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THE
HELMET OF NAVARRE

BY BERTHA RUNKLE.
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(Continued.)

Our eyes travelled from his pistols over the rest of him. He was small, lean, and wiry, with dark, sharp face and deep-set twinkling eyes. One moment's glance gave us to know that Peyrot was no fool. My lord closed the door after him and went straight to the point.

"M. Peyrot, you were engaged last night in an attack on the Duke of St. Quentin. You did not succeed in slaying him, but you did kill his man, and you took from him a packet. I come to buy it."

He looked at us a little dazed, not understanding, I deem, how we knew this. Certainly, it had been too dark in the lane for his face to be seen, and he had doubtless made sure that he was not followed home. He said directly:

"You are the Comte de Mar?"

"Even so, M. Peyrot. I did not care to have the whole story known to you. I have no hesitation in confiding that I am M. de Mar."

M. Peyrot swept a bow till his head almost touched the floor.

"My poor apartment is honored."

As he bowed low, I made a spring forward. I thought to pin him before he could rise. But he was up with the lightness of a bird from the bough and standing three yards away from me, where I crouched on the spring like a felled cat. He grinned at me in open enjoyment.

"Monsieur desiré?" he asked sympathetically.

"No, it is I who desire," said M. Etienne, clearing himself a place to sit on the corner of the table. "I desire that packet, monsieur. You know this little expedition of yours tonight was something of a failure. When you report to the general-duke he will not be in the best of humors. He does not like failures, the general. He will not incline to reward you

Jean Peyrot, who does not move in court circles, is as a lion to trouble them. In other words, I have no notion what you are talking about."

"Oh, come," M. Etienne cried, "as I am a man of business, we know as well as you where you were before dawn."

"Before dawn? Marry, I was sleeping the sleep of the virtuous."

M. Etienne slipped across the room as quickly as Peyrot's self might have done, lifted up a heavy curtain hanging before an alcove, and disclosed the bed folded smooth, the pillow undisturbed. He turned with a triumphant grin on the owner, who showed all his teeth pleasantly in answer, no wait abashed.

"For all you are a count, monsieur, you have the worst manners ever came inside these walls."

M. Etienne, with no attempt at mending them, went on a tour about the room, examining with smiling interest all its furniture, even to the dishes and tankards on the table. Peyrot, leaning against the wall by the window, regarded him steadily, with impressive face. At length M. Etienne walked over to the chest by the chimney-piece and deliberately put his hand on the key.

"Stop!" M. Etienne, turning, looked into his pistol-barrel.

My lord stood exactly as he was, bent over the chest, his fingers on the key, looking over his shoulder at the bravo with raised, protruding eyebrows and laughing mouth. But though he laughed, he stood still.

"If you make a movement I do not like, M. de Mar, I will shoot you as I would a rat. Your side is down and mine is up; I have no fear to kill you. It will be painful to me, but if necessary I shall do it."

"M. Peyrot has made his fortune in Paris? Monsieur rolls in wealth, of course?" Peyrot shrugged his shoulders, his eyes leaving the ceiling and making a "winking" pilgrimage of the room, resting finally on his own rusty clothing.

"Do I look it?" he answered.

"Oh," said M. Etienne, slowly, as one who digests an entirely new idea. "I supposed Monsieur that he as rich as a monarch, he is so old on the subject of turning an honest penny."

Peyrot's eyes condescended to meet the visitor's.

"Say on," he permitted lazily. "I offer twenty pistoles for a packet, seal unbroken taken at dawn from the person of M. de St. Quentin's squire."

"Now you are talking sensibly," the camp said, as if M. Etienne had been the shuffler. "That is a fair offer and demands a fair answer. Moreover, such seal as you display deserves success. I will look about a bit this morning among my friends and see if I can get wind of your packet. I will meet you at dinner-time at the inn at the Bonne Pensee."

"Dinner-time is far hence. You forget, M. Peyrot, that you are risen earlier than usual. I will go out and sit on the stairs for five minutes while you consult your friends."

Peyrot grinned cheerfully.

