

guard you, with instructions to kill you on spot if you should attempt to escape.

CHAPTER X

THE LEAGUE OF EQUITY.

The darkness of night enveloped the country, when De Maurevert, closely guarded, set off in company with the bandit Croixmore to the meeting-place of the League of Equity.

The place of meeting fixed was in a deep and narrow gully dividing a high and steep-sided mountain. A hundred peasants, hidden amid the hollows of the rocks, were talking among themselves while waiting the arrival of the Seigneur de Tournoll.

"Friends," said a sturdy mountaineer—whom we have seen at the commencement of this history, holding forth at a little inn at Saint Pardoux—"my dear companions, it is certain that right is on our side; that is why I am opposed to placing our interests in the hands of the Seigneur de Tournoll. To make the devil our pleader, when our cause is just, is to risk losing our nation."

"You forget, Blaise," replied another mountaineer, "that we peasants know nothing of the science of war. What would become of us without an experienced leader? We should get ourselves out to pieces!"

"Nothing of the sort," cried Blaise. "Has it not many times been seen that simple peasants have all at once become excellent captains? We can, after all, if we need it, choose for our leader some noble and honest seigneur."

"Where shall we find such a marvel, Blaise?"

The mountaineer reflected, then shook his head.

"There is no doubt it would be difficult," he said. "No matter. I maintain that to entrust our interests to the sire de Tournoll is to give our cause an evil reputation, and to expose ourselves to certain mortifications."

Maitre Blaise was still speaking when a long and shrill whistle sounded amid the silence of night. It was the signal agreed on to announce the approach of the Seigneur de Tournoll and his people. A confused hum of human voices, appearing to descend from the sky, came down the side of the mountain; torches blazed on all sides; and a large number of the conspirators, until then unseen, became visible.

"Long live the Seigneur de Tournoll!" roared Blaise, who, dreading lest his remarks, repeated to the bandit, might bring him into serious trouble at some later time, unlearned to make himself conspicuous for his enthusiasm.

No one repeated the cry after him. In a little time the adventurer Croixmore appeared at the head of his escort.

After saluting the assemblage by a majestic gesture of his hand, the bandit dismounted, and directed his steps towards a kind of raised stand or tribune, constructed hastily with blocks of stone, in the middle of the delf. Eight mountaineers holding lighted torches placed themselves at the four angles, and Croixmore, raised above the crowd, his auditors, began his address.

"Dear and beloved companions," he said, "you have called on me in your distress; I have taken pity on you in your sufferings, and come to your assistance. I am ready to help you in your resistance of the tyranny of your seigneur, and to conduct you to victory. Before joining ourselves in a close alliance, however, it is necessary that we, you and I, should clearly understand what this engagement is we are entering into. Here are the conditions on which my support will be given to you. In the first place, I require to exercise over all the societies of the League of Equity full and complete authority; whoever disobeys my orders shall be shot or hung—as I may decide on the spot—without any other form of judgment. Next, I demand, in case of the capture of a castle, two-thirds of the booty for my men at arms. I shall adjudge the value of the spoils with any one having the right to raise his voice. Further, I require, before commencing the campaign, the sum of four thousand crowns to be paid to me in good and current money. If—as I have no doubt they will—these conditions, so reasonable and moderate, shall be accepted by you, I will do my best to commence hostilities before the end of the week. Dear and well-beloved companions, I give you half an hour to reflect on my conditions, and to accept or decline them. Deliberate carefully!"

The conspirators received this beautiful address in silence. In putting his capdity nakedly before them, the Seigneur de Tournoll set the mountaineers thinking; they speedily asked themselves whether, instead of gaining an ally, they were not rather creating a new tyrant. Scattered in numerous groups, they were discussing warmly among themselves in low tones, when a second whistle was heard; all the torches were instantly extinguished, and every voice hushed.

Shortly a mountaineer, after answering the challenge of the sentinel keeping guard on all sides, penetrated the delf, and asked to be introduced to Croixmore.

"Seigneur," he said, "a hundred paces from here I have left a man, under good guard, who asks pressing to see you. It is in vain I have told him that you are not here; he will not believe me, and threatens to drive a dagger through my body if I do not obey him."

"Do you know the man?"

mountaineer, crossing himself in terror. "Oh, yes, I know him! His name is Benoit—he is the leader of the Marquis de la Tremblais's twelve apostles!"

Croixmore could not avoid making a movement of astonishment and uneasiness, but he decided instantly on the part he would take.

