

Choice Literature.

HOW THEY KEPT THE FAITH.

A TALE OF THE HUGUENOTS OF LANGUEDOC.

CHAPTER II.—(Continued).

"There are Huguenot physicians, however, already in the field, who will gladly open to those who knock. I cannot draw back, my father. If I may not follow your calling, I will at least follow in your steps. I would be unworthy to be called your son if I faltered now. The greater the peril, the fewer there will be who will run the risk, and the fewer, the more need." He stopped suddenly at a low sob from Eglantine. The prospect of her separation from those she loved best had been growing on her childish heart until the small cup had overflowed.

"I want my Aunt Monique. Let me go to my Aunt Monique!" she exclaimed in a passion of grief, and breaking from the pastor's arms, fled precipitately from the room.

"Let be. The mother will know how to comfort her," said Godfrey Chevalier. "My son, did you mark no double meaning in what M. Laval said of the dowry he would bestow upon his granddaughter, and the interest he would give you in the business if you would show yourself agreeable to his wishes?"

"It is plain that he likes not the prospect of a hard and perilous life for Eglantine," answered Rene. "I infer we would have little to hope from him in the worldly advantage, if I displease him now. But you know I have never looked to the money, my father."

"That were little, if that were all, though a share of this world's goods would help thee over many a rough place in these troublous times. Look again, Rene. Remember that M. Laval loves his granddaughter better than aught else in the world; that he holds the secret of her parentage; and that his attachment to our Church is only nominal. Remember, that though he has never ventured to claim her openly, it is in his power to do so at any moment, and that you may find it difficult some day to press thy suit with the man you have angered and crossed. M. Laval will not lightly break the promise made to the dead, but he warns you plainly to be careful how you decide."

"You surely do not think he would dare to betray the secret of her birth to the Catholic relatives?"

"Read the letter again."

There was no sound but the crackling of the embers upon the hearth, as the lad, who had all at once grown very pale, obeyed. He did not look up when he had finished, as he had done the first time, and his father laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to build it, lest haply, after he has laid the foundations, he is not able to finish." Rene, I pray God to give you the desire of your heart, but it is well to ask yourself in the beginning, is there aught dearer to you in the world than Christ, your Lord?"

The youth struggled with himself for a moment more, but it was evidently only to control his emotion. Then he looked up, his face still pale, but his eyes glowing.

"I cannot draw back, but I cannot give her up," he cried. "You have taught me all my life to look upon her as a trust to us from God. What He has given into my care, He will surely give me strength to keep. I might hesitate to ask her to share so hard a lot, if I did not feel that she would be safer with me than with any one else, just because I love and understand her, and will watch over her, as no one else ever would. Let M. Laval do his worst, my father; I will trust God for the future, and go forward and do my duty."

"You are resolved upon that, Rene?"

"At any cost. 'Whoso loveth houses and lands more than Him is not worthy of Him.'"

"Then I have not been disappointed in you, my son"; and the Huguenot folded his boy in a close embrace. "Be of good cheer, Rene. It is written: 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.'"

Late that night, as the pastor sat writing at his study table, he became suddenly conscious of two burning eyes watching him through the pane over which he had forgotten to draw the curtain. He rose at once, and went to the window. The moon was already on the wane, but there was still sufficient light to make objects discernible. There was no one without. After watching several minutes, he was about to turn away, thinking he had been the victim of some strange hallucination, when a stealthy shadow, creeping out from under the garden wall, flitted across the road, and disappeared in the opposite wood.

The slouched hat, and short, ragged cloak were those of Armand, the penitent.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE SNARE.

There falls sometimes into Southern Februaries a day of early warmth, when the winds sleep, and the sapphire skies drop violets, and the hillsides open veins of crocus gold. We hear the birds sing in the wood, and become conscious all at once of a yellow down on the tips of the naked elms, and a fine unguent scattered in the air. The fears that lay heavy on our hearts loose their hold with the brooks. Hope mounts in the blood, like the melting sap in the wood.

