

would be ample time for them to return to Rouen before the Duke could have effected a junction with Mayenne; and time would be saved if he now secured the German cavalry. Though the visit to the Lady Gabrielle now formed but an unimportant object of their journey, yet the danger which Bellegarde dreaded, seemed in no way lessened. The Castle of Cœuvres was almost on the direct route; at all events it afforded the safest and most convenient resting place. It was the afternoon of the sixth day from their quitting Rouen, that the cavalcade, travel-soiled and worn, presenting any appearance rather than that of a company of knights engaged in an exploit of romantic gallantry, reached the little village before described, as lying in the valley below the Castle of Cœuvres. There their vanity bade them halt for a time, that they might, in some measure, recover from the fatigues of the journey, and array themselves in a mode better suited for entering a courtly hall, or lady's bower. And now that Bellegarde despaired, his prayers were answered, yet in a manner that could hardly diminish his sorrow. While they yet tarried in the village, they received the doleful intelligence that the good and noble Lady Margaret had that morning closed her eyes on earth and its sorrows. Delicacy of feeling, or even common courtesy, forbade them intruding at such a season.

With noble generosity, Henry dispensed with Bellegarde's services during the remainder of the journey, that he might share, and attempt to lighten, the sorrows of his betrothed. A tear which did not sully though it dimmed, started to Bellegarde's eye, as Henry announced his kindly purpose. He could have wept in his remorse and gratitude, that he had so mistrusted and harshly judged his noble master. Henry observed his emotion, and as he wrung his hand in parting, said:

"Perchance it is for the weal of France that we are not now permitted to behold the Lady Gabrielle; even though her beauty did not make the monarch a slave; it might draw from their allegiance hearts, with whose service France and her king could now but ill dispense."

CHAPTER VII.

WITHOUT entering into the details of a campaign, in which the object of the party of the League was to retard, and that of Henry, who could with difficulty hold together his mercenary and mutinous troops, to expedite, we pass an interval of some weeks. The king, designing to entrap the Duke of Parma, had disbanded his whole army, and dispersed them over the country. His own quarters were fixed at Louviers. It was at this

time, while waiting an opportunity to strike a decisive blow, that Henry, whose vigilance could be satisfied with nothing short of personal investigation, was at Mautes.

The day had been passed in a vexatious council, the members of which seemed to have but one fixed design, and that was in every way to thwart the plans and intentions of the king. Protestants and Catholics, French and Foreigners, though at variance on every other point, seemed united in this. Sick at heart, indignant that he should be obliged to make disgraceful and disadvantageous concessions, where he should have issued commands, Henry retired from their noise and clamour. His head ached with excitement and vexation, and the blood rolled like fire through his veins. It was now the twilight hour, and Henry, hoping that he might, in some measure, escape from thought, and calm his excited soul, determined to walk forth. That he might escape observation, which in his present mood he could ill brook, he wrapped a loose cloak about his person, whose ample folds fully attained their object, and drawing his cap down so as to effectually conceal his features, sallied forth. As he walked on in his haste, jostling and jostled, now by a beggar, now by a fit bourgeois, now by one of his own noisy and selfish counsellors, now by a private soldier, alike unheeded by all, Henry thought of fortune, and its gifts, of fortune, and its changes. In this musing mood, oblivious of all around, he proceeded till he found himself without the city, and beneath the walls of a venerable château. From its gardens the sweet scents of a thousand summer flowers were borne on the gentle gale. The last streak of daylight had faded from the west; already the moon, with her attendant train, had risen from the bosom of the silvery Rhine. Her beams lay, a bridge of quivering light, upon its waters. It was one of those scenes and hours of quiet beauty, which might well win from the contemplation of self and its sorrows, and fill the soul with high and holy meditation. But Henry's mind and eye were now alike blind to beauty. Careless or thoughtless of consequences, he entered the grounds belonging to the château. He wandered on till he reached the forest, through whose thickly interwoven branches the moonlight fell at intervals, in faint, straggling, melancholy rays. The gloom was congenial, and seating himself on a moss-grown stone, he buried his head in his mantle, and resigned himself to indignant thought. He might have remained an hour in this position, when he was roused from his reverie, by a voice whose tones he could never forget. It was indeed Gabrielle, and she sang that same hymn which before had awakened such deep emotion in Henry's