

CHAPTER II.

THE PURSUIT.

NOBODY who had acquaintance with Victor de Montaiglon would call him coward. He had fought with De Grammont, and brought a wound from Dettingen under circumstances to set him up for life in a repute for valour, and half a score of duels were at his credit or discredit in the chronicles of Paris society.

And yet, somehow, standing there in an unknown country beside a brute companion wantonly struck down by a robber's shot, and the wood so still around, and the thundering sea so unfamiliar, he felt vastly uncomfortable, with a touch of more than physical apprehension. If the enemy would only manifest themselves to the eye and ear as well as to the unclassed senses that inform the instinct, it would be much more comfortable. Why did they not appear? Why did they not follow up their assault upon his horse? Why were they lurking in the silence of the thicket, so many of them, and he alone and so obviously at their mercy? The pistols he held provided the answer.

"What a rare delicacy!" said Count Victor, applying himself to the release of his mail from the saddle whereto it was strapped. "They would not interrupt my regretful tears. But for the true *élan* of the trade of robbery, give me old Cartouche picking pockets on the Pont Neuf."