

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE chapellan of Hacquemont was still at his post. It had been at first intended that he should go forth with Odille and her escort, but the old priest prayed so earnestly to be suffered to remain that he at last prevailed ; indeed it was not likely—unless by some unlucky accident—that harm would befall him. While it was yet dark Ralph confessed himself and heard mass in the castle chapel. Many in the garrison besides Lanyon and De Marsan did likewise, albeit one of the spearmen who had come from over Alps was heard to mutter discontentedly in his beard, “that their captain’s brains must be wool-gathering. In the merry old days he would have found time for no such mummeries.” But this was not altogether so. The Free Companion from boyhood upward had ever been rather a foe than a friend to frock and cowl ; he had once lain actually under the Church’s ban, and for many years had been something more than irregular in observance of devotion ; but he had never thought blasphemously or even lightly in his heart of the faith of his forefathers, and now, looking death calmly in the face, he was minded to meet it, not like a Pagan, but like a Chrisom, though sinful man.

The breach in the northwestern walls was, as has been aforesaid, nearly, if not quite, practicable when on the previous evening the French artillery slackened