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The Cat and the King.

By STANLEY J. WEYMAN.

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It was in the spring of the year 1609 that at the king's instance I had a suite of apartments fitted up for him at the Arsenal, that he might visit me, whenever it pleased him, without putting my family to inconvenience; in another place will be found an account of the 5,000 crowns a year which he was so obliging as to allow me for this purpose. He honored me by using these rooms, which consisted of a hall, a chamber, a wardrobe, and a closet, two or three times in the course of that year, and he had himself with him his attendants and cook; and the free opportunities of consulting me on the Great Undertaking, which this plan afforded, led me to hope that notwithstanding the enmity of my detractors, he would continue to adopt it. That he did not do, nor ever visited me after the close of that year, was due not so much to the lamentable event, soon to be related, which within a few months deprived France of her greatest sovereign, as to a strange matter that attended his last stay with me. I have since had cause to think that she did not receive at the time as much attention as it deserved; and have even imagined that had I gazed a little deeper into the mystery I might have found a clue to the future as well as the past, and averted one more, and the last, danger from my master. But

I have had cause to mention more than once in the course of these memoirs. He met me at the door and conducted me through the rooms with an air of satisfaction; nor could I find the slightest fault, until my wife, looking about her with a woman's eye for minute things, paused by the bed in the chamber and directed my attention to something on the floor.

She stooped over it. "What is this?" she asked. "Has something been—"

"Upset here?" I said, looking also. There was a little pool of white liquid on the floor beside the bed.

La Trape uttered an exclamation of annoyance and explained that he had not seen it before, that it had not been there five minutes earlier, and that he did not know how it came to be there now.

"What is it?" I said, looking about for some pitcher that might have overflowed; but finding none. "Is it milk?"

"I don't know, your excellency," he answered. "But it shall be removed at once."

"See that it is," I said. "Are the boughs in the fire-place fresh?" For the weather was still warm and we had not lit a fire.

"Yes, your excellency; quite fresh."

"Well, see to that, and remove it," I said, pointing to the mess. "It looks ill."

And with that the matter passed from my mind; the more completely as I heard at that moment the sound of the king's approach, and went into the court yard to receive him. He brought with him Roquelaure, de Vic, Erard, the engineer, and some others, but none whom he did not know that I should be glad to receive. He dined well, and after dinner amused himself with seeing the young men ride at the ring, and even rode a course himself with his usual skill; that being, if I remember rightly, the last occasion on which I ever saw him take a lance.

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"What is this?" she asked.

Providence would not have it so; a slight indisposition under which I was suffering at the time rendered me less able, both in mind and body; the result being that Henry, who was always averse to the publication of these ominous episodes, and held that being known they bred the like in mischievous minds, had, his way, the case ending in no more than the punishment of a careless rascal.

Before supper he walked for a time in the hall, with Sillery, for whom he had sent; and after supper, pronouncing himself tired, he dismissed all and retired with me to his chamber. Here we had some talk on a subject that I greatly dreaded—I mean his infatuation for Madame de Conde; but about 11 o'clock he yawned, and, after thanking me for a reception which he said was quite to his mind, he bade me go to bed.

I was half way to the door when he called me back. "Why, Grandmaster," he said, pointing to the little table by the head of the bed on which his night dress stood, "you might be going to drop me. Do you expect me to drink all these in the night?"

"I think that there is only your posset, sire," I said, "and the lemon-water which you generally drink."

"And two or three other things?" "Perhaps they have given you my majesty some of the Arbois wine that you were good enough to—"

"Cut-tut!" he said, lifting the cover of one of the cups. "This is not wine. It may be a milk-posset."

"Yes, sire; very likely," I said drowsily. "But it is not!" he answered, when he had smelled it. "It is plain milk! Come, my friend," he continued, looking drolly at me, "have you turned leech, or I babe in arms that you put such strong liquors before me? However, to show you that I have some childish tastes left, and am not so depreed as you have been trying to make me out for the last hour—I will drink your health in it. It would serve you right if I made you pledge me in the same liquor!"

The cup was at his lips when I sprung forward and, heedless of ceremony caught his arm. "Pardon, sire!" I cried, in sudden agitation. "If that is milk, I gave no order that it should be placed here; and I know nothing of its origin. I beg that you will not drink it, until I have made some inquiry!"

