
Bertha the Penitent

by Honore de Balzac

I. How Bertha Remained a Maiden in the Married State

About the time of the first flight of the Dauphin, which threw our good Sire, Charles the Victorious, into a state of great dejection, there happened a great misfortune to a noble House of Touraine, since extinct in every branch; and it is owing to this fact that this most deplorable history may now be safely brought to light. To aid him in this work the author calls to his assistance the holy confessors, martyrs, and other celestial dominations, who, by the commandments of God, were the promoters of good in this affair.

From some defect in his character, the Sire Imbert de Bastarnay, one of the most landed lords in our land of Touraine, had no confidence in the mind of the female of man, whom he considered much too animated, on account of her numerous vagaries, and it may be he was right. In consequence of this idea he reached his old age without a companion, which was certainly not to his advantage. Always leading a solitary life, this said man had no idea of making himself agreeable to others, having only been mixed up with wars and the orgies of bachelors, with whom he did not put himself out of the way. Thus he remained stale in his garments, sweaty in his accoutrements, with dirty hands and an apish face. In short, he looked the ugliest man in Christendom. As far as regards his person only though, since so far as his heart, his head, and other secret places were concerned, he had properties which rendered him most praiseworthy. An angel (pray believe this) would have walked a long way without meeting an old warrior firmer at his post, a lord with more spotless scutcheon, of shorter speech, and more perfect loyalty.

Certain people have stated, they have heard that he gave sound advice, and was a good and profitable man to consult. Was it not a strange freak on the part of God, who plays sometimes jokes on us, to have granted so many perfections to a man so badly apparelled?

When he was sixty in appearance, although only fifty in years, he determined to take unto himself a wife, in order to obtain lineage. Then, while foraging about for a place where he might be able to find a lady to his liking, he heard much vaunted, the great merits and perfections of a daughter of the illustrious house of Rohan, which at that time had some property in the province. The young lady in question was called Bertha, that being her pet name. Imbert having been to see her at the castle of Montbazou, was, in consequence of the prettiness and innocent virtue of the said Bertha de Rohan, seized with so great a desire to possess her, that he determined to make her his wife, believing that never could a girl of such lofty descent fail in her duty. This marriage was soon celebrated, because the Sire de Rohan had seven daughters, and hardly knew how to provide for them all, at a time when people were just recovering from the late wars, and patching up their unsettled affairs. Now the good man Bastarnay happily found Bertha really a maiden, which fact bore witness to her proper bringing up and perfect maternal correction. So immediately the night arrived when it should be lawful for him to embrace her, he got her with a child so roughly that he had proof of the result two months after marriage, which rendered the Sire Imbert joyful to a degree. In order that we may here finish with this portion of the story, let us at once state that from this legitimate grain was born the Sire de Bastarnay, who was Duke by the grace of Louis the Eleventh, his chamberlain, and more than that, his ambassador in the countries of Europe, and well-beloved of this most redoubtable lord, to whom he was never faithless. His loyalty was an heritage from his father, who from his early youth was much

attached to the Dauphin, whose fortunes he followed, even in the rebellions, since he was a man to put Christ on the cross again if it had been required by him to do so, which is the flower of friendship rarely to be found encompassing princes and great people. At first, the fair lady of Bastarnay comported herself so loyally that her society caused those thick vapours and black clouds to vanish, which obscured the mind of this great man, the brightness of the feminine glory. Now, according to the custom of unbelievers, he passed from suspicion to confidence so thoroughly, that he yielded up the government of his house to the said Bertha, made her mistress of his deeds and actions, queen of his honour, guardian of his grey hairs, and would have slaughtered without a contest any one who had said an evil word concerning this mirror of virtue, on whom no breath had fallen save the breath issued from his conjugal and marital lips, cold and withered as they were. To speak truly on all points, it should be explained, that to this virtuous behaviour considerably aided the little boy, who during six years occupied day and night the attention of his pretty mother, who first nourished him with her milk, and made of him a lover's lieutenant, yielding to him her sweet breasts, which he gnawed at, hungry, as often as he would, and was, like a lover, always there. This good mother knew no other pleasures than those of his rosy lips, had no other caresses than those of his tiny little hands, which ran about her like the feet of playful mice, read no other book than that in his clear baby eyes, in which the blue sky was reflected, and listened to no other music than his cries, which sounded in her ears as angels' whispers. You may be sure that she was always fondling him, had a desire to kiss him at dawn of day, kissed him in the evening, would rise in the night to eat him up with kisses, made herself a child as he was a child, educated him in the perfect religion of maternity; finally, behaved as the best and happiest mother that ever lived, without disparagement to our Lady the Virgin, who could have had little trouble in bringing up our Saviour, since he was God.

This employment and the little taste which Bertha had for the blisses of matrimony much delighted the old man, since he would have been unable to return the affection of a too amorous wife, and desired to practice economy, to have the wherewithal for a second child.

After six years had passed away, the mother was compelled to give her son into the hands of the grooms and other persons to whom Messire de Bastarnay committed the task to mould him properly, in order that his heir should have an heritage of the virtues, qualities and courage of the house, as well as the domains and the name. Then did Bertha shed many tears, her happiness being gone. For the great heart of this mother it was nothing to have this well-beloved son after others, and during only certain short fleeting hours. Therefore she became sad and melancholy. Noticing her grief, the good man wished to bestow upon her another child and could not, and the poor lady was displeased thereat, because she declared that the making of a child wearied her much and cost her dear. And this is true, or no doctrine is true, and you must burn the Gospels as a pack of stories if you have not faith in this innocent remark.

This, nevertheless, to certain ladies (I did not mention men, since they have a smattering of the science), will still seem an untruth. The writer has taken care here to give the mute reasons for this strange antipathy; I mean the distastes of Bertha, because I love the ladies above all things, knowing that for want of the pleasure of love, my face would grow old and my heart torment me. Did you ever meet a scribe so complacent and so fond of the ladies as I am? No; of course not. Therefore, do I love them devotedly, but not so often as I could wish, since I have oftener in my hands my goose-quill than I have the barbs with which one tickles their lips to make them laugh and be merry in all innocence. I understand them, and in this way.