"Hullo, companions!" he cried; "let the torches be re-lit, and all of you join in a psalm. The visitor who is coming here must be led to believe that he has come amongst a party of Protestants engaged in prayer. As to you, friend," he continued, addressing the mountaineer who had announced the arrival of the Chief of the Apostles, "bring the Marquis de la Tremblais's executioner to me quickly."

At these orders of Croixmore's the torches blazed anew, and a formidable concert awoke the echoes of the delf.

"My dear friend," he said, turning to De Maurevert, "confess that the appearance of the apostle Benoit in this place at this hour strongly furthers the auspicious with which your very questionable conduct had already inspired me. We shall see how you come off at this confrontation. I doubt whether it will be much to your honor."

"Croixmore," replied the captain, calmly, "I am amused to find you so long doubt my word. I reserve to myself, when once my ransom has been paid, and I have regained my liberty, to handle you roughly for the coarseness of your behavior to me. Not only is the apostle Benoit not my accomplice, but he is the most openly declared of my enemies!"

De Maurevert had hardly finished speaking ere the Chief of the Apostles presented himself before the Commander of Mercenaires de Tournoll. At sight of the giant, a smile of ferocious pleasure moved the apostle's features.

"Seigneur," he said, addressing Croixmore, "I desire to have a private and secret conversation with you, if it will please you to send away your men-at-arms for a moment."

"With pleasure, Benoit. Now that we are alone, explain yourself. But first, a question—is it your master, the Marquis de la Tremblais, who has sent you to me, or have you come here on your own account?"

"I come in the name of my seigneur and master," replied Benoit, after a moment's hesitation; "it is in his name I speak. Seigneur de Croixmore," he went on, after a further slight pause, "monsieur begs you to give him your assistance to do justice on a wretch who has dared to outrage him. My seigneur has, besides, instructed me to offer you two hundred crowns as the price of the service he asks of you."

"To what wretch do you refer?"

"To Captain de Maurevert, here present."

"Oh! Captain de Maurevert!—you are sure you have not mistaken the name?" inquired Croixmore, in a tone compounded of suspicion and irony.

"It is impossible to be more certain."

"And supposing I were to consent to mix myself up in this quarrel of your master with the captain, and that I take part with the marquis, what am I expected to do with Monsieur de Maurevert? To hand him over to you, no doubt?"

"Not at all, seigneur; but to hang him to the nearest tree."

At the tone of sincerity with which Benoit returned this answer, the Seigneur de Tournoll felt his suspicions vanishing. Still foaming, however, that the dealing of the Chief of the Apostles concealed some kind of snare, he demanded:

"How did you happen to learn that an open air service was to take place here this evening, and that I was to be present?"

"In the simplest way," replied Benoit. "Some of the spies I had sent out to keep watch on the doings of this De Maurevert came to tell me the road the captain had taken. I immediately followed in his steps, and traced him to your chateau, where your people furnished me with a guide to you, and thus I am here."

This explanation of the apostle was so plausible and natural as perfectly to convince Croixmore of his prisoner's innocence, and as to Benoit's ignorance on the subject of the meeting of the members of the League of Equity.

Turning towards De Maurevert, who was still attended by the two men instructed to keep guard over him at a little distance removed, he made a sign to them to rejoin him. The captain, though inwardly scandalized at the front-and-easy way in which the bandit treated him, at once obeyed the summons, being impatient to learn the result of the conference between the Seigneur de Tournoll and Benoit.

"Captain," Croixmore said to him, at the same time indicating the Chief of the Apostles by a nod, "here is a faithful servant of the Marquis de la Tremblais come to offer me, on the part of his master, two hundred crowns, if I will be at the trouble of having you strung up on a gibbet!"

"Death and furies!" cried De Maurevert, purple with anger, "everybody to-day is giving the word to have me hanged! Blood and carnage! Have they suddenly learnt that madame, my mother, was guilty of a weakness, that they treat me in this peasant fashion? I warn you, sire de Croixmore—and I beg you to remark in passing that I give you the title of sire out of pure courtesy, because you have otherwise no right to it—I warn you, that before you give me up to the gibbet, as you talk of doing, I shall hope to make a good and sturdy fight. I declare, moreover, sire de Croixmore, that you are the dullest and most stupid ass that ever cropped grass on a meadow! To think of hanging me for two hundred crowns, when

my ransom will bring you four hundred! This sort of mistaken prodigality amounts to insanity. As to you, lout," he continued, turning his fiery glance on Benoit, "I swear, on the faith of a gentleman, on my dagger and on my sword, that if heaven spares my life, I will take a terrible vengeance on you for your insolence, and that you shall not pass out of the world except by my hand! Now, sire de Croixmore, do you still hold to your idea of the gallows—or am I to begin the battle? You have committed the double blunder of leaving me my sword and dagger, and of not having had me searched—for I wear under my buff coat an excellent suit of mail. Speak!—I feel in extremely good spirits, and ready for any extreme."

