

ON THE CHARACTER OF FRANCIS I.

YOUNG has asserted that love of fame is the universal passion, and he may probably be in the right; yet there are circumstances connected with the gratification of this passion, which might, to reflecting minds, materially diminish the value of its object. One of these is the capricious injustice so often regulating or disordering the distribution of fame; of this there are few examples more remarkable than that of Francis I. of France.

Francis claimed and acquired the reputation of being both a perfect *preux chevalier*, second to none, unless, perchance, to Bayard, and an enlightened appreciator and patron of science, literature, and the arts: the father of letters. As such he was very generally acknowledged during his life, and has been transmitted to the admiration of subsequent ages; whilst his supposed laconic communication to his mother, then Regent of France, of the disasters of the battle of Pavia, '*Madame, tout est perdu hormis l'honneur,*' remains on record, as one of the noblest effusions of a lofty spirit under the pressure of adversity. The only admitted blots in his escutcheon, *i. e.* his want of political views and his unbounded licentiousness, with its consequences, the exhaustion of his exchequer, and the leaving of his armies unpaid, his generals destitute, scarcely, perhaps, lowered the estimation in which he was held by the pleasure-loving nation over whom he reigned. The former has generally been regarded as a necessary consequence of his chivalrousness; the latter, treated as a feather in the scale, save by some few wives, sympathising in the sorrows of his two neglected and despised queens, or by a still smaller number of philosophical speculators upon the wide-spreading mischief wrought by the dissolute morals of a court. A rapid glance at the history of Francis I., will show to how much of his high character he was entitled.

From contemporaneous and admiring French chroniclers we learn, that Francis read nothing but romances of chivalry; whence may be argued that it was from knights-errant, from an Amadis de Gaul, rather than from a Bayard, that he formed his idea of a true knight. Accordingly, courtesy towards the one sex and courage towards the other—meaning thereby indiscriminate gallantry and as indiscriminate a

disinterested love of war and fighting—constituted his *beau idéal* of a *preux chevalier*.

Of the lofty, scrupulous, jealous honour distinguishing the character of the *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, of that Bayard from whose hand Francis insisted upon receiving knighthood, he evidently had no conception; if he had, he could hardly have given cause for these remarks. When he lay a prisoner in Spain, after his defeat at Pavia, Charles V. imposed hard conditions upon him as the price of his release. Francis obtained from the Pope a prospective absolution for his intended future violation of the oath he was then about to take; he signed a legal protest against the signature he was about to give as invalid, because extorted under duress, and then, with every appearance of frankness, signed the treaty of Madrid, and swore at the altar to fulfil all its conditions, or, should anything render that impossible, to return to his prison. No sooner had he set foot on French ground, than he leaped on to a horse, galloped off, exclaiming, 'Again I am a king!' and, as a matter of course, refused to execute the treaty; offering a sum of money in lieu of the provinces torn by his predecessor, Louis XI., from Charles's grandmother, Mary of Burgundy; which provinces it was Charles's great object to recover. For this dishonourable conduct, the compatriot eulogists of Francis have apologised, upon the score of Charles's refusal to release him upon more equitable terms. Whether it were or were not unjust in Charles to demand the restitution of his patrimony, it is needless to inquire, and equally so to ask whether Bayard would not rather have died in captivity than have freed himself by giving a promise he meant not to keep. Without appealing to a chivalrous code of honour, or to a stoical code of ethics, it is sufficient to observe, that Francis, by abdicating in favour of his son, could have at once annihilated Charles's power of extortion, and converted himself into an ordinary prisoner of war, ransomable, as his sons, hostages for his faith, ultimately proved, by money.

But the treaty of Madrid was not the only one that the French king signed in the same way. He similarly protested against the treaty of Cambrai, which was extorted from him by no other constraint than the usual

one of an unsuccessful war, and in which he had almost as dishonourably purchased Charles's final renunciation of his claim to the country of Burgundy, by the desertion and sacrifice of all his own allies, those smaller princes and states in Germany and Italy, whom he had excited to take arms in his cause against the powerful emperor.

