

ARTHUR BLANE;
OR,
**THE HUNDRED
CUIRASSIERS.**

BY JAMES GRANT

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'He that would France win,
Must at Scotland first begin!'
Old Proverb.

PREFACE

In the following pages are narrated much of real life and adventure, with much that is historically true; but these passages I leave to the inquiring reader to discover or to separate. The localities are all described from old works or other sources, as they existed in the time of the hero.

Many of the characters are real, and belong to history, such as the Vicomte de Turenne, De Toneins, Vaudemont, Raoul d'Ische, the Marechal de la Force, the Marquis of Gordon, and others. The Count de Bitche was also a veritable personage who disgraced those days, and his abduction of the Countess of Lutzelstein was a real event.

The story of Tushielaw is an old Scottish legend.

So great was the French spirit for duelling in that age, that many of the clergy wore swords. Thus, in 1617, we find the Cardinal de Guise *drawing his rapier* upon the Duke of Nevers Gonzaga, and it is notorious that Cardinal de Retz fought a great many duels when, as an abbé, he was soliciting the Archbishopric of Paris.

Some notes of interest, regarding the Scots and Scottish Guard in France will be found at the end of this Romance, in which I have endeavoured to portray something of the free and reckless character of the French court and army during the reign of Louis XIII.,—a state of morals gradually introduced by his more dissolute predecessors, and which, under the Grand Monarque, increased, together with tyranny and misgovernment, until the

foundations of the throne were sapped, the old dynasty of France expatriated, and her nobility destroyed.

Edinburgh, April 1858.

ARTHUR BLANE;
OR,
THE HUNDRED CUIRASSIERS.

CHAPTER I. THE PRETTY MASK.

It was about the end of April, 1634—twelve had tolled from the huge dark towers of Notre Dame, and the night was dark and gusty.

I found myself bewildered among the intricate and gloomy streets of old Paris; having lost the way to my hotel, the *Golden Fleur de Lys*, in the ancient Rue d'Ecosse. In my ignorance of the thoroughfares and of their names, having been repeatedly misled by wicked gamins and practical jokers, midnight found me completely entangled among the narrow alleys that bordered on the terrible locality of the Place de la Grève, the lofty, quaint and peculiar mansions of which towered on three sides, while on the fourth, lay the Seine, whose muddy waters have hidden the gashed corpse of many a murdered man—have swept away the red débris of many a massacre, and been the last refuge of many a desperate and despairing heart.

Against the dark sky, I could distinguish the darker outlines of the steep sharp gables that overhung the Place, with their fronts covered by grotesque sculptures in wood and stone. A few lights twinkled feebly amid the masses of that great pillared edifice of the days of Charles V., named from him, the Maison au Dauphin; and the flickering oil lamps that swung mournfully to and fro, at the ends of the dark alley, cast a sickly light upon the fantastic projections of the houses, and on the whitewashed turret of the ancient pillory and stone gibbet, whereon so many thousands of human beings, during ages past, have died in agony and disgrace.

Here then, in this place of pleasant associations, I—who had arrived in Paris but the night before—found myself alone, wandering in ignorance of the way, at midnight—I, a Scot and stranger, with my whole worldly possessions about me, to wit, ten of those gay louis d'ors (first coined by Louis XIII.), a good suit of black velvet, a fair cloak of serge de Berri, worth about ten pistoles; but having a good sword, that had notched more than one crown in its time, with a pair of steel Scottish pistols in my girdle engraved with my coat of arms and the significant legend,

"He who gives *quickly*, gives *twice*."

Moreover I was only twenty years of age—active, determined even to recklessness, and at all times master of my weapons, if not of my temper.

In a secret pocket of my doublet, I carried a letter of recommendation from Esme Stuart, who was Lord of Aubigne, Duke of Lennox, Lord High Admiral and Great Chamberlain of Scotland, to Madame Clara, the mistress of Louis XIII., who had created her Comtesse d'Amboise. In wit and beauty she was the rival of Ninon de l'Enclos, and the superior of the lovely Marion de l'Orme, being one of those bold, artful, and beautiful women who in all ages have entangled the politics and swayed the destinies of France; and on this missive from the duke, who had known Madame Clara in her girlish days, when she was a dame d'honneur, and he a gay captain of the Scottish archers—and had known her more intimately, perhaps, than the most Christian king could have relished—all my hope of success in the French service depended; for by the ruin and misfortunes which their own patriotism had brought upon my family, I was landless, homeless, all but penniless and an outcast from my country—a country where it is

ever the doom and curse of patriotism and purity of spirit to be stifled and crushed under the heels of envy, calumny, avarice, and sectarianism.

The last note of the vast bell of Notre Dame de Paris, had pealed away over the darkened city, when I paused and looked about me.

The ends of the streets and alleys were closed by iron chains, over which I had fallen more than once. None of the city watch were visible, and save myself no one seemed abroad, for I heard no sound save the mournful creaking of the oil lamps, which swung, few and far between, in the centre of the way, or the murmur of the river as it chafed against the wooden abutments of the quay and poured through the arches of the Pont de Notre Dame.

