

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

Alfred de Vigny

Table of Contents

<u>Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5</u>	1
<u>Alfred de Vigny</u>	1
<u>BOOK 5</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. THE SECRET</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER XIX. THE HUNTING PARTY</u>	5
<u>CHAPTER XX. THE READING</u>	18
<u>CHAPTER XXI. THE CONFESSIONAL</u>	28

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- BOOK 5.
 - CHAPTER XVIII. THE SECRET
 - CHAPTER XIX. THE HUNTING PARTY
 - CHAPTER XX. THE READING
 - CHAPTER XXI. THE CONFESSIONAL

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BOOK 5.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE SECRET

De Thou had reached home with his friend; his doors were carefully shut, and orders given to admit no one, and to excuse him to the refugees for allowing them to depart without seeing them again; and as yet the two friends had not spoken to each other.

The counsellor had thrown himself into his armchair in deep meditation. Cinq-Mars, leaning against the lofty chimneypiece, awaited with a serious and sorrowful air the termination of this silence. At length De Thou, looking fixedly at him and crossing his arms, said in a hollow and melancholy voice:

"This, then, is the goal you have reached! These, the consequences of your ambition! You are about to banish, perhaps slay, a man, and to bring then, a foreign army into France; I am, then, to see you an assassin and a traitor to your country! By what tortuous paths have you arrived thus far? By what stages have you descended so low?"

"Any other than yourself would not speak thus to me twice," said Cinq-Mars, coldly; "but I know you, and I like this explanation. I desired it, and sought it. You shall see my entire soul. I had at first another thought, a better one perhaps, more worthy of our friendship, more worthy of friendship friendship, the second thing upon earth."

He raised his eyes to heaven as he spoke, as if he there sought the divinity.

"Yes, it would have been better. I intended to have said nothing to you on the subject. It was a painful task to keep silence; but hitherto I have succeeded. I wished to have conducted the whole enterprise without you; to show you only the finished work. I wished to keep you beyond the circle of my danger; but shall I confess my weakness? I feared to die, if I have to die, misjudged by you. I can well sustain the idea of the world's malediction, but not of yours; but this has decided me upon avowing all to you."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

"What! and but for this thought, you would have had the courage to conceal yourself forever from me? Ah, dear Henri, what have I done that you should take this care of my life? By what fault have I deserved to survive you, if you die? You have had the strength of mind to hoodwink me for two whole years; you have never shown me aught of your life but its flowers; you have never entered my solitude but with a joyous countenance, and each time with a fresh favor. Ah, you must be very guilty or very virtuous!"

"Do not seek in my soul more than therein lies. Yes, I have deceived you; and that fact was the only peace and joy I had in the world. Forgive me for having stolen these moments from my destiny, so brilliant, alas! I was happy in the happiness you supposed me to enjoy; I made you happy in that dream, and I am only guilty in that I am now about to destroy it, and to show myself as I was and am. Listen: I shall not detain you long; the story of an impassioned heart is ever simple. Once before, I remember, in my tent when I was wounded, my secret nearly escaped me; it would have been happy, perhaps, had it done so. Yet what would counsel have availed me? I should not have followed it. In a word, 'tis Marie de Mantua whom I love."

"How! she who is to be Queen of Poland?"

"If she is ever queen, it can only be after my death. But listen: for her I became a courtier; for her I have almost reigned in France; for her I am about to fall perhaps to die."

"Die! fall! when I have been reproaching your triumph! when I have wept over the sadness of your victory!"

"Ah! you know me but ill, if you suppose that I shall be the dupe of Fortune, when she smiles upon me; if you suppose that I have not pierced to the bottom of my destiny! I struggle against it, but 'tis the stronger I feel it. I have undertaken a task beyond human power; and I shall fail in it."

"Why, then, not stop? What is the use of intellect in the business of the world?"

"None; unless, indeed, it be to tell us the cause of our fall, and to enable us to foresee the day on which we shall fall. I can not now recede. When a man is confronted with such an enemy as Richelieu, he must overcome him or be crushed by him. Tomorrow I shall strike the last blow; did I not just now, in your presence, engage to do so?"

"And it is that very engagement that I would oppose. What confidence have you in those to whom you thus abandon your life? Have you not read their secret thoughts?"

"I know them all; I have read their hopes through their feigned rage; I know that they tremble while they threaten. I know that even now they are ready to make their peace by giving me up; but it is my part to sustain them and to decide the King. I must do it, for Marie is my betrothed, and my death is written at Narbonne. It is voluntarily, it is with full knowledge of my fate, that I have thus placed myself between the block and supreme happiness. That happiness I must tear from the hands of Fortune, or die on that scaffold. At this instant I experience the joy of having broken down all doubt. What! blush you not at having thought me ambitious from a base egoism, like this Cardinal ambitious from a puerile desire for a power which is never satisfied? I am ambitious, but it is because I love. Yes, I love; in that word all is comprised. But I accuse you unjustly. You have embellished my secret intentions; you have imparted to me noble designs (I remember them), high political conceptions. They are brilliant, they are grand, doubtless; but shall I say it to you? such vague projects for the perfecting of corrupt societies seem to me to crawl far below the devotion of love. When the whole soul vibrates with that one thought, it has no room for the nice calculation of general interests; the topmost heights of earth are far beneath heaven."

De Thou shook his head.

"What can I answer?" he said. "I do not understand you; your reasoning unreasons you. You hunt a shadow."

"Nay," continued Cinq-Mars; "far from destroying my strength, this inward fire has developed it. I have calculated everything. Slow steps have led me to the end which I am about to attain. Marie drew me by the hand; could I retreat? I would not have done it though a world faced me. Hitherto, all has gone well; but an invisible barrier arrests me. This barrier must be broken; it is Richelieu. But now in your presence I undertook to do this; but perhaps I was too hasty. I now think I was so. Let him rejoice; he expected me. Doubtless he foresaw that it would be the youngest whose patience would first fail. If he played on this calculation, he played well. Yet but for the love that has urged me on, I should have been stronger than he, and by just means."

Then a sudden change came over the face of Cinq-Mars. He turned pale and red twice; and the veins of his forehead rose like blue lines drawn by an invisible hand.

"Yes," he added, rising, and clasping together his hands with a force which indicated the violent despair concentrated in his heart, "all the torments with which love can tear its victims I have felt in my breast. This timid girl, for whom I would shake empires, for whom I have suffered all, even the favor of a prince, who perhaps has not felt all I have done for her, can not yet be mine. She is mine before God, yet I am estranged from her; nay, I must hear daily discussed before me which of the thrones of Europe will best suit her, in conversations wherein I may not even raise my voice to give an opinion, and in which they scorn as mate for her princes of the blood royal, who yet have precedence far before me. I must conceal myself like a culprit to hear through a grating the voice of her who is my wife; in public I must bow before her her husband, yet her servant! 'Tis too much; I can not live thus. I must take the last step, whether it elevate me or hurl me down."

"And for your personal happiness you would overthrow a State?"

"The happiness of the State is one with mine. I secure that undoubtedly in destroying the tyrant of the King. The horror with which this man inspires me has passed into my very blood. When I was first on my way to him, I encountered in my journey his greatest crime. He is the genius of evil for the unhappy King! I will exorcise him. I might have become the genius of good for Louis XIII. It was one of the thoughts of Marie, her most cherished thought. But I do not think I shall triumph in the uneasy soul of the Prince."

"Upon what do you rely, then?" said De Thou.

"Upon the cast of a die. If his will can but once last for a few hours, I have gained. 'Tis a last calculation on which my destiny hangs."

"And that of your Marie!"

"Could you suppose it?" said Cinq-Mars, impetuously. "No, no! If he abandons me, I sign the treaty with Spain, and then-war!"

"Ah, horror!" exclaimed the counsellor. "What, a war! a civil war, and a foreign alliance!"

"Ay, 'tis a crime," said Cinq-Mars, coldly; "but have I asked you to participate in it?"

"Cruel, ungrateful man!" replied his friend; "can you speak to me thus? Know you not, have I not proved to you, that friendship holds the place of every passion in my heart? Can I survive the least of your misfortunes, far less your death. Still, let me influence you not to strike France. Oh, my friend! my only friend! I implore you on my knees, let us not thus be parricides; let us not assassinate our country! I say us, because I will never separate myself from your actions. Preserve to me my self-esteem, for which I have labored so long; sully not my life and my death, which are both yours."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

De Thou had fallen at the feet of his friend, who, unable to preserve his affected coldness, threw himself into his arms, as he raised him, and, pressing him to his heart, said in a stifled voice:

"Why love me thus? What have you done, friend? Why love me? You who are wise, pure, and virtuous; you who are not led away by an insensate passion and the desire for vengeance; you whose soul is nourished only by religion and science why love me? What has my friendship given you but anxiety and pain? Must it now heap dangers on you? Separate yourself from me; we are no longer of the same nature. You see courts have corrupted me. I have no longer openness, no longer goodness. I meditate the ruin of a man; I can deceive a friend. Forget me, scorn me. I am not worthy of one of your thoughts; how should I be worthy of your perils?"

"By swearing to me not to betray the King and France," answered De Thou. "Know you that the preservation of your country is at stake; that if you yield to Spain our fortifications, she will never return them to us; that your name will be a byword with posterity; that French mothers will curse it when they shall be forced to teach their children a foreign language know you all this? Come."

And he drew him toward the bust of Louis XIII.

"Swear before him (he is your friend also), swear never to sign this infamous treaty."

Cinq-Mars lowered his eyes, but with dogged tenacity answered, although blushing as he did so:

"I have said it; if they force me to it, I will sign."

De Thou turned pale, and let fall his hand. He took two turns in his room, his arms crossed, in inexpressible anguish. At last he advanced solemnly toward the bust of his father, and opened a large book standing at its foot; he turned to a page already marked, and read aloud:

"I think, therefore, that M. de Ligneboeuf was justly condemned to death by the Parliament of Rouen, for not having revealed the conspiracy of Catteville against the State."

Then keeping the book respectfully opened in his hand, and contemplating the image of the President de Thou, whose Memoirs he held, he continued:

"Yes, my father, you thought well. . I shall be a criminal, I shall merit death; but can I do otherwise? I will not denounce this traitor, because that also would be treason; and he is my friend, and he is unhappy."

Then, advancing toward Cinq-Mars, and again taking his hand, he said:

"I do much for you in acting thus; but expect nothing further from me, Monsieur, if you sign this treaty."

Cinq-Mars was moved to the heart's core by this scene, for he felt all that his friend must suffer in casting him off. Checking, however, the tears which were rising to his smarting lids, and embracing De Thou tenderly, he exclaimed:

"Ah, De Thou, I find you still perfect. Yes, you do me a service in alienating yourself from me, for if your lot had been linked to mine, I should not have dared to dispose of my life. I should have hesitated to sacrifice it in case of need; but now I shall assuredly do so. And I repeat to you, if they force me, I shall sign the treaty with Spain."

CHAPTER XIX. THE HUNTING PARTY

Meanwhile the illness of Louis XIII threw France into the apprehension which unsettled States ever feel on the approach of the death of princes. Although Richelieu was the hub of the monarchy, he reigned only in the name of Louis, though enveloped with the splendor of the name which he had assumed. Absolute as he was over his master, Richelieu still feared him; and this fear reassured the nation against his ambitious desires, to which the King himself was the fixed barrier. But this prince dead, what would the imperious minister do? Where would a man stop who had already dared so much? Accustomed to wield the sceptre, who would prevent him from still holding it, and from subscribing his name alone to laws which he alone would dictate? These fears agitated all minds. The people in vain looked throughout the kingdom for those pillars of the nobility, at the feet of whom they had been wont to find shelter in political storms. They now only saw their recent tombs. Parliament was dumb; and men felt that nothing could be opposed to the monstrous growth of the Cardinal's usurping power. No one was entirely deceived by the affected sufferings of the minister. None was touched with that feigned agony which had too often deceived the public hope; and distance nowhere prevented the weight of the dreaded 'parvenu' from being felt.

The love of the people soon revived toward the son of Henri IV. They hastened to the churches; they prayed, and even wept. Unfortunate princes are always loved. The melancholy of Louis, and his mysterious sorrow interested all France; still living, they already regretted him, as if each man desired to be the depository of his troubles ere he carried away with him the grand mystery of what is suffered by men placed so high that they can see nothing before them but their tomb.

