

that he had been one of the first instigators of the enterprise, the execution of which it was intended to entrust to Fabian. They endeavoured to calm him, but d'Hocquincourt was one of those men whom every endeavour to appease only irritates still more, until his choler has exhausted itself.

"We shall meet again, De Croissi!" he exclaimed vehemently; "and if any undue means have been used to induce this man to do any thing repugnant to his feelings, I, the marshal d'Hocquincourt, promise to support him in his refusal, even should our project fail entirely."

At this moment, the large door of the chamber was thrown wide open, and an usher announced "The Queen!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE QUEEN REGENT.

MARSHAL D'HOCQUINCOURT immediately ceased speaking, and all the assembly rose from their seats as Anne of Austria entered, accompanied only by Mademoiselle de Montglat. The Queen had just quitted the state apartments, and she still wore the rich costume in which she had presided in the court circle.

Fabian needed not the announcement of the usher to recognise in this imposing personage the Queen Regent of France. On seeing her appear thus proud and majestic, blazing with jewels, in all the splendor of royal parade, the poor country youth experienced a sentiment of respect approaching fear, and felt his courage fail for the accomplishment of his secret designs. His eyes eagerly sought the countenance of Elizabeth, but he saw nothing there to re-assure his mind. Mademoiselle de Montglat was still more pale than she had been in the morning; her features betrayed a profound and heavy grief; her eyes met those of Fabian, but they expressed nought but despair. It could not then be she who, in the ante-chamber, had promised him assistance; but who was this mysterious friend, powerful enough to promise protection, even in a palace?

"Heaven have you in its holy keeping, gentlemen!" said Anne of Austria, courteously answering the profound reverences of her councillors. "I trust you will pardon my delay. The frivolous frequenters of the Grand Gallery knew not that my most faithful and loyal subjects awaited me here; and never, believe me, has etiquette seemed to me so irksome as it has this evening."

After these general words, the Queen took her

place in the arm-chair reserved for her, and exchanged a few words in a low tone with each of those present. The Baron de Croissi came last; but the Regent seemed to listen to him very unwillingly, and she soon interrupted him.

"Tis well, Monsieur de Croissi," she said aloud; "I confide to you all the details of this project. But where is the young squire who was to lend us the aid of his arm? You told me, I believe, that I should find him here?"

"Behold him, Madam!" replied the Baron, taking his brother by the hand to conduct him before the Queen.

Anne of Austria bent upon Fabian that quick and penetrating look which characterised her; and almost immediately she turned to her maid of honour, who stood, pale and trembling, behind her chair.

"Thou hast shown excellent taste, Elizabeth!" she whispered in her ear, with a smile; "I am much pleased with the look of this gallant of thine."

Then, in a graver tone, she addressed Fabian: "Approach, young man! It gives me pleasure to see near me a gentleman who is reported as so faithful to my cause."

Fabian's first impressions past, he had readily overcome his trouble of mind, and, with a firm step and calm demeanor, he advanced and knelt before the Queen.

"Rise, sir!" said the Regent, graciously; "we have heard you spoken of as a bold and resolute cavalier."

"And I can affirm," interposed D'Hocquincourt, unceremoniously, "that Your Majesty, in this, has not been deceived. You may believe me, for I have seen him at work, no longer agone than yesterday, on the Pont-Neuf."

"Every one will admit Marshal d'Hocquincourt to be an excellent judge of courage," courteously replied the Queen; "and this young man ought to be proud of such testimony. But, at the present time, more is wanted than the brute courage which might lead one to face danger in a popular tumult, or in a battle-fray; the safety of the state sometimes requires another species of courage, and such we expect from our young champion. Shall our hopes be justified?"

Fabian had risen from his knee and now stood opposite the Queen's chair. The courtiers stood around with their looks fixed, by turns, on the Regent and on the young adventurer; the latter, whose early embarrassment had now given place to a noble boldness, now replied, with a respectful inclination:

"Is it not the duty of a subject to obey his