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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**