

ate answer; but stood silent and stern while she stood still touching his arm, waiting in patience for some word at any rate of forgiveness. He was using all the powers of his mind to see if there might even yet be any way to escape this great shipwreck. She had not answered his question. She had not told him in so many words that her heart was still his, though she had promised her hand to the Basle merchant. But he could not doubt that it was so. As he stood there silent, with that dark look upon his brow, which he had inherited from his father, and that angry fire in his eye, his heart was in truth once more becoming soft and tender towards her. He was beginning to understand how it had been with her. He had told her, just now, that he did not believe her, when she assured him that she had thought that she was forgotten. Now he did believe her. And there arose in his breast a feeling that it was due to her that he should explain this change in his mind.

"I suppose you did think it," he said suddenly.

"Think what, George?"

"That I was a vain, empty, false-tongued fellow, whose word was worth no reliance."

"I thought no evil of you, George—except that you were changed to me. When you came you said nothing to me. Do you not remember?"

"I came because I was told that you were to be married to this man. I asked you the question, and you would not deny it. Then I said to myself that I would wait and see." When he had spoken she had nothing further to say to him. The charges which he had made against her were all true. They seemed at least to be true to her, then in her present mood—in that mood in which all that she now desired was his forgiveness. The wish to defend herself, and to stand before him as one justified, had gone from her. She felt that having still possessed his love, having still been the owner of the one thing she valued, she had ruined herself by her own doubts; and she could not forgive herself the fatal blunder.

"It is of no use to think of it any more," he said at last. "You have to become this man's wife now, and I suppose you must go through with it."

"I suppose I must," she said, "unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Nothing, George. Of course I will marry him. He has my word. And I have promised my uncle also. But, George, you will say that you forgive me?"

"Yes; I will forgive you."

But still there was the same black cloud upon his face, the same look of pain, the same glance of anger in his eye.

"Oh, George, I am so unhappy! There can be no comfort for me now, unless you will say that you will be contented."

"I cannot say that, Marie."

"You will have your house, and your business, and so many things to interest you. And in time,—after a little time——"

"No, Marie, after no time at all. You told me at supper to-night that I had better get a wife for myself. But I will get no wife. I could not bring myself to marry another girl. I could not take a woman home as my wife if I did not love her. If she were not the person of all persons most dear to me, I should loathe her."

He was speaking daggers to her, and he must have known how sharp were his words. He was speaking daggers to her, and she must have felt that he knew how he was wounding her. But yet she did not resent his usage, even by a motion of her lip. Could she have brought herself to do so, her agony would have been less sharp. "I suppose," she said at last, "that a woman is weaker than a man. But you say that you will forgive me?"

"I have forgiven you."

Then very gently she put out her hand to him, and he took it and held it for a minute. She looked up at him as though for a moment she had thought that there might be something else,—that there might be some other token of true forgiveness, and then she withdrew her hand. "I had better go now," she said. "Good night, George."

"Good night, Marie." And then she was gone.

As soon as he was alone he sat himself down on the bed-side and began to think of it. Everything was changed to him since he had called her into the room, determining that he would crush her with his thunderbolt. Let things go as they may with a man in an affair of love, let him be as far as possible from the attainment of his wishes, there will always be consolation to him, if he knows that he is loved. To be preferred to all others, even though that preference may lead to no fruition, is in itself a thing enjoyable. He had believed that Marie had forgotten him,—that she had been captivated either by the effeminate prettiness of his rival, or by his wealth and standing in the world. He believed all this no more. He knew now how it was with her and with him, and, let his countenance say what it might to the contrary, he could bring himself to forgive her in his heart. She had not forgotten him! She had not ceased to love him! There was merit in that which went far with him in excuse of her perfidy.

