

**The Heptameron, by Marguerite de  
Navarre**



*S. Fraulenberg, Inc.*

*L. Butler, Sculp.*

THE CLERK ENTREATING FORGIVENESS OF THE PRESIDENT



### TALE XXXVI.

*By means of a salad a President of Grenoble avenged himself upon one of his clerks with whom his wife was smitten, and so saved the honour of his house.*

**I**n the town of Grenoble there dwelt a President whose name I shall not mention, but he was not a Frenchman. <sup>1</sup> He had a very beautiful wife, and they lived in great tranquillity together.

This lady, finding that her husband was now old, fell in love with a young clerk, called Nicholas. When the President went to the court in the morning, Nicholas used to enter his room and take his place. This was observed by a servant of the President's who had served his master well for thirty years, and in his faithfulness he could not refrain from speaking to him of the matter.

The President, being a prudent man, would not lightly believe the story, but said that the servant wished to create contention between himself and his wife. If the matter, said he, were really as the servant declared, he could easily prove it to him, and if proof were not given he would believe that it was a lie contrived in order to destroy the love existing between himself and his wife. The servant promised that he would show him the truth of what he had said, and one morning, as soon as the President was gone to the court and Nicholas had entered the room, he sent one of his fellow-servants to tell his master to come, while he himself remained watching at the door lest Nicholas should come out.

As soon as the President saw the sign that was made to him by one of his servants, he pretended to be ill, left the court and hastened home. Here he found his old servant at the door, and was assured by him that Nicholas was inside and had only just gone in.

"Do not stir from this door," said his lord to him, "for, as you are aware, there is no other means of going into or out of the room, except indeed by way of a little closet of which I myself alone carry the key."

The President entered the room and found his wife and Nicholas in bed together. The clerk, clad in nothing but his shirt, threw himself at his feet to entreat forgiveness, while his wife began to weep.

Then said the President —

"Though you have done a deed the enormity of which you may yourself judge, I am yet unwilling that my house should be dishonoured on your account, and the daughters I have had by you made to suffer. Wherefore," he continued, "cease to weep, I command you, and hearken to what I am going to do; and do you, Nicholas, hide yourself in my closet and make not a single sound."

When this was done, he opened the door, and calling his old servant, said to him —

"Did you not assure me that you would show me Nicholas in company with my wife? Trusting in your word, I came hither in danger of killing my poor wife, and I have found nothing of what you told me. I have searched the whole room, as I will show you."

So saying, he caused his servant to look under the beds and in every quarter. The servant, finding nothing, was greatly astonished, and said to his master —

“The devil must have made away with him, for I saw him go in, and he did not come out through the door. But I can see that he is not here.”

Then said his master to him —

“You are a wicked servant to try to create contention in this way between my wife and me. I dismiss you, and will pay you what I owe you for your services to me, and more besides; but be speedily gone, and take care that you are not in the town twenty-four hours from now.”

The President paid him for five or six years in advance, and, knowing him to be a faithful servant, resolved to reward him still further.

When the servant was gone weeping away, the President made Nicholas come forth from the closet, and after telling them both what he thought of their wickedness, he commanded them to give no hint of the matter to anyone. He also charged his wife to dress more bravely than was her wont, and to attend all assemblies, dances and feasts; and he told Nicholas to make more merry than before, but, as soon as he whispered to him, “Begone,” to see that he was out of the town before three hours were over. Having arranged matters in this way, he returned to the court, none being any the wiser. And for a fortnight, contrary to his wont, he entertained his friends and neighbours, and after the banquet had the tabourers, so that the ladies might dance.

One day, seeing that his wife was not dancing, he commanded Nicholas to lead her out. The clerk, thinking that the past had been forgotten, did so gladly, but when the dance was over, the President, under pretence of charging him with some household matter, whispered to him, “Begone, and come back no more.” And albeit Nicholas was grieved to leave his mistress, yet was he no less glad that his life was spared.

