

THE FAVORITE

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MY LADY'S SLIPPER.

Torn at the heel, out at the toe,
Brooke half dim, and rumped the bow;
Quaint in design, dainty in size,
Something Titania's self might prize;
Hinting of instep's proud impress;
Hinting of dimpled foot's carress—
How came you perched on my papers and chair,
With such an impudent, coquettish air?

Gay little buckle, arch little heel,
Will you my lady's life reveal?
Tell where you bore her such a day?
If to the church? if to the play?
If through the dance's dizzy maze,
Twinkling faster than eye could gaze?
If through the wet, tangled grass in the lane,
Seeking the lover who lures in the rain?

Tell me if ever daintiest foot
Walk into mischief? Do they meet
Hard, sharp stones and slippery ways,
Misty nights and drearier days?
Tell me if ever Want and Pain
Lift for her soothing tread in vain?
Tell me if sorrow e'er lurks by her side?
Tell me if Love is her faithfullest guide?

Not into evil, dear little friend,
Let my lady's footsteps tend.
Watch no brave man's loving heart
Her proud foot shall spurn apart.
Grant this tiny slipper soon
Meets a heavier pair of shoon,
Whose stout make and stronger will
Shall my lady's pathway fill,
Turn her haughty foot aside,
Subject to their manlier stride;
Quick to aid it, swift to cheer,
Up the rocky hill-side tread;
While the patter of willing feet
Makes music in his heart most sweet!

FEUDAL TIMES;

OR,

TWO SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

A Romance of Daring and Adventure.

(Translated especially for the FAVORITE from the French of Paul Duplessis.)

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE KING'S FAVORITE.

On the morning of the third day after Raoul had missed seeing the king on his way to Bel-Ebat, the hall, ante-chamber, audience-chamber and council-chamber leading to his majesty's private cabinet, presented, at five o'clock, a truly imposing appearance. All these rooms in the Louvre were occupied by a compact crowd of courtiers, who, according to their offices and dignities, waited in one or other room to present their respects to the king, as soon as his majesty should have asked for his morning cloak and sword.

Henry III. was in his cabinet, the servants charged with the important duty of dressing him engaged in the discharge of their office. Near him, in a large arm-chair, loling in an attitude of almost incredible carelessness, was a young man of handsome figure and highly intelligent features.

The face of the king, which was ordinarily stamped with an expression of real good-heartedness, was this morning marked by a look of mortification and embarrassment.

"My son," he said to the young man seated before him, "your unjust reproaches pierce me to the heart. Why do you constantly affect to believe that I do not love you? You know well, my dear d'Arques, that you and Lavalette possess my entire affection. If you would not make me the most miserable of men, cease this painful jest, and confess that you do not doubt my attachment."

The young man whom the king addressed as d'Arques received with a smile of incredulity the king's professions of devotion, and replied in an ironical tone:



RAOUL'S INTERVIEW WITH THE KING.

"I am quite sure, sire, if I were to take you at your word, you would find yourself so much embarrassed as to speedily wish me at the devil. That, sire, is why, instead of taking you at your word, I pursue the more open course of discussing the matter with you."

"Silence, ungrateful!" cried the king, in a tone that changed the command into an appeal. "To speak to me in this way, you must have been secretly mixing yourself up with the League, and taken an oath to worry me to death. The language you use is neither that of a friend nor of a subject; you forget that I am the king."

At these words d'Arques rose quickly and placed himself in a humble and respectful attitude.

"Sire," he said, gravely, "I beg, on both knees, your Majesty to forgive me the freedom of my language. If the king had not authorized me to treat him as gentleman to gentleman, I should never have permitted myself to behave so towards him. The moment your majesty reminds me of the respect I owe him, I become his most humble subject, and await whatever orders he may deign to give me."

The action and the reply of the young courtier made a strong impression on the king, in whose eyes tears instantly glittered.

"My son," he cried, "why can you take such pleasure in tormenting me? Why do you remind me that heaven, by placing me upon the throne, has condemned me to isolation? Do not be so cruel, d'Arques. Drive away that cold look from your face. You know well that between you and me there is neither sceptre nor crown. We are, as you said just now, two gentlemen, two friends, and companions in arms—

better still, two brothers. Come, come, d'Arques—your anger has passed away, has it not? Sit down again, and let us talk as if not a cloud had, even for a moment, come between us."

"Sire," replied the favorite, without stirring, "if the king orders me, he shall be obeyed; if it is a request addressed to me by Henry de Valois, the gentleman, I shall not heed it."

