



# An Enemy of the King

By Hagenbuch Wyman

## CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

Impelled by uncontrollable wrath, he thrust at me furiously. With a timely twist, I sent his sword flying from his hand to the door. I motioned him to follow.

Completely astonished, he obeyed my gesture, went and picked up his sword, opened the door, and then turned to Blaise and spoke these words, in a voice that trembled with rage:

"Monsieur, since you let your menial hands touch your sword for you, I cannot hope for satisfaction. But though I am no great prophet, I can predict that both you and your crew shall yet feel the force of my lances on your necks. And, mademoiselle," he added, removing his look to the lady, "this is not the end of it with you!"

With which parting threats he strode out of the inn, closing the door after him.

Blaise, deprived by his false position of the power of speech, stood with frowning brow and puffed-out cheeks, nervously clutching at his sword hilt. The lady and her maid looked at him with curiosity, as if a gentleman who would stand idly and speechlessly by while his servant resented an insult to a lady, was a strange being, to be viewed with wonder.

"Mademoiselle," said I, laying my sword on a table, "heaven is kind to me in having led me where I might have the joy of serving you."

"The lady, whose musical voice had the sound of sadness in it, answered with graciousness warranted by the occasion:

"My good man, your sword lifts you above your degree, even," and here she glanced at Blaise, and continued in a tone of irresistible contempt, "as the tameness of some gentlemen lowers them beneath theirs."

Blaise, from whose nature tameness was the attribute farthest removed, looked first at the lady, in helpless bewilderment, then at me, with mute reproach for having placed him in his ridiculous position, and lastly at the maid, who regarded him with open derision. To be laughed at by this pliant creature, to whose charms he had been so speedily susceptible, was the crowning misery. His expression of woe was such that I could not easily retain my own serious and respectful countenance.

Having to make some answer to the lady I said:

"An opportunity to defend so fair a lady would elevate the most ignoble." The lady, not being accustomed to exchanging compliments with a servant, went to her maid and talked with her in whispers, the two both gazing at Blaise with expressions of mirth.

Blaise strode to my side with an awkwardness quite new to him. His face was in a violent perspiration.

"The devil!" he whispered. "How they laugh at me! Won't you explain?"

"Impossible!"

"I object to being taken for a call," said Blaise, suddenly to burst with anger. Then, readily reaching the limit of his endurance, he faced the lady and blurted out:

"Mademoiselle, I would have run your pursuer through quickly enough, but I did not rob my master—"

I coughed a warning against his betraying us. He hesitated, then despairingly added, in a voice of resignation:

"—my master, the King, of a single stroke of his sword, which I have devoted entirely to his service."

"I do not doubt," said the lady, with cold irony, "that your sword is active enough when drawn in the service of your King."

"My King," replied Blaise with dignity, "had the goodness to make a somewhat similar remark when he took Cahors."

"Cahors?" repeated the lady in a tone of perplexity. "But the King never took Cahors."

"The King of France—no," cried Blaise, "but the King of Navarre did!"

"Blaise!" I cried, in angry reproof at his impudence.

"The tone in which I spoke had so startled the lady that she dropped her mask, and I saw the sweetest face that ever gladdened the eyes of a man. It was the face of a girl naturally of a cheerful nature, but newly made acquainted with sorrow. Grief had not rendered the nature or the face unresponsive to transient impressions of a pleasant or cheerful kind. Here was one of those hearts in which grief does not exclude all possibility of gaiety. Sorrow might lie at the bottom, never forgotten and never entirely concealed, but meriment might ripple on the surface. As for its outward, the face, in every part, harmonized with the grace and purity of the chin and mouth. Her eyes were blue and large, with an eloquence displayed without intent or consciousness.

"What does it mean?" she said, in a charming bewilderment. "The servant reproves the master. Ah! I see. The servant is the master."

And she smiled with pleasure at his discovery.

"But still your servant, mademoiselle, was all that I could say. Blaise vented his great breath of relief. "I feel better now," he said, heartily, and he turned with a beaming countenance to the maid, who looked at his stalwart form and promptly revised her opinion of him. The two were soon in conversation together at the fireplace, and I was left to complete explanations with the lady, who did not attempt the coquetry of replacing her mask.

said, modestly averting her eyes from my frankly admiring look. "And now I understand why it was you drew a sword."