The King, wishing to reassure the whole nation, announced the temporary reestablishment of his health, and ordered the court to prepare for a grand hunting party to be given at Chambord a royal domain, whither his brother, the Duc d'Orleans, prayed him to return.

This beautiful abode was the favorite retreat of Louis, doubtless because, in harmony with his feelings, it combined grandeur with sadness. He often passed whole months there, without seeing any one whatsoever, incessantly reading and re-reading mysterious papers, writing unknown documents, which he locked up in an iron coffer, of which he alone had the key. He sometimes delighted in being served by a single domestic, and thus so to forget himself by the absence of his suite as to live for many days together like a poor man or an exiled citizen, loving to figure to himself misery or persecution, in order the better to enjoy royalty afterward. Another time he would be in a more entire solitude; and having forbidden any human creature to approach him, clothed in the habit of a monk, he would shut himself up in the vaulted chapel. There, reading the life of Charles V, he would imagine himself at St. Just, and chant over himself that mass for the dead which brought death upon the head of the Spanish monarch.

But in the midst of these very chants and meditations his feeble mind was pursued and distracted by contrary images. Never did life and the world appear to him more fair than in such times of solitude among the tombs. Between his eyes and the page which he endeavored to read passed brilliant processions, victorious armies, or nations transported with love. He saw himself powerful, combating, triumphant, adored; and if a ray of the sun through the large windows fell upon him, suddenly rising from the foot of the altar, he felt himself carried away by a thirst for daylight and the open air, which led him from his gloomy retreat. But returned to real life, he found there once more disgust and ennui, for the first men he met recalled his power to his recollection by their homage.

It was then that he believed in friendship, and summoned it to his side; but scarcely was he certain of its possession than unconquerable scruples suddenly seized upon his soul—scruples concerning a too powerful attachment to the creature, turning him from the Creator, and frequently inward reproaches for removing himself too much from the affairs of the State. The object of his momentary affection then seemed to him a despotic being, whose power drew him from his duties; but, unfortunately for his favorites, he had not the strength of mind

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

outwardly to manifest toward them the resentment he felt, and thus to warn them of their danger, but, continuing to caress them, he added by this constraint fuel to the secret fire of his heart, and was impelled to an absolute hatred of them. There were moments when he was capable of taking any measures against them.

Cinq-Mars knew perfectly the weakness of that mind, which could not keep firmly in any path, and the weakness of a heart which could neither wholly love nor wholly hate. Thus, the position of favorite, the envy of all France, the object of jealousy even on the part of the great minister, was so precarious and so painful that, but for his love, he would have burst his golden chains with greater joy than a galley-slave feels when he sees the last ring that for two long years he has been filing with a steel spring concealed in his mouth, fall to the earth. This impatience to meet the fate he saw so near hastened the explosion of that patiently prepared mine, as he had declared to his friend; but his situation was that of a man who, placed by the side of the book of life, should see hovering over it the hand which is to indite his damnation or his salvation. He set out with Louis to Chambord, resolved to take the first opportunity favorable to his design. It soon presented itself.

The very morning of the day appointed for the chase, the King sent word to him that he was waiting for him on the Escalier du Lys. It may not, perhaps, be out of place to speak of this astonishing construction.

Four leagues from Blois, and one league from the Loire, in a small and deep valley, between marshy swamps and a forest of large holm-oaks, far from any highroad, the traveller suddenly comes upon a royal, nay, a magic castle. It might be said that, compelled by some wonderful lamp, a genie of the East had carried it off during one of the "thousand and one nights," and had brought it from the country of the sun to hide it in the land of fogs and mist, for the dwelling of the mistress of a handsome prince.

Hidden like a treasure; with its blue domes, its elegant minarets rising from thick walls or shooting into the air, its long terraces overlooking the wood, its light spires bending with the wind, its terraces everywhere rising over its colonnades, one might there imagine one's self in the kingdom of Bagdad or of Cashmir, did not the blackened walls, with their covering of moss and ivy, and the pallid and melancholy hue of the sky, denote a rainy climate. It was indeed a genius who raised this building; but he came from Italy, and his name was Primaticcio. It was indeed a handsome prince whose amours were concealed in it; but he was a king, and he bore the name of Francois I. His salamander still spouts fire everywhere about it. It sparkles in a thousand places on the arched roofs, and multiplies the flames there like the stars of heaven; it supports the capitals with burning crowns; it colors the windows with its fires; it meanders up and down the secret staircases, and everywhere seems to devour with its flaming glances the triple crescent of a mysterious Diane that Diane de Poitiers, twice a goddess and twice adored in these voluptuous woods.

The base of this strange monument is like the monument itself, full of elegance and mystery; there is a double staircase, which rises in two interwoven spirals from the most remote foundations of the edifice up to the highest points, and ends in a lantern or small lattice-work cabinet, surmounted by a colossal fleur-de-lys, visible from a great distance. Two men may ascend it at the same moment, without seeing each other.

This staircase alone seems like a little isolated temple. Like our churches, it is sustained and protected by the arcades of its thin, light, transparent, openwork wings. One would think the docile stone had given itself to the finger of the architect; it seems, so to speak, kneaded according to the slightest caprice of his imagination. One can hardly conceive how the plans were traced, in what terms the orders were explained to the workmen. The whole thing appears a transient thought, a brilliant reverie that at once assumed a durable form—the realization of a dream.

Cinq-Mars was slowly ascending the broad stairs which led him to the King's presence, and stopping longer at each step, in proportion as he approached him, either from disgust at the idea of seeing the Prince whose daily complaints he had to hear, or thinking of what he was about to do, when the sound of a guitar struck his ear. He recognized the beloved instrument of Louis and his sad, feeble, and trembling voice faintly reechoing from the

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

vaulted ceiling. Louis seemed trying one of those romances which he was wont to compose, and several times repeated an incomplete strain with a trembling hand. The words could scarcely be distinguished; all that Cinq-Mars heard were a few such as 'Abandon, ennui de monde, et belle flamme.

The young favorite shrugged his shoulders as he listened.

"What new chagrin moves thee?" he said. "Come, let me again attempt to read that chilled heart which thinks it needs something."

He entered the narrow cabinet.

Clothed in black, half reclining on a couch, his elbows resting upon pillows, the Prince was languidly touching the chords of his guitar; he ceased this when he saw the grand ecuyer enter, and, raising his large eyes to him with an air of reproach, swayed his head to and fro for a long time without speaking. Then in a plaintive but emphatic tone, he said:

"What do I hear, Cinq-Mars? What do I hear of your conduct? How much you do pain me by forgetting all my counsels! You have formed a guilty intrigue; was it from you I was to expect such things you whom I so loved for your piety and virtue?"

Full of his political projects, Cinq-Mars thought himself discovered, and could not help a momentary anxiety; but, perfectly master of himself, he answered without hesitation:

"Yes, Sire; and I was about to declare it to you, for I am accustomed to open my soul to you."

"Declare it to me!" exclaimed the King, turning red and white, as under the shivering of a fever; "and you dare to contaminate my ears with these horrible avowals, Monsieur, and to speak so calmly of your disorder! Go! you deserve to be condemned to the galley, like Rondin; it is a crime of high treason you have committed in your want of faith toward me. I had rather you were a coiner, like the Marquis de Coucy, or at the head of the Croquants, than do as you have done; you dishonor your family, and the memory of the marechal your father."

Cinq-Mars, deeming himself wholly lost, put the best face he could upon the matter, and said with an air of resignation:

"Well, then, Sire, send me to be judged and put to death; but spare me your reproaches."

"Do you insult me, you petty country-squire?" answered Louis. "I know very well that you have not incurred the penalty of death in the eyes of men; but it is at the tribunal of God, Monsieur, that you will be judged."

"Heavens, Sire!" replied the impetuous young man, whom the insulting phrase of the King had offended, "why do you not allow me to return to the province you so much despise, as I have sought to do a hundred times? I will go there. I can not support the life I lead with you; an angel could not bear it. Once more, let me be judged if I am guilty, or allow me to return to Touraine. It is you who have ruined me in attaching me to your person. If you have caused me to conceive lofty hopes, which you afterward overthrew, is that my fault? Wherefore have you made me grand ecuyer, if I was not to rise higher? In a word, am I your friend or not? and, if I am, why may I not be duke, peer, or even constable, as well as Monsieur de Luynes, whom you loved so much because he trained falcons for you? Why am I not admitted to the council? I could speak as well as any of the old ruffs there; I have new ideas, and a better arm to serve you. It is your Cardinal who has prevented you from summoning me there. And it is because he keeps you from me that I detest him," continued Cinq-Mars, clinching his fist, as if Richelieu stood before him; "yes, I would kill him with my own hand, if need were."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

D'Effiat's eyes were inflamed with anger; he stamped his foot as he spoke, and turned his back to the King, like a sulky child, leaning against one of the columns of the cupola.

Louis, who recoiled before all resolution, and who was always terrified by the irreparable, took his hand.

O weakness of power! O caprices of the human heart! it was by this childish impetuosity, these very defects of his age, that this young man governed the King of France as effectually as did the first politician of the time. This Prince believed, and with some show of reason, that a character so hasty must be sincere; and even his fiery rage did not anger him. It did not apply to the real subject of his reproaches, and he could well pardon him for hating the Cardinal. The very idea of his favorite's jealousy of the minister pleased him, because it indicated attachment; and all he dreaded was his indifference. Cinq-Mars knew this, and had desired to make it a means of escape, preparing the King to regard all that he had done as child's play, as the consequence of his friendship for him; but the danger was not so great, and he breathed freely when the Prince said to him:

"The Cardinal is not in question here. I love him no more than you do; but it is with your scandalous conduct I reproach you, and which I shall have much difficulty to pardon in you. What, Monsieur! I learn that instead of devoting yourself to the pious exercises to which I have accustomed you, when I fancy you are at your Salut or your Angelus you are off from Saint Germain, and go to pass a portion of the night with whom? Dare I speak of it without sin? With a woman lost in reputation, who can have no relations with you but such as are pernicious to the safety of your soul, and who receives free-thinkers at her house in a word, Marion de Lorme. What have you to say? Speak."

Leaving his hand in that of the King, but still leaning against the column, Cinq-Mars answered:

"Is it then so culpable to leave grave occupations for others more serious still? If I go to the house of Marion de Lorme, it is to hear the conversation of the learned men who assemble there. Nothing is more harmless than these meetings. Readings are given there which, it is true, sometimes extend far into the night, but which commonly tend to exalt the soul, so far from corrupting it. Besides, you have never commanded me to account to you for all that I do; I should have informed you of this long ago if you had desired it."

"Ah, Cinq-Mars, Cinq-Mars! where is your confidence? Do you feel no need of it? It is the first condition of a perfect friendship, such as ours ought to be, such as my heart requires."

The voice of Louis became more affectionate, and the favorite, looking at him over his shoulder, assumed an air less angry, but still simply ennuye, and resigned to listening to him.

"How often have you deceived me!" continued the King; "can I trust myself to you? Are they not fops and gallants whom you meet at the house of this woman? Do not courtesans go there?"

"Heavens! no, Sire; I often go there with one of my friends a gentleman of Touraine, named Rene Descartes."

"Descartes! I know that name! Yes, he is an officer who distinguished himself at the siege of Rochelle, and who dabbles in writing; he has a good reputation for piety, but he is connected with Desbarreaux, who is a free-thinker. I am sure that you must mix with many persons who are not fit company for you, many young men without family, without birth. Come, tell me whom saw you last there?"

"Truly, I can scarcely remember their names," said Cinq-Mars, looking at the ceiling; "sometimes I do not even ask them. There was, in the first place, a certain Monsieur Monsieur Groot, or Grotius, a Hollander."

"I know him, a friend of Barnevelt; I pay him a pension. I liked him well enough; but the Card but I was told that he was a high Calvinist."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

"I also saw an Englishman, named John Milton; he is a young man just come from Italy, and is returning to London. He scarcely speaks at all."

"I don't know him not at all; but I'm sure he's some other Calvinist. And the Frenchmen, who were they?"

"The young man who wrote *Cinna*, and who has been thrice rejected at the *Academie Francaise*; he was angry that *Du Royer* occupied his place there. He is called *Corneille*."

"Well," said the King, folding his arms, and looking at him with an air of triumph and reproach, "I ask you who are these people? Is it in such a circle that you ought to be seen?"

