or two later historians, who state that Gaston caused his son to expiate with his life his attempt to poison him. Be this as it may, there is no doubt that at the time Gaston firmly believed that the poison he discovered secreted on the boy's person was intended for his destruction. That a man of such unbridled temper, who brooked no opposition, should in the face of such a terrible discovery act in the manner he did, even if the worst construction be put upon the presence of a small pocketknife in the father's hand, made the event in the eyes of his contemporaries a tragedy, but not a brutal murder. Among his own people, who knew full well how intense had been his love for his only child, he seems to have lost none of his popularity, and to the esteem in which his subjects held their lord for his good and wise government was added the deepest compassion. Even in an age when deeds of violence and "sudden death" of all sorts and kinds were every-day events, it was felt that the Castle of Orthéz had witnessed on that fateful 4th of January, 1381, a tragedy the like of which history has recorded but few, and that retribution of the direst kind should overtake Navarre's infamous King for making his innocent nephew the tool of a dastardly plot.

The story of this tragic event may be related briefly, even at the risk of wearying those who know their Froissart. The fortunes of one of the innumerable wars waged by Gaston had placed a great noble, le Sire d'Albret, as prisoner in Gaston's hands. Unable to pay the huge ransom of 50,000 francs demanded by his captor—something like a million in modern currency—d'Albret got the brother of Gaston's wife, Charles the Bad, King of Navarre, to guarantee the payment of the ransom. At first Gaston refused to accept this surety, but finally at Countess Agnes's urgent entreaties he did so, and d'Albret was set at liberty. As soon as the latter could collect this formidable sum he paid it over to the King of Navarre, believing that the latter had in the meanwhile paid the guaranteed ransom to Gaston. But not only had this not occurred, but even when Charles had received the 50,000 francs he refused to pay it over to his brother-in-law, the rightful owner. Time went by, Charles turning a deaf ear to his brother-in-law's demands. Finally, about the year 1374, Countess Agnes obtained her husband's permission to journey to her brother with a view of getting the money from him. But even these personal pleadings of his sister could not melt the avaricious ruler's heart, not even when Countess Agnes declared that without the money she dared not return to Orthéz, for her imperious husband would never believe that she had not connived at the whole affair. "The money is in my hands, and in my hands it shall remain," replied the truculent King. "Gaston gave you no dower, and this sum I shall retain for you, whether you stay here or you return to your husband," he declared. Fearing Gaston's wrath, and though unable to change her brother's resolution, she stayed on at his Court, and even Pope Gregory's kindly attempt to heal the breach between the three relations, and the Princess of Wales' intercession in her interview with Gaston, failed to mend matters. Gaston however permitted that their youthful son might pay a visit to his mother. This he did in the autumn of 1380, and when the time came for him to return to his father his perfidious uncle, the King, took him aside, and told him that his heart was deeply grieved by the unhappy quarrel between the boy's father and mother, and that he greatly desired to bring about a speedy reconciliation by means of a potent love-powder which, he instructed the youth, had to be administered to his father secretly or it would lose its power. "As soon as he would have partaken of it his heart, now filled with the spirit of hatred for his wife, would be overflowing with the fondest love for her," said his uncle, as he hung a tiny *sachet* containing the powder round the youth's neck, underneath his clothes, where he was to carry it without showing it to anybody till a favourable opportunity came for secretly administering it to his father in his food. Three days after the youth's return to Orthéz he was playing at ball with his bastard brother Ivain with the result that a boyish quarrel took place, in the course of which young Gaston gave his playmate some blows. Complaining, with streaming eyes, of this to his father, Ivain disclosed to him the fact that young Gaston, since his return from Navarre, wore on his breast underneath his shirt a little bag filled with a powder which, the youth boasted, would soon lead to his mother's return to Orthéz and her reconciliation with their father.

