

SIR GALAHAD OF THE ARMY

CHAPTER I

THE CAMP AT SALEGNA

THAT Monsieur de Commynes should have contrived even a three days' truce was a triumph of diplomatic insinuation. Being an honourable gentleman and the representative of The Most Christian King, he would not lie even to secure the boon of such a heaven-sent breathing space. In diplomacy the lie direct is, at best, a crude weapon with a dangerous recoil. Because of that recoil, and for the reasons already given, Monsieur de Commynes never used it except when the choice was narrowed down to a lie or the truth, and the truth was the more dangerous. Few men of his day were more discreet, more persuasive, or better versed in that nice art of negotiation which sweetens bitters and makes the worse appear the better.

No lie, then, was necessary. The truth, well larded, as it were, with possibilities and insinuations was sufficient. On behalf of the confederate Italian states the Marquis of Mantua swallowed it comfortably. Commynes' argument lay somewhat on these lines—the King desired nothing better than to return to France in peace, therein lay the truth; the King was young and those about him hard to convince, therein lay the suggestion; France was not bound forever to her present allies, therein lay the insinuation; and all three, truth, suggestion and insinuation, were pressed home with that persuasive address in whose use Monsieur de Commynes was a past master.