It was such a morning in the Cevennes a few weeks after the return of the young sieur, La Roche, to his father's chateau. The snows had melted from the hills during the night, and the fine, clear air that smote his cheek as he opened his turret window, brought the bleat of lambs from the opposite slope. The view visible from the latticed casement was one calculated to stir the enthusiasm of a heart less ardent than that of Henri La Roche. The chateau stood on one of the natural terraces of the hills, and just below lay the lovely valley of the Vaunage, the fair Canaan of Southern France, carpeted with verdure. Northward the mighty shoulders of Mounts Mazin and Lozere thrust themselves through melting mantles of mist. Far away to the east, touched by the rising sun, flashed the towers and spires of Nismes, while a turquoise gleam on the edge of the southern horizon told where the fertile meadows of Languedoc met the blue waters of the Mediterranean, two thousand feet below.

With an elastic step and a brighter look than he had worn for many a day, the young sieur entered the stone-paved hall, where his father sat at breakfast.

"There is rare sport upon the hills to-day, Jean tells me. With your good-will, my father, we will have the falcons after breakfast, and go a-hunting. I do but eat my heart out waiting here by the fire for the boon that never comes. Since his majesty cannot trust a Huguenot gentleman to lead his troops against the enemy, I must content myself with smaller game. Jean hath gone to bid Rene Chevalier be ready to accompany us."

Monsieur lifted his fine, impassive face from the pile of letters beside his plate. He was a stately, soldierly-looking old man, and his suit of plain black velvet was devoid of any ornament but a military badge upon the breast. His left sleeve was empty, and a sword hung at his side.

"You will have no cause to complain of the quality of your game another spring," he said, as his white, wrinkled hand selected a paper from those before him, and extended it to Henri. "Our grand monarch hath indeed been slow in granting the prayer of an old servant, who has begrudged neither blood nor treasure for his throne; but Minister Colbert's entreaties, joined to those of our cousin Renau, have carried the day. There is your commission, Henri, to a regiment on the Spanish frontier. I would you might have learned the art of war under my old captain, Turenne—so true a gentleman and so pure a knight. But since that may not be, I am glad you are to carve out your fortune on the bodies of bead-telling Spaniards, not on the stout breasts of fellow-Protestants—Dutchmen though they be."

The young man had seized the paper, and was devouring the contents with watchful eyes.

"His majesty shall never regret placing this confidence in me," he exclaimed proudly. "I have but one regret, my father, that the peace of Nimeguen gives me small opportunity at present to display my loyalty. Minister Colbert will do me another good turn if he ceases his groans over the empty treasury, and permits our king's native love of glory to give his soldiers an occasion to unsheath their swords. The king's enemies are mine, be they they Papist or Protestant."

The father lifted his hand.

"Peace, foolish boy. You know as little of the horrors of carnage as of the heavy burdens which his majesty's glorious wars have laid upon the shoulder of his people and the table of his minister. You will have occasion soon enough, I doubt not, to win your laurels. I wish I were as sure of thy loyalty to the King of kings, Henri, as I am of thy faithfulness to the trust which our earthly sovereign has reposed in thee."

The young man flushed angrily, but unable to bear the keen glance bent upon him, his eyes fell, and he tried to laugh away the rebuke.

"Pon my word, my father, that is a sharp speech from thy lips. What has drawn it down upon my head,—the gay attire with which I scandalized the temple-folk last Sabbath, or the laugh over the top of the pew with that dark-eyed little witch at Madame Chevalier's side? I have atoned for the first with a louis d'or to every old grandsire and grandame I have met this week, and I have submitted to a grave lecture by Madame Chevalier for the second, and promised La Petite a rose-coloured ribbon the next time I go to Nismes to make up to her for the disgrace into which I brought her."