Even of his epistolary glory must Francis be despoiled: the celebrated letter above quoted having been extracted, or to speak correctly, constructed, from one a good deal longer and less spirited, which, unluckily for the king's reputation, has been preserved in the MS. registers of the Parliament of Paris. It is given by Delaure in his *Histoire de Paris*, and by Sismondi, in his *Histoire de Français*,—and shall be transcribed here in all its original quaintness, untranslated, as being somewhat untranslatable:—

“Madame, pour vous avertir comment se porte le ressort de mon infortune, de toutes choses ne m'est demeuré que le honneur et la vie, qui est sauvé; et pour ce que, en notre adversité, cette nouvelle vous fera quelque peu de reconfort, j'ai prié qu'on me laissât vous écrire ces lettres, ce qu'on m'a agréablement accordé. Vous suppliant ne vouloir prendre l'extrémité de vous même, en sesant de votre accoutumée prudence, car j'ai espoir en le fin que Dieu ne m'abandonnera point; vous recommandant vos petits-enfans et les miens; vous suppliant faire donner sûr passage et le retour en Espagne a ce porteur, qui va vers l'empereur, pour savoir comme il faudre que je sois traité! Et sur ce très humblement me recommande a votre bonne grâce.”

The chivalrous honour of Francis rests then altogether upon his rash valour; his permitting the emperor to pass safely through France; and his challenging him to single combat. These grounds are unquestionable; but the circumstances of the last two require notice. Francis certainly did send Charles a challenge; but when the latter accepted it, he contrived, by such paltry shuffling as refusing to let the emperor's herald, Burgundy, king-at-arms, deliver his message, and insisting upon a simple yes or no, to defeat the projected duel, and throwing, as he averred, the blame of declining it upon Charles—a proceeding, of which, when Francis's undoubted courage and total want of political consideration, are duly appreciated, it is difficult to conjecture the object.

Come we now to the emperor's passage through France. It has usually been represented that, an alarming rebellion having

broken out at Ghent, in the winter, the emperor, anxious to hasten thither in person, and unwilling to trust the sea in stormy weather, requested a safe-conduct through France, which Francis generously granted, and respected, despite the remonstrances of his more politic but less honourable counsellors. How stand the facts, according to the historians of both countries, and to the MSS. of diplomacy still existing in the French archives?

Francis was at peace with Charles, whose sister, Eleonora, queen-dowager of Portugal, he had married; and the constable de Montmorency, his new favourite and minister, was earnest to unite the two monarchs by the ties of friendship as well as of marriage, that they might conjointly accomplish the great task of crushing heresy. Under these circumstances, Francis invited his imperial brother-in-law to visit him, taking France in his way from one part to another of his extensive dominions. The instructions given to the bishop elect of Avranches when ambassador in Spain, dated August 5th, 1539, are still extant, and the following extract shows that this was not the first invitation. The ambassador was directed to say, “that the king is so firm and constant in the friendship he bears the emperor, his best brother, that neither the duchy of Milan, nor other particular things, will ever make him change his opinion. And it must not be omitted likewise to say to the said emperor, that if his road had been through France, the king would have taken pleasure therein, as in one of the things that in this world he most desires; but since the affairs of the said lord emperor do not allow it, the king is, and will always be, well content with all that shall please him, and will not entreat him to do more than suits with his convenience and inclination.”

The ambassador returned home in September; and in his report of his mission appears the emperor's answer to this message. It runs thus:—“The emperor thanks the king, and says that if his affairs may suffer it, he shall be very glad to pass through France, where he knows that he shall have as much security as in his own lands, and much more pleasure and satisfaction; but that he was not yet resolved touching the time of his journey, waiting to see what the Turk will do; and that even should he go to Italy, he will do so only to bring to an end what has been concluded between himself and the king.” * * *

Whilst these civilities were passing be-

tween the now allied sovereigns, the city of Ghent was, and for nearly three years had been, in a state rather of tumultuous sedition than of open rebellion, on account of a tax, the manner of imposing which militated against the chartered rights of Flanders. In 1537 the Ghentese offered to transfer the whole province of Flanders to France, which offer Francis rejected; partly as a man of honour, because its acceptance would have been a most flagrant breach of faith; partly as a statesman, because Montmorency's political views required his living in amity with the emperor. He did more than reject; he communicated to Charles the offer of the Ghentese, together with their confidential disclosures concerning their resources, and again urged Charles to cross France to Flanders. The emperor, at length resolved to visit the Low Countries, accepted his brother-in-law's renewed invitation; but the manner of his journey does not lead to the conclusion that he chose this road for the sake of despatch. Some of the details given by contemporaries of his progress may perhaps enliven this discussion of character.