"M. de Mar doesn't seem able to get it through his head that I know nothing whatever of this affair."

"No, I certainly don't get that through my head."

Peyrot regarded him with an air ill-used, yet compassionate, such as he might in the monkish days have employed toward one who could not be convinced, for instance, of the efficacy of prayer.

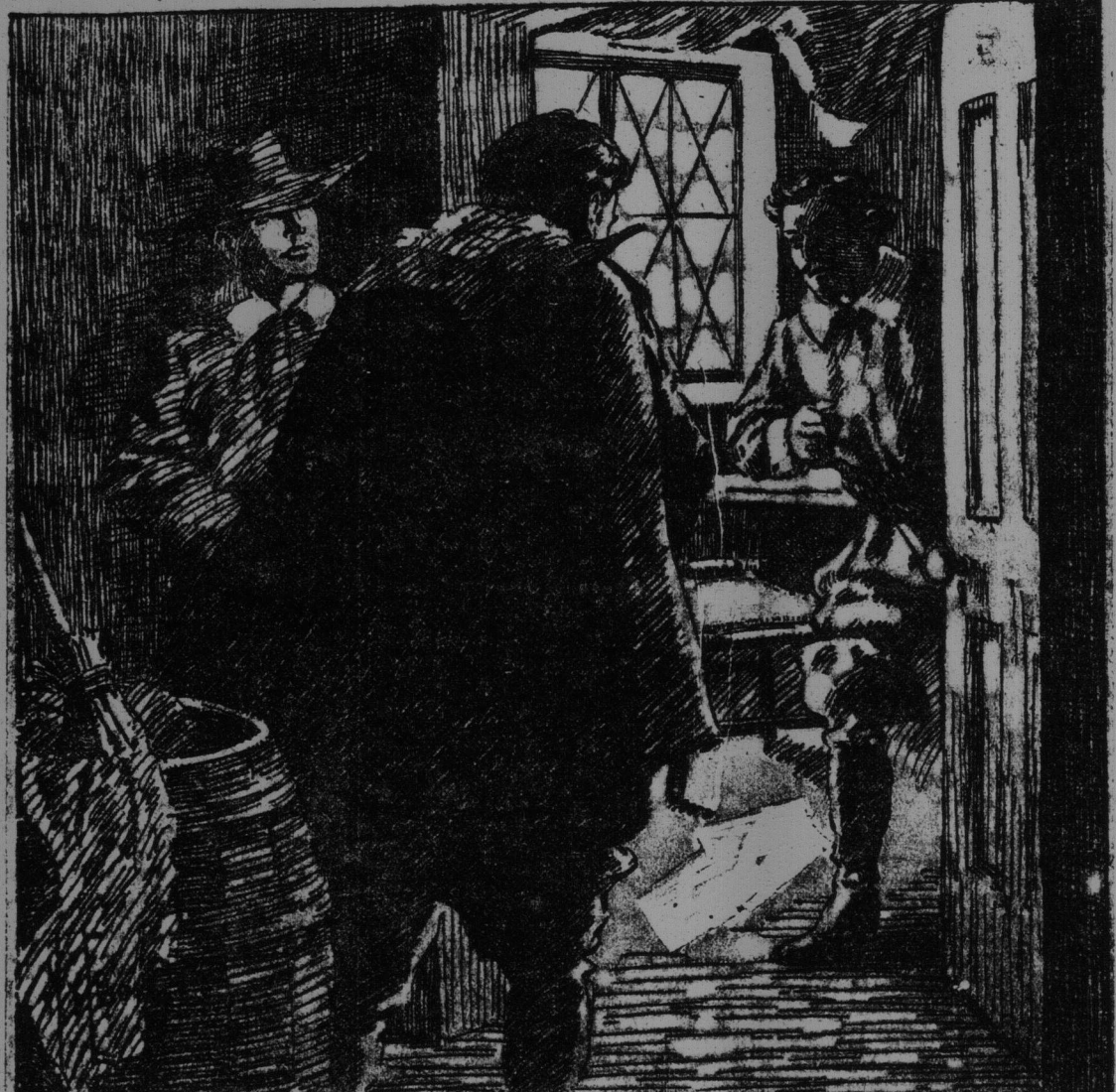
"M. de Mar," quoth he, plaintively, in pity half for himself so misundestood, half for his interlocutor so wilfully blind, "I do solemnly assure you, once and for all, that I know nothing of this affair of yours. Till you so asserted, I had no knowledge that Monsieur, your honored father, had been set on—and deeply I am pained to hear it. These be evil days when such things can happen. As for your packet, I learn of it only through your word, having no more to do with this deplorable business than a babe unborn."

