

"One might feign it," began Amaury. "I did not say I would feign it," said the Syrian, dryly. "I said I could easily become ill—listen and lose none of my words. In a minute I shall be lying there on the ground, without voice or motion; thou wilt then call the nearest masons who are working below at the portals—command them to place me on a litter; and I think," added he ironically, "that thy powerful influence will go far enough to induce them to receive a dying man at the hospital."

Montruel looked at him stupefied. Before he could find words to reply, Mahmoud had drawn from his breast a small flask and put it to his lips.

At the same moment he fell back like one struck to the earth by lightning, and after a slight convulsion, had no more motion than a corpse.

The emotion in the city remained as great as ever. Upon the place du Palais, in the rue de la Barillerie, and beyond the two bridges the crowd increased.

Every one was eager to learn the smallest item of information regarding the proceedings of that tribunal which was about to decide the fate of such high destinies.

In the silence of every other bell of Paris, that one from the belfry of the new palace rang out, at measured intervals, a long and deep tone, announcing to the city and its neighbourhood that the council of prelates were deliberating.

A thousand rumours circulated—for Paris always insists upon having some news, however impossible it may be to obtain it.

The walls of the throne-room were thick; the doors were closed; it was certain that not a word could escape from that redoubtable chamber; and yet the lying and credulous bourgeois related to each other, from minute to minute, all that had passed in the council—they were not particular about details; but each risked his own little fable, and generously accepted the fable of his neighbour—and these accounts, fabricated with the usual Parisian ingenuity, acquired a very respectable degree of authenticity, after having passed through a dozen mouths.

Some said—"Our sire the king is standing in the midst of those churchmen. His helmet on his head, and his gauntlet hand upon his hip, as well becomes a brave man-at-arms to do when he is surrounded by a room full of hypocrites!"

"Ah! ha!" said another "our sire, the king, may well feel proud as Herod—he has made his bow before all these assembled bishops."

Another voice in the crowd proclaimed that the king had said to the council, "Judge not—judge not, my good sirs—I am the king, and will do ever and always as I please."

Another voice affirmed that the king having first crossed himself, like a good Christian, said, "I am the king, but our holy father is the representative of the king of kings—and you are the representatives of our holy father; whatsoever you shall judge proper, my reverend masters, I shall accept your sentence devoutly."

And between these two extreme versions, there were a million of intermediate shades—proving that Paris, though as yet only adolescent, was already the most famous gossip of Europe!

The passing of a closed litter, containing a poor patient, that they were carrying to the infirmary, was not likely to attract much attention from a crowd so steeped in political considerations. A few asked who that sick man was, borne by four workmen from Notre Dame, and followed by a man-at-arms, who seemed to be escorting him.

Those who, in that man-at-arms, could recognize sire Amaury, suspected that some diablerie was on hand; but it was not considered so improbable that some unfortunate artisan might have fallen from the scaffolding.

One remarkable thing, however, and which, under other circumstances, might have furnished the text of many commentaries, was, that the litter had already passed by many infirmaries without stopping. Every time they reached the door of some hospital or convent, the masons who bore the litter attempted to set it down, but were urged by Messire Amaury to advance,

who said to them, "When it is time to stop I will tell you."

The last orders of Jean Cadore had been executed to the letter. Messire Amaury had called, at hazard, four of the masons who were working on the scaffolding and had required them to lend their aid. The three first who saw Jean Cadore extended on the floor of his workshop shook their heads and said—

"It is no use to carry him to the infirmary; it is a coffin that he requires and not a bed!"

The fourth, who had an indefinable expression of fear and suspicion upon his face, knelt down by the side of the supposed corpse and watched it a long time. He rose at length without uttering a word; and when Messire Amaury gave orders that the body should be carried away—it was him who fetched the litter.

But once on their road the three others assumed that air of sadness, that every fatal accident gives to those even, who are not directly interested. The fourth was nearly as pale as Jean Cadore himself—his anxious eye seemed unceasingly to be interrogating the crowd—and to be eagerly seeking some one, among all those strange faces that surrounded him.

One would have said that he had some great secret in his heart, but could find nobody to whom he could confide it.

A little before they reached the great crowd which encumbered the approaches to the chatelet, and at the moment when the gossiping groups were increasing, that companion with the pale and frightened face perceived, at the turn of a street an old man, with white hairs, who was listening to the rumours of the crowd. His face suddenly changed and became lighted up with a ray of satisfaction:

"Christian," cried he, "come to me, Christian, mon père."

The old man heard him, and immediately approached the litter.

By instinct, Messire Amaury seemed to understand that his designs were threatened with some interruption—of what nature he could not guess—but he desired to prevent the old man from joining and talking with the companion.

