

Adventures in a Castle.

An Original Story.

(CONTINUED.)

MEANWHILE the Count de Vauban, whose unbounded extravagance reduced him to the verge of ruin, was obliged to abscond from the importunity of his creditors; but when Louis and Henry were both lost, he thought proper to come forward and claim their fortunes: at the earnest prayer of M. Dupont the grant of them to the Count was deferred by the king for one year, promising, that if in that time one of them did not appear, he should be put in possession of them. As M. Dupont still entertained suspicions of the Count, he did not think it necessary to inform the King, that the lawful owner of the estates was found, till Louis was able to carry himself the evidence of it. Therefore as soon as he was well enough to travel, he set out, attended by two servants, well armed for the security of their master, and proceeded by easy stages to Paris, to claim the investiture of the states, as his age authorised the demand. Louis the fifteenth, who then ruled over that fertile and extensive kingdom, without hesitation ordered him to be put in possession of all the fortune his father had left, which was far from being small, though principally vested in the funds: his landed estate only consisted of the chateau and grounds occupied by M. Dupont. Upon his return night overtook him two leagues from the chateau, but his desire of reaching it determined him to proceed, notwithstanding the darkness, and a wood which he was obliged to pass through, in which several robberies and murders had been perpetrated. He had passed through the greater part of it without any alarm, when just as he approached the farther side, a report of a pistol, followed by the clashing of swords, roused him from a reverie into which he had fallen. Clapping spurs to his horse he hastened forward with the servants at full speed; the moon at intervals shone forth from the broken clouds, and very opportunely yielded her light for him to perceive a group of men, apparently of different parties, as the clashing of swords announced an encounter. Impelled by the natural generosity of his disposition, he hastened to join the weaker party, who thus reinforced soon put their adversaries to flight. A gentleman who seemed to be the superior of the party, was slightly wounded; and thro' fear of its being irritated by riding far, he accepted an invitation to the chateau, which he had accorded in the politest terms. They found M. Dupont

and his family expecting Louis with anxiety, and his guests they treated with the most hospitable politeness. Before they retired, Louis begged to know what had occasioned the rencounter in the forest, and whom it was he had the good fortune to assist upon that occasion. The stranger informed him, that he was no other than the Duke of Alencon, who upon his way to his seat a short distance beyond the chateau, had the misfortune of breaking his carriage, and as he did not wish to stay till it was repaired, he proceeded on horseback with a few servants, and in the forest had been attacked by some men, whom he supposed to be banditti. He overwhelmed Louis with his thanks, and the next morning insisted upon his accompanying him to his castle, to which he consented, as the easy behaviour of the Duke had entirely won his confidence. He remained with him several weeks, and every day raised them in each other's estimation, till Louis had resolved to open his whole soul to him. This he deferred till his venerable guardian should come to the castle, whither he had been urged to present himself. The Duke of Alencon had one son and one daughter, to whom all his immense estates would belong, the daughter possessed all the graces of the sex, but her brother the Marquis de Lantz, disgraced his distinguished rank by his vicious propensities. Antoniette de Lantz (this was the Duke's family name) had been universally admired, and Louis understood that a young nobleman, who was one of her suitors, was favoured by the Marquis, and approved by Alencon. Notwithstanding the caution which this information was calculated to give, young Boileau could not exclude the passion of love from his bosom, and the image of Antoniette haunted him continually. At length he was told that the lover of Mademoiselle de Lantz, was expected at the castle the day following, and the day after M. Dupont had announced his intention of visiting the Duke. Curiosity to see the man to whom his admired Antoniette would probably be joined in the bands of marriage, prevented him from sleeping, and he arose early the next morning, with his ideas occupied by the same subject. After he had breakfasted he remained in the parlour with the Duke, Antoniette and the Marquis, when a carriage drove into the yard. "It is the Count," exclaims the Marquis, and flew out of the room to receive him, while Louis walked to one of the windows and saw a light from his carriage the *Count de Vauban*. Astonishment transfixed him to the spot, and contradictory ideas passed through his