The good man Bastarnay was not a smart young fellow of an amorous nature, and acquainted with the pranks of the thing. He did not trouble himself much about the fashion in which he killed a soldier so long as he killed him; that he would have killed him in all ways without saying a word in battle, is, of course, understood. The perfect heedlessness in the matter of death was in accordance with the nonchalance in the matter of life, the birth and manner of begetting a child,

and the ceremonies thereto appertaining. The good sire was ignorant of the many litigious, dilatory, interlocutory and proprietary exploits and the little humourings of the little fagots placed in the oven to heat it; of the sweet perfumed branches gathered little by little in the forests of love, fondlings, coddings, huggings, nursing, the bites at the cherry, the cat-licking, and other little tricks and traffic of love which ruffians know, which lovers preserve, and which the ladies love better than their salvation, because there is more of the cat than the woman in them. This shines forth in perfect evidence in their feminine ways. If you think it worth while watching them, examine them attentively while they eat: not one of them (I am speaking of women, noble and well-educated) puts her knife in the eatables and thrusts it into her mouth, as do brutally the males; no, they turn over their food, pick the pieces that please them as they would gray peas in a dove-cote; they suck the sauces by mouthfuls; play with their knife and spoon as if they are only ate in consequence of a judge's order, so much do they dislike to go straight to the point, and make free use of variations, finesse, and little tricks in everything, which is the especial attribute of these creatures, and the reason that the sons of Adam delight in them, since they do everything differently to themselves, and they do well. You think so too. Good! I love you.

Now then, Imbert de Bastarnay, an old soldier, ignorant of the tricks of love, entered into the sweet garden of Venus as he would into a place taken by assault, without giving any heed to the cries of the poor inhabitants in tears, and placed a child as he would an arrow in the dark. Although the gentle Bertha was not used to such treatment (poor child, she was but fifteen), she believed in her virgin faith, that the happiness of becoming a mother demanded this terrible, dreadful bruising and nasty business; so during his painful task she would pray to God to assist her, and recite /Aves/ to our Lady, esteeming her lucky, in only having the Holy Ghost to endure. By this means, never having experienced anything but pain in marriage, she never troubled her husband to go through the ceremony again. Now seeing that the old fellow was scarcely equal to it--as has been before stated--she lived in perfect solitude, like a nun. She hated the society of men, and never suspected that the Author of the world had put so much joy in that from which she had only received infinite misery. But she loved all the more her little one, who had cost her so much before he was born. Do not be astonished, therefore, that she held aloof from that gallant tourney in which it is the mare who governs her cavalier, guides him, fatigues him, and abuses him, if he stumbles. This is the true history of certain unhappy unions, according to the statement of the old men and women, and the certain reason of the follies committed by certain women, who too late perceive, I know not how, that they have been deceived, and attempt to crowd into a day more time than it will hold, to have their proper share of life. That is philosophical, my friends. Therefore study well this page, in order that you may wisely look to the proper government of your wives, your sweethearts, and all females generally, and particularly those who by chance may be under your care, from which God preserve you.

Thus a virgin in deed, although a mother, Bertha was in her one-and- twentieth year a castle flower, the glory of her good man, and the honour of the province. The said Bastarnay took great pleasure in beholding this child come, go, and frisk about like a willow-switch, as lively as an eel, as innocent as her little one, and still most sensible and of sound understanding; so much so that he never undertook any project without consulting her about it, seeing that if the minds of these angels have not been disturbed in their purity, they give a sound answer to everything one asks of them. At this time Bertha lived near the town of Loches, in the castle of her lord, and there resided, with no desire to do anything but look after her household duties, after the old custom of the good housewives, from which the ladies of France were led away when Queen Catherine and the Italians came with their balls and merry-makings. To these practices Francis the First and his successors, whose easy ways did as much harm to the State of France as the goings on of the Protestants lent their aid. This, however, has nothing to do with my story.

About this time the lord and lady of Bastarnay were invited by the king to come to his town of Loches, where for the present he was with his court, in which the beauty of the lady of Bastarnay

had made a great noise. Bertha came to Loches, received many kind praises from the king, was the centre of the homage of all the young nobles, who feasted their eyes on this apple of love, and of the old ones, who warmed themselves at this sun. But you may be sure that all of them, old and young, would have suffered death a thousand times over to have at their service this instrument of joy, which dazzled their eyes and muddled their brains. Bertha was more talked about in Loches than either God or the Gospels, which enraged a great many ladies who were not so bountifully endowed with charms, and would have given all that was left of their honour to have sent back to her castle this fair gatherer of smiles.

A young lady having early perceived that one of her lovers was smitten with Bertha, took such a hatred to her that from it arose all the misfortunes of the lady of Bastarnay; but also from the same source came her happiness, and her discovery of the gentle land of love, of which she was ignorant. This wicked lady had a relation who had confessed to her, directly he saw Bertha, that to be her lover he would be willing to die after a month's happiness with her. Bear in mind that this cousin was as handsome as a girl is beautiful, had no hair on his chin, would have gained his enemy's forgiveness by asking for it, so melodious was his young voice, and was scarcely twenty years of age.

"Dear cousin," said she to him, "leave the room, and go to your house; I will endeavour to give you this joy. But do not let yourself be seen by her, nor by that old baboon-face by an error of nature on a Christian's body, and to whom belongs this beauteous fay."

The young gentleman out of the way, the lady came rubbing her treacherous nose against Bertha's, and called her "My friend, my treasure, my star of beauty"; trying every way to be agreeable to her, to make her vengeance more certain on the poor child who, all unwittingly, had caused her lover's heart to be faithless, which, for women ambitious in love, is the worst of infidelities. After a little conversation, the plotting lady suspected that poor Bertha was a maiden in matters of love, when she saw her eyes full of limpid water, no marks on the temples, no little black speck on the point of her little nose, white as snow, where usually the marks of the amusement are visible, no wrinkle on her brow; in short, no habit of pleasure apparent on her face--clear as the face of an innocent maiden. Then this traitress put certain women's questions to her, and was perfectly assured by the replies of Bertha, that if she had had the profit of being a mother, the pleasures of love had been denied to her. At this she rejoiced greatly on her cousin's behalf--like the good woman she was.

Then she told her, that in the town of Loches there lived a young and noble lady, of the family of a Rohan, who at that time had need of the assistance of a lady of position to be reconciled with the Sire Louis de Rohan; that if she had as much goodness as God had given her beauty, she would take her with her to the castle, ascertain for herself the sanctity of her life, and bring about a reconciliation with the Sire de Rohan, who refused to receive her. To this Bertha consented without hesitation, because the misfortunes of this girl were known to her, but not the poor young lady herself, whose name was Sylvia, and whom she had believed to be in a foreign land.

It is here necessary to state why the king had given this invitation to the Sire de Bastarnay. He had a suspicion of the first flight of his son the Dauphin into Burgundy, and wished to deprive him of so good a counsellor as was the said Bastarnay. But the veteran, faithful to young Louis, had already, without saying a word, made up his mind. Therefore he took Bertha back to his castle; but before they set out she told him she had taken a companion and introduced her to him. It was the young lord, disguised as a girl, with the assistance of his cousin, who was jealous of Bertha, and annoyed at her virtue. Imbert drew back a little when he learned that it was Sylvia de Rohan, but was also much affected at the kindness of Bertha, whom he thanked for her attempt to bring a little wandering lamb back to the fold. He made much of his wife, when his last night at home came, left men-at-arms about his castle, and then set out with the Dauphin for

Burgundy, having a cruel enemy in his bosom without suspecting it. The face of the young lad was unknown to him, because he was a young page come to see the king's court, and who had been brought up by the Cardinal Dunois, in whose service he was a knight-bachelor.

