

302 THE ROMANCE OF BAYARD

instigated Madame Louise and the King to bring against him the lawsuit which deprived him of his seven provinces."

"Ay," cut in another officer. "You it was, all know, who drove him to rebel and he, our able General, has by you been driven to the Spaniards. Had but Bourbon been here now on our side, instead of you, 'twould be a better shewing we should have made before them!"

"My comrades are right," interposed a third. "there is this comfort for us in our misery, that your neck will be surely stretched before to-morrow by him that was the Constable of France. While dying ourselves, we can at any rate feel that satisfaction!"

"Cease your insolence," responded Bonnivet, "or I will have you all shot this moment, go hence and assist to clear away that block at the bridge!"

As the officers, who were in rags and shoeless and moreover, so fatigued that scarce could they move, crawled off towards the bridge, their disconsolate commander more fully than ever realised the hopelessness of his situation.

"Those ruffians speak the truth! I shall indeed feel Bourbon's bitter vengeance, should he take me!"

"Yet how to escape? resign my command, they say! Ay, there lies the door of safety. To Bayard will I hand 't over. Then should great disaster terminate the war, on him, not me, will fall the King's displeasure.

"First will I reach the Royal ear, to throw all blame on this hated Pierre de Terrail, thus will my favour fast endure!"

The better to carry out his plot, the Admiral now threw himself on the ground. While groaning as if in agony, he beckoned to an officer who was but coldly surveying his prostrate commander.

"What ails you, General?" this one enquired casually.