When the President had convinced all his kinsfolk and friends and the whole countryside of the deep love that he bore his wife, he went into his garden one fine day in the month of May to gather a salad, of such herbs that his wife did not live for twenty-four hours after eating of them; whereupon he made such a great show of mourning that none could have suspected him of causing her death; and in this way he avenged himself upon his enemy, and saved the honour of his house. <sup>2</sup>

“I do not mean by this, ladies, to praise the President’s conscience, but rather to bring out the frailty of a woman and the great patience and prudence of a man. And I beg you, ladies, be not angered by the truth, which sometimes speaks as loudly against ourselves as against the men; for vice and virtue are common alike to men and women.”

“If all those,” said Parlamente, “who have fallen in love with their servants were obliged to eat salads of that kind, I know some who would be less fond of their gardens than they are at present, and who would pluck up the herbs to get rid of such as restore the honour of a family by compassing the death of a wanton mother.”

Hircan, who guessed why she had said this, angrily replied — “A virtuous woman should never judge another guilty of what she would not do herself.”

“Knowledge is not judgment nor yet foolishness,” returned Parlamente. “However, this poor woman paid the penalty that many others have deserved, and I think that the President, when desirous of vengeance, comported himself with wondrous prudence and wisdom.”

“And with great malevolence, also,” said Longarine. “’Twas a slow and cruel vengeance, and showed he had neither God nor conscience before his eyes.”

“Why, what would you have had him do,” said Hircan, “to revenge himself for the greatest wrong that a woman can deal to a man?”

“I would have had him kill her in his wrath,” she replied. “The doctors say that since the first impulses of passion are not under a man’s control, such a sin may be forgiven; so it might have obtained pardon.” “Yes,” said Geburon, “but his daughters and descendants would have always borne the stain.”

“He ought not to have killed her at all,” said Longarine, “for, when his wrath was past, she might have lived with him in virtue, and nothing would ever have been said about the matter.”

“Do you think,” said Saffredent, “that he was appeased merely because he concealed his anger? For my part, I believe that he was as wrathful on the last day, when he made his salad, as he had been on the first, for there are persons whose first impulses have no rest until their passion has worked its

will. I am well pleased you say that the theologians deem such sins easy to be pardoned, for I am of their opinion.”

“It is well to look to one’s words,” said Longarine, “in presence of persons so dangerous as you. What I said is to be understood of passion when it is so strong that it suddenly seizes upon all the senses, and reason can find no place.”

“It is so,” said Saffredent, “that I understood your words, and I thence conclude that, whatever a man may do, he can commit only venial sin if he be deeply in love. I am sure that, if Love hold him fast bound, Reason can never gain a hearing, whether from his heart or from his understanding. And if the truth be told, there is not one among us but has had knowledge of such passion; and not merely do I think that sin so committed is readily pardoned, but I even believe that God is not angered by it, seeing that such love is a ladder whereby we may climb to the perfect love of Himself. And none can attain to this save by the ladder of earthly love, <sup>3</sup> for, as St. John says, ‘He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?’” <sup>4</sup>

“There is not a passage in Scripture,” said Oisille, “too good for you to turn to your own purposes. But beware of doing like the spider, which transforms sound meat into poison. Be advised that it is a perilous matter to quote Scripture out of place and without cause.”

“Do you call speaking the truth out of place and without cause?” said Saffredent. “You hold, then, that when, in speaking to you unbelieving women, we call God to our assistance, we take His name in vain; but if there be any sin in this, you alone must bear the blame, for it is your unbelief that compels us to seek out all the oaths that we can think of. And in spite of it all, we cannot kindle the flame of charity in your icy hearts.”

“That,” said Longarine, “proves that you all speak falsely. If truth were in your words, it is strong enough to make you be believed. Yet there is danger lest the daughters of Eve should hearken too readily to the serpent.”

