

CHAPTER I.

[1524.]

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Excerpt

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THE COURT AND REIGN
OF
FRANCIS THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

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THE deaths of Bayard and Vandenesse were the greatest loss sustained by the French during the retreat, if we except that of the duchy itself, which was once more in the hands of the confederated sovereigns. As regarded the troops, few had fallen, although all had suffered greatly alike from fatigue and privation; yet when Bon-nivet again crossed the French frontier, it was with the humiliating consciousness that his defeat had been more fatal to the interests of Francis than any by which it had been preceded in the Milanese. The retreat was also effected in such confusion that Bourbon and Pescara resolved to pursue the fugitives; but the jealousy of the Spanish general would not permit him to follow the advice of the duke, who suggested the expediency of pushing forward at once to the interior, declaring his conviction that, so soon as he should reach Bourbonnais,

Beaujolais, and Auvergne, all which countries had formerly been his own, the inhabitants would instantly join his standard. To this scheme Pescara, however, could not be induced to listen; and, accordingly, after much expostulation on the part of Bourbon, it was decided that their joint armies should proceed to the frontiers of Provence, where the pledge of the ex-connétable was to a certain degree redeemed; for not only did the lesser towns through which they passed receive him with little more than a mere show of resistance, and, at his suggestion, swear fidelity to the emperor; but even Aix, the capital of Provence, admitted him within its walls on the 9th of August; and ten days subsequently the confederated generals, with an army composed of seven thousand lansquenets, six thousand Spanish infantry, two thousand Italians, and six hundred light-horse, sat down before Marseilles.

Nor was even this formidable force the only one by which the besieged citizens were threatened, as M. de Lannoy, the Viceroy of Naples, engaged shortly to follow with a body of six thousand cavalry; while Ugo de Moncada was to keep the whole army supplied with provisions and ammunition, which were to be conveyed by a fleet of sixteen galleys to the coast.

On ascertaining the strait to which the Marseillaise were reduced, Francis lost no time in despatching Brion Chabot (as he had previously done to the Parisians) to assure the citizens of effective aid; but, before he arrived, Lorenzo de Céri had already thrown himself into the town with the remnant of his battalion of Italian patriots, now reduced, however, to four thousand men,

and even those so worn by fatigue and wounds that few of them survived this new demand upon their energies.

On the departure of Bonnivet for Italy Francis had returned to Blois, where he, for the first time, exerted himself to regain the affections of the people who were indignant at the defection of Bourbon, which they justly attributed to his persecution by the court; and it was no sooner made known that he would be accessible to all petitions, than he was inundated with complaints against the soldiery and the fiscal agents. To the representations of the peasantry he replied by authorizing them to resist, even by violent measures, the rapine of the troops, to take possession of their own property wherever they might find it, and to deliver over the marauders to the provost-marschals when they chanced to fall into their hands. He next regulated and equalized the taxes; and, finally, he commanded that all funds raised in the provinces should be at once conveyed to Blois to meet the national exigencies; while he at the same time in some degree curtailed his personal expenses; ordaining that all presents which he might hereafter make in specie, should be paid only at the end of the year, after all the public accounts were settled; "excepting always;" said the ordonnance in conclusion; "the current outlay necessary to our own privy necessities and pleasures."

The jeopardy of Marseilles, however, sufficed to arouse the king for a time from the selfish indulgences to which he was so painfully addicted. He had vainly endeavoured to doubt the advent of Bourbon into his very kingdom at the head of an army, but when at length he

was compelled to admit the fact, he hastily raised a corps of observation, instructed to harass the confederates by every means short of an engagement, which was to be carefully avoided. He moreover levied fourteen thousand foot and six thousand lansquenets in Switzerland, and divided them between François Duke de Lorraine and Richard de la Pole, together with fourteen or fifteen hundred cavalry. He also despatched *ad interim* the Maréchal de Chabannes, with orders to possess himself of the city of Avignon before it fell into the hands of the enemy; an enterprise in which he succeeded.

Meanwhile the position of Bourbon was onerous in the extreme. The citizens rose as one man to oppose him; and the burgher-guard alone soon amounted to nine thousand men. Nor was it solely against male valour that he was called upon to contend; all ranks of women throughout the city vying with each other in their efforts to second the noble exertions of their fathers and brothers, and succeeding so efficiently in defending one of the trenches, whence the troops had been withdrawn to meet an attack upon another point, that it has ever since been known as "The Ladies' Trench." Those who were too weak to hurl missiles, or to supply ammunition to the combatants, bore away the wounded and administered to their wants; while so resolute were the inhabitants never to surrender their city, that the siege lasted forty days, and the sacrifice of life on both sides was immense.

An evil star appeared to plane over Bourbon. The supplies of which he had wrung a promise from England did not arrive; and the Italian troops, satisfied by the

expulsion of the French from their territories, refused to co-operate across the frontier, loudly insisting that a representation should be made to the emperor, to secure the mediation of the pope, by which peace might be restored throughout Europe. The imperial flotilla was, moreover, encountered by the galleys of Andrea Doria, and the French vessels under La Fayette the vice-admiral; several of the ships were destroyed, and others taken, together with all on board, among whom was Philibert de Chalon, Prince of Orange; and meanwhile Bourbon was as ill seconded within the camp as without.

