

gipsy and a priest of satan. Can'st thou dance?"

"Like Terpsichore!"

"I know nothing about Terpsichore. Can'st thou drink?"

"As much as you please, in reason, master Antoine."

The brigand shook his head with a satisfied air. To compare him to a Pacha, surrounded by his favourites, would fall short of his merits; for he was a thousand times more despotic than a Pacha.

Men and women formed a circle around him, contemplating this scene with a curiosity which increased at every instant. They hardly dared to whisper when the chief was speaking. One singular thing was that the masked woman's name was in every mouth and yet nobody could believe in the reality of her presence. But they all respected the mistress of Phillip Augustus more than they respected herself. For she was there, and yet they did not wish to believe that she was there.

Cadocu struck with his fist upon the table and his eyes searched the crowd.

"Where is Catherine? Where is Alix? Where is Jeanne?"

Two beautiful girls immediately presented themselves: these were Alix and Jeanne; Catherine waited a little longer, but at last she appeared—but her eyes were very red, and it was plain that she had been weeping.

Cadocu gave Alix a sign to approach. This was a tall girl of vigorous frame, in whose presence Agnes herself appeared but petite.

"Alix," said Cadocu, "there are some here who boast of being able to drink."

"Eh bien!" replied Alix, "let us drink together."

Agnes had good reason to boast; for in the noble fêtes which she was accustomed to give at the Louvre, to relieve the tedium of the long absences of Phillip Augustus, Agnes always remained queen of the feast—her gold cup, mounted with precious stones, was emptied, and filled unceasingly, with the perfumed wines of Syracuse and Nicosie.

She took from the table the great cup, from which Cadocu had been drinking, and filled it to the brim.

But that was neither the wine of Syracuse nor of Nicosie—it was that strong nectar, manufactured from the juice of the grape, mixed with alcohol and spices.

The odour which the cup exhaled reached her nostrils, and Agnes allowed a shudder of disgust to escape her.

Maitre Antoine shook his head with an expression of dissatisfaction.

Agnes plucked up courage, and drained the enormous cup to the dregs.

"'Tis thy turn, my girl," said she to Alix, handing her the cup.

Alix burst into laughter, and placed the cup upon the table.

"I do not drink out of that," replied she.

Agnes smiled triumphantly for she thought her rival found the cup too large.

But Alix chose from among the empty pitchers, which stood before Cadocu, the deepest and the widest, holding twelve cups, and this she filled to the brim, raising the pitcher to her lips with both hands. She continued drinking a long time till she seemed red in the face and the veins of her neck all swollen. Having drained the pitcher to the last drop, she removed it from her lips, drew a long breath, and smiling, handed it to Agnes saying, in her turn, "It is now for thee."

As Agnes hesitated and appeared frightened, Alix remarked, "that is only a commencement; when thou hast drunk that, I will do something better."

Agnes took the diamond pin which fastened her ermine cloak, and offered it to her victorious competitor. "I cry you mercy, my girl," said she, hoping to cover her defeat by an act of generosity.

But Cadocu did not approve of this mode of settling the drinking bout, and growled between his teeth—"She can't drink well."

Agnes was not more successful with Alix, who

threw back her diamond pin with disdain, saying—"I know what your jewels are worth; for I saw those which thou hast given this morning to the beggars in the purlieus of Notre Dame!"

"Come hither, Jeanne," resumed Cadocu.

A girl stepped forward, of a supple and beautifully rounded figure, like those women of Catalina, who travel the world making gold by the activity and graceful style of their dancing.

Madame Agnes was right when she said she could dance like Terpsichore. Nobody could approach her in the noble fêtes given by the Court. As soon as maitre Antoine had given the signal, and the viol had played the prelude, she sprang into the circle, which enlarged around her—the cup of spiced wine had mounted to her brain, and she surpassed herself in those gracious and classic steps which the Crusaders had imported from Constantinople.

Cadocu yawned and said—

"Now, Jeanne, show madame how we can dance."

Jeanne, at one bound, made a perilous leap over the table covered with pitchers; she was a performer of remarkable strength—with a perfect acquaintance with all the Bohemian and Egyptian dances.

Her leaps, in comparison with the great ballets of Agnes, were esteemed in that place as the drinking feat of the pitcher against the cup.

"That's what we call dancing," said Cadocu, emptying his goblet; "thou can'st not dance, madame."

"Come hither, Catherine!"

Catherine had dried her tears—comforted by seeing her hated rival disconcerted at every step—and she now stepped forward holding a *theorbe* in her hand, of a peculiar form.

