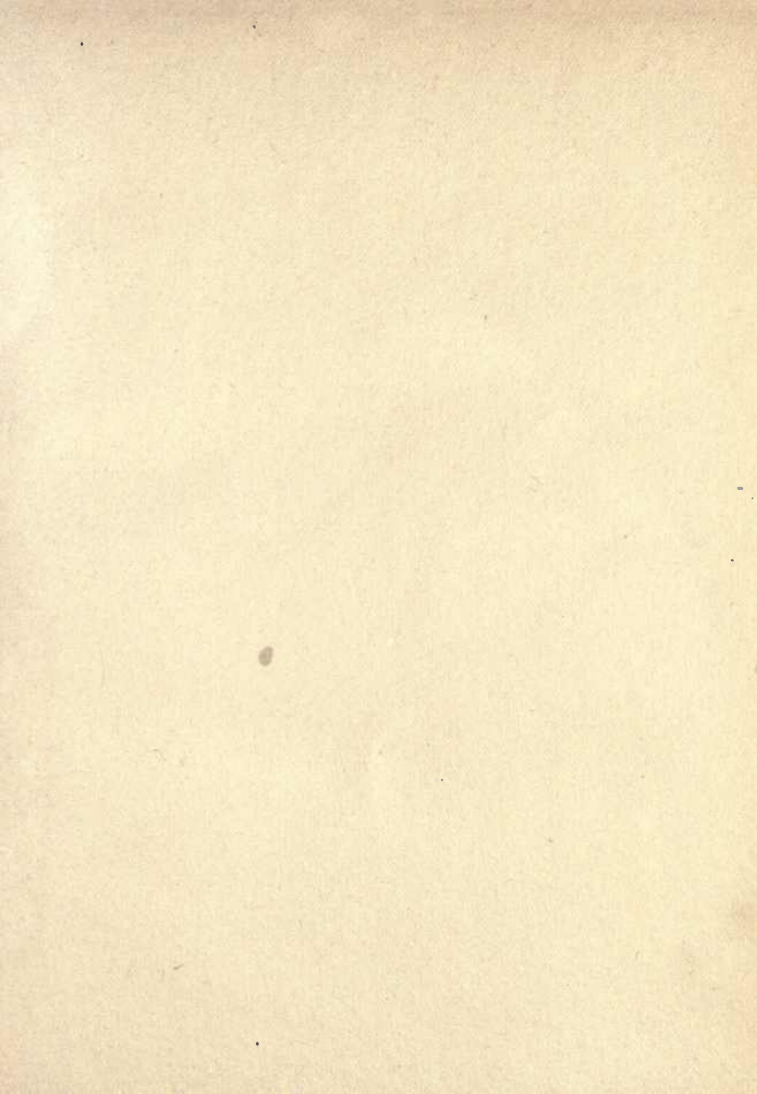


Mrs. C. L. Anderson.



THE TWO DIANAS

THE WORKS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

IN THIRTY VOLUMES



THE TWO DIANAS
VOLUME TWO



ILLUSTRATED WITH DRAWINGS ON WOOD BY
EMINENT FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARTISTS



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THE TWO DIANAS

CHAPTER I

LOVE SHARED

THEN Diana threw herself into the arms of Gabriel.

"And I must thank and bless you also, my Gabriel," said she. "My last thought before I fainted was to invoke my guardian angel, and you came. Oh, how I thank you!"

"Ah, Diana," said he, "how I have suffered since I saw you last, and how long it is since that!"

"And what of me, then?" she cried.

Then they began recounting, with a superfluity of details the reverse of dramatic, it must be acknowledged, all they had done and felt during an absence each had found so difficult to bear.

Calais, the Duke de Guise, the conqueror, and the conquered, all were forgotten. All the rumors and all the passions that surrounded the lovers did not affect them. Lost in their world of love and rapture, they no longer heard, they no longer saw, the world beyond them.

The soul that has encountered so many griefs and so many terrors is, in some sort, weakened and enfeebled by suffering, and, although strong against sorrow, cannot resist happiness.

In the soothing atmosphere of pure emotions, Diana and Gabriel willingly abandoned themselves to the gentle influence of that serenity and joy to which they had been hitherto unaccustomed.

To the scene of violent passion we have described succeeded another at once like and different.

"How good it is to be near you, my love!" said Diana. "Instead of the presence of that impious man whom I hated and who frightened me, what delight your reassuring and dear presence affords me!"