Cinq-Mars was confounded at this observation, which hurt his self-pride, and, approaching the King, he said:

"You are right, Sire; but there can be no harm in passing an hour or two in listening to good conversation. Besides, many courtiers go there, such as the *Duc de Bouillon*, *Monsieur d'Aubijoux*, the *Comte de Brion*, the *Cardinal de la Vallette*, *Messieurs de Montresor*, *Fontrailles*; men illustrious in the sciences, as *Mairet*, *Colletet*, *Desmarets*, author of *Araine*; *Faret*, *Doujat*, *Charpentier*, who wrote the *Cyropedie*; *Giry*, *Besons*, and *Baro*, the continuer of *Astree* all academicians."

"Ah! now, indeed, here are men of real merit," said Louis; "there is nothing to be said against them. One can not but gain from their society. Theirs are settled reputations; they're men of weight. Come, let us make up; shake hands, child. I permit you to go there sometimes, but do not deceive me any more; you see I know all. Look at this."

So saying, the King took from a great iron chest set against the wall enormous packets of paper scribbled over with very fine writing. Upon one was written, *Baradas*, upon another, *D'Hautefort*, upon a third, *La Fayette*, and finally, *Cinq-Mars*. He stopped at the latter, and continued:

"See how many times you have deceived me! These are the continual faults of which I have myself kept a register during the two years I have known you; I have written out our conversations day by day. Sit down."

Cinq-Mars obeyed with a sigh, and had the patience for two long hours to listen to a summary of what his master had had the patience to write during the course of two years. He yawned many times during the reading, as no doubt we should all do, were it needful to report this dialogue, which was found in perfect order, with his will, at the death of the King. We shall only say that he finished thus:

"In fine, hear what you did on the seventh of December, three days ago. I was speaking to you of the flight of the hawk, and of the knowledge of hunting, in which you are deficient. I said to you, on the authority of *La Chasse Royale*, a work of King Charles IX, that after the hunter has accustomed his dog to follow a beast, he must consider him as of himself desirous of returning to the wood, and the dog must not be rebuked or struck in order to make him follow the track well; and that in order to teach a dog to set well, creatures that are not game must not be allowed to pass or run, nor must any scents be missed, without putting his nose to them.

"Hear what you replied to me (and in a tone of ill-humor mind that!) 'Ma foi! Sire, give me rather regiments to conduct than birds and dogs. I am sure that people would laugh at you and me if they knew how we occupy ourselves.' And on the eighth wait, yes, on the eighth while we were singing vespers together in my chambers, you threw your book angrily into the fire, which was an impiety; and afterward you told me that you had let it drop a sin, a mortal sin. See, I have written below, lie, underlined. People never deceive me, I assure you."

"But, Sire "

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

"Wait a moment! wait a moment! In the evening you told me the Cardinal had burned a man unjustly, and out of personal hatred."

"And I repeat it, and maintain it, and will prove it, Sire. It is the greatest crime of all of that man whom you hesitate to disgrace, and who renders you unhappy. I myself saw all, heard, all, at Loudun. Urbain Grandier was assassinated, rather than tried. Hold, Sire, since you have there all those memoranda in your own hand, merely reperuse the proofs which I then gave you of it."

Louis, seeking the page indicated, and going back to the journey from Perpignan to Paris, read the whole narrative with attention, exclaiming:

"What horrors! How is it that I have forgotten all this? This man fascinates me; that's certain. You are my true friend, Cinq-Mars. What horrors! My reign will be stained by them. What! he prevented the letters of all the nobility and notables of the district from reaching me! Burn, burn alive! without proofs! for revenge! A man, a people have invoked my name in vain; a family curses me! Oh, how unhappy are kings!"

And the Prince, as he concluded, threw aside his papers and wept.

"Ah, Sire, those are blessed tears that you weep!" exclaimed Cinq-Mars, with sincere admiration. "Would that all France were here with me! She would be astonished at this spectacle, and would scarcely believe it."

"Astonished! France, then, does not know me?"

"No, Sire," said D'Effiat, frankly; "no one knows you. And I myself, with the rest of the world, at times accuse you of coldness and indifference."

"Of coldness, when I am dying with sorrow! Of coldness, when I have immolated myself to their interests! Ungrateful nation! I have sacrificed all to it, even pride, even the happiness of guiding it myself, because I feared on its account for my fluctuating life. I have given my sceptre to be borne by a man I hate, because I believed his hand to be stronger than my own. I have endured the ill he has done to myself, thinking that he did good to my people. I have hidden my own tears to dry theirs; and I see that my sacrifice has been even greater than I thought it, for they have not perceived it. They have believed me incapable because I was kind, and without power because I mistrusted my own. But, no matter! God sees and knows me!"

"Ah, Sire, show yourself to France such as you are; reassume your usurped power. France will do for your love what she would never do from fear. Return to life, and reascend the throne."

"No, no; my life is well-nigh finished, my dear friend. I am no longer capable of the labor of supreme command.'
"Ah, Sire, this persuasion alone destroys your vigor. It is time that men should cease to confound power with crime, and call this union genius. Let your voice be heard proclaiming to the world that the reign of virtue is about to begin with your own; and hence forth those enemies whom vice has so much difficulty in suppressing will fall before a word uttered from your heart. No one has as yet calculated all that the good faith of a king of France may do for his people that people who are drawn so instantaneously to ward all that is good and beautiful, by their imagination and warmth of soul, and who are always ready with every kind of devotion. The King, your father, led us with a smile. What would not one of your tears do?"

During this address the King, very much surprised, frequently reddened, hemmed, and gave signs of great embarrassment, as always happened when any attempt was made to bring him to a decision. He also felt the approach of a conversation of too high an order, which the timidity of his soul forbade him to venture upon; and repeatedly putting his hand to his chest, knitting his brows as if suffering violent pain, he endeavored to relieve himself by the apparent attack of illness from the embarrassment of answering. But, either from passion, or from a

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

resolution to strike the crowning blow, Cinq-Mars went on calmly and with a solemnity that awed Louis, who, forced into his last intrenchments, at length said:

"But, Cinq-Mars, how can I rid myself of a minister who for eighteen years past has surrounded me with his creatures?"

"He is not so very powerful," replied the grand ecuyer; "and his friends will be his most sure enemies if you but make a sign of your head. The ancient league of the princes of peace still exists, Sire, and it is only the respect due to the choice of your Majesty that prevents it from manifesting itself."

"Ah, mon Dieu! thou mayst tell them not to stop on my account. I would not restrain them; they surely do not accuse me of being a Cardinalist. If my brother will give me the means of replacing Richelieu, I will adopt them with all my heart."

"I believe, Sire, that he will to-day speak to you of Monsieur le Duc de Bouillon. All the Royalists demand him."

"I don't dislike him," said the King, arranging his pillows; "I don't dislike him at all, although he is somewhat factious. We are relatives. Knowest thou, *chez ami*" and he placed on this favorite expression more emphasis than usual "knowest thou that he is descended in direct line from Saint Louis, by Charlotte de Bourbon, daughter of the Duc de Montpensier? Knowest thou that seven princes of the blood royal have been united to his house; and eight daughters of his family, one of whom was a queen, have been married to princes of the blood royal? Oh, I don't at all dislike him! I have never said so, never!"

"Well, Sire," said Cinq-Mars, with confidence, "Monsieur and he will explain to you during the hunt how all is prepared, who are the men that may be put in the place of his creatures, who the field-m Marshals and the colonels who may be depended upon against Fabert and the Cardinalists of Perpignan. You will see that the minister has very few for him."

"The Queen, Monsieur, the nobility, and the parliaments are on our side; and the thing is done from the moment that your Majesty is not opposed to it. It has been proposed to get rid of the Cardinal as the Marechal d'Ancre was got rid of, who deserved it less than he."

"As Concini?" said the King. "Oh, no, it must not be. I positively can not consent to it. He is a priest and a cardinal. We shall be excommunicated. But if there be any other means, I am very willing."

Thou mayest speak of it to thy friends; and I on my side will think of the matter."

The word once spoken, the King gave himself up to his resentment, as if he had satisfied it, as if the blow were already struck. Cinq-Mars was vexed to see this, for he feared that his anger thus vented might not be of long duration. However, he put faith in his last words, especially when, after numberless complaints, Louis added:

"And would you believe that though now for two years I have mourned my mother, ever since that day when he so cruelly mocked me before my whole court by asking for her recall when he knew she was dead ever since that day I have been trying in vain to get them to bury her in France with my fathers? He has exiled even her ashes."

At this moment Cinq-Mars thought he heard a sound on the staircase; the King reddened.

"Go," he said; "go! Make haste and prepare for the hunt! Thou wilt ride next to my carriage. Go quickly! I desire it; go!"

And he himself pushed Cinq-Mars toward the entrance by which he had come.

The favorite went out; but his master's anxiety had not escaped him.

He slowly descended, and tried to divine the cause of it in his mind, when he thought he heard the sound of feet ascending the other staircase. He stopped; they stopped. He re-ascended; they seemed to him to descend. He knew that nothing could be seen between the interstices of the architecture; and he quitted the place, impatient and very uneasy, and determined to remain at the door of the entrance to see who should come out. But he had scarcely raised the tapestry which veiled the entrance to the guardroom than he was surrounded by a crowd of courtiers who had been awaiting him, and was fain to proceed to the work of issuing the orders connected with his post, or to receive respects, communications, solicitations, presentations, recommendations, embraces to observe that infinitude of relations which surround a favorite, and which require constant and sustained attention, for any absence of mind might cause great misfortunes. He thus almost forgot the trifling circumstance which had made him uneasy, and which he thought might after all have only been a freak of the imagination. Giving himself up to the sweets of a kind of continual apotheosis, he mounted his horse in the great courtyard, attended by noble pages, and surrounded by brilliant gentlemen.

Monsieur soon arrived, followed by his people; and in an hour the King appeared, pale, languishing, and supported by four men. Cinq-Mars, dismounting, assisted him into a kind of small and very low carriage, called a brouette, and the horses of which, very docile and quiet ones, the King himself drove. The prickers on foot at the doors held the dogs in leash; and at the sound of the horn scores of young nobles mounted, and all set out to the place of meeting.

It was a farm called L'Ormage that the King had fixed upon; and the court, accustomed to his ways, followed the many roads of the park, while the King slowly followed an isolated path, having at his side the grand ecuyer and four persons whom he had signed to approach him.

The aspect of this pleasure party was sinister. The approach of winter had stripped well-nigh all the leaves from the great oaks in the park, whose dark branches now stood up against a gray sky, like branches of funereal candelabra. A light fog seemed to indicate rain; through the melancholy boughs of the thinned wood the heavy carriages of the court were seen slowly passing on, filled with women, uniformly dressed in black, and obliged to await the result of a chase which they did not witness. The distant hounds gave tongue, and the horn was sometimes faintly heard like a sigh. A cold, cutting wind compelled every man to don cloaks, and some of the women, putting over their faces a veil or mask of black velvet to keep themselves from the air which the curtains of their carriages did not intercept (for there were no glasses at that time), seemed to wear what is called a domino. All was languishing and sad. The only relief was that ever and anon groups of young men in the excitement of the chase flew down the avenue like the wind, cheering on the dogs or sounding their horns. Then all again became silent, as after the discharge of fireworks the sky appears darker than before.

In a path, parallel with that followed by the King, were several courtiers enveloped in their cloaks. Appearing little intent upon the stag, they rode step for step with the King's brouette, and never lost sight of him. They conversed in low tones.

"Excellent! Fontrailles, excellent! victory! The King takes his arm every moment. See how he smiles upon him! See! Monsieur le Grand dismounts and gets into the brouette by his side. Come, come, the old fox is done at last!"

"Ah, that's nothing! Did you not see how the King shook hands with Monsieur? He's made a sign to you, Montresor. Look, Gondi!"

"Look, indeed! That's very easy to say; but I don't see with my own eyes. I have only those of faith, and yours. Well, what are they doing now? I wish to Heaven I were not so near-sighted! Tell me, what are they doing?"

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

Montresor answered, "The King bends his ear toward the Duc de Bouillon, who is speaking to him; he speaks again! he gesticulates! he does not cease! Oh, he'll be minister!"

"He will be minister!" said Fontrailles.

"He will be minister!" echoed the Comte du Lude.

"Oh, no doubt of it!" said Montresor.