The old lord, believing that he was a girl, thought him very modest and timid, because the lad, doubting the language of his eyes, kept them always cast down; and when Bertha kissed him on the mouth, he trembled lest his petticoat might be indiscreet, and would walk away to the window, so fearful was he of being recognised as a man by Bastarnay, and killed before he had made love to the lady.

Therefore he was as joyful as any lover would have been in his place, when the portcullis was lowered, and the old lord galloped away across the country. He had been in such suspense that he made a vow to build a pillar at his own expense in the cathedral at Tours, because he had escaped the danger of his mad scheme. He gave, indeed, fifty gold marks to pay God for his delight. But by chance he had to pay for it over again to the devil, as it appears from the following facts if the tale pleases you well enough to induce you to follow the narrative, which will be succinct, as all good speeches should be.

II. How Bertha Behaved, Knowing the Business of Love

This bachelor was the young Sire Jehan de Sacchez, cousin of the Sieur de Montmorency, to whom, by the death of the said Jehan, the fiefs of Sacchez and other places would return, according to the deed of tenure. He was twenty years of age and glowed like a burning coal; therefore you may be sure that he had a hard job to get through the first day. While old Imbert was galloping across the fields, the two cousins perched themselves under the lantern of the portcullis, in order to keep him the longer in view, and waved him signals of farewells. When the clouds of dust raised by the heels of the horses were no longer visible upon the horizon, they came down and went into the great room of the castle.

"What shall we do, dear cousin?" said Bertha to the false Sylvia. "Do you like music? We will play together. Let us sing the lay of some sweet ancient bard. Eh? What do you say? Come to my organ; come along. As you love me, sing!"

Then she took Jehan by the hand and led him to the keyboard of the organ, at which the young fellow seated himself prettily, after the manner of women. "Ah! sweet coz," cried Bertha, as soon as the first notes tried, the lad turned his head towards her, in order that they might sing together. "Ah! sweet coz you have a wonderful glance in your eye; you move I know not what in my heart."

"Ah! cousin," replied the false Sylvia, "that it is which has been my ruin. A sweet milord of the land across the sea told me so often that I had fine eyes, and kissed them so well, that I yielded, so much pleasure did I feel in letting them be kissed."

"Cousin, does love then, commence in the eyes?"

"In them is the forge of Cupid's bolts, my dear Bertha," said the lover, casting fire and flame at her.

"Let us go on with our singing."

They then sang, by Jehan's desire, a lay of Christine de Pisan, every word of which breathed love.

"Ah! cousin, what a deep and powerful voice you have. It seems to pierce me."

"Where?" said the impudent Sylvia.

"There," replied Bertha, touching her little diaphragm, where the sounds of love are understood better than by the ears, but the diaphragm lies nearer the heart, and that which is undoubtedly the first brain, the second heart, and the third ear of the ladies. I say this, with all respect and with all honour, for physical reasons and for no others.

"Let us leave off singing," said Bertha; "it has too great an effect upon me. Come to the window; we can do needlework until the evening."

"Ah! dear cousin of my soul, I don't know how to hold the needle in my fingers, having been accustomed, to my perdition to do something else with them."

"Eh! what did you do then all day long?"

"Ah! I yielded to the current of love, which makes days seem Instants, months seem days, and years months; and if it could last, would gulp down eternity like a strawberry, seeing that it is all youth and fragrance, sweetness and endless joy."

Then the youth dropped his beautiful eyelids over his eyes, and remained as melancholy as a poor lady who has been abandoned by her lover, who weeps for him, wishes to kiss him, and would pardon his perfidy, if he would but seek once again the sweet path to his once-loved fold.

"Cousin, does love blossom in the married state?"

"Oh no," said Sylvia; "because in the married state everything is duty, but in love everything is done in perfect freedom of heart. This difference communicates an indescribable soft balm to those caresses which are the flowers of love."

"Cousin, let us change the conversation; it affects me more than did the music."

She called hastily to a servant to bring her boy to her, who came, and when Sylvia saw him, she exclaimed--

"Ah! the little dear, he is as beautiful as love."

Then she kissed him heartily upon the forehead.

"Come, my little one," said the mother, as the child clambered into her lap. "Thou art thy mother's blessing, her unclouded joy, the delight of her every hour, her crown, her jewel, her own pure pearl, her spotless soul, her treasure, her morning and evening star, her only flame, and her heart's darling. Give me thy hands, that I may eat them; give me thine ears, that I may bite them; give me thy head, that I may kiss thy curls. Be happy sweet flower of my body, that I may be happy too."

"Ah! cousin," said Sylvia, "you are speaking the language of love to him."

"Love is a child then?"

"Yes, cousin; therefore the heathen always portrayed him as a little boy."

And with many other remarks fertile in the imagery of love, the two pretty cousins amused themselves until supper time, playing with the child.

"Would you like to have another?" whispered Jehan, at an opportune moment, into his cousin's ear, which he touched with his warm lips.

"Ah! Sylvia! for that I would ensure a hundred years of purgatory, if it would only please God to give me that joy. But in spite of the work, labour, and industry of my spouse, which causes me much pain, my waist does not vary in size. Alas! It is nothing to have but one child. If I hear the sound of a cry in the castle, my heart beats ready to burst. I fear man and beast alike for this innocent darling; I dread volts, passes, and manual exercises; in fact, I dread everything. I live not in myself, but in him alone. And, alas! I like to endure these miseries, because when I fidget, and tremble, it is a sign that my offspring is safe and sound. To be brief--for I am never weary of talking on this subject--I believe that my breath is in him, and not in myself."

With these words she hugged him to her breasts, as only mothers know how to hug children, with a spiritual force that is felt only in their hearts. If you doubt this, watch a cat carrying her kittens in her mouth, not one of them gives a single mew. The youthful gallant, who had certain fears about watering this fair, unfertile plain, was reassured by this speech. He thought then that it would only be following the commandments of God to win this saint to love; and he thought right. At night Bertha asked her cousin--according to the old custom, to which the ladies of our day object--to keep her company in her big seigneurial bed. To which request Sylvia replied--in order to keep up the role of a well-born maiden--that nothing would give her greater pleasure. The curfew rang, and found the two cousins in a chamber richly ornamented with carpeting, fringes, and royal tapestries, and Bertha began gracefully to disarray herself, assisted by her women. You can imagine that her companion modestly declined their services, and told her cousin, with a little blush, that she was accustomed to undress herself ever since she had lost the services of her dearly beloved, who had put her out of conceit with feminine fingers by his gentle ways; that these preparations brought back the pretty speeches he used to make, and his merry pranks while playing the lady's-maid; and that to her injury, the memory of all these things brought the water into her mouth.