"They have all been tasted?" he asked, still holding the cup in his hand with the lid raised, but looking at it gravely.

"They should have been!" I answered. "But La Trape, whom I made answerable for that, is outside. I will go and question him. If you will wait, sire, a moment—"

quantity of each—according to the orders given to you?" I persisted. "Yes, your excellency."

"But I caught a guilty look in his eyes, and in a gust of rage I cried out that he lied. "The truth!" I thundered, in a terrible voice. "The truth, you villain; you did not taste all?"

"I did, your excellency; as God is above, I did!" he answered. But he had grown pale, and he looked at the King in a terrified way.

"You did?" "Yes?" "Yet I did not believe him, and I was about to give him the lie again, when the King intervened. "Quite so," he said to La Trape, with a smile. "You drank my good fellow, of the posset and the lemon water, and you tasted the milk, but you did not drink of it. Is not that the whole truth?"

"Yes, sire, he whimpered, breaking down. "But I—I gave some to it?" "And the cat is no worse?"

"No, sire." "There, Grandmaster," the King said, turning to me, "that is the truth, I think. What do you say to it?"

"That the rest is simple," I answered, grimly. "He did not drink it before; but he will drink it now, sire."

The king, sitting on the bed, laughed and looked at La Trape; as if his good-nature almost led him to interpose. But after a moment's hesitation he thought better of it, and handed me the cup. "Very well," he said; "is your man. Have your way with him. After all, he should have drunk it."

"He shall drink it now, or be broken on the wheel!" I said. "Do you hear, you?" I continued, turning to him in a white heat of rage at the thought of his

negligence, and the price it might have cost me. "Take it, and beware that you do not drop or spill it. For I swear that that shall not save you!"

He took the cup with a pale face, and hands that shook so much that he needed both to support the vessel. He hesitated, too, so long that, had I not possessed the best of reasons for believing in his fidelity, I should have suspected him of more than negligence. The shadow of his tall figure seemed to wave on the tapestry behind him; and with a little imagination I might have thought that the lights in the room



He hesitated.

had sunk. The soft whispering of the pages outside could be heard, and a stifled laugh; but inside there was not a sound. He carried the cup to his lips; then he lowered it again.

I took a step forward. He recoiled a pace, his face ghastly. "Patience, excellency," he said, hoarsely. "I shall drink it. But I want to speak first."

"Speak!" the king answered. "If there is death in it, I take God to witness that I know nothing, and know nothing! There is some witch's work here—it is not the first time that I have come across this devil's milk today! But I take God to witness I know nothing! Now, it is here I will drink it, and—"

He did not finish the sentence, but drawing a deep breath raised the cup to his lips. I saw the apple in his throat rise and fall with the effort he made to swallow, but he drank so slowly that it seemed to me that he would never drain the cup. Nor did he, for when he had swallowed, as far as I could judge from the tilting of the cup, about half of the milk, Henry rose suddenly and, seizing it, took it from him with his own hand.

"That will do," the king said. "Do you feel ill?"

La Trape drew a trembling hand across his brow, on which the sweat stood in beads; but instead of answering he remained silent, gazing fixedly before him. We waited and watched, and at length, when I should think three minutes had elapsed, he changed his position for one of greater ease, and I saw his face relax. The unnatural pallor faded, and the open lips closed. A moment later he spoke. "I feel nothing, sire," he said.

trivial now that I came to tell it—though it had doubtless contributed much to La Trape's fright—that I had to apologize. "Still it is odd," the king said. "These drinks were not here, at that time, of course?"

"No, sire; they have been brought up within the hour."

"Well, your butler must explain it." And with that he raised his voice and called La Trape back; who came, looking red and sheepish.

[To Be Continued.]

NEW CHAINLESS BICYCLE. Inventor Has a Device for Constructing Frame of Bamboo.

An inventor in New York city who has recently perfected a device for mending punctures in bicycle tires, is also content that the day is not far distant when the chainless bicycle will take the place of the present bicycle. He has been experimenting in this direction for several years and has perfected a bicycle which dispenses with the sprocket wheels, chain, forty per cent. of the frame, and the ordinary pedals and cranks.

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