But what should he do now? She was not as yet married to Adrian Urmand. Might there not still be hope;—hope for her sake as well as for his own? He perfectly understood that in his country,—nay, for aught he knew to the contrary, in all countries,—a formal betrothal was half a marriage. It was half the ceremony in the eyes of all those concerned; but yet, in regard to that indissoluble bond which would indeed have divided Marie from him beyond the reach of any hope to the contrary, such betrothal was of no effect whatever. This man whom she did not love was not yet Marie's husband;—need never become so if Marie could only be sufficiently firm in resisting the influence of all her friends. No priest could marry her without her own consent. He, George, he himself would have to face the enmity of all those with whom he was connected. He was sure that his father, having been a party to the betrothal, would never consent to a breach of his promise to Urmand. Madame Voss, Madame Faragon, the priest, and their Protestant pastor would all be against them. They would be as it were outcasts from their own family. But George Voss, sitting there on his bed-side, thought that he could go through it all, if only he could induce Marie Bromar to bear the brunt of the world's displeasure with him. As he got into bed he determined that he would begin upon the matter to his father during the morning's walk. His father would be full of wrath;—but the wrath would have to be endured sooner or later.

(To be continued.)

A PAGE OF FUTURE HISTORY.

(From the *Pall Mall Gazette*.)

In one of the murkiest streets of Paris their lives a soothsayer who is descended from the great Nostradamus who predicted such strange things to Catherine of Medici; nay, if one were to believe his neighbours, he is perhaps that famous wizard in person. For a fee which is not excessive this mysterious man will kindly allow one a glimpse of things that will be written when we shall all of us be underground. We have laid a stress on the word *written*, for M. Nostradamus's power does not extend to things to be said or done, it is simply the gift of being able to read in the books and newspapers of the future. Thus, when he desires to know what will have become of England in a hundred years hence, he evokes the *Pall Mall Gazette* of the 20th or 25th of February, 1972; when he feels curious as to the fate of France, he calls for the *Journal des Débats* of the same dates. A few nights ago three eminent Frenchmen, feeling concerned about the unsettled condition of their country's affairs, and having heard of M. Nostradamus's seer-craft, resolved to pay him a visit, and as ten o'clock struck at the church adjoining M. Nostradamus's residence, the three gentlemen knocked at his door. They were—a very famous statesman, a General no less famous, especially with his pen; and a veteran journalist, who has publicly prided himself upon having an idea a day, though he has omitted to say whether these ideas are always good ones. The soothsayer, not expecting visitors at that late hour, opened to the party himself; but being a man of courtly ways, notwithstanding his wisdom, he no sooner heard the errand on which the callers were bent than he bowed gravely and requested them to walk in. They followed him, and were introduced into a chamber plainly furnished, and with nothing remarkable about it save a glass cage on the table containing a toad. This toad was very remarkable, being five times the size of ordinary members of his race. The proceedings having commenced with the payment of fees, "I must premise," said M. Nostradamus, "that the power I wield is not mine but that toad's. He is a toad who sojourned during two thousand three hundred years, at the smallest computation, in a stone of the lesser Pyramid. Such as you see him, he was extricated from his confinement by a soldier of Bonaparte's army in 1799, and sold for a large sum of money to Mlle. Lenormand, prophetess to the Empress Joséphine, from whom I had him after he had predicted, with striking accuracy, the defeat of Waterloo, which he had read in M. Victor Hugo's 'Misérables' fifty years before publication." "And can he read everything?" asked the eminent journalist, much interested. "Everything," answered the soothsayer; and saying this, he opened the cage's door, upon which the toad hopped out and stationed himself on a clean ream of foolscap close to a miniature inkstand and a small bundle of crowquills. "The toad's way," proceeded the soothsayer, "is to read in the books of the future which are invisible to us, and to make copies of the extracts required of him with one of those crowquills. He writes an excellent hand." And as he spoke the toad drew one of the quills from the bundle, and tried the nib of it on the table cloth; then he displayed himself sprawling-wise on the foolscap in a convenient attitude for writing, and croaked to intimate that he was ready. "Excuse me—one moment," interposed the journalist at this juncture; "do you know who we are?" "I have that honour," answered the soothsayer, bowing. "Well, then," replied the journalist, "I hope you—that is, Monsieur the Toad—will see the necessity of reading in none but very trustworthy histories. We wish to hear the relation of this year's events treated by the best historian of fifty years hence; but, mind, he must be the very best." "Certainly," rejoined the soothsayer, "but I may say in a general manner that the historians of the future will be more accurate than those of our day. The bitter experience we have gained by following the counsels of writers who have studied only to flatter our national vanity at the expense of truth——" But here he stopped, for the eminent statesman, growing very red, was making a violent use of his pocket-handkerchief; seeing which, the soothsayer coloured at his own *lapsus lingue*, and called hastily upon the toad to do his duty. For the next half-hour nothing was heard but the rhythmical crackle of the crowquill on the foolscap, with occasional interruptions when the toad dipped his pen in the inkstand or paused to make a comma or a full stop; for he was very particular in his punctuation. When he had reached the end of the page he laid down his pen and hopped back into his cage. The soothsayer took up the paper, and one might have heard a gnat fly as he cleared his throat and began:—