Charles was received at Bayonne, which he entered in the month of October, by the Dauphin, the Duke of Orleans, and four hundred noblemen. Francis himself, who by his vices had incurred many of the infirmities of old age in his forty-fifth year, was detained by illness at Châtelherault. The Princes offered to go to Spain as hostages for the Emperor's safety, during his stay in France. But this would have been an ungracious mode of paying a fraternal visit; Charles declined it, and travelled in their company, disporting himself by the way. In every favourable situation he enjoyed the recreation of hawking. In every town he was received by the nobility of the province and the citizens, with the highest honours, and with a splendour of which a short extract from contemporary annals may give an idea. We are told that at Orleans he was met by "a body of ninety-two young tradesmen, mounted on good steeds, all dressed in large surcoats of black velvet, and doublets of white satin, fastened with gold buttons; velvet caps, covered with jewels and embroidered with goldsmith's work; and buskins of white morocco *chiquetés*; (what this may be dictionaries tell not;) and all with gilt spurs, and the harquebuss at the saddle bow. And there was one cap that was valued at two thousand crowns, and there was not him who had not upon him upwards of two thousand francs in rings."

But the necessity of expending thus much hard cash in apparel, was not the only inconvenience to which the emperor's visit put the inhabitants of the unlucky towns that lay in his way. At Bordeaux, it appears that some of the courtiers sent to form the imperial escort, finding themselves short of horses, pressed into their service all they chanced to meet with, utterly disregarding the objections and remonstrances of their owners. Some of the forcibly-borrowed animals were returned when no longer wanted, but numbers were permanently detained, of course without being paid for. The plundered proprietors carried their complaints to the foot of the throne; but to Francis the whole transaction appeared only as an excellent jest, at which he laughed heartily, and dismissed the complainants, to use a homely but expressive phrase, with their labour for their pains.

An occurrence at Amboise bore a graver aspect to all parties. A perfumer had undertaken to astonish the Emperor with French elegance, by filling his bed-chamber with a fragrant and balmy atmosphere. The artist's performance proved inferior to his conception; and the Emperor was half-suffocated by the density of the aromatic vapours that had been designed voluptuously to regale his nostrils. The unlucky result of the odoriferous project was reported to the King, who forthwith ordered the misadventured compounder of sweet smells to be hanged. Happily for the victim of his own injudicious zeal, Charles heard of the intended expiation of his night of coughing, and interfered in behalf of the perfumer. But the more clemency the Imperial sufferer displayed, the more did Francis hold himself bound to be inexorable. A long contest, of good nature on the one side and politeness on the other, ensued, during which the agony of the unskilful incense-burner may better be conceived than described. At length the Emperor's earnest and often-repeated asseverations that it was not to see or to cause executions he had visited France, prevailed; the King yielded, and the unintentional offender escaped.

At Châtelherault, Francis, now restored to his ordinary state of infirm health, received Charles with every demonstration of brotherly affection, and immediately ceded to him the place of honour. On the 1st of January, 1540, the two Sovereigns entered Paris together, when the prison doors were thrown open, and the malefactors released, in the name, and in honour, of the Emperor.

During the eight or ten days that the Imperial visiter spent in the French capital nothing was thought of, to all appearance at least, but festivities, amusements, and rejoicings. Yet this is the period historians have assigned to the efforts made by the opponents of the Constable and his policy, to prevail upon Francis to violate all the laws of hospitality and common decency, imprison his brother-in-law and invited guest, and extort from him some kind of counterpart to the treaty of Madrid, or at least a renunciation of all the stipulations of that treaty. Amongst these antagonists of Montmorency we find the Dauphin, the King of Navarre, husband of Francis's celebrated sister Margaret, the Princes of the blood, the Duchess d'Etampes, then the reigning mistress, and the Court-jester.

With respect to these last two respectable councillors, we are told, that Francis, when presenting his paramour to the brother of his wife, said, 'See you this fair lady? She advises me not to let you go hence till you shall have revoked the treaty of Madrid.' 'Well,' returned the Emperor, coldly, 'If the advice be good, it should be followed.' Charles is, however, said to have thought it desirable to stop such advice from lips so influential, and, by the gift of a valuable diamond ring, not only effected this, but gained the protection of the frail beauty.

Whether Breusquet, the Jester, likewise was thus denounced to the Emperor by his master, we know not; but his mode of giving his advice has been recorded, and is characteristic. He is said to have kept a register of fools, in which he was constantly making new entries and alterations, indicative of his opinion of the different courtiers and their proceedings. This he one day showed to Francis, who found the last name entered to be that of the Emperor Charles V. With assumed or real displeasure, the King asked, how he dared enrol so great a monarch amongst fools? The Jester replied, 'He has proved himself entitled to a place in my list, by venturing alone into the dominions of a Prince whom he had ill-used.' The King shook his head reprovingly, at an answer that implied distrust of his own honour; when Breusquet subjoined, 'But should Charles prove more lucky than wise, and be allowed freely to quit them again, I shall efface his name, and substitute that of the Monarch who lets slip such an opportunity.'