"I declare I was almost shaken, almost thought we had wronged him. But M. Etienne gauged him otherwise."

"You were please me," he began.

"The contemplation of virtue," theascal droned with down-drawn lips, in put tone, "is always uplifting to the spirit."

(to be continued.)



"Our Eyes Travelled from His Pistols Over the Rest of Him."

dear. While I am in the very best humor in the world."

He smiled to prove it. Nor do I think his complaisance altogether feigned. The temper of our host amused him.

As for friend Peyrot, he still looked dazed. I thought it was because he had not yet made up his mind what line to take, but had I viewed him with neutral eyes I might easily have deemed his bewilderment genuine.

"Perhaps we should get on better if I could understand what monsieur is driving at," he suggested. M. Peyrot's remarks about his noble father and the general-duke are interesting, but humble

M. Etienne sat down on the chest and emitted more amiably than ever.

"Why have I never known you before, Peyrot?"

"One moment, monsieur." The nose of the pistol turned around to me. "Go over there to the door, you."

I retreated, covered by the shining music to a spot that pleased him.

"Now are we more comfortable," Peyrot observed, pulling a chair over against the wall and seating him, the pistol on his knee.

Monsieur crossed his legs, as if of all seats in the world he liked the present one the best. He had brought most of the airs of the noble into his mansion, realizing already that they would but hamper him, as his rifle hammer a doublet, Peyrot, freedom adventurer, living by his sharp sword and sharp wit, reverenced a count no more than a foot-candle. The occasional nodding deference was more insulating than outright rudeness; but M. Etienne bore it untroubled. Possibly he schooled himself so to bear it, but I think rather he felt so easily secure on the height of his generalized that Peyrot's impudence merely tickled him.

"I was wondering," he answered pleasantly, "how long you have dwelt in this town and I not known it. You are from Guenne, methinks."

"Carissime way," the other said indifferently. Then memory bringing a deep trouble to his eye, he added: "What think you, monsieur? I was left a week-old babe on the monastery steps, was reared up in holiness within the sacred walls, chorister at ten, novice at eighteen, full-fledged friar, fasting, praying, and singing masses, exhorting dying souls and living sinners, at twenty."

"A very pretty brotherhood, you for sample."

"Nay, I am none. Else I might have stayed. But one night I took lodgings, hired in the woods till my hair grew, and struck out for Paris. And never regretted it, neither."

He leaned his head back, his eyes fixed contemptuously on the ceiling, and burst into song, in voice as melodious as a lark:

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TERRIBLE PAINS ACROSS BACK
SUFFERED EIGHT MONTHS WITH KIDNEY TROUBLE.
WOULD HAVE TO STAY IN BED FOR THREE DAYS AT A TIME.
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"One day a neighbor of mine advised me to try Doan's Kidney Pills. I was so much discouraged I told him I was tired of trying remedies, but he urged me to try one box so I purchased one, and before I was through using it, I found a change for the better so I got five boxes more, and I have had no trouble with my kidneys since. I would not be without Doan's Pills in my house."

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Pleety and Grace and Gloom, I've such like guests I have in my room! Pleety and Gloom and Grace, I hang my door shut in your face! Gloom and Grace and Pleety, I set my dog on such as ye!

Finishing his story, he continued to lean time with his head on the floor and to gaze upon the ceiling. But I think we could not have twiddled a finger without his noting it. M. Etienne rose and leaned across the table toward him.

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