"At that time France, feeling tired of being kicked about like a foot-ball between contending factions, and having had enough of the rule of superannuated statesmen, the squabbles of incompetent generals, and the inflated paradoxes of ignorant journalists, took a great resolution. It is not quite clear whence this resolution sprang, but soon the conviction flew from town to village and from village to city that the moment had come for putting an end once and for all to discussions concerning who should rule, and how he should rule." "That's what I have said long ago," interrupted the statesman. "I declared in the tribune only yesterday that if they would leave it all to me——" "Hush!" chorused the general and the journalist; and the soothsayer continued: "Instantly, and as though by magic, committees were formed in every commune to elect delegates to the towns, who in their turn nominated deputies to the cities, who in their turn appointed a National Committee of Twelve, who were empowered to award the Government of France on the sealed tender system to the pretender who should make the most satisfactory bid, and bind himself to accept all the reciprocal conditions which the National Committee should lay down. Proclamations to this effect were posted on all the dead walls of the country, heralds were despatched into the highways to convoke all pretenders to appear in person at the Palais d'Industrie, Paris, with their sealed tenders, on a certain day; and, pending the final result, the Government was vested in the Committee itself, which was instructed to rule on liberal principles, but instantly to lock up any journalist who made objections." "I protest against that arrangement," exclaimed the eminent journalist hotly; "when the time comes I shall certainly make objections." "Pardon me," observed the soothsayer, "here follows the list of the Committee, and you are on it." "Ah, that is another matter," replied the journalist, smiling, "pray go on." And M. Nostradamus proceeded: "After a time it was found that the pretenders promised to be inconveniently numerous—a very host, in fact;