"A privilege too precious to be resigned," I answered in a low tone, "even for the sake of my secret and my safety."

"My words were spoken so tenderly that she sought relief from her charming embarrassment by taking up my sword from the table, and saying, with a smile:

"I have you in my power, monsieur, follower of the King of Navarre! What if I were minded on behalf of the governor of this province to make you a prisoner?"

"My faith!" I could only reply, "you need no sword to make prisoners of men."

"You hope to purchase your freedom from a compliment," she said, continuing the jest; "but you cannot close my eyes with flattery."

"It would be a crime beyond me to close eyes so beautiful!"

She gave a pretty little smile and shrug of helplessness, as if to say, "I cannot help it, monsieur; if you will overwhelm me with compliments which are not deserved, I am powerless to prevent you." But the compliments were all the more deserved, because she seemed to think them so.

Her modesty weakened my own audacity, and her innocent eyes put me into a kind of confusion. So I changed the subject.

"I appears to me, mademoiselle," I said, "that I have had the honor of riding you of unpleasant company."

Her face quickly clouded, as if my sword had brought to her mind a greater trouble than the mere importunities of an insolent adventurer.

"De Berquin!" she said, and then heaved a deep sigh; "I had forgotten about the subject of my father."

"I would not commit his offence of thrusting unwelcome company on you," I replied; "but I would gladly offer you for a few leagues the sword that has already put him to flight."

She was for some time silent. Then she answered slowly in a low voice, "I ride toward Clochonne, monsieur."

Taking this for an acceptance of my offer, I sheathed my sword, and replied with an animation that betrayed my pleasure:

"And I toward the same place, mademoiselle. When you choose to set out, I am ready."

"I am ready now, monsieur," she said, lingering over the word "monsieur," as if trying to recall whether or not I had told her my name.

It was no time at which to disclose the whole under which I was known throughout the province as a fugitively proscribed, and yet I was unwilling to pass under a false name. Therefore I said:

"I am M. de Launay, once of Anjou, but now a wanderer in particular. The great have caused my chateau to be scattered over my lands, stone by stone, and have otherwise encouraged my taste for travel and adventure."

At this moment she glanced toward Blaise. I saw on his face a look of alarm and disapproval, as if he feared that the lady or her maid might be aware that De Launay and La Tournois were one man, but was manifestly not of her face that he had no cause for such an apprehension.

The lady smiled at my description, and, adjusting her gloves, replied:

"And I am Mlle. de Varion, daughter of a gentleman of Fleurieu."

"What!" I interrupted, "the Catholic gentleman who has been imprisoned for sheltering a Huguenot?"

"Yes," she answered, sorrowfully, "I was a prisoner in particular. My father went on: 'and it is to save myself from imprisonment that I have determined to flee to the south, in the hope of finding refuge in one of the provinces controlled by your King of Navarre.'"

"But," I interposed, "how can you be in danger of imprisonment? It was not you, but your father, who violated the edict."

"Nevertheless," she answered, in a low and unsteady voice, averting her glance to the floor, "M. de la Châtre, the governor of the province, has threatened me with imprisonment if I remain in Berry."

"Doubtless," I said with indignation, "the governor does this in order to escape the importunities you would make in your father's behalf. He would not proceed to such a step from the fear of being touched by your pleadings."

"It may be so," she answered faintly. I did not tell her that the idea of releasing her father had already entered my head. In order to bring him safe out of the chateau of Fleurieu, it would be necessary for me to return to Maury for my company. The attempt would be a hazardous one, and I might fail, and I did not wish to raise hopes in her for disappointment. She should not learn of my intention until after its fulfillment. In the meantime, less because I thought she would react unfavorably, than because I was loath to lose the new-found happiness that her presence gave me, I would conduct her to Maury, on the pretext of my having some business there, and then, at a convenient time, a safe flight to Guéninge.

Having summoned the landlord and paid him, I waited for Mlle. de Varion to precede me to the door. There was a moment's delay while her maid sought the riding whip which mademoiselle had laid down on one of the tables. At this moment, there came a sudden knock at the door, which would furnish me with amusement, and I rode southward and afford mademoiselle an interesting surprise on her arrival at Maury.

ed at me, with a look of terror on her face. "Decidedly," I thought, "as the mere mention of my name produces such an effect on her, it is well that I am not going to introduce myself until she shall have learned that I am not such a terrible cutthroat as the Catholics in this province think me." And I said aloud:

"Fear not, mademoiselle. He is not as bad as his enemies represent him. I shall be glad to have his guidance," she said, still pale.