This discourse considerably astonished the lady Bertha, who let her cousin say her prayers, and make other preparations for the night beneath the curtains of the bed, into which my lord, inflamed with desire, soon tumbled, happy at being able to catch an occasional glimpse of the wondrous charms of the chatelaine, which were in no way injured. Bertha, believing herself to be with an experienced girl, did not omit any of the usual practices; she washed her feet, not minding whether she raised them little or much, exposed her delicate little shoulders, and did as all the ladies do when they are retiring to rest. At last she came to bed, and settled herself comfortably in it, kissing her cousin on the lips, which she found remarkably warm.

"Are you unwell, Sylvia, that you burn so?" said she.

"I always burn like that when I go to bed," replied her companion, "because at that time there comes back to my memory the pretty little tricks that he invented to please me, and which make me burn still more."

"Ah! cousin, tell me all about this he. Tell all the sweets of love to me, who live beneath the shadow of a hoary head, of which the snows keep me from such warm feelings. Tell me all; you are cured. It will be a good warning to me, and then your misfortunes will have been a salutary lesson to two poor weak women."

"I do not know I ought to obey you, sweet cousin," said the youth.

"Tell me, why not?"

"Ah! deeds are better than words," said the false maiden, heaving a deep sigh as the /ut/ of an organ. "But I am afraid that this milord has encumbered me with so much joy that you may get a little of it, which would be enough to give you a daughter, since the power of engendering is weakened in me."

"But," said Bertha, "between us, would it be a sin?"

"It would be, on the contrary, a joy both here and in heaven; the angels would shed their fragrance around you, and make sweet music in your ears."

"Tell me quickly, then," said Bertha.

"Well, then, this is how my dear lord made my heart rejoice."

With these words Jehan took Bertha in his arms, and strained her hungering to his heart, for in the soft light of the lamp, and clothed with the spotless linen, she was in this tempting bed, like the pretty petals of a lily at the bottom of the virgin calyx.

"When he held me as I hold thee he said to me, with a voice far sweeter than mine, 'Ah, Bertha, thou art my eternal love, my priceless treasure, my joy by day and my joy by night; thou art fairer than the day is day; there is naught so pretty as thou art. I love thee more than God, and would endure a thousand deaths for the happiness I ask of thee!' Then he would kiss me, not after the manner of husbands, which is rough, but in a peculiar dove-like fashion."

To show her there and then how much better was the method of lovers, he sucked all the honey from Bertha's lips, and taught her how, with her pretty tongue, small and rosy as that of a cat, she could speak to the heart without saying a single word, and becoming exhausted at this game, Jehan spread the fire of his kisses from the mouth to the neck, from the neck to the sweetest forms that ever a woman gave a child to slake its thirst upon. And whoever had been in his place would have thought himself a wicked man not to imitate him.

"Ah!" said Bertha, fast bound in love without knowing it; "this is better. I must take care to tell Imbert about it."

"Are you in your proper senses, cousin? Say nothing about it to your old husband. How could he make his hands pleasant like mine? They are as hard as washerwoman's beetles, and his piebald beard would hardly please this centre of bliss, that rose in which lies our wealth, our substance, our loves, and our fortune. Do you know that it is a living flower, which should be fondled thus, and not used like a trombone, or as if it were a catapult of war? Now this was the gentle way of my beloved Englishman."

Thus saying, the handsome youth comported himself so bravely in the battle that victory crowned his efforts, and poor innocent Bertha exclaimed--

"Ah! cousin, the angels are come! but so beautiful is the music, that I hear nothing else, and so flaming are their luminous rays, that my eyes are closing."

And, indeed, she fainted under the burden of those joys of love which burst forth in her like the highest notes of the organ, which glistened like the most magnificent aurora, which flowed in her veins like the finest musk, and loosened the liens of her life in giving her a child of love, who

made a great deal of confusion in taking up his quarters. Finally, Bertha imagined herself to be in Paradise, so happy did she feel; and woke from this beautiful dream in the arms of Jehan, exclaiming--

"Ah! who would not have been married in England!"

"My sweet mistress," said Jehan, whose ecstasy was sooner over, "you are married to me in France, where things are managed still better, for I am a man who would give a thousand lives for you if he had them."

Poor Bertha gave a shriek so sharp that it pierced the walls, and leapt out of bed like a mountebank of the plains of Egypt would have done. She fell upon her knees before her /Prie-Dieu/, joined her hands, and wept more pearls than ever Mary Magdalene wore.

"Ah! I am dead" she cried; "I am deceived by a devil who has taken the face of an angel. I am lost; I am the mother for certain of a beautiful child, without being more guilty than you, Madame the Virgin. Implore the pardon of God for me, if I have not that of men upon earth; or let me die, so that I may not blush before my lord and master."

Hearing that she said nothing against him, Jehan rose, quite aghast to see Bertha take this charming dance for two so to heart. But the moment she heard her Gabriel moving she sprang quickly to her feet, regarded him with a tearful face, and her eye illumined with a holy anger, which made her more lovely to look upon, exclaimed--

"If you advance a single step towards me, I will make one towards death!"

And she took her stiletto in her hand.

So heartrending was the tragic spectacle of her grief that Jehan answered her--

"It is not for thee but for me to die, my dear, beautiful mistress, more dearly loved than will ever woman be again upon this earth."

"If you had truly loved me you would not have killed me as you have, for I will die sooner than be reproached by my husband."

"Will you die?" said he.

"Assuredly," said she.

"Now, if I am here pierced with a thousand blows, you will have your husband's pardon, to whom you will say that if your innocence was surprised, you have avenged his honour by killing the man who had deceived you; and it will be the greatest happiness that could ever befall me to die for you, the moment you refuse to live for me."

Hearing this tender discourse spoken with tears, Bertha dropped the dagger; Jehan sprang upon it, and thrust it into his breast, saying--

"Such happiness can be paid for but with death."

And fell stiff and stark.

Bertha, terrified, called aloud for her maid. The servant came, and terribly alarmed to see a wounded man in Madame's chamber, and Madame holding him up, crying and saying, "What have you done, my love?" because she believed he was dead, and remembered her vanished joys, and thought how beautiful Jehan must be, since everyone, even Imbert, believed him to be a girl. In her sorrow she confessed all to her maid, sobbing and crying out, "that it was quite enough to have upon her mind the life of a child without having the death of a man as well." Hearing this the poor lover tried to open his eyes, and only succeeded in showing a little bit of the white of them.

