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**Nestle Tower**  
Aloysius Bertrand

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**Aloysius Bertrand**

NESLE TOWER

At the Nesle Tower there was a guard house  
wherein the watch lodged during the night.

—Brantôme

"Jack of clubs."

"Queen of spades! I win!"

The old soldier who had lost slammed his fist on the table,  
sending the pot of winnings all over the floor.

But then, Master Hugues, the provost, spat into the iron  
brazier, making a grimace like that of a hypocrite who had swal-  
lowed a spider while eating his soup.

\*

"Faugh! Are the pork-butchers scalding their hogs at mid-  
night? Good God, there's a straw boat burning on the Seine!"

At first the fire was only a harmless sprite lost in the river  
fog. Soon, it became a demon on all fours throwing cannon-shot and  
powerful arquebusades from a jet of water.

A crowd of many jokers, cripples and bums rushed over to  
the river bank and began dancing jigs in front of the spiral of flame  
and smoke.

Both the Nesle Tower—from which the watch had exited,  
with their blunderbusses slung over their shoulders—and the tower  
of the Louvre—from which, through a window, the king and queen  
saw everything without being seen—both these towers facing each  
other glowed red.

Translated from the French by **Gian Lombardo**