At the commencement of the siege he had treated the matter lightly; for, deceived by the facility with which he had rendered himself master of the other towns of Provence, he did not calculate upon any protracted resistance on the part of the Marseillaise, and was unguarded enough to declare that half-a-dozen discharges of artillery would bring the terrified citizens to the feet of the confederated generals with the keys of the fortress in their hands, and ropes about their necks; and so great was the influence which he possessed over the troops, that they would have placed implicit confidence in the assurance, had not Pescara, who had already writhed beneath a conviction of the duke's paramount importance in his own country, led him to imbue the soldiery with feelings of suspicion and distrust towards his person which soon induced fatal results. The arrival of Lannoy was also painfully delayed; and although the invading army had reached Provence at the beginning of July, it was not until the 7th of September that the besiegers were enabled to mount their battery with the heavy ordnance

which they had brought for the purpose from Toulon and Bregançon, while their musketry produced no impression whatever upon the walls of the city; and this was the more mortifying to the confederated generals from the fact that the artillery of the enemy was in excellent condition and admirably served, producing an amount of damage in their camp for which they had been totally unprepared.

The Italian patriots under Lorenzo de Céri, also succeeded by their constant sallies in impeding the mining and other labours of the imperialists; while so constant and well-directed a fire was sustained against them, that on one occasion during the performance of mass in the tent of the Marquis de Pescara, the officiating priest and two of the attendants were killed by a cannon-ball. Attracted by the confusion consequent on the event, Bourbon hastened to the scene of action, anxiously inquiring what had occurred; when the Spanish General, who had remained calm and self-possessed during the uproar, sarcastically requested him to dismiss all uneasiness, as it was only the timid burghers of Marseilles, who, according to his pledge, were on their way with the city keys, and their necks in the noose, to deliver themselves and their fortress into his hands.

A day or two subsequently a breach was effected by means of the heavy ordnance, and an attempt was made to take the city by storm; but Lorenzo de Céri so effectually protected the opening by means of a strong rampart and a deep ditch, that it was found impracticable; and Pescara no sooner ascertained the fact than he proceeded to the tent of Bourbon, in which a council of war was then sitting, and, without affecting to remark

the duke himself, exclaimed vehemently ; “ Gentlemen, you who will it may go to heaven ; there are means at hand, if you only remain, and persevere in this siege ; but as I can wait, I shall return to Italy, before I lose alike my life and my renown.”

As he ceased speaking he left the tent, and was followed by every individual of the council save Bourbon himself, who had no alternative save to issue orders for a retreat, which he now saw would be effected equally without his sanction. At that moment he became bitterly aware that he had lost at once substance and shadow. The independent kingdom, and the royal wife, both of which his sword and his name were to have secured to him, had alike eluded his grasp ; he was no longer the powerful master of a dozen provinces upon whom victory had waited ; he was an outlawed, exiled, worsted general ; an alien alike in his own land and in that which he had adopted.

On the 28th of September the retreat accordingly commenced, deliberately and in good order ; but it was not effected without molestation, the Maréchal de Chabannes, at the head of six hundred horse, falling upon the rear of the column, and not only destroying a great number of the enemy, but also securing an enormous quantity of booty ; while Montmorenci with a strong force pursued them as far as Toulon, and did considerable damage, although he did not succeed in arresting their march.

On the 28th of June, Francis had written from Amboise to assure the citizens of Provence that he would immediately march in person to their assistance ; and for

this purpose he had collected an army consisting of fourteen hundred Swiss, six thousand lansquenets, ten thousand French and Italian infantry, and fifteen hundred horse. The retreat of the confederated generals, however, rendered this reinforcement unnecessary ; and dazzled by such unhoped-for success, Francis, who once more saw himself master of a considerable army, resolved to make a new attempt to regain the Milanese.

The most experienced of his generals attempted to dissuade him from so quixotic a project, representing that the autumn was now nearly at an end, and that his army must be inevitably weakened and exhausted by the mere casualties of so formidable a march, even before they met the enemy ; but to this objection he replied by haughtily remarking, that such as were afraid of the cold might remain in Provence. He had been assured by Bonnivet that his presence alone was required to ensure the subjugation of the duchy, and his vanity was flattered by the prospect of succeeding where older and more tried soldiers had failed. Equally in vain were the expostulations of Louise de Savoie, who having been informed of his altered intentions, despatched a courier to entreat him to await her arrival, as she had secrets of great importance to communicate ; while at the same time she informed him of the death of the queen, whose long-failing health had at length given way under her perpetual mortifications.

Neither consideration, however, could change or retard his resolution ; and contenting himself by simply expressing his regret at the demise of his wife, and confirming the authority of his mother as regent of France