

The abbé's eyes gleamed with a baleful light, but he said nothing.

"The secret which must have puzzled you is this. Why should I, an unknown, unimportant person, have dared to imprison a dear friend of the commander of the Queen's forces?—a man who even without such powerful support is quite strong enough to make a great deal of trouble for me."

"I should never think," returned the abbé, with pathetic meekness, "of indulging in so low a passion as revenge."

"Well, abbé, I should be the last man in the world to advise you to forgo revenge if you desire it, but I am quite sure you will say nothing of your imprisonment. I ask you now to mount your horse and speed to Loches. Tell the Duke d'Epernon, and his son the archbishop, to lead to Montrichard a mounted guard of importance suitable for the escorting of the Queen. The company must be at Montrichard by six o'clock on the morning of the twenty-second. There I, your assistant, abbé, shall hand over to their keeping Her Majesty the Queen. I could not ask a man of your position to indulge in falsehood."

"I should think not," muttered the abbé, eyeing Cardillac with doubt and misgiving, the glance, nevertheless, illumined with a ray of hope.

"But if I were you I should assume a distant, mysterious air. I should say to enquirers: 'You