"Ha! Madame, don't cry out," said the servant, "let us keep our senses together and save this pretty knight. I will go and seek La Fallotte, in order not to let any physician or surgeon into the secret, and as she is a sorceress she will, to please Madame, perform the miracle of healing this wound so not a trace of it shall remain.

"Run!" replied Bertha. "I will love you, and will pay you well for this assistance."

But before anything else was done the lady and her maid agreed to be silent about this adventure, and hide Jehan from every eye. Then the servant went out into the night to seek La Fallotte, and was accompanied by her mistress as far as the postern, because the guard could not raise the portcullis without Bertha's special order. Bertha found on going back that her lover had fainted, for the blood was flowing from the wound. At the sight she drank a little of his blood, thinking that Jehan had shed it for her. Affected by this great love and by the danger, she kissed this pretty varlet of pleasure on the face, bound up his wound, bathing it with her tears, beseeching him not to die, and exclaiming that if he would live she would love him with all her heart. You can imagine that the chatelaine became still more enamoured while observing what a difference there was between a young knight like Jehan, white, downy, and agreeable, and an old fellow like Imbert, bristly, yellow, and wrinkled. This difference brought back to her memory that which she had found in the pleasure of love. Moved by this souvenir, her kisses became so warm that Jehan came back to his senses, his look improved, and he could see Bertha, from whom in a feeble voice he asked forgiveness. But Bertha forbade him to speak until La Fallotte had arrived. Then both of them consumed the time by loving each other with their eyes, since in those of Bertha there was nothing but compassion, and on these occasions pity is akin to love.

La Fallotte was a hunchback, vehemently suspected of dealings in necromancy, and of riding to nocturnal orgies on a broomstick, according to the custom of witches. Certain persons had seen her putting the harness on her broom in the stable, which, as everyone knows is on the housetops. To tell the truth, she possessed certain medical secrets, and was of such great service to ladies in certain things, and to the nobles, that she lived in perfect tranquillity, without giving up the ghost on a pile of fagots, but on a feather bed, for she had made a hatful of money, although the physicians tormented her by declaring that she sold poisons, which was certainly true, as will be shown in the sequel. The servant and La Fallotte came on the same ass, making such haste that they arrived at the castle before the day had fully dawned.

The old hunchback exclaimed, as she entered the chamber, "Now then, my children, what is the matter?"

This was her manner, which was familiar with great people, who appeared very small to her. She put on her spectacles, and carefully examined the wound, saying--

"This is fine blood, my dear; you have tasted it. That's all right, he has bled externally."

Then she washed the wound with a fine sponge, under the nose of the lady and the servant, who held their breath. To be brief, Fallotte gave it as her medical opinion, that the youth would not

die from this blow, "although," said she, looking at his hand, "he will come to a violent end through this night's deed."

This decree of chiromancy frightened considerably both Bertha and the maid. Fallotte prescribed certain remedies, and promised to come again the following night. Indeed, she tended the wound for a whole fortnight, coming secretly at night-time. The people about the castle were told by the servants that their young lady, Sylvia de Rohan, was in danger of death, through a swelling of the stomach, which must remain a mystery for the honour of Madame, who was her cousin. Each one was satisfied with this story, of which his mouth was so full that he told it to his fellows.

The good people believe that it was the malady which was fraught with danger; but it was not! it was the convalescence, for the stronger Jehan grew, the weaker Bertha became, and so weak that she allowed herself to drift into that Paradise the gates of which Jehan had opened for her. To be brief, she loved him more and more. But in the midst of her happiness, always mingled with apprehension at the menacing words of Fallotte, and tormented by her great religion, she was in great fear of her husband, Imbert, to whom she was compelled to write that he had given her a child, who would be ready to delight him on his return. Poor Bertha avoided her lover, Jehan, during the day on which she wrote the lying letter, over which she soaked her handkerchief with tears. Finding himself avoided (for they had previously left each other no more than fire leaves the wood it has bitten) Jehan believed that she was beginning to hate him, and straightway he cried too. In the evening Bertha, touched by his tears, which had left their mark upon his eyes, although he had well dried them, told him the cause of her sorrow, mingling therewith her confessions of her terrors for the future, pointing out to him how much they were both to blame, and discoursing so beautifully to him, gave utterance to such Christian sentences, ornamented with holy tears and contrite prayers, that Jehan was touched to the quick by the sincerity of his mistress. This love innocently united to repentance, this nobility in sin, this mixture of weakness and strength, would, as the old authors say, have changed the nature of a tiger, melting it to pity. You will not be astonished then, that Jehan was compelled to pledge his word as a knight-bachelor, to obey her in what ever she should command him, to save her in this world and in the next. Delighted at this confidence in her, and this goodness of heart, Bertha cast herself at Jehan's feet, and kissing them, exclaimed--

"Oh! my love, whom I am compelled to love, although it is a mortal sin to do so, thou who art so good, so gentle to thy poor Bertha, if thou wouldst have her always think of thee with pleasure, and stop the torrent of her tears, whose source is so pretty and so pleasant (here, to show him that it was so, she let him steal a kiss)--Jehan, if thou wouldst that the memory of our celestial joys, angel music, and the fragrance of love should be a consolation to me in my loneliness rather than a torment, do that which the Virgin commanded me to order thee in a dream, in which I was beseeching her to direct me in the present case, for I had asked her to come to me, and she had come. Then I told her the horrible anguish I should endure, trembling for this little one, whose movements I already feel, and for the real father, who would be at the mercy of the other, and might expiate his paternity by a violent death, since it is possible that La Fallotte saw clearly into his future life. Then the beautiful Virgin told me, smiling, that the Church offered its forgiveness for our faults if we followed her commandments; that it was necessary to save one's self from the pains of hell, by reforming before Heaven became angry. Then with her finger she showed me a Jehan like thee, but dressed as thou shouldst be, and as thou wilt be, if thou does but love thy Bertha with a love eternal."

Jehan assured her of his perfect obedience, and raised her, seating her on his knee, and kissing her. The unhappy Bertha told him then that this garment was a monk's frock, and trembling besought him-- almost fearing a refusal--to enter the Church, and retire to Marmoustier, beyond Tours, pledging him her word that she would grant him a last night, after which she would be neither for him nor for anyone else in the world again. And each year, as a reward for this, she

would let him come to her one day, in order that he might see the child. Jehan, bound by his oath, promised to obey his mistress, saying that by this means he would be faithful to her, and would experience no joys of love but those tasted in her divine embrace, and would live upon the dear remembrance of them. Hearing these sweet words, Bertha declared to him that, however great might have been her sin, and whatever God reserved for her, this happiness would enable her to support it, since she believed she had not fallen through a man, but through an angel.