"I hope he'll give me a regiment, and I'll marry my cousin," cried Olivier d'Entraigues, with boyish vivacity.

The Abbe de Gondi sneered, and, looking up at the sky, began to sing to a hunting tune.

"Les etourneaux ont le vent bon,
Ton ton, ton ton, ton taine, ton ton

"I think, gentlemen, you are more short-sighted than I, or else miracles will come to pass in the year of grace 1642; for Monsieur de Bouillon is no nearer being Prime-Minister, though the King do embrace him, than I. He has good qualities, but he will not do; his qualities are not various enough. However, I have much respect for his great and singularly foolish town of Sedan, which is a fine shelter in case of need."

Montresor and the rest were too attentive to every gesture of the Prince to answer him; and they continued:

"See, Monsieur le Grand takes the reins, and is driving."

The Abbe replied with the same air:

"Si vous conduisez ma brouette,
Ne versez pas, beau postillon,
Ton ton, ton ton, ton taine, ton ton."

"Ah, Abbe0-, your songs will drive me mad!" said Fontrailles. "You've got airs ready for every event in life."

"I will also find you events which shall go to all the airs," answered Gondi.

"Faith, the air of these pleases me!" said Fontrailles, in an under voice. "I shall not be obliged by Monsieur to carry his confounded treaty to Madrid, and I am not sorry for it; it is a somewhat touchy commission. The Pyrenees are not so easily passed as may be supposed; the Cardinal is on the road."

"Ha! Ha!" cried Montresor.

"Ha! Ha!" said Olivier.

"Well, what is the matter with you? ah, ah!" asked Gondi. "What have you discovered that is so great?"

"Why, the King has again shaken hands with Monsieur. Thank Heaven, gentlemen, we're rid of the Cardinal! The old boar is hunted down. Who will stick the knife into him? He must be thrown into the sea."

"That's too good for him," said Olivier; "he must be tried."

"Certainly," said the Abbe; "and we sha'n't want for charges against an insolent fellow who has dared to discharge a page, shall we?" Then, curbing his horse, and letting Olivier and Montresor pass on, he leaned toward M. du

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

Lude, who was talking with two other serious personages, and said:

"In truth, I am tempted to let my valet-de-chambre into the secret; never was a conspiracy treated so lightly. Great enterprises require mystery. This would be an admirable one if some trouble were taken with it. 'Tis in itself a finer one than I have ever read of in history. There is stuff enough in it to upset three kingdoms, if necessary, and the blockheads will spoil all. It is really a pity. I should be very sorry. I've a taste for affairs of this kind; and in this one in particular I feel a special interest. There is grandeur about it, as can not be denied. Do you not think so, D'Aubijoux, Montmort?"

While he was speaking, several large and heavy carriages, with six and four horses, followed the same path at two hundred paces behind these gentlemen; the curtains were open on the left side through which to see the King. In the first was the Queen; she was alone at the back, clothed in black and veiled. On the box was the Marechale d'Effiat; and at the feet of the Queen was the Princesse Marie. Seated on one side on a stool, her robe and her feet hung out of the carriage, and were supported by a gilt step for, as we have already observed, there were then no doors to the coaches. She also tried to see through the trees the movements of the King, and often leaned back, annoyed by the passing of the Prince-Palatine and his suite.

This northern Prince was sent by the King of Poland, apparently on a political negotiation, but in reality, to induce the Duchesse de Mantua to espouse the old King Uladislas VI; and he displayed at the court of France all the luxury of his own, then called at Paris "barbarian and Scythian," and so far justified these names by strange eastern costumes. The Palatine of Posnanian was very handsome, and wore, in common with the people of his suite, a long, thick beard. His head, shaved like that of a Turk, was covered with a furred cap. He had a short vest, enriched with diamonds and rubies; his horse was painted red, and amply plumed. He was attended by a company of Polish guards in red and yellow uniforms, wearing large cloaks with long sleeves, which hung negligently from the shoulder. The Polish lords who escorted him were dressed in gold and silver brocade; and behind their shaved heads floated a single lock of hair, which gave them an Asiatic and Tartar aspect, as unknown at the court of Louis XIII as that of the Moscovites. The women thought all this rather savage and alarming.

Marie de Mantua was importuned with the profound salutations and Oriental elegancies of this foreigner and his suite. Whenever he passed before her, he thought himself called upon to address a compliment to her in broken French, awkwardly made up of a few words about hope and royalty. She found no other means to rid herself of him than by repeatedly putting her handkerchief to her nose, and saying aloud to the Queen:

"In truth, Madame, these gentlemen have an odor about them that makes one quite ill."

"It will be desirable to strengthen your nerves and accustom yourself to it," answered Anne of Austria, somewhat dryly.

Then, fearing she had hurt her feelings, she continued gayly:

"You will become used to them, as we have done; and you know that in respect to odors I am rather fastidious. Monsieur Mazarin told me, the other day, that my punishment in purgatory will consist in breathing ill scents and sleeping in Russian cloth."

Yet the Queen was very grave, and soon subsided into silence. Burying herself in her carriage, enveloped in her mantle, and apparently taking no interest in what was passing around her, she yielded to the motion of the carriage. Marie, still occupied with the King, talked in a low voice with the Marechale d'Effiat; each sought to give the other hopes which neither felt, and sought to deceive each other out of love.

"Madame, I congratulate you; Monsieur le Grand is seated with the King. Never has he been so highly distinguished," said Marie.

Then she was silent for a long time, and the carriage rolled mournfully over the dead, dry leaves.

"Yes, I see it with joy; the King is so good!" answered the Marechale.

And she sighed deeply.

A long and sad silence again followed; each looked at the other and mutually found their eyes full of tears. They dared not speak again; and Marie, drooping her head, saw nothing but the brown, damp earth scattered by the wheels. A melancholy revery occupied her mind; and although she had before her the spectacle of the first court of Europe at the feet of him she loved, everything inspired her with fear, and dark presentiments involuntarily agitated her.

Suddenly a horse passed by her like the wind; she raised her eyes, and had just time to see the features of Cinq-Mars. He did not look at her; he was pale as a corpse, and his eyes were hidden under his knitted brows and the shadows of his lowered hat. She followed him with trembling eyes; she saw him stop in the midst of the group of cavaliers who preceded the carriages, and who received him with their hats off.

A moment after he went into the wood with one of them, looking at her from the distance, and following her with his eyes until the carriage had passed; then he seemed to give the man a roll of papers, and disappeared. The mist which was falling prevented her from seeing him any more. It was, indeed, one of those fogs so frequent on the banks of the Loire.

The sun looked at first like a small blood-red moon, enveloped in a tattered shroud, and within half an hour was concealed under so thick a cloud that Marie could scarcely distinguish the foremost horses of the carriage, while the men who passed at the distance of a few paces looked like grizzly shadows. This icy vapor turned to a penetrating rain and at the same time a cloud of fetid odor. The Queen made the beautiful Princess sit beside her; and they turned toward Chambord quickly and in silence. They soon heard the horns recalling the scattered hounds; the huntsmen passed rapidly by the carriage, seeking their way through the fog, and calling to each other. Marie saw only now and then the head of a horse, or a dark body half issuing from the gloomy vapor of the woods, and tried in vain to distinguish any words. At length her heart beat; there was a call for M. de Cinq-Mars.

"The King asks for Monsieur le Grand," was repeated about; "where can Monsieur le Grand Ecuyer be gone to?"

A voice, passing near, said, "He has just lost himself."

These simple words made her shudder, for her afflicted spirit gave them the most sinister meaning. The terrible thought pursued her to the chateau and into her apartments, wherein she hastened to shut herself. She soon heard the noise of the entry of the King and of Monsieur, then, in the forest, some shots whose flash was unseen. She in vain looked at the narrow windows; they seemed covered on the outside with a white cloth that shut out the light.

Meanwhile, at the extremity of the forest, toward Montfauult, there had lost themselves two cavaliers, wearied with seeking the way to the chateau in the monotonous similarity of the trees and paths; they were about to stop near a pond, when eight or nine men, springing from the thickets, rushed upon them, and before they had time to draw, hung to their legs and arms and to the bridles of their horses in such a manner as to hold them fixed. At the same time a hoarse voice cried in the fog:

"Are you Royalists or Cardinalists? Cry, 'Vive le Grand!' or you are dead men!"

"Scoundrels," answered the first cavalier, trying to open the holsters of his pistols, "I will have you hanged for abusing my name."

"Dios es el Señor!" cried the same voice.

All the men immediately released their hold, and ran into the wood; a burst of savage laughter was heard, and a man approached Cinq-Mars.

"Amigo, do you not recognize me? 'Tis but a joke of Jacques, the Spanish captain."

Fontrailles approached, and said in a low voice to the grand ecuyer:

"Monsieur, this is an enterprising fellow; I would advise you to employ him. We must neglect no chance."

"Listen to me," said Jacques de Laubardemont, "and answer at once. I am not a phrase-maker, like my father. I bear in mind that you have done me some good offices; and lately again, you have been useful to me, as you always are, without knowing it, for I have somewhat repaired my fortune in your little insurrections. If you will, I can render you an important service; I command a few brave men."

"What service?" asked Cinq-Mars. "We will see."

"I commence by a piece of information. This morning while you descended the King's staircase on one side, Father Joseph ascended the other."

"Ha! this, then, is the secret of his sudden and inexplicable change! Can it be? A king of France! and to allow us to confide all our secrets to him."

"Well! is that all? Do you say nothing? You know I have an old account to settle with the Capuchin."

"What's that to me?" and he hung down his head, absorbed in a profound revery.

"It matters a great deal to you, since you have only to speak the word, and I will rid you of him before thirty-six hours from this time, though he is now very near Paris. We might even add the Cardinal, if you wish."

"Leave me; I will use no poniards," said Cinq-Mars.

"Ah! I understand you," replied Jacques. "You are right; you would prefer our despatching him with the sword. This is just. He is worth it; 'tis a distinction due to him. It were undoubtedly more suitable for great lords to take charge of the Cardinal; and that he who despatches his Eminence should be in a fair way to be a marechal. For myself, I am not proud; one must not be proud, whatever one's merit in one's profession. I must not touch the Cardinal; he's a morsel for a king!"

"Nor any others," said the grand ecuyer.

"Oh, let us have the Capuchin!" said Captain Jacques, urgently.

"You are wrong if you refuse this office," said Fontrailles; "such things occur every day. Vitry began with Concini; and he was made a marechal. You see men extremely well at court who have killed their enemies with their own hands in the streets of Paris, and you hesitate to rid yourself of a villain! Richelieu has his agents; you must have yours. I can not understand your scruples."

"Do not torment him," said Jacques, abruptly; "I understand it. I thought as he does when I was a boy, before reason came. I would not have killed even a monk; but let me speak to him." Then, turning toward Cinq-Mars, "Listen: when men conspire, they seek the death or at least the downfall of some one, eh?"

And he paused.

"Now in that case, we are out with God, and in with the Devil, eh?"

"Secundo, as they say at the Sorbonne; it's no worse when one is damned, to be so for much than for little, eh?"

"Ergo, it is indifferent whether a thousand or one be killed. I defy you to answer that."

"Nothing could be better argued, Doctor-dagger," said Fontrailles, half-laughing, "I see you will be a good travelling-companion. You shall go with me to Spain if you like."

"I know you are going to take the treaty there," answered Jacques; "and I will guide you through the Pyrenees by roads unknown to man. But I shall be horribly vexed to go away without having wrung the neck of that old he-goat, whom we leave behind, like a knight in the midst of a game of chess. Once more Monsieur," he continued with an air of pious earnestness, "if you have any religion in you, refuse no longer; recollect the words of our theological fathers, Hurtado de Mendoza and Sanchez, who have proved that a man may secretly kill his enemies, since by this means he avoids two sins that of exposing his life, and that of fighting a duel. It is in accordance with this grand consolatory principle that I have always acted."

"Go, go!" said Cinq-Mars, in a voice thick with rage; "I have other things to think of."

"Of what more important?" said Fontrailles; "this might be a great weight in the balance of our destinies."

"I am thinking how much the heart of a king weighs in it," said Cinq-Mars.

"You terrify me," replied the gentleman; "we can not go so far as that!"