Either a sense of honour, or Montmorency's influence, or perhaps a consciousness, founded upon his own conduct, of the uselessness of

any signature extorted from a captive prince, strengthened Francis against persuasions, arguments, and ridicule; and he refused to take any advantage of his ally's confidence in his plighted word. But Charles, who was duly informed of the strenuous exertions of the anti-imperialist faction, is said to have been so far alarmed thereby, that when the Duke of Orleans, who valued himself upon his agility, in the playfulness of youth sprang up behind him, as he sat on horseback, and clasping him in his arms, exclaimed, 'Now is your imperial majesty my prisoner!' the Emperor started and changed colour.

Upon leaving Paris, Charles visited the warm advocate for peace and friendship between the two sovereigns, Montmorency, at his magnificent seat of Chantilly, and was accompanied thither by Francis and his whole court. It is alleged that the princely heads of the anti-imperialist faction, the Dauphin, the King of Navarre, and the Duke of Vendôme, had projected the seizure of Charles during the festivities with which the Constable marked his sense of the honour done him by his imperial guest; that the plot was luckily betrayed to Montmorency, and that he, with great difficulty, prevailed upon the conspirators to abandon their iniquitous design. Their chief, the Dauphin, together with the Duke of Orleans and the Constable, then attended the Emperor to the frontiers; and he quitted France for the Netherlands, after spending three full months in his journey across the kingdom from Spain.

But the most revolting, and the least known part of Francis's character and conduct, is his sanguinary, his ferocious persecution of heretics in France, even whilst he was supporting and encouraging them in Germany. Catholic writers of those days of bigotry, when uncompromising zeal for orthodoxy was the sole test of devotion, have handed down to us many details of the French King's expiations, whether ridiculous or atrocious, of divers acts of absurd if not insane fanaticism on the part of his Huguenot subjects.

The fashion of breaking the images of saints and even crucifixes had begun to prevail amongst the French Calvinists; and the constituted authorities, lay and ecclesiastical, had at once adopted those horrible measures of repression which have ever been found rather to foster than to check the madness of religious enthusiasm. Jean Leclerc, a wool-carder, was the first French iconoclast. Zeal against what he deemed idolatry, impelled him to break images at Meaux, his native

town, where he was in consequence flogged and branded with a red-hot iron; and afterwards to renew his reforming exploits at Metz, where, in 1525, he was burned alive. But these were provincial matters, scarcely worthy the attention of France.

Three years later, an image of the Blessed Virgin, enshrined in the *Rue des Rosiers* at Paris, was, on the morning of Whitsunday, discovered to have been broken, and trampled in the mud, during the preceding night. The King and the people were alike exasperated by the sacrilege. Francis ordered a silver image to be made with all speed, in size, and every other respect, similar to that which had been destroyed; and on the 11th of June—the crime had been committed in the night of the 30th of May—he walked in procession, followed by all the Princes of the blood, great officers of the crown, and foreign ambassadors; by the courts of justice, the municipal bodies, the religious orders in Paris, and many bishops, to instal the new image in the niche whence its predecessor had been sacrilegiously ejected. But Francis was not content with this bloodless atonement. He ordered vigorous measures against heretics throughout France; and *Actes de Foi*, as, in imitation of the Spanish *Autos da Fé*, the solemn public condemnation and execution of heretics was called in French, were celebrated in many towns, especially at Toulouse. One such *Acte de Foi*, which was held at Paris, in the year 1535, he attended with his whole court, and the details of the ceremony are so curious as in some measure to compensate the pain of reading the account of its horrors.

Some act of absurd sacrilege had been perpetrated by fanatics against the host, or consecrated wafer used in the Eucharist, which Francis resolved to expiate, in order, as le Père Daniel informs his readers, “to draw down the blessing of heaven upon his arms, by this signal display of his pious zeal against the new doctrines.” He hastened to Paris, and ordered a solemn procession for the 21st of January, 1535. Between eight and nine o’clock in the morning of that day the procession set forth from the church of St. Germain. At its head were borne, all the bodies and relics of saints preserved in the various sanctuaries of Paris: to wit, those of St. Germain, St. Sherry, St. Marceau, St. Genevieve, St. Opportune, St. Landry, St. Honoré, the head of St. Louis, and all the relics of the Holy Chapel, which had never before been publicly exhibited since the death of the sainted French king. These were