He urged on his horse, but unfortunately all progress became very difficult, owing to their proximity to the palace, where the cause of the king and his two wives was being decided.

All that Messire Amaury could do was to separate the old man with white hairs from that pale faced stone-cutter just as they had shaken hands.

But it was too late, for the stone-cutter had had time to say to the old man,—

"The man who is within the litter wants to assassinate queen Angeli!"

Old Christian stepped back, mixed with the crowd, and followed the litter at a distance.

The fourth stone-cutter, with the pale face, was Eric, the Dane, who had come from the far-off north country, to save the queen of France.

Eric remembered the prophecy of Mila. Eric had not forgotten the strange rencontre that he and his sister had experienced on the night of their arrival at Paris. Ever since he had been working on the portals of Notre Dame; he had never, for a single moment lost sight of that man, so plainly pointed out by the prophecy—that man who bore both a Christian and a Muslim name—that Mahmoud-el-Reis who had sculptured the image of the Virgin Mary, and that the freemasons called Jean Cadore.

When Messire Amaury had been suddenly interrupted in the midst of his conversation with Mahmoud, and had thrust his body out of the window to see if any one was standing on the watch, he could perceive nothing along the entablature of the first story; but the intrepid and agile brother of Eve had been there and had slipped down the outer columns to the ground.

Eric had heard the whole conversation—but Eric had more of good will than of resources. He would have been a stronger man in the wild forests of his own country. In Paris he felt lost, and was a thousand times more isolated than in those desert woods where he had passed his childhood—in the midst of these unknown manners and customs his intelligence was at fault. Be-

sides he missed Eve, that gentle fairy, who was at once his inspiration, his courage, his heart and mind.

At that moment he would have given ten years of his life to have seen his sister, if only for one moment. But where was poor Eve? It was now a whole week since page Albret had led her to the Louvre, by the orders of the king, and Eve had not since returned; and her brother, in spite of all his enquiries, could not find the page, who alone could have told him what had become of her.

When they had crossed the bridge and had reached the gateway of the chatelet, the litter-bearers did not stop till they had reached the inner door. Amaury Montruel then raised his vizor, and the guards allowed the cortège to pass in the name of the king.

At five hundred paces from la Porte-aux-Peintres, Amaury took the lead, and before the litter came up had rang at the bell of Saint-Martin-hors-les-Murs.

In the name of the king, he demanded a private cell for the excellent artisan, Jean Cadore, who was about to enrich the grand portal of Notre Dame with an image of the holy virgin—which was a *chef-d'œuvre*.

Prior Anselm came forward to receive the litter at the threshold of the abbey—the bearers not being permitted to pass over it.

Montruel put both spurs to his horse and returned to Paris.

Of the four bearers, three resumed their way to Notre Dame. Eric slipped behind that hedge which enclosed those fields, where, on the evening of his arrival at Paris, he had overheard that conversation between the friend of the king and Mahmoud-el-Reis.

Some moments after he met with Christian, the Dane, who was waiting for him under the high walls that enclosed the abbey.

#### PART IV.

The sun was already descending towards the horizon, and the belfry of the palace had ceased to sound its measured and grave tones.

In a narrow cell of the abbey Saint Martin-hors-les-Murs, and which contained nothing but a bed, a bench, and a prie-dieu, lay Mahmoud-el-Reis—his pale face had still some bronze tints—but he was motionless; by his side sat an old monk, with an impassible face, lazily reciting his rosary, and thinking no more of his patient than of the grand Turk.

In fact, the new comer not having given the slightest sign of life since his admission into the abbey, in the king's name, was supposed to be really dead; and Christian charity could only now give him the prayers which help the soul on its last journey.

The rosary of the old monk had many beads, and when he was tired of passing them through his fingers, he relieved himself by performing a little sum, which seemed to refresh him and give him courage to pursue his task.

When the old monk was asleep, an observer coming by chance into his cell would have been struck with the strong contrast presented by the two faces before him.

The monk's face was in full bloom, under a half-bald skull; his cheeks though slightly pendant, presented a happy mixture of the lily and the rose; he had three chins all well developed; the general expression of his features was gentleness, though with a shade of apathy. One could see that he was a kind man, and who, if he had never done much good, had never done much harm.

The other face, on the contrary, was energetic, haughty, and powerful—repelling all idea of negative qualities, and proclaiming an active superiority, whether for good or evil.

The life of the monk had doubtless been a long sleep—without dreams—without remorse—but also without aspirations.

The life of the stranger had been a tempest, and the bronze that tinted his pale features seemed but the mysterious reflection of some volcano which was buring in his soul.

The day was falling, and the red light of the setting sun, penetrating through the bars of the