While surveying the river on one side, and the pillared recesses of the Maison au Dauphin on the other, espying a fancied lurker in every shadowy depth, all the old stories I had heard of Paris floated through my mind; for I had been told that there were quarters of the city, such as the infamous Cour des Miracles, into which neither the sergeants of the Provost, nor the officers of the Chatelet dared to venture—strongholds of vice and villany, where mohawks, midnight assassins, house-breakers, cloak-snatchers, cut-purses, Spanish gypsies, Italian musicians, German mountebanks, Jew vendors of quack medicine, and women whose fall, like that of angels, had brought them far from heaven, repaired by day; and from whence, like a living and pestilent flood, they issued by night to ensnare, and waylay the unwary and the wandering.

Then there were lacqueys, pages, nobles, and gallants, who went about masked, muffled, and armed to the teeth, fighting the

watch, insulting the peaceful, carrying off pretty girls, *sabre à la main*, and committing such outrages that in 1607 it was computed that since the accession of Henry IV the number of French gentlemen slain in duels alone amounted to *four thousand*.*

* Lomenie—Mém. Hist. de France.

I thought of these things, and keeping my cloak well about me with one hand, kept the other on the pommel of my sword.

Turning to quit the Place de la Grève (I have learned all the local names since that eventful night), I stood a moment irresolute whether to take the alley which leads into the Rue Coutellerie and from thence towards the Faubourg St. Martin, when a cry arrested my steps. It seemed to come from the shadow of Rolande's Tower, an old building half Roman and half Gothic, in a cell of which Madame de Rolande, the daughter of a French crusader, died of grief in the days of St. Louis, and which stands at the corner of the Place, near the Rue de la Tannerie and close to the river.

Then a woman rushed towards me exclaiming,

'Monsieur, if you are a gentleman you will protect me!'

'With my life, madame,' I replied.

'With your sword would be more to the purpose,' said she, as I took her hand; 'by your voice you are a Scottish archer?'

'Would to heaven I were! I am but a poor gentleman, forced to leave his own country and seek military service in France.'

'Your name—'

'Arthur Blane, of Blanerne,—but who are they that pursue you?' I asked, while endeavouring to make out her features, which were partly concealed by a black velvet mask, through the holes of which her eyes sparkled with no common animation. By her voice she seemed young; by her bearing noble; and by her gloveless hands, which were small, white, and soft, I was assured that she was beautiful. 'Lady,' I resumed; 'to where shall I conduct you?'

'On your honour, I charge you neither to conduct nor follow me.'

'But you were molested—'

'By two tipsy gallants who, deeming me a grisette, I presume, have pursued me all the way from the Logis de Lorraine; but hark! you hear them,—I must leave you—'

'Alone—alone and here!'

'Yes.'

'Oh, madame, think of the hour, the place—your beauty—'

'Enough; a carriage waits me at the Pont de Notre Dame.'

"Tis well,' said I, unsheathing my sword; 'your molesters shall not pass this way if I can prevent them.'

'Oh! a thousand thanks brave sir,' said she with a shudder on seeing the shining steel, and holding out her ungloved hand.

'Madame, I risk my life for you, and you give me but your hand to kiss!'

'What! do you too take me for a grisette?' she asked with a haughty smile as she lifted her little mask. I kissed her cheek, and in a moment she slipped from my arm and was gone! Her face was more than beautiful; but I had no time to think upon it, and stood sword in hand in the centre of the Quai de la Grève, barring the passage of two men, cloaked, masked, and armed, who came boldly up to me, singing with the brusque air of tipsy roisterers.

CHAPTER II. A CASE OF RAPIERS.

I dreaded being robbed and consequently of perchance losing the duke's letter to Madame d'Amboise—a letter which contained the destiny of my life. I had nothing valuable to lose besides but my life, and, strange to say, I valued it less than my letter. Wrapped in my cloak, I stood with rapier on guard right in the centre of the Quai, while the cavaliers came close up to me. Both were, as I have said, masked, armed, and cloaked; and moreover were taller and, to all appearance, stouter than I. One was singing that gay and lively song in which the people of Lower Normandy still remember the mother of the English conqueror—the wife of Herluin, the Comte de Conteville; and his companion joined vigorously in the gay chorus.

'De Guillaume-le-Conquérant
Chantons l'historiette;
Il nâquit cet illustre enfant
D'une simple amourette.
Le hazard fait souvent les grands:
Vive le fils d'Harlette!

*Normands,
Vive le fils d'Harlette!"*

'Fille d'un simple pelletier
Elle était gentilette:
Robert en galant chevalier,
Vint lui center fleurette;

L'amour égale tous les rangs:
Vive le fils d'Harlette!

*Normands,
Vive le fils d'Harlette!*

Pausing in his song, the singer came scornfully up to me with one hand on his sword and the other on his moustache, saying,

'Pardieu—you saw one of the most inconstant of God's creatures pass this way?'

'To the point, monsieur,' said I, 'what do you mean?'

'A woman—you saw her?'

'Yes,' I replied, still barring the way with my sword.

'Pretty, and with a modest air which would have deceived the devil himself.'

'Perhaps so.'

'And which way went she?' demanded both imperiously.

'My sword is drawn to answer you,' I replied, considerably ruffled by the brusquerie of their bearing.

'Stay, chevalier,' said one, laughing; 'let the poor man alone—'tis only some bourgeois seized by a fit of valour.'

'Peste, monseigneur, I see by a glance that he is no bourgeois; and where is his lantern?'

'You have drunk like a Swiss to-night, chevalier, and cannot see it.'

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