followed by cardinals, bishops, abbots, all the prelates, and all the clergy, secular and regular, within reach, in due order. Then came Jean du Bellay, bishop of Paris, bearing the consecrated wafer in the sacred pix, in his hands. Immediately behind him, after the holy, as contemporary writers express it, walked the king, bare-headed, and carrying a torch of virgin wax. He was followed by the queen, the princes of the blood, the parliament, the masters of requests, all the courts of justice, the royal guard, and two hundred gentlemen. All the foreign ambassadors at the French court likewise attended. The procession slowly traversed every quarter of the town, and at six several principal stations altars were prepared for the host, and piles of wood, upon which were to be burnt as many convicted heretics. And so completely did the people participate in the feelings actuating their sovereign, that it was with difficulty the doomed victims could be preserved from the fury of the rabble, who would have torn them to pieces before the moment arrived for burning them.

But simple burning was not all the torture that these unfortunate men were destined to endure. At every station a machine had been prepared, with a large beam of wood hanging see-saw fashion. One end of the beam was over the blazing pile of wood, and to this the intended victim was strongly bound, in which situation he awaited the arrival of the procession. Upon reaching the spot, the bishop of Paris reverently deposited the host upon the altar; the king committed his torch to the care of the cardinal of Lorraine, folded his hands, and knelt down in prayer. The horrible machine was then set in motion; the end to which the Huguenot was fastened descending, plunged the wretch into the fire, and rising again, withdrew him from the flames, to prolong his agony; and this dreadful operation was repeated, until the cords that bound the martyr to the beam being burnt through, he fell upon the pile beneath, and was finally consumed. And during the whole of this terrific ceremony the king remained upon his knees, humbly imploring the mercy and protection of heaven upon his people. How the queen and the rest of the procession occupied themselves the while is not specified; but it is to be hoped and believed in prayer.

At six different places was this excruciating scene repeated; and when the six heretics were all burnt, the procession terminated its career at the church of St. Genevieve, where

the bishop of Paris finally deposited the host upon the high altar, and said mass. The king and princes then dined at the episcopal palace; and after dinner the king, mounting a pulpit in the great hall, where the court, the parliament, and the *corps diplomatique* had re-assembled, Francis I. harangued against heresy, professing that, "should his own children fall into such execrable and accursed opinions, he would give them up to be sacrificed to God."

Atrocities and feelings such as have been described must probably be considered as characteristic of the age rather than of the individual. But if this palliative plea be admitted in favour of the gallant, the be-praised Francis I., should it not likewise some little soften the horror entertained for the execrated Charles IX. of France, and Philip II. of Spain? This however is not the place for such an inquiry; and another problem, more within our competency, remains unsolved, with an attempt to solve which this discussion shall conclude, and

Francis I. be left to repose upon his honour. The problem is, how so ignorant a bigot could acquire the reputation of the protector and father of arts, sciences, and letters? This is the solution: the best at least that history seems to furnish. Francis, whose passion for fame is indisputable, had just knowledge enough to be ambitious of such meaner laurels to intertwine with warlike wreaths; and Italy's established power of distributing celebrity of this description appears to have been one of his motives for desiring to achieve conquests in that fair but unhappy land. He courted her artists, her poets, her scholars, her philosophers: and when, by the peace of Cambrai, he betrayed his allies, the Florentine republicans, to the vengeance of the pope and the emperor, many such distinguished characters, flying from their enslaved country, sought refuge in the French court. Francis joyfully welcomed, and lavished upon them courtesies and pensions; which they repaid with the reputation he has ever since enjoyed.

THE FRIEND OF OUR EARLY DAYS.

BY MRS. NORTON.

FAREWELL! a long farewell!
 Friend of the days gone by:
 My heart heaves now with a painful swell,
 And the tears stand in mine eye;
 For the sap in the green tree of life decays
 When we part from the friend of our early days!

Farewell! the dark blue sea
 Is stretching between us now;
 Strangers must tell thee news of me—
 Unseen and unheard art thou.
 Oh! greet them kindly, for, blame or praise,
 They bring news of the friend of early days!

Farewell! mine eyes must weep
 When I think of thy parting words;
 And my harp shall a spirit of sadness keep
 Enshrined in its trembling chords:
 And breathe, in the midst of the merriest lays,
 One sigh for the friend of early days!

Farewell! our looks were changed,
 Our words were cold and few:
 But hearts which by force may be estranged,
 By force are not made untrue.
 To his lost home love wanders—and while life decays,
 Years still for the friend of early days!