"Ill-natured!" murmured the king, in a tone of affectionate reproach. "What have I done, that you should be so merciless? Since you drive me to extremities—yes; it is the king who orders you to be seated, to recover your habitual gaiety, amiability, and abandon, and to treat him with the brotherly familiarity always so delightful to him."

The favorite re-seated himself in his arm-chair, but his face was still overshadowed.

"Duc de Joyeuse—for in a few days your accounts of Joyeuse will be raised into a duchy, and you will have a right to bear this title—take care how you venture to disobey the orders of your king!" said Henry, in a coaxing tone.

"I, sire—in what?"

"Have I not commanded you to drive from your countenance this villainous shadow that persists in darkening it?"

"Henry," cried the Duc de Joyeuse, in a voice really moved by feeling, "I beg you not to exhibit so much attachment to me: the thought that, some day or other, you may withdraw your friendship from me, prevents my enjoying the signal and numberless favors you shower upon me, and leaves me, envied of all, as I am, the most miserable gentleman at your Court."

been aroused in him by the occurrence of some frightful act of blasphemy; "you know that that is impossible!"

"Why, then, do you refuse my request, Henry?—why do you not give me a position so elevated that envy, reduced to impotence, shall be compelled to renounce all attempts to rouse me in your regard? Why not change into reality the title of brother which your heart already accords to me? But no—you dare not! Instead of eagerly seizing the idea of cementing this alliance, you listen to the propositions of the ambassador of Ferrara, who solicits the hand of your sister-in-law, Marguerite of Lorraine, for his master, Alphonso d'Este!"

"Henry, if I did not love you with unequalled devotion, if my affection for you were not proof against all trial, I should never have dared to speak to you of this marriage. I am not swayed in this matter—I give you my word as a gentleman—by any feeling of cupidity or ambition. You yourself know what little use I make of greatness and riches. My sole desire, I repeat, is to create between you and myself such a bond as envy itself shall be powerless to break.—One last word, Henry. If, forgetting that you are king—that is to say, the absolute master of your subjects, and fearing the clamor of the envious through at my elevation, you refuse my prayer, I make a solemn and irrevocable oath that I will retire at once and for ever from the Court. I shall prefer to see you regret my voluntary exile than to submit to your indifference. I fear neither poverty, disgrace, nor abandonment; but the thought that I had lost your friendship I could not bear."

"My dear son," cried the king, deeply affected, "you are right; nothing but death must separate us. I will this very day dismiss the ambassador from Ferrara, and within a month you shall marry the queen's sister."

Henry III. rose from his seat, gently pushing back Camusat, the oldest of his body servants, who was at the moment holding ready his majesty's pourpoint, and throwing his arms about his favorite's neck, kissed him warmly on both cheeks.

While this little scene was passing between Henry III. and the Duc de Joyeuse, the chevalier, his brain on fire and his heart violently agitated, dismounted from his horse before the gates of the Louvre. De Maurevert's prediction had been realized. The young man had the evening before received an order to attend at the rising of his majesty.

"My dear companion," De Maurevert remarked to him, after the messenger's departure, "let this be a lesson to you for the future. Never forget that every man has his feeble and sneaking side on which he is vulnerable. To oppose force by force is to produce a struggle, with the chance of defeat. One can only engage with security after having carefully sought out the weak side of one's adversary. If you had had nothing but the goodness of your cause to rely on, the king would assuredly never have condescended to grant you an audience. Flatter one of his manias, serve him in one of his absurdities, and then it is the king himself who comes to you!"

"And now, my dear Raoul, suffer me—for really you are not a good hand at business—one last bit of advice. When you are introduced to his majesty don't give way to excessive exaggeration. Kings are used to speeches—great eloquence goes for very little with them. What they like—because it is what they rarely get—is people who amuse them—or clever flatterers, who, under the appearance of rough frankness, ply them with the most extravagant laudation.

"It is of no use attempting to prove to his majesty that the Marquis de la Tremblais is an abominable miscreant; what you have to do is to assure Henry III. that he is the most accomplished man in the world. One word more: the king is very fond of dress; your costume must be irreproachable. Here, my dear friend, are two hundred crowns to help you to dress yourself. No refusal! The devil—we are not on a footing of compliments and ceremonies. The money a courtier spends in finery is money well laid out. I will add, if you wish it, that I make no objection to your giving me your note of hand for five hundred crowns; but my sole wish, in making you this advance, is to oblige you."

Thanks to the generosity and advice of the captain, when Sforzi reached the Louvre, the following morning, his appearance was elegant in the extreme. At the moment he was giving his horse into the charge of one of the grooms in waiting, Henry III. was saying to his future brother-in-law, the Duc de Joyeuse:

"Have you remembered, as I begged of you,