

310 THE ROMANCE OF BAYARD

Now the officer Du Bellay and several men came running to the fallen hero from across the bridge.

"General!" they cried, "the match is lighted, we can carry you across!"

"Nay, Du Bellay, leave me! retire instantly, blow up the arch! save the army! this is my resting-place! Retire also, L'Allègre, dear friend!"

All left save L'Allègre, and scarcely had they reached the other side of the river when a dull explosion was heard. The arch next to the farther shore was destroyed, and the safety of the French army secured.

The Cardinal, who had been in conversation with some Spanish officers, now came to join Marguerite by the side of the fallen Bayard.

Marguerite kissed her lover tenderly on the face. "My beloved," she said in heart-broken tones which belied the hopes her words expressed, "this wound may not be mortal. I am free and may be your bride! The Holy Father's Nuncio even now will make us one before heaven! Cardinal! hear us pledge our vows!"

While placing his hand feebly in that of the Princess, Bayard sadly shook his head. "Too late! my Marguerite, too late! God hath willed it otherwise, my moments on earth are numbered. But oh! that I should leave you sorrowing!"

While Marguerite fell back in a paroxysm of weeping, the Cardinal, on his knees beside Bayard, gently said that he would hear him confess and shrive him. As the Nuncio listened to the whispered words of the dying man, Marguerite knelt between Anne Boleyn and L'Allègre, with hands joined in prayer. A bevy of great Spanish captains, who had also approached, likewise knelt reverently at a little distance.

Presently the Cardinal rose, and, spreading his hands out over the noble Bayard, pronounced the following words. "God absolve thee, my son, for in