Then they returned to the nest which contained their love but only to bid a final adieu to all their lovely flowers. There can be but little doubt that Seigneur Cupid had something to do with this festival, for no woman ever experienced such joy in any part of the world before, and no man ever took as much. The especial property of true love is a certain harmony, which brings it about that the more one gives, the more the other receives, and vice-versa, as in certain cases in mathematics, where things are multiplied by themselves without end. This problem can only be explained to unscientific people, by asking them to look into their Venetian glasses, in which are to be seen thousands of faces produced by one alone. Thus, in the heart of two lovers, the roses of pleasure multiply within them in a manner which causes them to be astonished that so much joy can be contained, without anything bursting. Bertha and Jehan would have wished in this night to have finished their days, and thought, from the excessive languor which flowed in their veins, that love had resolved to bear them away on his wings with the kiss of death; but they held out in spite of these numerous multiplications.

On the morrow, as the return of Monsieur Imbert de Bastarnay was close at hand, the lady Sylvia was compelled to depart. The poor girl left her cousin, covering her with tears and with kisses; it was always her last, but the last lasted till evening. Then he was compelled to leave her, and he did leave her although the blood of his heart congealed, like the fallen wax of a Paschal candle. According to his promise, he wended his way towards Marmoustier, which he entered towards the eleventh hour of the day, and was placed among the novices. Monseigneur de Bastarnay was informed that Sylvia had returned to the Lord which is the signification of le Seigneur in the English language; and therefore in this Bertha did not lie.

The joy of her husband, when he saw Bertha without her waistband--she could not wear it, so much had she increased in size--commenced the martyrdom of this poor woman, who did not know how to deceive, and who, at each false word, went to her Prie-Dieu, wept her blood away from her eyes in tears, burst into prayers, and recommended herself to the graces of Messieurs the Saints in paradise. It happened that she cried so loudly to God that He heard her, because He hears everything; He hears the stones that roll beneath the waters, the poor who groan, and the flies who wing their way through the air. It is well that you should know this, otherwise you would not believe in what happened. God commanded the archangel Michael to make for this penitent a hell upon earth, so that she might enter without dispute into Paradise. Then St. Michael descended from the skies as far as the gate of hell, and handed over this triple soul to the devil, telling him that he had permission to torment it during the rest of her days, at the same time indicating to him Bertha, Jehan and the child.

The devil, who by the will of God, is lord of all evil, told the archangel that he would obey the message. During this heavenly arrangement life went on as usual here below. The sweet lady of Bastarnay gave the most beautiful child in the world to the Sire Imbert, a boy all lilies and roses, of great intelligence, like a little Jesus, merry and arch as a pagan love. He became more beautiful day by day, while the elder was turning into an ape, like his father, whom he painfully resembled. The younger boy was as bright as a star, and resembled his father and mother, whose corporeal and spiritual perfections had produced a compound of illustrious graces and marvellous intelligence. Seeing this perpetual miracle of body and mind blended with the essential conditions, Bastarnay declared that for his eternal salvation he would like to make the younger the elder, and that he would do with the king's protection. Bertha did not know what to

do, for she adored the child of Jehan, and could only feel a feeble affection for the other, whom, nevertheless she protected against the evil intentions of the old fellow, Bastarnay.

Bertha, satisfied with the way things were going, quieted her conscience with falsehood, and thought that all danger was past, since twelve years had elapsed with no other alloy than the doubt which at times embittered her joy. Each year, according to her pledged faith, the monk of Marmoustier, who was unknown to everyone except the servant-maid, came to pass a whole day at the chateau to see his child, although Bertha had many times besought brother Jehan to yield his right. But Jehan pointed to the child, saying, "You see him every day of the year, and I only once!" And the poor mother could find no word to answer this speech with.

A few months before the last rebellion of the Dauphin Louis against his father, the boy was treading closely on the heels of his twelfth year, and appeared likely to become a great savant, so learned was he in all the sciences. Old Bastarnay had never been more delighted at having been a father in his life, and resolved to take his son with him to the Court of Burgundy, where Duke Charles promised to make for this well-beloved son a position, which should be the envy of princes, for he was not at all averse to clever people. Seeing matters thus arranged, the devil judged the time to be ripe for his mischiefs. He took his tail and flapped it right into the middle of this happiness, so that he could stir it up in his own peculiar way.

III. Horrible Chastisement of Bertha and Expiation of the Same, Who Died Pardoned

The servant of the lady of Bastarnay, who was then about five-and- thirty years old, fell in love with one of the master's men-at-arms, and was silly enough to let him take loaves out of the oven, until there resulted therefrom a natural swelling, which certain wags in these parts call a nine months' dropsy. The poor woman begged her mistress to intercede for her with the master, so that he might compel this wicked man to finish at the altar that which he had commenced elsewhere. Madame de Bastarnay had no difficulty in obtaining this favour from him, and the servant was quite satisfied. But the old warrior, who was always extremely rough, hastened into his pretorium, and blew him up sky-high, ordering him, under the pain of the gallows, to marry the girl; which the soldier preferred to do, thinking more of his neck than of his peace of mind.

Bastarnay sent also for the female, to whom he imagined, for the honour of his house, he ought to sing a litany, mixed with epithets and ornamented with extremely strong expressions, and made her think, by way of punishment, that she was not going to be married, but flung into one of the cells in the jail. The girl fancied that Madame wanted to get rid of her, in order to inter the secret of the birth of her beloved son. With this impression, when the old ape said such outrageous things to her--namely, that he must have been a fool to keep a harlot in his house--she replied that he certainly was a very big fool, seeing that for a long time past his wife had been played the harlot, and with a monk too, which was the worst thing that could happen to a warrior.

Think of the greatest storm you ever saw it in your life, and you will have a weak sketch of the furious rage into which the old man fell, when thus assailed in a portion of his heart which was a triple life. He seized the girl by the throat, and would have killed her there and then, but she, to prove her story, detailed the how, the why, and the when, and said that if he had no faith in her, he could have the evidence of his own ears by hiding himself the day that Father Jehan de Sacchez, the prior of Marmoustier, came. He would then hear the words of the father, who solaced herself for his year's fast, and in one day kissed his son for the rest of the year.