brain with such rapidity, as almost to derange him. To find his uncle, whom he strongly suspected of being the source of all his misfortunes, received into the family of the Duke of Alencon, as the approved lover of his daughter, almost surpassed comprehension. He however fortunately recovered his presence of mind, before the Count entered the room, and determined to observe his countenance with the most watchful scrutiny. De Vauban entered, introduced by the Marquis with smiles in his aspect, when his attention was arrested by the sight of his nephew; his countenance displayed contending emotions, and guilt and fear were delineated in every feature. The company observed the extraordinary confusion of the Count, and were at a loss to account for it, or the piercing attention with which Louis regarded him: but in a short time de Vauban's wonted ease of manners returned, and he paid his compliments to the company, apologizing for his emotion, which he said was to be attributed to his surprize, at again seeing his runaway nephew, who he had much feared had been lost to his friends for ever. He then acquainted the company with their consanguinity, but was completely at a loss to enter into conversation with Louis, who sat totally silent wrapt in his own reflections. To all their enquiries respecting his absence, of which the Count had spoken, he gave incoherent replies, and instantly relapsed into his abstraction of mind to what was passing before him. The day passed with a degree of unsociability to which the family of the Duke of Alencon were unaccustomed, but the unusual reserve, to them so mysterious, which clouded the manners of their two guests, deprived them of their wonted cheerfulness. The Duke, to whom Louis had endeared himself in the first place, by according him his assistance when beset in the forest, with so much celerity, and which his affectionate manners had confirmed, was anxious to know what occasioned the uneasiness under which his young friend seemed to labour, and they all separated to retire to bed at night, seemingly pleased that the day was expired. Louis was unable to sleep, from the concurrence of circumstances which a short time had produced; the confusion of the Count upon their interview, almost confirmed his suspicions that he was the cause of his imprisonment. Restless and tormented with his own ideas, he arose, dressed and seated himself at the window;—opening the casement to give admission to the air, he observed a man walking on the terrace below, apparently waiting for some one, and in a few minutes

he was joined by another. The casement at which he sat, was too high from the terrace to permit him to hear the whole of the discourse that ensued, but he found that it was an assignation. Curiosity to know who it was that had taken this opportunity for a private interview, prompted him to listen, and he found it was the Marquis and the Count de Vauban. He was so much interested in every thing which concerned his uncle, that he could not refrain from listening, and from what part of their discourse reached his ear he found it of dreadful import. He had conceived a dislike to the Marquis at first sight, which had been strengthened by his manners towards him, but he now found him to be a man, in whom every species of villainy were concentrated. The attack made upon the Duke of Alencon in the forest, where Louis had been the means of his rescue, had been the act of the Count's desperate dependants under his influence. De Vauban's situation with respect to pecuniary affairs was desperate, and in order to rid himself of the importunity of his creditors, he had afforded protection to a party of banditti, who resided in the environs of the Castle, which had been the scene of the Boileau's imprisonment. From this place they made depredations throughout the vicinity, and a considerable dividend of their plunder was appropriated to the use of de Vauban. But as this was a very uncertain dependence, the Count had listened to proposals from the Marquis de Lantz, who also felt his extravagance limited by the prudence of the Duke, to assassinate his father, and share with him the large estates which would then come into his possession. This horrid scheme, of which Louis had been the means of disappointing, plainly proves that de Vauban would hesitate at nothing, that had a tendency to promote his views. The conversation then turned upon Louis, and the Count de Vauban related to the Marquis the obstacle he was to the possession of M. Boileau's estate, and communicated his desire of having him removed, to his worthless companion, who readily assented to his intentions, and they removed to another part of the terrace to lay the plan of their future proceedings. The horror which pervaded the breast of Louis was indescribable; to find that any human being should be so lost to every sense of rectitude, as to not only connive at, but to assist in an attempt, to murder his *own father*, was more than he could ever have supposed. Nothing more transpired of their intentions that night, and the day dawned upon Louis, while he remained fixed at the

casement so deeply wrapt in meditation, that he was scarcely conscious of his existence. When roused from his reveries, he was almost ready to conclude that it was a horrid dream; but memory recalled to his imagination the conversation he had heard, too forcibly to suffer him to admit the pleasing supposition. The next day brought M. Dupont to the Castle de Alencon, and as soon as possible a private interview was obtained with Louis and the Duke, when, after receiving the request of his two friends, Louis recapitulated his adventures in the Castle.

(To be continued.)