"And," said Gabriel, "since our infancy, when we were happy without knowing it, I do not remember, during my isolated and agitated life, a moment to be compared with this."

For a time they were silent, absorbed in mutual adoration. Diana resumed:

"Come and sit close to me, Gabriel. Would you believe it? Even in captivity, I have dreamed and almost foreseen the moment that united us in such an unhopèd-for fashion. I had a surety that you would be my deliverer, and that in my last extremity God would bring you, my knight, to save me."

"And as to me, Diana, the thought of you," said Gabriel, "at once attracted me like a magnet and guided me like a light. Shall I confess it to you and to my conscience? Although other powerful motives might have urged me on, I should never have conceived the idea of taking Calais, never accomplished it by such rash methods, if you had not been here a prisoner; if an instinctive knowledge of the perils you ran had not inspired and encouraged me. Except for the hope of succoring you, except for another sacred interest that forms the object of my life, Calais would still be in the power of the English. God grant that I may not be punished for having wished and done good through purely interested motives!"

The Viscount d'Exmès thought for a moment of the scene in the Rue St. Jacques, of the self-denial of Ambroise Paré, and of the austere belief of the admiral that Heaven wishes pure hands for pure causes.

But the beloved voice of Diana reassured him, when it cried—

"God punish you, Gabriel! God punish you for having been great and generous!"

"Who knows?" said he, questioning Heaven with eyes that had in them a gloomy presentiment.

"I know," replied Diana, with her charming smile.

She was so enchanting when she said so that Gabriel, struck with her glorious beauty, and forgetting all other thoughts, could not help exclaiming—

"Diana, you are beautiful as an angel!"

"And you valiant as a hero, Gabriell!" she replied.

They were seated near each other. Their hands by chance met and clasped. Night was beginning to fall.

Diana, blushing to the temples, rose and took some steps across the chamber.

"You are leaving me, you are flying from me, Diana," said Gabriel, sadly.

"Oh, no!" she returned quickly, going up to him. "With you, it is different; I am not afraid, my dear Gabriel."

Diana was wrong. The danger was different; but it was still danger, and the friend was not less, perhaps, to be feared than the enemy.

"Well and good," said Gabriel, taking the soft little white hand she abandoned to him anew; "well and good, let us be happy for a little, after suffering so much. Let us unburden our souls and let them rest in confidence and joy."

"True," replied Diana; "I feel so happy by your side, Gabriel. Let us forget for a moment the world and the tumult around us; let us enjoy this delicious hour. God, I believe, will permit us to do so without trouble and without fear. You are right; else why have we suffered so?"

With a graceful movement familiar to her from childhood, she laid her charming head upon Gabriel's shoulder. Her great velvet eyes softly closed, and her hair touched the lips of the ardent young man.

It was he now who rose shuddering and confused.

"Well?" said Diana, opening her astonished and languishing eyes.

He fell on his knees before her, quite pale, and flung his arms around her.

"Diana, I love you! I love you!" he cried from the depths of his heart.

"And I love you, Gabriell!" answered Diana, courageously, and as if obeying an irresistible instinct of her heart.

How their faces approached, how their lips united, how in that kiss their souls mingled, God alone knows; for it is certain they did not know themselves.

But suddenly Gabriel, who felt his soul stagger under the confusing weight of so much happiness, tore himself from the arms of Diana.

"Diana, let me fly!" he cried in accents of terror.

"Fly! and why?" she asked, surprised.

"Diana! Diana! if you were my sister!" returned Gabriel, beside himself.

"Your sister!" repeated Diana, thunderstruck.

Gabriel stopped, astonished and to some extent stunned by his own words, and, passing his hand over his burning brow, he asked in a loud voice:

"What, then, have I said?"

"What have you said, indeed?" returned Diana. "Are those terrible words of yours to be taken literally? What is the solution of this frightful mystery? Good heavens! am I really your sister?"

"My sister? did I confess you were my sister?" said Gabriel.

"Ah, then it is true!" cried Diana, trembling.

"No, it is not, it cannot be true. I do not know; who can know? And, besides, I ought not to have told you all this. It is a secret of life and death I had sworn to keep. Ah, merciful Heaven! I preserved my coolness and my reason in suffering and misfortune; must the first drop of happiness that touches my lips intoxicate me even to madness, even to forgetfulness of my oaths?"

"Gabriel," returned Madame de Castro, gravely, "God

knows it is not a vain curiosity that leads me on. But you have said either too much or too little for my repose. It is necessary to finish now."

"Impossible! impossible!" cried Gabriel, with a sort of dismay.