Imbert ordered this woman instantly to leave the castle, since, if her accusation were true, he would kill her just as though she had invented a tissue of lies. In an instant he had given her a hundred crowns, besides her man, enjoining them not to sleep in Touraine; and for greater security, they were conducted into Burgundy, by de Bastarnay's officers. He informed his wife of

their departure, saying, that as her servant was a damaged article he had thought it best to get rid of her, but had given her a hundred crowns, and found employment for the man at the Court of Burgundy. Bertha was astonished to learn that her maid had left the castle without receiving her dismissal from herself, her mistress; but she said nothing. Soon afterwards she had other fish to fry, for she became a prey to vague apprehensions, because her husband completely changed in his manner, commenced to notice the likeness of his first-born to himself, and could find nothing resembling his nose, or his forehead, his this, or his that, in the youngest he loved so well.

"He is my very image," replied Bertha one day that he was throwing out these hints. "Know you not that in well regulated households, children are formed from the father and mother, each in turn, or often from both together, because the mother mingles her qualities with the vital force of the father? Some physicians declare that they have known many children born without any resemblance to either father or mother, and attribute these mysteries to the whim of the Almighty."

"You have become very learned, my dear," replied Bastarnay; "but I, who am an ignoramus, I should fancy that a child who resembles a monk--"

"Had a monk for a father!" said Bertha, looking at him with an unflinching gaze, although ice rather than blood was coursing through her veins.

The old fellow thought he was mistaken, and cursed the servant; but he was none the less determined to make sure of the affair. As the day of Father Jehan's visit was close at hand, Bertha, whose suspicions were aroused by this speech, wrote him that it was her wish that he should not come this year, without, however, telling him her reason; then she went in search of La Fallotte at Loches, who was to give her letter to Jehan, and believed everything was safe for the present. She was all the more pleased at having written to her friend the prior, when Imbert, who, towards the time appointed for the poor monk's annual treat, had always been accustomed to take a journey into the province of Maine, where he had considerable property, remained this time at home, giving as his reason the preparations for rebellion which monseigneur Louis was then making against his father, who as everyone knows, was so cut up at this revolt that it caused his death. This reason was so good a one, that poor Bertha was quite satisfied with it, and did not trouble herself. On the regular day, however, the prior arrived as usual. Bertha seeing him, turned pale, and asked him if he had not received her message.

"What message?" said Jehan.

"Ah! we are lost then; the child, thou, and I," replied Bertha.

"Why so?" said the prior.

"I know not," said she; "but our last day has come."

She inquired of her dearly beloved son where Bastarnay was. The young man told her that his father had been sent for by a special messenger to Loches, and would not be back until evening. Thereupon Jehan wished, in spite of his mistress, to remain with her and his dear son, asserting that no harm would come of it, after the lapse of twelve years, since the birth of their boy.

The days when that adventurous night you know of was celebrated, Bertha stayed in her room with the poor monk until supper time. But on this occasion the lovers--hastened by the apprehensions of Bertha, which was shared by Jehan directly she had informed him of them--dined immediately, although the prior of Marmoustier reassured Bertha by pointing out to her the

privileges of the Church, and how Bastarnay, already in bad odour at court, would be afraid to attack a dignitary of Marmoustier. When they were sitting down to table their little one happened to be playing, and in spite of the reiterated prayers of his mother, would not stop his games, since he was galloping about the courtyard on a fine Spanish barb, which Duke Charles of Burgundy had presented to Bastarnay. And because young lads like to show off, varlets make themselves bachelors at arms, and bachelors wish to play the knight, this boy was delighted at being able to show the monk what a man he was becoming; he made the horse jump like a flea in the bedclothes, and sat as steady as a trooper in the saddle.

"Let him have his way, my darling," said the monk to Bertha. "Disobedient children often become great characters."

Bertha ate sparingly, for her heart was as swollen as a sponge in water. At the first mouthful, the monk, who was a great scholar, felt in his stomach a pain, and on his palette a bitter taste of poison that caused him to suspect that the Sire de Bastarnay had given them all their quietus. Before he had made this discovery Bertha had eaten. Suddenly the monk pulled off the tablecloth and flung everything into the fireplace, telling Bertha his suspicion. Bertha thanked the Virgin that her son had been so taken up with his sport. Retaining his presence of mind, Jehan, who had not forgotten the lesson he had learned as a page, leaped into the courtyard, lifted his son from the horse, sprang across it himself, and flew across the country with such speed that you would have thought him a shooting-star if you had seen him digging the spurs into the horse's bleeding flanks, and he was at Loches in Fallotte's house in the same space of time that only the devil could have done the journey. He stated the case to her in two words, for the poison was already frying his marrow, and requested her to give him an antidote.

"Alas," said the sorceress, "had I known that it was for you I was giving this poison, I would have received in my breast the dagger's point, with which I was threatened, and would have sacrificed my poor life to save that of a man of God, and of the sweetest woman that ever blossomed on this earth; for alas! my dear friend, I have only two drops of the counter-poison that you see in this phial."

"Is there enough for her?"

"Yes, but go at once," said the old hag.

The monk came back more quickly than he went, so that the horse died under him in the courtyard. He rushed into the room where Bertha, believing her last hour to be come, was kissing her son, and writhing like a lizard in the fire, uttering no cry for herself, but for the child, left to the wrath of Bastarnay, forgetting her own agony at the thought of his cruel future.

"Take this," said the monk; "my life is saved!"

Jehan had the great courage to say these words with an unmoved face, although he felt the claws of death seizing his heart. Hardly had Bertha drunk when the prior fell dead, not, however, without kissing his son, and regarding his dear lady with an eye that changed not even after his last sigh. This sight turned her as cold as marble, and terrified her so much that she remained rigid before this dead man, stretched at her feet, pressing the hand of her child, who wept, although her own eye was as dry as the Red Sea when the Hebrews crossed it under the leadership of Baron Moses, for it seemed to her that she had sharp sand rolling under her eyelids. Pray for her, ye charitable souls, for never was woman so agonised, in divining that her lover has saved her life at the expense of his own. Aided by her son, she herself placed the monk in the middle of the bed, and stood by the side of it, praying with the boy, whom she then told that the prior was his true father. In this state she waited her evil hour, and her evil hour did not take long

in coming, for towards the eleventh hour Bastarnay arrived, and was informed at the portcullis that the monk was dead, and not Madame and the child, and he saw his beautiful Spanish horse lying dead. Thereupon, seized with a furious desire to slay Bertha and the monk's bastard, he sprang up the stairs with one bound; but at the sight of the corpse, for whom his wife and her son repeated incessant litanies, having no ears for his torrent of invective, having no eyes for his writhings and threats, he had no longer the courage to perpetrate this dark deed. After the first fury of his rage had passed, he could not bring himself to it, and quitted the room like a coward and a man taken in crime, stung to the quick by those prayers continuously said for the monk. The night was passed in tears, groans, and prayers.

