

tion to this, but in after years I recalled it as a fatal presage.

XV.

MELCHIOR'S STORY:—THE PICTURE.

A YEAR had passed since my marriage, and my father-in-law had informed me of the birth of my son Joachim, when the rebellion of *Monsieur* and the Duke de Montmorency broke out. This time I had a part in the play and entered warmly into it. But the weakness and irresolution of the Prince ruined us. Montmorency, conquered at Castelmaudery, was beheaded at Toulouse; but the only revenge of the Cardinal on *Monsieur* was to leave him undisturbed in his retirement from Court.

Whilst we passed our time in idleness at Nancy, an Italian painter, named Giorgione, solicited the patronage of the Duke of Orleans. The artist was carrying into Italy for his master, the Duke of Modena, a gallery of portraits, which he had painted or collected through France and the Netherlands. Fontenilles, Villemore and myself accompanied the Prince, on the visit which he made to this gallery. Several well-known court beauties passed under our review, amidst a shower of sarcastic and epigrammatic sayings—but how was I thunder-struck, when I saw Gaston pause before a portrait whose features I at once recognised!

"Is it possible," he cried, "that this head is painted after nature?"

"It is; my lord!" I interposed in desperation; "it is the portrait of my wife. But if the other ladies bear no greater resemblance to their pictures, I dare assure your Highness that you would recognise none of the originals by the copies."

The poor painter was astonished at this charge, but thinking that I had some peculiar motive for speaking as I did, he discreetly made no reply.

I looked to *Monsieur*, my heart sinking with dread and anxiety. He said not a word, but remained absorbed in the contemplation of the portrait, and I saw him flush and grow pale by turns.

"Speak frankly, Bernard!" he abruptly exclaimed, without removing his eyes from the picture! "Has your wife these large, blue, reflective eyes?"

"Yes, my Lord!" I replied, trembling like a criminal.

"And that small rosy mouth?"

"Yes, my lord!"

"And that glossy black hair; and that elegant figure?"

"It is true," I answered, my forehead bedewed

with a cold perspiration. "But there is a wanting in the original that ineffable charm of expression, which lends such enchanting animation to the portrait."

He remained silent for a few minutes and then turned on me his penetrating gaze.

"I must see this prodigy!" he exclaimed. "If the Marchioness de Cosse appears ugly with such a countenance as that, Bernard! your wife must be one of the wonders of the world. We will set out in a few days for Brussels, and will then pass judgment on her looks."

A knife struck to my heart could not have tortured me more. I wrote to Adelaide, forewarning her of the evil that threatened us. I advised her to appear cold and distant before the Prince, to be careless and negligent in dress, haughty and laconic in speech, and to make the most unfavorable impression possible. Alas! she profited by my counsels only to appear more dazzling than ever in the eyes of Gaston of Orleans. He had conversed but a few minutes with her when he cast towards me a glance such as I shall never forget, and then came over to where I stood.

"Is this the woman, Bernard!" he exclaimed, "in whom thou could'st find neither wit nor beauty?"

I was too embarrassed to reply. A singular smile wrenched the lips of the Prince, and he resumed—

"My poor Marquis! how I pity thee! 'Thine is of a surety a hard lot!"

If *Monsieur* was displeased at the part I had acted, this was the only instance in which such a feeling was manifested; thenceforth he continued to treat me with his usual kindness and beneficence, and this silent pardon rendered me more than ever devoted to him. Adelaide returned with us to the petty Court of Lorraine. Every day I made new progress in the favor of the Prince—I was lodged in the Ducal Palace—I was the channel through which every applicant sought grace of the Duke of Orleans. Beloved by my wife and by my master, I believed myself the happiest of men. Who could then have foretold the approaching catastrophe which was to embitter my whole future existence?

Some time after our return to Nancy, I remarked frequent changes of disposition on the part of my wife. Sometimes she eagerly sought my presence, as if oppressed by some secret thought, which she was anxious to confide in me; sometimes she as sedulously avoided me, as if I had all at once inspired her with involuntary aversion. One instant she would converse with me smiling and sprightly; the next she became pale, silent and melancholy.