"Nor do I think what you suppose, Monsieur," continued D'Effiat, in a severe tone. "I was merely reflecting how kings complain when a subject betrays them. Well, war! war! civil war, foreign war, let your fires be kindled! since I hold the match, I will apply it to the mine. Perish the State! perish twenty kingdoms, if necessary! No ordinary calamities suffice when the King betrays the subject. Listen to me."

And he took Fontrailles a few steps aside.

"I only charged you to prepare our retreat and succors, in case of abandonment on the part of the King. Just now I foresaw this abandonment in his forced manifestation of friendship; and I decided upon your setting out when he finished his conversation by announcing his departure for Perpignan. I feared Narbonne; I now see that he is going there to deliver himself up a prisoner to the Cardinal. Go at once. I add to the letters I have given you the treaty here; it is in fictitious names, but here is the counterpart, signed by Monsieur, by the Duc de Bouillon, and by me. The Count-Duke of Olivares desires nothing further. There are blanks for the Duc d'Orleans, which you will fill up as you please. Go; in a month I shall expect you at Perpignan. I will have Sedan opened to the seventeen thousand Spaniards from Flanders."

Then, advancing toward the adventurer, who awaited him, he said:

"For you, brave fellow, since you desire to aid me, I charge you with escorting this gentleman to Madrid; you will be largely recompensed."

Jacques, twisting his moustache, replied:

"Ah, you do not then scorn to employ me! you exhibit your judgment and taste. Do you know that the great Queen Christina of Sweden has asked for me, and wished to have me with her as her confidential man. She was brought up to the sound of the cannon by the 'Lion of the North,' Gustavus Adolphus, her father. She loves the smell of powder and brave men; but I would not serve her, because she is a Huguenot, and I have fixed principles, from which I never swerve. 'Par exemple', I swear to you by Saint Jacques to guide Monsieur through the passes of the Pyrenees to Oleron as surely as through these woods, and to defend him against the Devil, if need be, as well as your papers, which we will bring you back without blot or tear. As for recompense, I want none. I always find it in the action itself. Besides, I do not receive money, for I am a gentleman. The Laubardemonts are a very ancient and very good family." "Adieu, then, noble Monsieur," said Cinq-Mars; go!"

After having pressed the hand of Fontrailles, he sighed and disappeared in the wood, on his return to the chateau of Chambord.

CHAPTER XX. THE READING

Shortly after the events just narrated, at the corner of the Palais-Royal, at a small and pretty house, numerous carriages were seen to draw up, and a door, reached by three steps, frequently to open. The neighbors often came to their windows to complain of the noise made at so late an hour of the night, despite the fear of robbers; and the patrol often stopped in surprise, and passed on only when they saw at each carriage ten or twelve footmen, armed with staves and carrying torches. A young gentleman, followed by three lackeys, entered and asked for Mademoiselle de Lorme. He wore a long rapier, ornamented with pink ribbon. Enormous bows of the same color on his high-heeled shoes almost entirely concealed his feet, which after the fashion of the day he turned very much out. He frequently twisted a small curling moustache, and before entering combed his small pointed beard. There was but one exclamation when he was announced.

"Here he is at last!" cried a young and rich voice. "He has made us wait long enough for him, the dear Desbarreaux. Come, take a seat! place yourself at this table and read."

The speaker was a woman of about four-and-twenty, tall and handsome, notwithstanding her somewhat woolly black hair and her dark olive complexion. There was something masculine in her manner, which she seemed to derive from her circle, composed entirely of men. She took their arm unceremoniously, as she spoke to them, with a freedom which she communicated to them. Her conversation was animated rather than joyous. It often excited laughter around her; but it was by dint of intellect that she created gayety (if we may so express it), for her countenance, impassioned as it was, seemed incapable of bending into a smile, and her large blue eyes, under her jet-black hair, gave her at first rather a strange appearance.

Desbarreaux kissed her hand with a gallant and chivalrous air. He then, talking to her all the time, walked round the large room, where were assembled nearly thirty persons—some seated in the large arm chairs, others standing in the vast chimney-place, others conversing in the embrasures of the windows under the heavy curtains. Some of them were obscure men, now illustrious; others illustrious men, now obscure for posterity. Thus, among the latter, he profoundly saluted MM. d'Aubijoux, de Brion, de Montmort, and other very brilliant gentlemen, who were there as judges; tenderly, and with an air of esteem, pressed the hands of MM. Monteruel, de Sirmond, de Malleville, Baro, Gombauld, and other learned men, almost all called great men in the annals of the Academy of which they were the founders itself called sometimes the Academic des Beaux Esprits, but really the Academic Francaise. But M. Desbarreaux gave but a mere patronizing nod to young Corneille, who was talking in a corner with a foreigner, and with a young man whom he presented to the mistress of the house by the name of M. Poquelin, son of the 'valet-de-chambre tapissier du roi'. The foreigner was Milton; the young man was Moliere.

Before the reading expected from the young Sybarite, a great contest arose between him and other poets and prose writers of the time. They spoke to each other with great volubility and animation a language incomprehensible to

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

any one who should suddenly have come among them without being initiated, eagerly pressing each other's hands with affectionate compliments and infinite allusions to their works.

"Ah, here you are, illustrious Baro!" cried the newcomer. "I have read your last sixain. Ah, what a sixain! how full of the gallant and the tendre?"

"What is that you say of the tendre?" interrupted Marion de Lorme; "have you ever seen that country? You stopped at the village of Grand-Esprit, and at that of Jolis-Vers, but you have been no farther. If Monsieur le Gouverneur de Notre Dame de la Garde will please to show us his new chart, I will tell you where you are."

Scudery arose with a vainglorious and pedantic air; and, unrolling upon the table a sort of geographical chart tied with blue ribbons, he himself showed the lines of red ink which he had traced upon it.

"This is the finest piece of Clelie," he said. "This chart is generally found very gallant; but 'tis merely a slight ebullition of playful wit, to please our little literary cabale. However, as there are strange people in the world, it is possible that all who see it may not have minds sufficiently well turned to understand it. This is the road which must be followed to go from Nouvelle-Amitie to Tendre; and observe, gentlemen, that as we say Cumae-on-the-Ionian-Sea, Cuma;-on-the-Tyrrhean-Sea, we shall say Tendre-sur-Inclination, Tendre-sur-Estime, and Tendre-sur-Reconnaissance. We must begin by inhabiting the village of Grand-Coeur, Generosity, Exactitude, and Petits-Soins."

"Ah! how very pretty!" interposed Desbarreaux. "See the villages marked out; here is Petits-Soins, Billet-Galant, then Billet-Doux!"

"Oh! 'tis ingenious in the highest degree!" cried Vaugelas, Colletet, and the rest.

"And observe," continued the author, inflated with this success, "that it is necessary to pass through Complaisance and Sensibility; and that if we do not take this road, we run the risk of losing our way to Tiedeur, Oubli, and of falling into the Lake of Indifference."

"Delicious! delicious! 'gallant au supreme!'" cried the auditors; "never was greater genius!"

"Well, Madame," resumed Scudery, "I now declare it in your house: this work, printed under my name, is by my sister she who translated 'Sappho' so agreeably." And without being asked, he recited in a declamatory tone verses ending thus:

L'Amour est un mal agreable
Don't mon coeur ne saurait guerir;
Mais quand il serait guerissable,
Il est bien plus doux d'en mourir.

"How! had that Greek so much wit? I can not believe it," exclaimed Marion de Lorme; "how superior Mademoiselle de Scudery is to her! That idea is wholly hers; she must unquestionably put these charming verses into 'Clelie'. They will figure well in that Roman history."

"Admirable, perfect!" cried all the savans; "Horatius, Aruns, and the amiable Porsenna are such gallant lovers."

They were all bending over the "carte de Tendre," and their fingers crossed in following the windings of the amorous rivers. The young Poquelin ventured to raise a timid voice and his melancholy but acute glance, and said:

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

"What purpose does this serve? Is it to give happiness or pleasure? Monsieur seems to me not singularly happy, and I do not feel very gay."

The only reply he got was a general look of contempt; he consoled himself by meditating, 'Les Precieuses Ridicules'.

Desbarreaux prepared to read a pious sonnet, which he was penitent for having composed in an illness; he seemed to be ashamed of having thought for a moment upon God at the sight of his lightning, and blushed at the weakness. The mistress of the house stopped him.

"It is not yet time to read your beautiful verses; you would be interrupted. We expect Monsieur le Grand Ecuyer and other gentlemen; it would be actual murder to allow a great mind to speak during this noise and confusion. But here is a young Englishman who has just come from Italy, and is on his return to London. They tell me he has composed a poem I don't know what; but he'll repeat some verses of it. Many of you gentlemen of the Academy know English; and for the rest he has had the passages he is going to read translated by an ex-secretary of the Duke of Buckingham, and here are copies in French on this table."

So saying, she took them and distributed them among her erudite visitors. The company seated themselves, and were silent. It took some time to persuade the young foreigner to speak or to quit the recess of the window, where he seemed to have come to a very good understanding with Corneille. He at last advanced to an armchair placed near the table; he seemed of feeble health, and fell into, rather than seated himself in, the chair. He rested his elbow on the table, and with his hand covered his large and beautiful eyes, which were half closed, and reddened with nightwatches or tears. He repeated his fragments from memory. His doubting auditors looked at him haughtily, or at least patronizingly; others carelessly glanced over the translation of his verses.

His voice, at first suppressed, grew clearer by the very flow of his harmonious recital; the breath of poetic inspiration soon elevated him to himself; and his look, raised to heaven, became sublime as that of the young evangelist, conceived by Raffaello, for the light still shone on it. He narrated in his verses the first disobedience of man, and invoked the Holy Spirit, who prefers before all other temples a pure and simple heart, who knows all, and who was present at the birth of time.

This opening was received with a profound silence; and a slight murmur arose after the enunciation of the last idea. He heard not; he saw only through a cloud; he was in the world of his own creation. He continued.

He spoke of the infernal spirit, bound in avenging fire by adamant chains, lying vanquished nine times the space that measures night and day to mortal men; of the darkness visible of the eternal prisons and the burning ocean where the fallen angels float. Then, his voice, now powerful, began the address of the fallen angel. "Art thou," he said, "he who in the happy realms of light, clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine myriads? From what height fallen? What though the field be lost, all is not lost! Unconquerable will and study of revenge, immortal hate and courage never to submit nor yield—what is else not to be overcome."

Here a lackey in a loud voice announced MM. de Montresor and d'Entraigues. They saluted, exchanged a few words, deranged the chairs, and then settled down. The auditors availed themselves of the interruption to institute a dozen private conversations; scarcely anything was heard but expressions of censure, and imputations of bad taste. Even some men of merit, dulled by a particular habit of thinking, cried out that they did not understand it; that it was above their comprehension (not thinking how truly they spoke); and from this feigned humility gained themselves a compliment, and for the poet an impertinent remark a double advantage. Some voices even pronounced the word "profanation."

The poet, interrupted, put his head between his hands and his elbows on the table, that he might not hear the noise either of praise or censure. Three men only approached him, an officer, Poquelin, and Corneille; the latter

whispered to Milton:

"I would advise you to change the picture; your hearers are not on a level with this."

The officer pressed the hand of the English poet and said to him:

"I admire you with all my soul."

The astonished Englishman looked at him, and saw an intellectual, impassioned, and sickly countenance.

He bowed, and collected himself, in order to proceed. His voice took a gentle tone and a soft accent; he spoke of the chaste happiness of the two first of human beings. He described their majestic nakedness, the ingenuous command of their looks, their walk among lions and tigers, which gambolled at their feet; he spoke of the purity of their morning prayer, of their enchanting smile, the playful tenderness of their youth, and their enamored conversation, so painful to the Prince of Darkness.

Gentle tears quite involuntarily made humid the eyes of the beautiful Marion de Lorme. Nature had taken possession of her heart, despite her head; poetry filled it with grave and religious thoughts, from which the intoxication of pleasure had ever diverted her. The idea of virtuous love appeared to her for the first time in all its beauty; and she seemed as if struck with a magic wand, and changed into a pale and beautiful statue.

Corneille, his young friend, and the officer, were full of a silent admiration which they dared not express, for raised voices drowned that of the surprised poet.

"I can't stand this!" cried Desbarreaux. "It is of an insipidity to make one sick."

"And what absence of grace, gallantry, and the belle flamme!" said Scudery, coldly.

"Ah, how different from our immortal D'Urfe!" said Baro, the continuator.