so the Committee decided that those only should be eligible who were members of a Royal or Imperial family, who had held the office of Cabinet Minister, or who had figured on the roll of a Provisional Government. On the morning of the competition all Paris was astir at an early hour to see the procession pass, for the Committee had not forbidden that the pretenders should parade with a certain pomp, and each naturally appeared with the surroundings he thought best calculated to charm the public eye. The Emperor Napoleon III. was the first to appear, and was preceded by three henchmen, the one carrying his uncle's grey topcoat, the second one his uncle's hat, and the middle one a tame eagle. Behind came semi-official journalists with proof-slips of their own articles artificially sewn to their garments, and, closing the procession, Marshal Le Bœuf with a plan of the campaign of Sedan, proving indisputably that the French ought to have won, and would have done so but for the Republicans. Not less bravely accoutred was the Count of Chambord, who rode in mediæval armour with the oriflamme of Joan of Arc to his right, the banner of Fontenoy to his left, and M. de Villermessant, editor of the *Figaro*, stalking on ahead and crying, 'Place à mon Roi—mon Roi à moi!' The Count of Paris was less splendid, but his personal adjustments had not been devised without a view to effect; for, going on foot, he carried a gingham umbrella, and cheer upon cheer rang out from the commercial element among the spectators at sight of this familiar symbol. M. Thiers appeared on the tallest horse in all Paris, and was preceded by ten grocers' apprentices, who carried each a volume of his 'History of the Revolution,' and followed by five soldiers with wooden legs, each armed with a volume of the 'History of the Consulate and the Empire,' and notices on their breasts stating that it was owing to these valuable volumes they had enlisted, and had lost their legs as above said. The procession was closed by MM. Blanqui and Félix Pyat walking fraternally side by side with projects for the general decapitation and reconstruction of society under their arms. It was exactly noon as the last candidate stepped over the threshold of the Palais d'Industrie, and upon the exhibition of his credentials obtained admission. Then the twelve members of the Committee being all in their places, and the representatives of the native and foreign press in theirs, and all other spectators having been rigorously excluded, with the exception of a lady who, having somehow got in, declined to go out, on the ground that she held for women's rights—i.e., the right of women to do what they pleased—the proceedings were formally inaugurated. The President of the Committee begged leave to say a few words. 'They were all met there,' he said, 'to award the Government of France to the best bid, but it was an understood thing that the candidate whose offer was accepted would be tied down to the strict fulfilment of his contract by certain conditions which he would now specify. The conditions were simply these:—As it was essential that the selected candidate should be guaranteed against all molestation or attempts at sedition on the part of his rivals, each of the unsuccessful candidates would, on leaving that room, be instantly transported to some place of abode which he himself should designate, and there be detained at the public expense and with good food for the remainder of his natural life. Further, as the nation had been so repeatedly hoaxed by pretenders, who ascended the throne with charters in their hands, which they threw to the winds as soon as they were fairly installed, the new ruler, whoever he was, should be under the occult supervision of three cooks, who should judge his acts impartially in their kitchen, and on the day when any act of his should not tally with the promises made in the sealed tender, they would, acting at their discretion, avenge the country without fuss or trouble by seasoning his soup with prussic acid. Of course it would be arranged that the cooks should all be men with five-and-twenty years' good character, and in order that no unworthy influences might be brought to bear upon them, they should be kept confined in their kitchen on handsome wages; but, on the other hand, the ruler would be strictly forbidden to eat of anything not prepared in that kitchen. Any candidate not agreeing to the foregoing conditions might still retire if he did so within the next five minutes, but once and for all any candidate who now withdrew, and who should at any ulterior date put in a claim for the throne, would be poisoned in whatever land he might be lurking by some secret agents who would on their return to France receive a free pardon and a pension out of the public taxes.' It was five-and-twenty minutes past twelve when the President closed his statement, and by half-past twelve the hall had been vacated by all save two candidates, the Count of Paris and M. Thiers. Walking up to the dais and speaking in the President's ear, the Count pointed out that under a Constitutional Monarchy it was the Prime Minister who would be responsible, and he asked whether, in the event of anything going wrong, it was not that functionary who would eat the prussic acid. Simultaneously M. Thiers, who had overheard something of His Royal Highness's words, answered, 'No, it was the King who would eat the acid all the same.' 'But,' added he, 'your Royal Highness need not be afraid, for I sink my own claims to the supreme power, and will bide content with the post of chief of your Cabinet, and with me at hand to advise, nothing, you may be sure, will ever go wrong.'

"Well," asked the statesman, the general, and the journalist, springing up together, "what next?" "That's all the toad has copied," answered the soothsayer.

LONG REIGNS OF ENGLISH SOVEREIGNS.—In tracing the rise and growth of the British Constitution, historians have not made so much as they might have done of the length of many of the reigns. This has admitted of steady if slow development, which might not have been this case with more frequent changes in the head of the Government. A change every four years, says the *Leisure Hour*, may suit the constitution of the tall American pine, but would not be so favourable for the broad British oak. The reigns of only ten Sovereigns covered more than four centuries, the aggregate of the following reigns being 403 years:—Henry I., 36; Henry II., 35; Henry III., 56; Edward I., 35; Edward III., 50; Henry VI., 39; Henry VIII., 38; Elizabeth, 45; George II., 34; George III., 60. Queen Victoria will have reigned thirty-five years at the next anniversary of her accession. Her reign already far exceeds that of the oldest Sovereigns of Europe. The Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz dates from 1842; the Duke of Saxe-Coburg from 1844; the Pope from 1846; the Emperor of Austria from 1848; and the Kings of Italy and of Holland from 1849. The reign of Victoria began in 1837.