“I see clearly,” said Saffredent, “that women are not to be conquered by men. So I shall be silent, and see to whom Ennasuite will give her vote.”

“I give it,” she said, “to Dagoucin, for I think he would not willingly speak against the ladies.”

“Would to God,” said Dagoucin, “that they were as well disposed towards me as I am towards them. To show you that I have striven to honour the virtuous among them by recalling their good deeds, I will now tell you the story of such a one. I will not deny, ladies, that the patience of the gentleman at Pampeluna, and of the President at Grenoble was great, but then it was equalled in magnitude by their vengeance. Moreover, when we seek to praise a virtuous man, we ought not so to exalt a single virtue as to make of it a cloak for the concealment of grievous vice; for none are praiseworthy save such as do virtuous things from the love of virtue alone, and this I hope to prove by telling you of the patient virtue of a lady whose goodness had no other object save the honour of God and the salvation of her husband.”





<sup>1</sup> The personage referred to is Jeffroy Charles or Carles, Chief President of the Parliament of Grenoble, and President of the Senate of Turin; his wife's name was Margaret du Mottet; she came of a very old family of Embrun. Some interesting particulars concerning President Charles, supplied by that erudite scholar M. Jules Roman, will be found in the Appendix to the present volume (A). — Ed.

<sup>2</sup> Whilst admitting the historical basis of this story, M. Le Roux de Lincy conceives it to be the same as No. xlvi. of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, printed half-a-century before the *Heptameron* was written. Beyond the circumstance, however, that in both cases a judge is shown privily avenging himself on his wife for her infidelity, there is no resemblance between the two tales. There is good reason for believing that Queen Margaret's narrative is based on absolute fact, and not on the story in the *Cent Nouvelles*. Both tales have often been imitated. See for instance Bonaventure Despéricr's *Contes, Nouvelles, et joyeux Devis* (tale xcii., or, in some editions, xc.); *Les Heures de Récréation de Louis Guicciardini*, p. 28; G. Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi, overro cento Novelle, &c.* (dec. iii. nov. vi.); Malespini's *Ducento Novelle* (part ii. nov. xvi.); Verboquet's *Les Délices, &c.*, 1623, p. 23; and Shirley's *Love's Cruelly*. These tales also inspired some of the Spanish dramatists, notably Calderon. — Ed. and L.

<sup>3</sup> All this passage is borrowed, almost word for word, from Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano*. See *ante*, vol. i. p. 10. — B.J.

<sup>4</sup> i John iv. 20. — M.

## APPENDIX A.

The following are the more important particulars, supplied by M. Jules Roman, with reference to President Charles of Grenoble:—

Jeffroy Charles was an Italian, born in the marquisate of Saluzza, where his father, Constant, had been a distinguished juriconsult. The hero of Queen Margaret's xxxvith tale always signed his name Jeffroy Charles, but his descendants adopted the spelling Carles. Doubtless the name had originally been Caroli. Before fixing himself in France, Jeffroy Charles had been in the service of Luigi II., Marquis of Saluzza, who had appointed him to the office of "Podesta" and entrusted him with various diplomatic missions to the French Court (see *Discorsi sopra alame famiglie nobili del Piemonte* by Francesco Agostini della Chiesa, in MS. in the State Archives, at Turin). At the time when Charles VIII. was planning his expedition to Naples, he gave a cordial greeting to all the Italians who presented themselves at his Court, and, securing the services of Jeffroy Charles, he appointed him counsellor of the Parliament of Grenoble (October 5, 1493), and entrusted him with various secret missions, the result being that he sojourned but unfrequently in Dauphiné. On the death of Charles VIII., Jeffroy secured the good graces of his successor, Louis XII., and was

appointed (June 16, 1500) President of the Senate of Turin, and some months later Chief President of the Parliament of Grenoble. Charles spent the greater part of that year on missions, both to the Court of the Emperor Maximilian and that of the Pope. It was he who obtained from the former the investiture of Louis XII. as Duke of Milan, which afterwards led to so much warfare. Most of the following years he spent at Milan, seeking to organise the government of the duchy, and contending against the rapacity of both the French and the Italian nobles. In 1508 he was sent by Louis XII. to Cambrai, in company with Cardinal d'Amboise, to conclude an alliance with the Emperor against Venice, and he also repaired the same year to Rome with Marshal Trivulzio to negotiate the Pope's entry into this league.