We left the inn and took horse, being joined outside by mademoiselle's two serving boys. Resuming his character of gentleman, Blaise rode ahead with the lady, while I followed at the side of the maid, he casting many an envious glance at the place I occupied, and reciprocating his feelings if not his looks. Nevertheless, I was sufficiently near mademoiselle to be able to exchange words with her. The day was at its best. The sun shone, a gentle breeze played with the red and yellow leaves in the roadway, and I was happy.

Looking down a by-way as we passed, I saw at a distance M. de Berquin talking to Bazemouche, while the latter's three scurvy-looking companions stood by, as if awaiting the outcome of the conversation between the two.

"Oh, M. de Berquin!" I said to myself, with an inward laugh, "I do not know whether you are bartering for help to persecute Mlle. de Varion, or to spy on her movements, but it has come to pass that you can do both at the same time."

"I do not fear for myself," she replied, with a pathetic little smile. "It is possible, that, having seen me only once, should put himself to so much trouble merely to inflict his attentions on me."

"Then you never saw him before the meeting at the inn to-day?" I asked, in spite of the objection that he had just made.

"Never. When he addressed me and introduced himself I was surprised that he should already know my name."

I then recalled that the governor's secretary, Montignac, at one time during his talk with De Berquin outside our window, had pointed toward the inn. Was it, then, of Mlle. de Varion that he had been talking? Montignac, of course, having witnessed the interview between mademoiselle and the governor, had learned her name. It must have been he who had communicated to De Berquin. Had the secretary intruded on the unceremonious cavalier with some commission relative to mademoiselle, as well as with the task of betraying me? It was in vain that I tried to find satisfactory answers to these questions.

I asked mademoiselle whether she had ever known Montignac before this day.

"Never," she answered, with a kind shudder, "though I desired to express both abhorrence and fear. Again she grew reticent; again the shadow and the look of confusion appeared on her face. I could make nothing of this sign. To attempt a solution by interrogating her was to court only pain, and rather than do that I preferred to remain mystified."

Once more mademoiselle cast an uneasy look at the riders in the distance.

"Ah!" said I with a smile, "you have no fear for yourself, yet you continue to look back with an expression that very nearly resembles that of fright."

"I do not fear for myself," she said, quite artlessly, "but for you that I fear. M. de Berquin will surely try to revenge himself on the humiliation you gave him."

A joyous thrill sent the blood to my cheeks, though I dissembled to express both abhorrence and fear. Again she grew reticent; again the shadow and the look of confusion appeared on her face. I could make nothing of this sign. To attempt a solution by interrogating her was to court only pain, and rather than do that I preferred to remain mystified."

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but for thirteen years I have prayed hard for the bountiful Father in heaven to bring us together again some day. For an answer to my infinite kindness will surely do so!"

Now and then mademoiselle turned in her saddle to look behind. It was when she did this for the ninth or tenth time that she came over the world and her lips parted with a half-uttered ejaculation of alarm. I followed her look and saw five mounted figures far behind us on the road. It was most probable that these were De Berquin, Bazemouche and the latter's three ragged comrades. But in this sight I found no reason to be disturbed. If mademoiselle was the object of my quest, it was because the party was sufficiently strong to protect her. If he had abandoned the intention of annoying her with further importunities and was merely proceeding to Clochonne, I had no objection to his going, nor any objection to his putting himself to so much trouble merely to inflict his attentions on me."

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affair, how could I ever again indulge my passion for fighting?"

Meanwhile, Bazemouche had gone to the door and cautiously opened it, no one having barred it after my departure from the kitchen. I could hear the sound of Blaise's superb snoring, mingled with the less resonant efforts of the old couple. Bazemouche surveyed a much of the kitchen as the moonlight disclosed to him. Then he quietly shut the door and turned to his fellows.

"It is well," he said. "The gentleman himself is snoring, and I am just inside the door. There is another room, and it is there that the women must be. The others are probably in the shed. Let us go quietly, as it would not be polite to disturb their sleep."

Whereupon Bazemouche led the way back to the woods, followed by fat Antoine, who doled puffingly