The apostle Benoit, whom the unsuccessful issue of his negotiation had caused to turn pale with rage, again addressed the leader of the bandits of Tournoll:

"Seigneur," he said, "will it please you to finish our interview? I have not yet spoken to you of the most interesting of the two subjects which brought me to you."

"Go on," answered Croixmore, whose suspicions were thoroughly reawakened.

"I will go straight to the point. Monsieur le Marquis de la Tremblais has the greatest interest in making himself master of the fortified Chateau de Taave. Nothing would be easier than for him to accomplish this object with his own forces, but, in consequence of certain scruples, which there is no need for me to explain to you, he prefers not taking any part in the affair. Will you, yes or no, agree to capture this chateau, as if on your own account?—for which service the marquis engages to pay you the enormous sum of ten thousand crowns as soon as you place him in possession of the house. As to the objects of pillage it contains, great and small, they will not be claimed. I doubt, Seigneur Croixmore, whether so splendid an offer was ever before made to you."

Croixmore, dazzled by the brilliancy of these offers, was about to accept, when De Maurevert stopped the answer that was upon his lips.

"Who called you, captain?" he demanded, with the savageness of a bulldog disturbed in his gnawing of a bone.

"Death!—a gentleman is always welcome whenever he deigns to present himself," replied De Maurevert, quite calmly. "I have been reflecting on the part you are making me play here, and find that it is beyond my powers to sustain it any longer. If you compel me to remain, a massacre will inevitably follow. Give me my liberty, and I undertake, on my honor, to send you, before three days are passed, the four hundred crowns for my ransom. Devil's horns!—you do not doubt my word, I hope?"

"On what resources are you counting, captain?"

"Million legions of Satan!—that's a question and a doubt that sends of the blackguard at ten leagues! On what resources do I count?—on ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand? The Dame d'Erlanges, among other persons, who would be proud and happy to oblige me, would hasten to furnish me the amount of my ransom."

"You are unlucky to-day, captain," replied Croixmore, after a brief silence. "In less than two days the Dame d'Erlanges will be completely ruined."

"What!—you are dreaming!" cried De Maurevert.

"Not in the least. I am, on the contrary, extremely wide-awake; and I repeat that before two days have passed the Dame d'Erlanges, if she is still living, will be reduced to beggary; and that because in two days I shall have taken, pillaged, and sacked the Chateau de Taave."

The bandit's words astonished De Maurevert to such a degree, that for a moment he was reduced to speechlessness. During that moment dull murmurs, changing almost instantly into cries and threats, rose from the divers groups of conspirators. The members of the League of Equity, already ill-disposed by the exorbitant pretensions of the Seigneur de Tournoll, had not observed without warrantable indignation and apprehension the long conference of the bandit and the executioner of the Marquis de la Tremblais. The word "treason" began to circulate from mouth to mouth, and by degrees the exasperation of the mountaineers boiled over; abuse, at first muttered, burst forth at length like a storm, in exclamations of rage and threats of death.

"By the sweet eyes of Madame Proserpine, and the beard of her lord and master, Pluto! I should be an enormous dunderhead to let slip such an opportunity as this!" muttered De Maurevert; and with a wrench so violent that he overthrew the two men who were holding him tightly by the arms, he freed himself, and, drawing his sword, sprang into the midst of the peasants.

"Brave companions!" he cried, in tones that rang through the delf—"fear nothing! I will be your leader—I, the illustrious Captain de Maurevert! Down with the traitors! Death to the spies! To the gallows with Croixmore!"

A frightful uproar followed De Maurevert's words and action, and the melee began.

(To be continued.)

A TERRIFIC "slide" of snow from a roof in a Maine village completely buried a man who happened to be passing by. The good people of the place went to work and dug him out. They found him unhurt, but in tears. He said he was a Swiss, and had not felt so happy for years—that it reminded him of days gone by in his native mountains.

