave a highway for a*