"Where is the 'Ariane,' where the 'Astrea?'" cried, with a groan, Godeau, the annotator.

The whole assembly well-nigh made these obliging remarks, though uttered so as only to be heard by the poet as a murmur of uncertain import. He understood, however, that he produced no enthusiasm, and collected himself to touch another chord of his lyre.

At this moment the Counsellor de Thou was announced, who, modestly saluting the company, glided silently behind the author near Corneille, Poquelin, and the young officer. Milton resumed his strain.

He recounted the arrival of a celestial guest in the garden of Eden, like a second Aurora in mid-day, shaking the plumes of his divine wings, that filled the air with heavenly fragrance, who recounted to man the history of heaven, the revolt of Lucifer, clothed in an armor of diamonds, raised on a car brilliant as the sun, guarded by glittering cherubim, and marching against the Eternal. But Emmanuel appears on the living chariot of the Lord; and his two thousand thunderbolts hurled down to hell, with awful noise, the accursed army confounded.

At this the company arose; and all was interrupted, for religious scruples became leagued with false taste. Nothing was heard but exclamations which obliged the mistress of the house to rise also, and endeavor to conceal them from the author. This was not difficult, for he was entirely absorbed in the elevation of his thoughts. His genius at this moment had nothing in common with the earth; and when he once more opened his eyes on those who surrounded him, he saw near him four admirers, whose voices were better heard than those of the assembly.

Corneille said to him:

"Listen. If you aim at present glory, do not expect it from so fine a work. Pure poetry is appreciated by but few souls. For the common run of men, it must be closely allied with the almost physical interest of the drama. I had been tempted to make a poem of 'Polyeuctes'; but I shall cut down this subject, abridge it of the heavens, and it shall be only a tragedy."

"What matters to me the glory of the moment?" answered Milton. "I think not of success. I sing because I feel myself a poet. I go whither inspiration leads me. Its path is ever the right one. If these verses were not to be read till a century after my death, I should write them just the same."

"I admire them before they are written," said the young officer. "I see in them the God whose innate image I have found in my heart."

"Who is it speaks thus kindly to me?" asked the poet.

"I am Rene Descartes," replied the soldier, gently.

"How, sir!" cried De Thou. "Are you so happy as to be related to the author of the Princeps?"

"I am the author of that work," replied Rene.

"You, sir! but still pardon me but are you not a military man?" stammered out the counsellor, in amazement.

"Well, what has the habit of the body to do with the thought? Yes, I wear the sword. I was at the siege of Rochelle. I love the profession of arms because it keeps the soul in a region of noble ideas by the continual feeling of the sacrifice of life; yet it does not occupy the whole man. He can not always apply his thoughts to it. Peace lulls them. Moreover, one has also to fear seeing them suddenly interrupted by an obscure blow or an absurd and untimely accident. And if a man be killed in the execution of his plan, posterity preserves an idea of the plan which he himself had not, and which may be wholly preposterous; and this is the evil side of the profession for a man of letters."

De Thou smiled with pleasure at the simple language of this superior man this man whom he so admired, and in his admiration loved. He pressed the hand of the young sage of Touraine, and drew him into an adjoining cabinet with Corneille, Milton, and Moliere, and with them enjoyed one of those conversations which make us regard as lost the time which precedes them and the time which is to follow them.

For two hours they had enchanted one another with their discourse, when the sound of music, of guitars and flutes playing minuets, sarabands, allemandes, and the Spanish dances which the young Queen had brought into fashion, the continual passing of groups of young ladies and their joyous laughter, all announced that the ball had commenced. A very young and beautiful person, holding a large fan as it were a sceptre, and surrounded by ten young men, entered their retired chamber with her brilliant court, which she ruled like a queen, and entirely put to the rout the studious conversers.

"Adieu, gentlemen!" said De Thou. "I make way for Mademoiselle de l'Enclos and her musketeers."

"Really, gentlemen," said the youthful Ninon, "we seem to frighten you. Have I disturbed you? You have all the air of conspirators."

"We are perhaps more so than these gentlemen, although we dance," said Olivier d'Entraigues, who led her.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

"Ah! your conspiracy is against me, Monsieur le Page!" said Ninon, looking the while at another light-horseman, and abandoning her remaining arm to a third, the other gallants seeking to place themselves in the way of her flying ceillades, for she distributed her glances brilliant as the rays of the sun dancing over the moving waters.

De Thou stole away without any one thinking of stopping him, and was descending the great staircase, when he met the little Abbe de Gondi, red, hot, and out of breath, who stopped him with an animated and joyous air.

"How now! whither go you? Let the foreigners and savans go. You are one of us. I am somewhat late; but our beautiful Aspasia will pardon me. Why are you going? Is it all over?"

"Why, it seems so. When the dancing begins, the reading is done."

"The reading, yes; but the oaths?" said the Abbe, in a low voice.

"What oaths?" asked De Thou.

"Is not Monsieur le Grand come?"

"I expected to see him; but I suppose he has not come, or else he has gone."

"No, no! come with me," said the bare-brained Abbe. "You are one of us. Parbleu! it is impossible to do without you; come!"

De Thou, unwilling to refuse, and thus appear to disown his friends, even for parties of pleasure which annoyed him, followed De Gondi, who passed through two cabinets, and descended a small private staircase. At each step he took, he heard more distinctly the voices of an assemblage of men. Gondi opened the door. An unexpected spectacle met his view.

The chamber he was entering, lighted by a mysterious glimmer, seemed the asylum of the most voluptuous rendezvous. On one side was a gilt bed, with a canopy of tapestry ornamented with feathers, and covered with lace and ornaments. The furniture, shining with gold, was of grayish silk, richly embroidered. Velvet cushions were at the foot of each armchair, upon a thick carpet. Small mirrors, connected with one another by ornaments of silver, seemed an entire glass, itself a perfection then unknown, and everywhere multiplied their glittering faces. No sound from without could penetrate this throne of delight; but the persons assembled there seemed far remote from the thoughts which it was calculated to give rise to. A number of men, whom he recognized as courtiers, or soldiers of rank, crowded the entrance of this chamber and an adjoining apartment of larger dimensions. All were intent upon that which was passing in the centre of the first room. Here, ten young men, standing, and holding in their hands their drawn swords, the points of which were lowered toward the ground, were ranged round a table. Their faces, turned to Cinq-Mars, announced that they had just taken an oath to him. The grand ecuyer stood by himself before the fireplace, his arms folded with an air of all-absorbing reflection. Standing near him, Marion de Lorme, grave and collected, seemed to have presented these gentlemen to him.

When Cinq-Mars perceived his friend, he rushed toward the door, casting a terrible glance at Gondi, and seizing De Thou by both arms, stopped him on the last step.

"What do you here?" he said, in a stifled voice.

"Who brought you here? What would you with me? You are lost if you enter."

"What do you yourself here? What do I see in this house?"

"The consequences of that you wot of. Go; this air is poisoned for all who are here."

"It is too late; they have seen me. What would they say if I were to withdraw? I should discourage them; you would be lost."

This dialogue had passed in low and hurried tones; at the last word, De Thou, pushing aside his friend, entered, and with a firm step crossed the apartment to the fireplace.

Cinq-Mars, trembling with rage, resumed his place, hung his head, collected himself, and soon raising a more calm countenance, continued a discourse which the entrance of his friend had interrupted:

"Be then with us, gentlemen; there is no longer any need for so much mystery. Remember that when a strong mind embraces an idea, it must follow it to all its consequences. Your courage will have a wider field than that of a court intrigue. Thank me; instead of a conspiracy, I give you a war. Monsieur de Bouillon has departed to place himself at the head of his army of Italy; in two days, and before the king, I quit Paris for Perpignan. Come all of you thither; the Royalists of the army await us."

Here he threw around him calm and confident looks; he saw gleams of joy and enthusiasm in the eyes of all who surrounded him. Before allowing his own heart to be possessed by the contagious emotion which precedes great enterprises, he desired still more firmly to assure himself of them, and said with a grave air:

"Yes, war, gentlemen; think of it, open war. Rochelle and Navarre are arousing their Protestants; the army of Italy will enter on one side; the king's brother will join us on the other. The man we combat will be surrounded, vanquished, crushed. The parliaments will march in our rear, bearing their petitions to the King, a weapon as powerful as our swords; and after the victory we will throw ourselves at the feet of Louis XIII, our master, that he may pardon us for having delivered him from a cruel and ambitious man, and hastened his own resolution."

Here, again glancing around him, he saw increasing confidence in the looks and attitudes of his accomplices.

"How!" he continued, crossing his arms, and yet restraining with an effort his own emotion; "you do not recoil before this resolution, which would appear a revolt to any other men! Do you not think that I have abused the powers you have vested in me? I have carried matters very far; but there are times when kings would be served, as it were in spite of themselves. All is arranged, as you know. Sedan will open its gates to us; and we are sure of Spain. Twelve thousand veteran troops will enter Paris with us. No place, however, will be given up to the foreigner; they will all have a French garrison, and be taken in the name of the King."

"Long live the King! long live the Union! the new Union, the Holy League!" cried the assembly.

"It has come, then!" cried Cinq-Mars, with enthusiasm; "it has come the most glorious day of my life. Oh, youth, youth, from century to century called frivolous and improvident! of what will men now accuse thee, when they behold conceived, ripened, and ready for execution, under a chief of twenty-two, the most vast, the most just, the most beneficial of enterprises? My friends, what is a great life but a thought of youth executed by mature age? Youth looks fixedly into the future with its eagle glance, traces there a broad plan, lays the foundation stone; and all that our entire existence afterward can do is to approximate to that first design. Oh, when can great projects arise, if not when the heart beats vigorously in the breast? The mind is not sufficient; it is but an instrument."

A fresh outburst of joy had followed these words, when an old man with a white beard stood forward from the throng.

"Bah!" said Gondi, in a low voice, "here's the old Chevalier de Guise going to dote, and damp us."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

And truly enough, the old man, pressing the hand of Cinq-Mars, said slowly and with difficulty, having placed himself near him:

"Yes, my son, and you, my children, I see with joy that my old friend Bassompierre is about to be delivered by you, and that you are about to avenge the Comte de Soissons and the young Montmorency. But it is expedient for youth, all ardent as it is, to listen to those who have seen much. I have witnessed the League, my children, and I tell you that you can not now, as then, take the title of the Holy League, the Holy Union, the Protectors of Saint Peter, or Pillars of the Church, because I see that you reckon on the support of the Huguenots; nor can you put upon your great seal of green wax an empty throne, since it is occupied by a king."

"You may say by two," interrupted Gondi, laughing.

"It is, however, of great importance," continued old Guise, amid the tumultuous young men, "to take a name to which the people may attach themselves; that of War for the Public Welfare has been made use of; Princes of Peace only lately. It is necessary to find one."

"Well, the War of the King," said Cinq-Mars.

"Ay, the War of the King!" cried Gondi and all the young men.

"Moreover," continued the old seigneur, "it is essential to gain the approval of the theological faculty of the Sorbonne, which heretofore sanctioned even the 'hautgourdiens' and the 'sorgueurs', [Names of the leaguers.] and to put in force its second proposition that it is permitted to the people to disobey the magistrates, and to hang them."

"Eh, Chevalier!" exclaimed Gondi; "this is not the question. Let Monsieur le Grand speak; we are thinking no more of the Sorbonne at present than of your Saint Jacques Clement."

There was a laugh, and Cinq-Mars went on:

"I wished, gentlemen, to conceal nothing from you as to the projects of Monsieur, those of the Duke de Bouillon, or my own, for it is just that a man who stakes his life should know at what game; but I have placed before you the least fortunate chances, and I have not detailed our strength, for there is not one of you but knows the secret of it. Is it to you, Messieurs de Montresor and de Saint-Thibal, I need tell the treasures that Monsieur places at our disposal? Is it to you, Monsieur d'Aignou, Monsieur de Mouy, that I need tell how many gentlemen are eager to join your companies of men-at-arms and light-horse, to fight the Cardinalists; how many in Touraine and in Auvergne, where lay the lands of the House of D'Effiat, and whence will march two thousand seigneurs, with their vassals?"