Gaston, who was wont to eat but one meal a day, and that in the evening, was in the habit of partaking it in lonely state at a raised table in the great hall of Orthéz Castle, lit up by flambeaux, his knights and gentlemen-in-waiting occupying in silent array the main body of the great room. At the meal which followed the above disclosure Gaston beckoned young Gaston to his side and made him stoop down as if he would whisper something into his ear. As the boy did so Gaston took from his bosom underneath his tunic the fateful *sachet*. Putting some of the powder on a piece of bread he gave it to one of his great hounds whom he called to his side. The effect of the poison was almost instantaneous, the hound expiring amid the most fearful convulsions! Gaston's wrath knew no bounds, and without listening to a word of explanation from the frightened youth would have thrown himself upon his son and killed him there and then had not the assembled knights prevented it. "Oh, Gaston, traitor!" he cried, "have I not for your sake waged war with the King of France, with the King of England, with the King of Spain, and with the King of Aragon, so as to increase your heritage, and did I not hold my own against all of them, and it is you who now want to kill me! Ah! you are a monster, but you shall die!"

Only with the greatest difficulty was Gaston prevented from carrying out his threat, but fifteen young nobles that were attached to the young Count's person were put to death, and the innocent victim of this infamous plot was cast into a dark prison in one of the towers of Orthéz, to await the sentence of a court which Gaston ordered should forthwith assemble, and which was to consist of all his great nobles and prelates of Foix. They unanimously declared that the youth should be spared, for "he is your heir and you have no more." The father relented in so far that he promised to spare his life, but he left him in his prison. Two weeks after the tragic scene the young prisoner's gaoler reported to the father that his charge refused to partake of food, and implored the Count to have mercy on his son. Gaston said he would see whether this was true, and for this purpose went down to the dungeon where the boy lay. As misfortune would have it he held in his hand a tiny knife with which he was in the habit of paring his nails, and by some unhappy chance he held it in such a way when he approached his son that he cut a vein in the boy's throat, from which he bled to death. Gaston's grief was the profoundest imaginable, and no one who has read his plaintive "Oraysons" can doubt the sincerity of his inconsolable sorrow. Even full seven years later, when Froissart paid his famous visit to Orthéz, none about Gaston's Court dared as much as whisper the sad tale into the chronicler's ears.[1]

All historians rank Gaston de Foix, notwithstanding his fierce temper, among the wisest and most popular rulers of his time. That he was much beloved by his people is disclosed by local researches among the *rondeaux* and *fableaux* of the peasantry of Béarn where are found many traces of the "good Count."[2] In view of this it is somewhat inexplicable why certain modern writers have portrayed to us Gaston as a repulsive voluptuary, while others indulge in cheap sneers at his sportsmanlike qualities. If we examine into the qualifications of these nineteenth-century critics we become convinced that their opinions should not be accepted as those of serious experts. When in the "Encyclopædia Britannica" (ix. p. 800–802) a distinguished writer calls Gaston "a cruel voluptuary," we must remember that the writer in question was no sportsman and did not possess any knowledge of old sporting lore.

And when the author of a recently published interesting book on the crossbow declares Gaston de Foix to have been not only a voluptuary but a tyrant and murderer of his own son, he shows by what he says of Gaston's history that his knowledge of the man's life-story and of his book is hardly as thorough as it should be for a critic. He says that Gaston was born in 1329, that he married the daughter of Philip VI. of France, that he wrote a work on the chase in two parts, the first, or theoretical part, existing only in manuscript, and that "*nineteen MS. copies of the work are known to exist; thirteen of these are in the British Museum Library, and three in the*

[1] It seems strange that no great tragedian has ever attempted to make that intensely dramatic scene in the great hall at Orthéz his own. Even in the quaintly laconic words of Froissart's mediæval diction the father's cry of reproach, on discovering the *sachet* of poison hung round his son's neck, lose nothing of their heartrending impressiveness.

[2] See Emile Vignoncour's *Recueil de Poésies Béarnaises*, 4th ed. Pau, 1886; and Jean Codorniu's *Étude historique*, Floraux, 1895.