By an express order from Madame, her servant had been to Loches to purchase for her the attire of a young lady of quality, and for her poor child a horse and the arms of an esquire; noticing which the Sieur de Bastarnay was much astonished. He sent for Madame and the monk's son, but neither mother nor child returned any answer, but quietly put on the clothes purchased by the servant. By Madame's order this servant made up the account of her effects, arranged her clothes, purples, jewels, and diamonds, as the property of a widow is arranged when she renounces her rights. Bertha ordered even her alms-purse be included, in order that the ceremony might be perfect. The report of these preparations ran through the house, and everyone knew then that the mistress was about to leave it, a circumstance that filled every heart with sorrow, even that of a little scullion, who had only been a week in the place, but to whom Madame had already given a kind word.

Frightened at these preparations, old Bastarnay came into her chamber, and found her weeping over the body of Jehan, for the tears had come at last; but she dried them directly she perceived her husband. To his numerous questions she replied briefly by the confession of her fault, telling him how she had been duped, how the poor page had been distressed, showing him upon the corpse the mark of the poniard wound; how long he had been getting well; and how, in obedience to her, and from penitence towards God, he had entered the Church, abandoning the glorious career of a knight, putting an end to his name, which was certainly worse than death; how she, while avenging her honour, had thought that even God himself would not have refused the monk one day in the year to see the son for whom he had sacrificed everything; how, not wishing to live with a murderer, she was about to quit his house, leaving all her property behind her; because, if the honour of the Bastarnays was stained, it was not she who had brought the shame about; because in this calamity she had arranged matters as best she could; finally, she added a vow to go over mountain and valley, she and her son, until all was expiated, for she knew how to expiate all.

Having with noble mien and a pale face uttered these beautiful words, she took her child by the hand and went out in great mourning, more magnificently beautiful than was Mademoiselle Hagar on her departure from the residence of the patriarch Abraham, and so proudly, that all the servants and retainers fell on their knees as she passed along, imploring her with joined hands, like Notre Dame de la Riche. It was pitiful to see the Sieur de Bastarnay following her, ashamed, weeping, confessing himself to blame, and downcast and despairing, like a man being led to the gallows, there to be turned off.

And Bertha turned a deaf ear to everything. The desolation was so great that she found the drawbridge lowered, and hastened to quit the castle, fearing that it might be suddenly raised again; but no one had the right or the heart to do it. She sat down on the curb of the moat, in view of the whole castle, who begged her, with tears, to stay. The poor sire was standing with his hand upon the chain of the portcullis, as silent as the stone saints carved above the door. He saw Bertha order her son to shake the dust from his shoes at the end of the bridge, in order to have nothing belonging to Bastarnay about him; and she did likewise. Then, indicating the sire to her son with her finger, she spoke to him as follows--

"Child, behold the murderer of thy father, who was, as thou art aware, the poor prior; but thou hast taken the name of this man. Give it him back here, even as thou leavest the dust taken by the shoes from his castle. For the food that thou hast had in the castle, by God's help we will also settle."

Hearing this, Bastarnay would have let his wife receive a whole monastery of monks in order not to be abandoned by her, and by a young squire capable of becoming the honour of his house, and remained with his head sunk down against the chains.

The heart of Bertha was suddenly filled with holy solace, for the banner of the great monastery turned the corner of a road across the fields, and appeared accompanied by the chants of the Church, which burst forth like heavenly music. The monks, informed of the murder perpetrated on their well-beloved prior, came in procession, assisted by the ecclesiastical justice, to claim his body. When he saw this, the Sire de Bastarnay had barely that time to make for the postern with his men, and set out towards Monseigneur Louis, leaving everything in confusion.

Poor Bertha, en croup behind her son, came to Montbazou to bid her father farewell, telling him that this blow would be her death, and was consoled by those of her family who endeavoured to raise her spirits, but were unable to do so. The old Sire de Rohan presented his grandson with a splendid suit of armour, telling him to acquire glory and honour that he might turn his mother's faults into eternal renown. But Madame de Bastarnay had implanted in the mind of her dear son no other idea than of atoning for the harm done, in order to save her and Jehan from eternal damnation. Both then set out for the places then in a state of rebellion, in order to render such service to Bastarnay that he would receive from them more than life itself.

Now the heat of the sedition was, as everyone knows, in the neighbourhood of Angoulême, and of Bordeaux in Guienne, and other parts of the kingdom, where great battles and severe conflicts between the rebels and the royal armies was likely to take place. The principal one which finished the war was given between Ruffec and Angoulême, where all the prisoners taken were tried and hanged. This battle, commanded by old Bastarnay, took place in the month of November, seven months after the poisoning of Jehan. Now the Baron knew that his head had been strongly recommended as one to be cut off, he being the right hand of Monseigneur Louis. Directly his men began to fall back, the old fellow found himself surrounded by six men determined to seize him. Then he understood that they wished to take him alive, in order to proceed against his house, ruin his name, and confiscate his property. The poor sire preferred rather to die and save his family, and present the domains to his son. He defended himself like the brave old lion that he was. In spite of their number, these said soldiers, seeing three of their comrades fall, were obliged to attack Bastarnay at the risk of killing him, and threw themselves together upon him, after having laid low two of his equerries and a page.

In this extreme danger an esquire wearing the arms of Rohan, fell upon the assailants like a thunderbolt, and killed two of them, crying, "God save the Bastarnays!" The third man-at-arms, who had already seized old Bastarnay, was so hard pressed by this squire, that he was obliged to leave the elder and turn against the younger, to whom he gave a thrust with his dagger through a flaw in his armour. Bastarnay was too good a comrade to fly without assisting the liberator of his house, who was badly wounded. With a blow of his mace he killed the man-at-arms, seized the squire, lifted him on to his horse, and gained the open, accompanied by a guide, who led him to the castle of Roche-Foucauld, which he entered by night, and found in the great room Bertha de Rohan, who had arranged this retreat for him. But on removing the helmet of his rescuer, he recognised the son of Jehan, who expired upon the table, as by a final effort he kissed his mother, and saying in a loud voice to her--

"Mother, we have paid the debt we owed him!"

Hearing these words, the mother clasped the body of her loved child to her heart, and separated from him never again, for she died of grief, without hearing or heeding the pardon and repentance of Bastarnay.

The strange calamity hastened the last day of the poor old man, who did not live to see the coronation of King Louis the Eleventh. He founded a daily mass in the Church of Roche-Foucauld, where in the same grave he placed mother and son, with a large tombstone, upon which their lives are much honoured in the Latin language.

The morals which any one can deduce from this history are the most profitable for the conduct of life, since this shows how gentlemen should be courteous with the dearly beloveds of their wives. Further, it teaches us that all children are blessings sent by God Himself, and over them fathers, whether true or false, have no right of murder, as was formerly the case at Rome, owing to a heathen and abominable law, which ill became that Christianity which makes us all sons of God.