"Baron de Beauvau, shall I recall the zeal and valor of the cuirassiers whom you brought to the unhappy Comte de Soissons, whose cause was ours, and whom you saw assassinated in the midst of his triumph by him whom with you he had defeated? Shall I tell these gentlemen of the joy of the Count-Duke of Olivares at the news of our intentions, and the letters of the Cardinal-Infanta to the Duke de Bouillon? Shall I speak of Paris to the Abbe de Gondi, to D'Entraigues, and to you, gentlemen, who are daily witnesses of her misery, of her indignation, and her desire to break forth? While all foreign nations demand peace, which the Cardinal de Richelieu still destroys by his want of faith (as he has done in violating the treaty of Ratisbon), all orders of the State groan under his violence, and dread that colossal ambition which aspires to no less than the temporal and even spiritual throne of France."

A murmur of approbation interrupted Cinq-Mars. There was then silence for a moment; and they heard the sound of wind instruments, and the measured tread of the dancers.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

This noise caused a momentary diversion and a smile in the younger portion of the assembly.

Cinq-Mars profited by this; and raising his eyes, "Pleasures of youth," he cried "love, music, joyous dances why do you not alone occupy our leisure hours? Why are not you our sole ambition? What resentment may we not justly feel that we have to make our cries of indignation heard above our bursts of joy, our formidable secrets in the asylum of love, and our oaths of war and death amid the intoxication of and of life!

"Curses on him who saddens the youth of a people! When wrinkles furrow the brow of the young men, we may confidently say that the finger of a tyrant has hollowed them out. The other troubles of youth give it despair and not consternation. Watch those sad and mournful students pass day after day with pale foreheads, slow steps, and half-suppressed voices. One would think they fear to live or to advance a step toward the future. What is there then in France? A man too many.

"Yes," he continued;"for two years I have watched the insidious and profound progress of his ambition. His strange practices, his secret commissions, his judicial assassinations are known to you. Princes, peers, marechals all have been crushed by him. There is not a family in France but can show some sad trace of his passage. If he regards us all as enemies to his authority, it is because he would have in France none but his own house, which twenty years ago held only one of the smallest fiefs of Poitou.

"The humiliated parliament has no longer any voice. The presidents of Nismes, Novion, and Bellievre have revealed to you their courageous but fruitless resistance to the condemnation to death of the Duke de la Vallette.

"The presidents and councils of sovereign courts have been imprisoned, banished, suspended a thing before unheard of because they have raised their voices for the king or for the public.

"The highest offices of justice, who fill them? Infamous and corrupt men, who suck the blood and gold of the country. Paris and the maritime towns taxed; the rural districts ruined and laid waste by the soldiers and other agents of the Cardinal; the peasants reduced to feed on animals killed by the plague or famine, or saving themselves by self-banishment such is the work of this new justice. His worthy agents have even coined money with the effigy of the Cardinal-Duke. Here are some of his royal pieces."

The grand ecuyey threw upon the table a score of gold doubloons whereon Richelieu was represented. A fresh murmur of hatred toward the Cardinal arose in the apartment.

"And think you the clergy are less trampled on and less discontented? No. Bishops have been tried against the laws of the State and in contempt of the respect due to their sacred persons. We have seen, in consequence, Algerine corsairs commanded by an archbishop. Men of the lowest condition have been elevated to the cardinalate. The minister himself, devouring the most sacred things, has had himself elected general of the orders of Citeaux, Cluny, and Premontre, throwing into prison the monks who refused him their votes. Jesuits, Carmelites, Cordeliers, Augustins, Dominicans, have been forced to elect general vicars in France, in order no longer to communicate at Rome with their true superiors, because he would be patriarch in France, and head of the Gallican Church."

"He's a schismatic! a monster!" cried several voices.

"His progress, then, is apparent, gentlemen. He is ready to seize both temporal and spiritual power. He has little by little fortified himself against the King in the strongest towns of France seized the mouths of the principal rivers, the best ports of the ocean, the salt-pits, and all the securities of the kingdom. It is the King, then, whom we must deliver from this oppression. 'Le roi et la paix!' shall be our cry. The rest must be left to Providence."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

Cinq-Mars greatly astonished the assembly, and De Thou himself, by this address. No one had ever before heard him speak so long together, not even in fireside conversation; and he had never by a single word shown the least aptitude for understanding public affairs. He had, on the contrary, affected the greatest indifference on the subject, even in the eyes of those whom he was molding to his projects, merely manifesting a virtuous indignation at the violence of the minister, but affecting not to put forward any of his own ideas, in order not to suggest personal ambition as the aim of his labors. The confidence given to him rested on his favor with the king and his personal bravery. The surprise of all present was therefore such as to cause a momentary silence. It was soon broken by all the transports of Frenchmen, young or old, when fighting of whatever kind is held out to them.

Among those who came forward to press the hand of the young party leader, the Abbe de Gondi jumped about like a kid.

"I have already enrolled my regiment!" he cried. "I have some superb fellows!" Then, addressing Marion de Lorme, "Parbleu! Mademoiselle, I will wear your colors your gray ribbon, and your order of the Allumette. The device is charming

'Nous ne brullons que pour bruller les autres.'

And I wish you could see all the fine things we shall do if we are fortunate enough to come to blows."

The fair Marion, who did not like him, began to talk over his head to M. de Thou a mortification which always exasperated the little Abbe, who abruptly left her, walking as tall as he could, and scornfully twisting his moustache.

All at once a sudden silence took possession of the assembly. A rolled paper had struck the ceiling and fallen at the feet of Cinq-Mars. He picked it up and unrolled it, after having looked eagerly around him. He sought in vain to divine whence it came; all those who advanced had only astonishment and intense curiosity depicted in their faces.

"Here is my name wrongly written," he said coldly.

"A CINQ MARCS,

CENTURIE DE NOSTRADAMUS.

Quand bonnet rouge passera par la fenetre,
A quarante onces on coupera tete,
Et tout finira.

[This punning prediction was made public three months before the conspiracy.]

"There is a traitor among us, gentlemen," he said, throwing away the paper. "But no matter. We are not men to be frightened by his sanguinary jests."

"We must find the traitor out, and throw him through the window," said the young men.

Still, a disagreeable sensation had come over the assembly. They now only spoke in whispers, and each regarded his neighbor with distrust. Some withdrew; the meeting grew thinner. Marion de Lorme repeated to every one that she would dismiss her servants, who alone could be suspected. Despite her efforts a coldness reigned throughout the apartment. The first sentences of Cinq-Mars' address, too, had left some uncertainty as to the intentions of the King; and this untimely candor had somewhat shaken a few of the less determined conspirators.

Gondi pointed this out to Cinq-Mars.

"Hark ye!" he said in a low voice. "Believe me, I have carefully studied conspiracies and assemblages; there are certain purely mechanical means which it is necessary to adopt. Follow my advice here; I know a good deal of this sort of thing. They want something more. Give them a little contradiction; that always succeeds in France. You will quite make them alive again. Seem not to wish to retain them against their will, and they will remain."

The grand ecuyer approved of the suggestion, and advancing toward those whom he knew to be most deeply compromised, said:

"For the rest, gentlemen, I do not wish to force any one to follow me. Plenty of brave men await us at Perpignan, and all France is with us. If any one desires to secure himself a retreat, let him speak. We will give him the means of placing himself in safety at once."

Not one would hear of this proposition; and the movement it occasioned produced a renewal of the oaths of hatred against the minister.

Cinq-Mars, however, proceeded to put the question individually to some of the persons present, in the election of whom he showed much judgment; for he ended with Montresor, who cried that he would pass his sword through his body if he had for a moment entertained such an idea, and with Gondi, who, rising fiercely on his heels, exclaimed:

"Monsieur le Grand Ecuyer, my retreat is the archbishopric of Paris and L'Ile Notre-Dame. I'll make it a place strong enough to keep me from being taken."

"And yours?" he said to De Thou.

"At your side," murmured De Thou, lowering his eyes, unwilling to give importance to his resolution by the directness of his look.

"You will have it so? Well, I accept," said Cinq-Mars; "and my sacrifice herein, dear friend, is greater than yours." Then turning toward the assembly:

"Gentlemen, I see in you the last men of France, for after the Montmorencys and the Soissons, you alone dare lift a head free and worthy of our old liberty. If Richelieu triumph, the ancient bases of the monarchy will crumble with us. The court will reign alone, in the place of the parliaments, the old barriers, and at the same time the powerful supports of the royal authority. Let us be conquerors, and France will owe to us the preservation of her ancient manners and her time-honored guarantees. And now, gentlemen, it were a pity to spoil the ball on this account. You hear the music. The ladies await you. Let us go and dance."

"The Cardinal shall pay the fiddlers," added Gondi.

The young men applauded with a laugh; and all reascended to the ballroom as lightly as they would have gone to the battlefield.

CHAPTER XXI. THE CONFESSIONAL

It was on the day following the assembly that had taken place in the house of Marion de Lorme. A thick snow covered the roofs of Paris and settled in its large gutters and streets, where it arose in gray heaps, furrowed by the wheels of carriages.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

It was eight o'clock, and the night was dark. The tumult of the city was silent on account of the thick carpet the winter had spread for it, and which deadened the sound of the wheels over the stones, and of the feet of men and horses. In a narrow street that winds round the old church of St. Eustache, a man, enveloped in his cloak, slowly walked up and down, constantly watching for the appearance of some one. He often seated himself upon one of the posts of the church, sheltering himself from the falling snow under one of the statues of saints which jutted out from the roof of the building, stretching over the narrow path like birds of prey, which, about to make a stoop, have folded their wings. Often, too, the old man, opening his cloak, beat his arms against his breast to warm himself, or blew upon his fingers, ill protected from the cold by a pair of buff gloves reaching nearly to the elbow. At last he saw a slight shadow gliding along the wall.

"Ah, Santa Maria! what villainous countries are these of the North!" said a woman's voice, trembling. "Ah, the duchy of Mantua! would I were back there again, Grandchamp!"

"Pshaw! don't speak so loud," said the old domestic, abruptly. "The walls of Paris have Cardinalist ears, and more especially the walls of the churches. Has your mistress entered? My master awaits her at the door."

"Yes, yes; she has gone in."

"Be silent," said Grandchamp. "The sound of the clock is cracked. That's a bad sign."

"That clock has sounded the hour of a rendezvous."

"For me, it sounds like a passing-bell. But be silent, Laure; here are three cloaks passing."

They allowed three men to pass. Grandchamp followed them, made sure of the road they took, and returned to his seat, sighing deeply.

"The snow is cold, Laure, and I am old. Monsieur le Grand might have chosen another of his men to keep watch for him while he's making love. It's all very well for you to carry love-letters and ribbons and portraits and such trash, but for me, I ought to be treated with more consideration. Monsieur le Marechal would not have done so. Old domestics give respectability to a house, and should be themselves respected."

"Has your master arrived long, 'caro amico'?"

"Eh, cara, cayo! leave me in peace. We had both been freezing for an hour when you came. I should have had time to smoke three Turkish pipes. Attend to your business, and go and look to the other doors of the church, and see that no suspicious person is prowling about. Since there are but two vedettes, they must beat about well."

"Ah, what a thing it is to have no one to whom to say a friendly word when it is so cold! and my poor mistress! to come on foot all the way from the Hotel de Nevers. Ah, amore! qui regna amore!"

"Come, Italian, wheel about, I tell thee. Let me hear no more of thy musical tongue."

"Ah, Santa Maria! What a harsh voice, dear Grandchamp! You were much more amiable at Chaumont, in Turena, when you talked to me of 'miei occhi neri.'"

"Hold thy tongue, prattler! Once more, thy Italian is only good for buffoons and rope-dancers, or to accompany the learned dogs."

"Ah, Italia mia! Grandchamp, listen to me, and you shall hear the language of the gods. If you were a gallant man, like him who wrote this for a Laure like me!"

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Cinq Mars, v5

And she began to hum:

Lieti fiori a felici, e ben nate erbe
Che Madonna pensando premer sole;
Piaggia ch'ascolti su dolci parole
E del bel piede alcun vestigio serbe.

The old soldier was but little used to the voice of a young girl; and in general when a woman spoke to him, the tone he assumed in answering always fluctuated between an awkward compliment and an ebullition of temper. But on this occasion he appeared moved by the Italian song, and twisted his moustache, which was always with him a sign of embarrassment and distress. He even omitted a rough sound something like a laugh, and said:

"Pretty enough, 'mordieu!' that recalls to my mind the siege of Casal; but be silent, little one. I have not yet heard the Abbe Quillet come. This troubles me. He ought to have been here before our two young people; and for some time past "

Laure, who was afraid of being sent alone to the Place St. Eustache, answered that she was quite sure he had gone in, and continued:

"Ombrose selve, ove'percote il sole
Che vi fa co'suoi raggi alte a superbe."