A VISIT TO A KINDERGARTEN.

In the Faubourg St. Antoine, there is an establishment called "L'Ecole Professionnelle," of which Madame Delton is the "Directrice." It is situated in the Rue de Neuilly, No. 28. Having had a letter of introduction, I presented myself as an Englishman wishing to learn something of the Kindergarten, and the "Système Frobel," as carried out in that establishment. I need hardly say that I was received with that courtesy and readiness to oblige which stands in such remarkable contrast with a similar application in my own country, except the applicant may happen to lean on the arm of a trustee or a director. This school is not supported by the Government; and therefore is, to all intents and purposes, a private one. The Kindergarten, or Frobel system has for its purpose the conveyance of knowledge to little children, from the age of four to seven, by means of objects and elementary instruction without books; so that the mind of the young is not taxed or fatigued by learning, but, as it were, pleasantly instructed by amusement. In this school, there are about sixty young pupils in two divisions. The first consists of little ones, who appear happy and full of play, and yet learn by playing. I saw a child of four years old to-day, who knew well the elements of geometry, and yet could not read. She recognized at once the obtuse and acute angle, the sphere, the cube, and the circle, and knew how to apply them by dictation to the formation of a figure. It seems almost paradoxical to say this of a child who cannot write a word; and yet it appears very simple and instructive if we only trace step by step the way it is arrived at. The most primitive lesson which the child receives is a ball to play with—simple enough, and which no child objects to; there is half a yard of string attached to it, and the balls are covered with worsted netting in various colors. The child by this is told that the ball is a circle, a round, a sphere; and by the various coverings learns to distinguish the various colors. He holds the string in one hand, and is told to throw up the ball, and of course it comes down again. He learns the words "up" and "down," and is then told that that is vertical or perpendicular. Then he throws it to the right and the left, and learns both those terms; and, it fact, knows his right hand from his left. It is a rule not to confine a child's attention to one thing more than a quarter of an hour; and then he has a box of cubes put before him, colored red, of one centimetre each. With these he first is taught to put them in a row, and then he recognizes a straight line; when this is accomplished, he is taught how, by placing them together, certain elementary forms are made; and so on this proceeds till the infant can construct—and can construct out of its own intelligence—many things in ordinary use, such as window, stool, doorway, &c. By degrees, the little one, after having mastered the cubes, is supplied with wooden bricks of the same kind, always in mathematical proportion, so that he may not be misled; and thus, after a few initiatory lessons, he is encouraged to exercise his own will, or, in other words, play with them as he thinks best. But the infant is very apt at imitation, and what one does the other will try to do. Before playing with the cubes or the bricks, they learn what is the surface and what the angle; and so, in fact, they learn geometry unconsciously, and yet they know it. Then the little ones are taught, for ten or fifteen minutes, in a song or chant, some of the elements of social knowledge; as "how flour is made," or simple figures of addition; and so three-quarters of an hour are spent. Then they are all turned out, if fine, into the yard, to do their gymnastics, or if wet, into the large empty room on the ground-floor.—E. Cetera.

A LEGEND OF THE HOLY GRAIL.

Once in the days when men wandered through the world seeking that cup, made of a single precious stone, holding the real blood of Christ, a knight left England to search for the same in distant lands. As he passed from his door, a poor sufferer cried to him for help. Absorbed in his grand hope the knight heeded him not, but went on. He wandered to the Holy Land, fought in many wars, endured much, but found not the precious cup; and at last, disappointed and dejected, returned home. As he neared his own house, the same poor sufferer cried to him for help.

"What dost thou require?" asked the knight. The aged man said, "Lo, I am perishing with thirst."

The knight dismounted and hastened to fetch a cup of water. He held the hair-cloth sufferer in his arms, raised his head, and proffered the water to his parched lips. Even as he did so the cup sparkled into a gem—the knight saw in his hand the holy grail, flushed with the true blood of Christ; and so we, my brothers, may wander far, and traverse many realms of philosophy and theology, to find the truth which represents the true life-blood of the noblest soul; but we shall find it only when and where we love and serve as he did. If we but give to the fainting soul at our door a cup of water from the well of truth, it shall flash back on us the radiance of God. As we can save, so shall we be saved. And when we are really moved by the outcome of famished hearts and brains, as by the wailing of helpless babes—when we deeply long to be a light and hope to men—the ways of doing so will open before us, even as undreamed energies to fill them shall be born within us.