The sieur La Roche looked excessively annoyed. "I wish you would be more thoughtful, Henri. The rose coloured ribbon will please Madame Chevalier hardly more than the laugh in church, or the book of fairy tales you brought the child down from Paris, and for which I hear she often neglects her lessons and better reading. It becomes you to set temptation in the path of one so young, and for whom our good pastor and his wife feel such special anxiety."

Henri shrugged his shoulders with a laugh. "I will not buy the ribbon, of course, if you object," he said carelessly; "but Mistress Eglantine needs no teaching from me to make her love everything that is bright and gay and heroic. Her gentle blood shows itself as much in that as in the set of her small head, or the shape of her little hand. Pastor Chevalier and his wife cannot rub the one out of her any more than the other, and unless what I heard of Madame Cartel in Paris was false, my father, the little maid will have all the ribbons and fairy-tales she wants when she is once under that lady's care."

"Then Godfrey Chevalier and his wife shall be told of it," replied monsieur gravely. "Baptiste," to the old butler, who entered the room, "tell Armand, the new groom, to have my horse at the door after breakfast. I have letters from the capital on which I must consult M. Chevalier."

"Armand is not here this morning, my lord. If you please, I will take the order to Jacques instead."

"Do so, then. But stay," catching sight of something in the wrinkled face; "is there aught wrong with that fellow Armand? You—none of you like him, I know that."

"He had a surly way about him, my lord, but the men had your orders, and they knew it was the pastor who bespoke him the place."

"Then what ails thee to change colour at the mention of his name? Out with it, Baptiste."

The old man went to the door, examined it to make sure it was quite closed, and then came close to his master's chair.

"The fellow asked leave last night to go down to Beaumont to see his mother; but we have sent to the hamlet this morning, and she hath seen nothing of him. One of the maids is sure she saw him talking two days ago with the curé."

Monsieur's usually placid brow darkened.

"Why was I not told of this at once?" he demanded sharply. "Tell Jacques to saddle the horses at once, Baptiste, and then come and let me know if aught has been heard of the fellow." He looked anxiously at his son as the serving-man retired.

"Armand has gone over to Lodève to see his sweetheart, and Marie has an attack of jealousy," laughed Henri, as he took his seat at the table and helped himself to a piece of cold pastry. "I cannot think evil of any one on a day like this, my father. I don't suppose it is anything worse than a stolen holiday."

"I hope not." But Henri La Roche's father pushed away his plate, and the old stag-hound, who knew every tone of her master's voice, rose from her couch upon the hearth-rug, and came and looked anxiously into his face. "They are prejudiced against the groom, and quick to believe evil of him, no doubt, yet I have never wholly trusted the man myself, Henri. Hark! was that the sound of shouting in the hamlet?"

"I noticed nothing, sir."

"Then there must be something wrong with my old ears. I could swear there comes and goes on the breeze a murmur like an angry sea. But I suppose it is only my old heart projecting its fears into the things about me. Ha!"—as Baptiste with a scared face, re-entered the room—"What ails thee, my man? Is there aught wrong in the village?"

"There is a tumult, my lord. Madame Chevalier has sent Jean running back to pray you come and speak a quieting word to them."

The sieur La Roche rose to his feet. "What is the meaning of the uproar, Baptiste, and where is M. Chevalier? Will they not listen to their pastor?"

The old servant burst into tears. "Alas, monsieur! M. Chevalier will not soon be seen in our hills again. The gendarmes surrounded the cottage at daybreak, and arrested him before he could spring from his couch. He is already on his way to prison."

Monsieur covered his face with his hands. "Apprehended!—a . . . by the king's officers! God have mercy on our stricken Church!"

But Henri had leaped from the table, with lightning flashing from under suddenly darkened brows.

"How dared they? The pastor was under my father's protection! What pretext do they make for the indignity? Speak, Jean!" to the valet, who had followed trembling.