That was Agnes' favourite instrument, upon which she had often charmed the leisure hours of Phillip Augustus—reciting the romances of chivalry. The king was passionately fond of those heroic songs which exalted the prowess of Roland, Renaud, d'Ogier, the Dane, and other preux chevaliers of the round table; and he had instituted at his own court a modern round table, in imitation of those of Arthur of Bretagne, and of the Emperor Charlemagne.

In truth, the epoch of Phillip was the classic era of knight-errantry—the fabulous exploits of the most remarkable romances date from that reign—though they related them as of Charlemagne's time or of Arthur of England, framing them on the manners and customs of the twelfth century.

Agnes was not discouraged; for she felt certain that she was about to revenge all her defeats at once—blow she possessed a marvellous voice, and the art of singing was no secret to her. In her beautiful hands the *theorbe* gave a soft and gentle prelude.

Then she sung in a low and sweet cadence the romance of Huon de Bordeaux.

Every body listened attentively, as though seized with an instinct of the beautiful; for her performance was really beautiful.

But Cadocu was no longer of the crowd—he was below it; and something stronger was required to touch his paralysed ear.

"Enough! enough!" cried he angrily, "I verily believe you are mocking us, madame; are we in a church that thou should'st try to entertain us with those lugubrious accents?"

Agnes de Meranie was now fairly overcome, and she bent her head without making any reply. Avaricious as she was, she would have given all the jewels from her casket rather than have miscarried in the enterprise she had undertaken in this low place. To women of her stamp, victory would excuse and ennoble any undertaking; but their audacity once conquered, and there remains to them nought but bitterness and misery.

Catherine, radiant and charming with pride, drew from the hands of Agnes the still trembling lyre. She seated herself opposite Cadocu, and with her elbow supported on the table, threw herself into an attitude of graceful abandon—a happy smile illuminated her features. In her practiced and skilful hands the *theorbe* burst, as it were, into an explosion of melodies, the first notes of which roused Cadocu and made him tremble.

He gave way to a smile as the thrilling voice of Catherine struck up the song of the brigands:

Routier, routier, point de maison,
Point de prison!
La telfe
Entiere,
Routier, routier, devant tes pas
S'ouvre là-bas:
Va faire
La guerre!
Routier, routier, ouvre la main
Sur ton chemin,
Pour prendre,
Pour rendre;
Routier, routier, pour prendre au fort
Et rendre au l'or
Au frere
Misere!

Cadocu pushed back his cup and cast a look of true tenderness at Catherine.

Catherine continued:

Routier, routier, le vin du roi
Coule pour toi,
La fille
Gentille,
Routier, routier, sourit toujours
A tes amours
Nouvelles
Et belles.
Routier, la reine a des bijoux
Et des yeux doux,
La reine
Méraine.
Routier, routier, tu les auras
Quand tu voudras;
Princesse,
Richesse.*

Catherine had finished her triumphant song, and she turned to cast a spiteful look upon her rival, for even victory will not always disarm the anger of a jealous woman.

"I will not say," said she, "that the princess never gives anything, but at least she never gives anything valuable."

Two or three loud laughs came from the crowd, proving that two or three women had understood the sarcasm.

Cadocu understood nothing, and yet Catherine's song had somewhat restored him—if not to reason, at least to life.

"Come hither," said he and he placed a loud kiss upon the young girl's brow, already intoxicated with joy.

Then he tried to rise, supporting himself on one side by the post, and on other by Catherine's shoulder.

"As to thee!" resumed he—addressing himself to Agnes, who stood like one stupefied—"Thou hast spoilt our night. See how quiet they are all, when they should be making a noise; for at this hour, I am accustomed to go to asleep to the noise of their revels."

He seemed serious, for he spoke with much emphasis; "I said just now," continued he, "that I only liked queens and wantons; but thou art not a queen—for Ingeburge, the Dane, was the king's wife before thee. Would a queen come here at the risk of soiling her soul and her crown?"

"Who will know it?" stammered Agnes, as to herself.

The merciless Catherine, pronounced those words which we have so often repeated in those pages, and that Phillip Augustus was so fond of repeating—

"The king knows all!"

Agnes trembled, and became pale.

"If thou art not a queen," resumed maitre Antoine, "neither art thou a courtesan—I say, a courtesan, worthy of us. Thou art beautiful; but Agnes the pretty—whom thy evil favourite, Amaury Montruel, caused to be strangled on the road to d'Etampes—was much more beautiful than thee. Thou can'st not drink like Alix—thou can'st not dance like Jeanne—thou can'st not sing like Catherine; therefore, I want nothing to do with thee. Away!"

Maitre Antoine fell back upon his bench, exhausted while Catherine uttered a loud cry of victory.

This cry acted like a signal—the orgie recommenced, where Agnes had interrupted it; and amid the howlings of the crowd she regained the steps leading to the street.

* Recueil de Johan Order, traduction Anglaise de Browne.