"Hum!" said the worthy old soldier, grumbling. "I have my feet in the snow, and a gutter runs down on my head, and there's death at my heart; and you sing to me of violets, of the sun, and of grass, and of love. Be silent!"

And, retiring farther in the recess of the church, he leaned his gray head upon his hands, pensive and motionless. Laure dared not again speak to him.

While her waiting-woman had gone to find Grandchamp, the young and trembling Marie with a timid hand had pushed open the folding-door of the church.

She there found Cinq-Mars standing, disguised, and anxiously awaiting her. As soon as she recognized him, she advanced with rapid steps into the church, holding her velvet mask over her face, and hastened to take refuge in a confessional, while Henri carefully closed the door of the church by which she had entered. He made sure that it could not be opened on the outside, and then followed his betrothed to kneel within the place of penitence. Arrived an hour before her, with his old valet, he had found this open a certain and understood sign that the Abbe Quillet, his tutor, awaited him at the accustomed place. His care to prevent any surprise had made him remain himself to guard the entrance until the arrival of Marie. Delighted as he was at the punctuality of the good Abbe, he would still scarcely leave his post to thank him. He was a second father to him in all but authority; and he acted toward the good priest without much ceremony.

The old parish church of St. Eustache was dark. Besides the perpetual lamp, there were only four flambeaux of yellow wax, which, attached above the fonts against the principal pillars, cast a red glimmer upon the blue and black marble of the empty church. The light scarcely penetrated the deep niches of the aisles of the sacred building. In one of the chapels the darkest of them was the confessional, of which we have before spoken, whose high iron grating and thick double planks left visible only the small dome and the wooden cross. Here, on either side, knelt Cinq-Mars and Marie de Mantua. They could scarcely see each other, but found that the Abbe Quillet, seated between them, was there awaiting them. They could see through the little grating the shadow of his hood. Henri d'Effiat approached slowly; he was regulating, as it were, the remainder of his destiny. It was not before his king that he was about to appear, but before a more powerful sovereign, before her for whom he had undertaken his immense work. He was about to test her faith; and he trembled.

He trembled still more when his young betrothed knelt opposite to him; he trembled, because at the sight of this angel he could not help feeling all the happiness he might lose. He dared not speak first, and remained for an instant contemplating her head in the shade, that young head upon which rested all his hopes. Despite his love, whenever he looked upon her he could not refrain from a kind of dread at having undertaken so much for a girl, whose passion was but a feeble reflection of his own, and who perhaps would not appreciate all the sacrifices he had made for her bending the firm character of his mind to the compliances of a courtier, condemning it to the intrigues and sufferings of ambition, abandoning it to profound combinations, to criminal meditations, to the gloomy labors of a conspirator.

Hitherto, in their secret interviews, she had always received each fresh intelligence of his progress with the transports of pleasure of a child, but without appreciating the labors of each of these so arduous steps that lead to honors, and always asking him with naivete when he would be Constable, and when they should marry, as if she were asking him when he would come to the Caroussel, or whether the weather was fine. Hitherto, he had smiled at these questions and this ignorance, pardonable at eighteen, in a girl born to a throne and accustomed to a grandeur natural to her, which she found around her on her entrance into life; but now he made more serious reflections upon this character. And when, but just quitting the imposing assembly of conspirators, representatives of all the orders of the kingdom, his ear, wherein still resounded the masculine voices that had sworn to undertake a vast war, was struck with the first words of her for whom that war was commenced, he feared for the first time lest this naivete should be in reality simple levity, not coming from the heart. He resolved to sound it.

"Oh, heavens! how I tremble, Henri!" she said as she entered the confessional; "you make me come without guards, without a coach. I always tremble lest I should be seen by my people coming out of the Hotel de Nevers. How much longer must I yet conceal myself like a criminal? The Queen was very angry when I avowed the matter to her; and whenever she speaks to me of it, 'tis with her severe air that you know, and which always makes me weep. Oh, I am terribly afraid!"

She was silent; Cinq-Mars replied only with a deep sigh.

"How! you do not speak to me!" she said.

"Are these, then, all your terrors?" asked Cinq-Mars, bitterly.

"Can I have greater? Oh, 'mon ami', in what a tone, with what a voice, do you address me! Are you angry because I came too late?"

"Too soon, Madame, much too soon, for the things you are to hear for I see you are far from prepared for them."

Marie, affected at the gloomy and bitter tone of his voice, began to weep.

"Alas, what have I done," she said, "that you should call me Madame, and treat me thus harshly?"

"Be tranquil," replied Cinq-Mars, but with irony in his tone. "'Tis not, indeed, you who are guilty; but I I alone; not toward you, but for you."

"Have you done wrong, then? Have you ordered the death of any one? Oh, no, I am sure you have not, you are so good!"

"What!" said Cinq-Mars, "are you as nothing in my designs? Did I misconstrue your thoughts when you looked at me in the Queen's boudoir? Can I no longer read in your eyes? Was the fire which animated them that of a love for Richelieu? That admiration which you promised to him who should dare to say all to the King, where is it? Is it all a falsehood?"

Marie burst into tears.

"You still speak to me with bitterness," she said; "I have not deserved it. Do you suppose, because I speak not of this fearful conspiracy, that I have forgotten it? Do you not see me miserable at the thought? Must you see my tears? Behold them; I shed enough in secret. Henri, believe that if I have avoided this terrible subject in our last interviews, it is from the fear of learning too much. Have I any other thought than that of your dangers? Do I not know that it is for me you incur them? Alas! if you fight for me, have I not also to sustain attacks no less cruel? Happier than I, you have only to combat hatred, while I struggle against friendship. The Cardinal will oppose to you men and weapons; but the Queen, the gentle Anne of Austria, employs only tender advice, caresses, sometimes tears."

"Touching and invincible constraint to make you accept a throne," said Cinq-Mars, bitterly. "I well conceive you must need some efforts to resist such seductions; but first, Madame, I must release you from your vows."

"Alas, great Heaven! what is there, then, against us?"

"There is God above us, and against us," replied Henri, in a severe tone; "the King has deceived me."

There was an agitated movement on the part of the Abbe.

Marie exclaimed, "I foresaw it; this is the misfortune I dreamed and dreamed of! It is I who caused it?"

"He deceived me, as he pressed my hand," continued Cinq-Mars; "he betrayed me by the villain Joseph, whom an offer has been made to me to poniard."

The Abbe gave a start of horror which half opened the door of the confessional.

"O father, fear nothing," said Henri d'Effiat; "your pupil will never strike such blows. Those I prepare will be heard from afar, and the broad day will light them up; but there remains a duty a sacred duty for me to fulfil. Behold your son sacrifice himself before you! Alas! I have not lived long in the sight of happiness, and I am about, perhaps, to destroy it by your hand, that consecrated it."

As he spoke, he opened the light grating which separated him from his old tutor; the latter, still observing an extraordinary silence, passed his hood over his forehead.

"Restore this nuptial ring to the Duchesse de Mantua," said Cinq-Mars, in a tone less firm; "I can not keep it unless she give it me a second time, for I am not the same whom she promised to espouse."

The priest hastily seized the ring, and passed it through the opposite grating; this mark of indifference astonished Cinq-Mars.

"What! Father," he said, "are you also changed?"

Marie wept no longer; but, raising her angelic voice, which awakened a faint echo along the aisles of the church, as the softest sigh of the organ, she said, returning the ring to Cinq-Mars:

"O dearest, be not angry! I comprehend you not. Can we break asunder what God has just united, and can I leave you, when I know you are unhappy? If the King no longer loves you, at least you may be assured he will not harm you, since he has not harmed the Cardinal, whom he never loved. Do you think yourself undone, because he is perhaps unwilling to separate from his old servant? Well, let us await the return of his friendship; forget these conspirators, who affright me. If they give up hope, I shall thank Heaven, for then I shall no longer tremble for

you. Why needlessly afflict ourselves? The Queen loves us, and we are both very young; let us wait. The future is beautiful, since we are united and sure of ourselves. Tell me what the King said to you at Chambord. I followed you long with my eyes. Heavens! how sad to me was that hunting party!"

"He has betrayed me, I tell you," answered Cinq-Mars. "Yet who could have believed it, that saw him press our hands, turning from his brother to me, and to the Duc de Bouillon, making himself acquainted with the minutest details of the conspiracy, of the very day on which Richelieu was to be arrested at Lyons, fixing himself the place of his exile (our party desired his death, but the recollection of my father made me ask his life). The King said that he himself would direct the whole affair at Perpignan; yet just before, Joseph, that foul spy, had issued from out of the cabinet du Lys. O Marie! shall I own it? at the moment I heard this, my very soul was tossed. I doubted everything; it seemed to me that the centre of the world was unhinged when I found truth quit the heart of the King. I saw our whole edifice crumble to the ground; another hour, and the conspiracy would vanish away, and I should lose you forever. One means remained; I employed it."

"What means?" said Marie.

"The treaty with Spain was in my hand; I signed it."

"Ah, heavens! destroy it."

"It is gone."

"Who bears it?"

"Fontrailles."

"Recall him."

"He will, ere this, have passed the defiles of Oleron," said Cinq-Mars, rising up. "All is ready at Madrid, all at Sedan. Armies await me, Marie armies! Richelieu is in the midst of them. He totters; it needs but one blow to overthrow him, and you are mine forever forever the wife of the triumphant Cinq-Mars."

"Of Cinq-Mars the rebel," she said, sighing.

"Well, have it so, the rebel; but no longer the favorite. Rebel, criminal, worthy of the scaffold, I know it," cried the impassioned youth, falling on his knees; "but a rebel for love, a rebel for you, whom my sword will at last achieve for me."

"Alas, a sword imbrued in the blood of your country! Is it not a poniard?"

"Pause! for pity, pause, Marie! Let kings abandon me, let warriors forsake me, I shall only be the more firm; but a word from you will vanquish me, and once again the time for reflection will be passed from me. Yes, I am a criminal; and that is why I still hesitate to think myself worthy of you. Abandon me, Marie; take back the ring."

"I can not," she said; "for I am your wife, whatever you be."

"You hear her, father!" exclaimed Cinq-Mars, transported with happiness; "bless this second union, the work of devotion, even more beautiful than that of love. Let her be mine while I live."

Without answering, the Abbe opened the door of the confessional and had quitted the church ere Cinq-Mars had time to rise and follow him.

"Where are you going? What is the matter?" he cried.

But no one answered.

"Do not call out, in the name of Heaven!" said Marie, "or I am lost; he has doubtless heard some one in the church."

But D'Effiat, agitated, and without answering her, rushed forth, and sought his late tutor through the church, but in vain. Drawing his sword, he proceeded to the entrance which Grandchamp had to guard; he called him and listened.

"Now let him go," said a voice at the corner of the street; and at the same moment was heard the galloping of horses.

"Grandchamp, wilt thou answer?" cried Cinq-Mars.

"Help, Henri, my dear boy!" exclaimed the voice of the Abbe Quillet.

"Whence come you? You endanger me," said the grand ecuyer, approaching him.

But he saw that his poor tutor, without a hat in the falling snow, was in a most deplorable condition.

"They stopped me, and they robbed me," he cried. "The villains, the assassins! they prevented me from calling out; they stopped my mouth with a handkerchief."

At this noise, Grandchamp at length came, rubbing his eyes, like one just awakened. Laure, terrified, ran into the church to her mistress; all hastily followed her to reassure Marie, and then surrounded the old Abbe.

"The villains! they bound my hands, as you see. There were more than twenty of them; they took from me the key of the side door of the church."

"How! just now?" said Cinq-Mars; and why did you quit us?"

"Quit you! why, they have kept me there two hours."

"Two hours!" cried Henri, terrified.

"Ah, miserable old man that I am!" said Grandchamp; "I have slept while my master was in danger. It is the first time."

"You were not with us, then, in the confessional?" continued Cinq-Mars, anxiously, while Marie tremblingly pressed against his arm.

"What!" said the Abbe, "did you not see the rascal to whom they gave my key?"

"No! whom?" cried all at once.

"Father Joseph," answered the good priest.

"Fly! you are lost!" cried Marie.