"The accusation is heavy enough, my young sieur. They say he has openly defied the king by breaking the last edict, and taking back in his church those who had been converted to the true faith; and that he hath spoken seditious words in the temple, teaching the people to obey their minister rather than the king. Antoine says M. Chevalier would make no resistance after he had read the warrant; only he complained that the charge was political, and that he was not allowed to suffer in the name of the religion. He would, he said, that he were as innocent of any sin against his God as of any disloyalty to his king."

"Whither have they taken him?"

"To the citadel of St. Esprit. The order was from the Intendant of Nismes."

Henri turned to his father, his glance like an unsheathed sword.

"Will you submit quietly to this injustice, sir, or will you give me permission to place myself at the head of the tenantry, and attempt a rescue? We could overtake them by a short cut through the hills."

The words roused M. La Roche from his stupor of grief. Sternly he tapped the military decoration upon his breast.

"Have you just received a commission in the king's army, and do you speak of resisting the king's orders?" he demanded. "Never let me hear such a word from your lips again, my son: We may recognize the hand that deals the blow, but we dare not forget that it wears the mailed gauntlet of France. Baptiste, see if our horses are ready. We will mount at once."

And as the man flew to execute his orders, he went up to his son, who had turned away, flushing scarlet at his reproof. "Thou art the joy of my life, Henri, even when I chide thee," he said tenderly. "Resistance would but seal our friend's doom, and give the strongest possible colouring to the accusations of his enemies. But there are still means that must not be left untried. Take Jean, my son, and ride down at once to Nismes. See M. de Argoussy in my name, and discover if the payment of any fine will secure our pastor's release or lighten his imprisonment. Obtain speech with him also, if possible, and come back and bring us tidings. I will to quiet these poor grief-stricken people, and comfort Madame Chevalier, if possible."

The glance of father and son met.

"You have little hope?" said the latter sadly.

"His enemies seek his life. The charge of sedition proves that."

The young man threw his arm around his father's neck. "You questioned my loyalty to the Reformed faith a few moments since, sir. I am not what I should be, and I fear I have too often grieved you and our dear pastor by my jests at our grave dress and manners, but you shall both see, now that the religion is really endangered, none will hold to it more firmly nor defend it more warmly than I."

"God helping thee," was the grave answer. But monsieur's sad face was illumined by a momentary gleam of joy. How often in the years to come would Henri La Roche remember those words.

He spoke but once more as they descended the broad staircase to the court.

"Armand, the traitor!" he hissed between his set teeth. But the sieur La Roche pointed upwards.

"Vengeance is Mine; I will recompense, saith the Lord," he repeated solemnly.

(To be continued.)

DOES HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF?

Napoleon Bonaparte used to speak of the French as the modern Romans confronted by a new Carthage in perfidious Albion. But nothing is more untrue than the famous saying—invented by one noodle and kept up by thousands of successive noodles—about "history repeating itself." Think honestly for a minute, and you will see that the exact contrary is nearer the truth. Until causes are the same, it is impossible that effects should not differ. Most impossible of all is it to find two nations who, not only in respective but in relative qualities, should resemble two nations of twenty centuries gone by. If, however, we must have an analogy from the past for the characters of the two nations divided by the British Channel, and for their relations to each other, it would be better to compare the English to the Romans and leave the French to represent the Greeks of old. Like the latter, the French are quick, artistic, and apt to preach to and mistrust one another. The English, on the other hand, are slow, practical, bound to the chariot-wheels of experience, each attentive to his own affairs, yet united in time of trouble. The last thing that such a people would do would be to take the ingenious speculations of poets and essayists and writers of fiction too seriously; much less would they be hurried away into hastily making use of such things as prescriptions meant for actual practice. But this is exactly what our volatile neighbours over the water did exactly one hundred years ago. Without political training, and broken up into antipathetic sections of caste and province, they felt that things were going wrong, and because their purveyors of light literature confirmed that feeling, they assumed that whatever these personages suggested was an infallible remedy.—*The National Review.*