

Joachim obeyed. He fixed the torch near his father's couch, and opened the dusty papers.

The contents were as follows.

XIII.

MELCHIOR'S STORY:—THE BROTHERS.

My father was a rough country baron, accustomed to consider himself as absolute master in his domains, and to execute there all the forms of justice, like an ancient feudal lord. He would have given his life to serve the King, Louis XIII., on whom he looked as his suzerain, but to whom he thought himself equal in purity of blood and nobility of descent. He bore the character of a violent and passionate man, and I do not remember having seen him smile twice during my whole youth. His life had been marked by crosses. He fondly loved my mother, and she died in giving birth to my younger brother Petris. Hence the marquis never saw the poor infant but his dark eye brows joined menacingly, and a nervous twitching agitated his lips; this feeling of dislike he could never master.

Children are seldom deceived as to the sentiments they inspire, and they soon discover who loves or who hates them; my poor brother, who had a heart naturally tender and affectionate, suffered much by the want of a father's love, and always fled his presence like a culprit. Whilst our father permitted me to hang around his neck, fondled me on his knee and passed his hand through my curling locks, seeming to see the features of my mother revived in my countenance, he banished Petris to the other end of the chamber, as a punishment for the petty offences we had committed in concert. The solitary life of the Marquis had gradually changed his melancholy into testiness and ill humour; I alone was able to calm his most violent fits of anger. I can still see him walking in the family picture gallery, with a tread heavy enough to shake the mortar from the old walls, his figure drawn up to its full height, his grey hair hanging loosely over his large forehead, and his eye fixed on the raging sea, that dashed itself against the rocks below. He used to spend whole hours there. Sometimes he would regard the arms, suspended in trophies on the wall, and say in a melancholy tone—

"These swords are rusting! my hands shall never more draw them from the scabbard."

"And why so, my father?" I asked, one day that I overheard him speak thus.

"Because they are no longer the fashion, boy!" he replied with a bitter smile; "because they have grown old like their master, and shouts of laughter would salute me, were I to display my

antiquated blade in the ante-chamber of the *Bas-Rouge*."

Then, as if ashamed of having said so much, he turned and abruptly quitted me. This phrase of *Bas-Rouge*, or Red-Stocking, was a designation frequently applied to the ex-Bishop of Lausanne, at that time Cardinal Richelieu.

Singularly enough, my brother never seemed in the least jealous of the partiality which our father so openly displayed towards me. Our old nurse, who humour'd every whim of mine, and took care that I was always handsomely dressed, allowed the garments of the *vagabond*, as she called Petris, to remain in the ragged state to which they were reduced, by contact with half the trees and bushes in the country. But he never seemed to remark that I was clad in silk and velvet—he in russet and ratoon. When our father gave us permission to appear at the village fêtes, oh! how we enjoyed ourselves! I think I still see the kind Petris, as he would lift me in his arms across the brooks and pools, lest I should soil the tip of my new shoes—for, although younger, he was far stronger and more robust than myself. How gaily he sang and whistled, when we had left the old gloomy castle behind us! With what pleasure he inhaled the scent of the eglantine or the wild-pea, as it floated on the balmy summer air! You would have thought him a captive escaped from prison. In all field sports, but especially with the cross-bow or musketoon, he distanced all competitors.

Petris never said he loved me, but he showed by his actions that he did. One evening—I shall never forget it—we were returning home about eleven o'clock, from the small town of Tremblade. The night was thick and dark, rendered still more so by the overshadowing trees of the forest through which we were passing, when we saw at the roadside, two small red lights glancing through the bushes. A furnished she-wolf, whose cubs had been killed some days before, had been seen wandering in the neighbourhood; I remembered this, and was terror-struck. Petris and I held each other's hands, and stood trembling, whilst the two brilliant eyes advanced steadily through the crackling brushwood.

"Fly! save yourself, Bernard!" cried my brother, flinging away my hand; and grasping the stout staff which he bore, he advanced towards the animal.

I could not move—my feet were sealed to the ground. Petris with a sudden dart, struck the wolf on the right shoulder. She fell, but rising immediately with a howl that made my blood run cold, she made a spring at her assailant. As he struck at her, the point of his staff fortunately entered her open mouth; and, seizing her throat