"And why impossible?" said Diana. "Something assures me that those secrets belong to me as much as to you, and that you have not the right to hide them from me."

"You are right," replied Gabriel; "and you have certainly as much claim to bear these sorrows as I have. But since the burden crushes me alone, do not ask me to share it with you."

"Yes, I demand and wish it, I insist on sharing your troubles," rejoined Diana; "and, in addition to all this, I implore you, Gabriel, my friend, do not refuse me."

"But I have taken an oath to the king," said Gabriel, anxiously.

"You have taken an oath?" returned Diana. "Well, keep that oath loyally with regard to strangers and even toward friends: you will act rightly in doing so. But since I, by your own confession, have the same interest in this mystery as you, can you, ought you, to observe a pernicious silence? No, Gabriel, if you feel any pity for me. My anxiety upon this subject has already sufficiently tortured my heart. In this respect, if not, alas! in the other accidents of your life, I am in some sort your second self. Do you perjure yourself when you think of your secret in the solitude of your conscience? Do you believe that my soul, profound and sincere, and ripened by so many trials, cannot as well as yours guard jealously the secret confided to it, whether that secret be one of joy or sorrow—a secret, too, which is mine as well as yours."

The tender and caressing words flowed on, touching the fibres of the young man's heart, as if it were some responsive instrument.

"And then, Gabriel, since fate forbids us to be joined in

love and happiness, how have you the courage to refuse the only fellowship allowed us, that of sorrow? Shall we, at least, not suffer less if we suffer together? Would it not be a grievous thing if the only bond that unites us should keep us apart?"

And, feeling that Gabriel, though half conquered, still hesitated—

"Moreover, take care!" continued Diana; "if you persist in your silence, why should I not use that language which just now, I know not why, caused you such anguish and terror—language which you once taught my lips and my heart? The woman who is your betrothed in the sight of Heaven can, in all chastity, lay her head on your shoulder, and her lips on your brow, as I do now—"

But Gabriel, heart-broken, again released himself from Diana with a shudder.

"No, Diana, have mercy on my reason, I supplicate you!" he cried. "You would know absolutely, then, my terrible secret? Well, to escape a possible crime, I will tell it to you! Yes, Diana, it is necessary to take literally the words I let fall in my anguish a moment ago. Diana, you are perhaps the daughter of Count Montgommery, my father! you are perhaps my sister!"

"Holy Virgin!" murmured Madame de Castro, crushed by this revelation.

"But how can this be?" she asked.

"I should have wished," he said, "that your calm, pure life had never known this history, full as it is of terror and of crime. But, alas! I feel too well that my own strength is not a sufficient shield against my love. You must help me against yourself, Diana, and I am going to tell you everything."

"I listen to you with dismay, but with attention," answered Diana.

Gabriel then related everything: how his father had loved Madame de Poitiers, and, in the opinion of all the court, had appeared to be loved in return; how the dauphin,

to-day the king, had been his rival; how the Count de Montgommery had disappeared, and how Aloyse had succeeded in learning, and had revealed to his son, what had become of him. This was all his nurse knew, and, as Madame de Poitiers refused to speak, Count Montgommery alone, if he were still alive, could tell the secret of Diana's birth.

When Gabriel had finished his gloomy narrative—

"It is frightful!" cried Diana. "Whatever be the issue, my friend, our destiny must be miserable in the end. If I am the daughter of Count de Montgommery, you are my brother, Gabriel; if I am the daughter of the king, you are the justly angered enemy of my father. In any case, we are separated."

"No, Diana," replied Gabriel, "our misfortune is not quite hopeless. Since I have begun by telling you everything, I am going to finish. And, indeed, I feel that you have been right: this confidence has relieved me, and my secret has, after all, only left my heart to enter into yours."

Gabriel then informed Diana of the strange and dangerous compact he had concluded with Henry the Second, and the solemn promise of the king to restore liberty to Count Montgommery, if his son, after defending St. Quentin against the Spaniards, should take Calais from the English.

Now Calais became a French city an hour ago; and Gabriel might, without vanity, believe that he had largely contributed to this glorious result.

As he spoke, hope dispelled gradually the sadness that overshadowed Diana's countenance, as the dawn dispels the darkness.

When Gabriel had finished, she remained a moment in pensive meditation; then, offering him her hand—

"My poor Gabriel," said she, firmly, "there will be for us in the future, as there has been in the past, much to think of and much to suffer. But let us not dwell upon that, my friend. We must not become weak and enfeebled.

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