On war being declared, he set aside his judicial robes, and took an active part in the campaign against Venice, fighting so bravely at Agnadel that Louis XII. knighted him on the battlefield. His last diplomatic mission was to the Court of Leo X. in 1515, in which year he was, on account of his great learning, appointed to direct the education of the King's younger daughter, the celebrated Renée of Ferrara. But it is doubtful whether he ever even entered upon these duties, since he died soon after he had been entrusted with them. His family remained in Dauphiné, where it died out, obscurely, during the seventeenth century. Only one of his sons, Anthony, evinced any talent, becoming counsellor of the Rouen Parliament (1519), and ambassador at Milan (1530). Lancelot de Carles, Bishop of Riez, was not, as some biographers assert, a son of Jeffroy Charles, nor was he, it would seem, in any way connected with the Saluzza family.

Jeffroy Charles's wife, Margaret du Mottet, had borne him eight children before he surprised her in adultery. After the tragical ending of his conjugal mishaps he adopted as his crest the figure of an angel holding the forefinger of one hand to his mouth as if to enjoin secrecy.<sup>1</sup> In the seventeenth century this "angel of silence" was to be seen, carved in stone, and serving as a support of the Charles escutcheon, on the house where the President had resided in the Rue des Clercs at Grenoble (Guy Allard's *Dictionnaire du Dauphiné*, &c , Grenoble 1695). Escutcheon and support have nowadays disappeared, but on certain of Charles's seals, as well as in books that belonged to him, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the emblem of the angel will still be found. The earliest seal on which we find it is one affixed to a receipt dated from Milan, July 31, 1506. Assuming that he adopted this crest in memory of the events narrated by Queen Margaret, it is probable that the latter occurred in the earlier part of 1506 or the latter part of the previous year.<sup>2</sup>

Three copies of a medal showing Charles's energetic, angular profile, with the inscription *Jafredus Karoli jurisconsultus preses Delphinatus et Mediolani* , are known to exist; one in the Grenoble museum, one in that of Milan, and one in my (M. Roman's ) collection. Three MS. works from the President's library are in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. The frontispiece of one of these (MSS. Lat. No. 4801) is a miniature painting of his escutcheon, surmounted by the half-length figure of the "angel of silence," who is clad in dark blue, with wings of red, green and blue feathers. On folio 74 of the same MS. is a full-length figure of the angel, clad in light blue and supporting Charles's escutcheon with one hand, whilst the forefinger of the other is pressed to his lips. In the libraries of Lyons, Grenoble and Turin are other richly-illuminated works that belonged to the President, who was a distinguished bibliophile and great patron of letters, several learned Italian writers, and among others, J. P. Parisio, J. M. Cattaneo and P'ranchino Gafforio, having dedicated their principal works to him. He it was, moreover, who saved the life of Aldo Manuzio, the famous Venetian printer, when he was arrested by the French as a spy in 1506.

From the foregoing particulars it will be seen that President Charles was alike learned, brave and skilful. But for the Queen of Navarre's circumstantial narrative it would be hard to believe that a man with so creditable a public record killed his wife by means of a salad of poisonous herbs. — Ed.

---

<sup>1</sup> The suggestion here presents itself that, apart from the question of any crime, this emblem of secrecy was a very fitting one for a diplomatist to assume. — Ed.

<sup>2</sup> That is, twenty years after the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* , from which some commentators think the *Heptameron* story to have been borrowed, was first printed. — Ed.