

“serving-men, armed, as were all who rode abroad in those quarrelsome times, completed the cavalcade of the wealthy burgher. Philip de Rosay halted for a moment when he saw the knight, and then pricking his steed towards him :

“I give thee joy of thy conquest, brave knight,” he said, heartily ; “and as for you false lord,” pointing to the corpse of De Valence, “I would far sooner see him lying stark and stiff where thou hast cast him, than lording it with his fellows over the honest citizens of Evreux. Thou dost God and the king service, every time thou pinnest one of these invaders to the earth. They are the very curse and leprosy of the land, more hateful a hundred times than any, or all, of the seven plagues that afflicted the Egyptians of old.”

“The quarrel was of his own seeking, good sir,” said the knight, “otherwise I would have suffered him to pass on unharmed. Nay, when he challenged me to the encounter, and I found myself, after the first few blows, gaining the advantage, I would even then have spared him, for he had just quitted the wine-cup, and I feared the draught had made him a conquest unworthy of my sword, but he scoffed at my forbearance, and forced me, by his own rashness, to slay him.”

“And in so doing thou didst but what thy knightly vow enjoins upon thee, young sir. He hath lived too long already, for, by the mass !” and the merchant moved a step forward, “I see, now that his squire holds up his bloody surcoat, by the gay arms emblazoned on it, this is no other than the impious De Valence, whom thou hast slain. He who, at the taking of our city, cast contempt upon the veritable blood of his Saviour, and clove to the earth the holy priest, ay, even at the very foot of the altar, where he served !”

“He it is, in truth, sir, and he hath met his punishment ; the good priest, too, is avenged ; and you worthless carcass shall go back to tell the usurpers of Evreux, that Navarre yet holds bold hearts, and strong hands, to defend and purge it from its foes.”

“I would there were a thousand like thee, now marshalled beneath thy banner,” said the merchant, warmly ; “ay, like thee, I say. But now turn about, brave knight, and pace back with me to the city. We are scarce a quarter of a league from its gates, and thou art in ill condition, after thy rough encounter, for a longer ride on this chilly evening.”

“I am beholden to thy courtesy, good sir,” returned Sir Enguerrard, with a graceful obeisance ; “but I must on to the Castle of Bruniquil ere night-fall, else my people will deem some misadventure hath befallen me.”

“And if that be all, the morn will tell them of their mistake, sir knight ; or, if thou carest not to hold them so long in suspense, one of my fellows shall prick on to Bruniquil, and report the cause of thy delay ; so, prithee, pull up thy left bridle rein, and turn back with me to Evreux. I will give thee a right hearty welcome beneath my roof ; and, in the morning, I warrant me, thou wilt be fain to own thou might'st have sought farther and fared worse, than on such cheer as Philip de Rosay offered for thy refreshment.”

“Right gladly would I accept thy hospitality, sir, which has been so lauded abroad, that I do violence to my inclination in refusing it ; but as thou see'st, I am in no plight to sit at thy board, soiled as I am with the dust and blood of the combat,” and as the knight spoke he glanced involuntarily towards the maiden.

Perhaps the merchant noted the glance, and so suspected the cause which made the knight scruple to return with him on account of his disordered person, for he made reply :

“And if there be naught else to hinder thee, why, we have fair water and in plenty, to cleanse thee from every spot, and my wardrobe can furnish thee a change of raiment, which thou wilt not disdain to wear for the nonce, since if it fit not as daintily as thou would'st have it, matters little ; thou wilt meet only plain burghers like myself at my board ; our damsels find their fitting place within their own bowers during these brawling times.”

Sir Enguerrard bit his lip, and again stole a look at the fair Gabrielle, who sat like a queen enthroned on the back of her magnificent courser. His rich housings almost swept the ground, and she bent over his arched neck, smoothing with her small ungloved hand his flowing mane, while with distended nostrils, and one foot pawing the earth, he glanced his fiery eye back at her, with a look which seemed to tell his pride in bearing so lovely a burden.

“Thou art over kind, sir,” said the knight, “and constrainest me by it to accept thy courtesy, trusting, however, thou wilt excuse in me any change of raiment, since I have bound myself, by a vow, not to put off armour till the King of Navarre has regained his liberty.”

“And I give thee heartier welcome for thy vow's sake,” returned the merchant ; “and were all who wear harness to bind themselves by the like, the strong gates of Crevecoeur would soon unfold to give Charles of Navarre his freedom. Comu now, for the twilight deepens, and ere long some score of French knaves, led by the Lord of Beaujeu, will be pricking hither in search of their slain companion. We passed them half a league