

## Choice Literature.

## HOW THEY KEPT THE FAITH.

## A TALE OF THE HUGUENOTS OF LANGUEDOC.

## CHAPTER XII.—(Continued).

"Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations," was the psalm they sang.

"It is the one he loved best," whispered Eglantine with a sob. "I sang it for him the night before we left Beaumont."

Her husband's answer was to point through an opening in the trees to the scene before him. A little band of men and women stood about a new-made grave, over which the sods were being hastily pressed down. The next moment he was in the midst of the startled, sorrow-stricken group, and would have thrown himself face downward upon the earth but for Rene Chevalier's sustaining hand.

"For his sake, monsieur, do not hinder us. Every moment is precious."

Henri looked at him for a moment with wild, blood-shot eyes, then turning away, hid his face in his cloak, and motioned them to proceed. He heard Madame Chevalier's voice rise clear and sweet with her son's, in the psalm that was now resumed, and felt his wife weeping silently upon his shoulder. More than one sob from the faithful vassals about him told him that his grief was theirs, but he neither spoke nor moved again, until his friend's hand once more touched his arm.

"It is over, my Lord. The sooner we disperse, the better."

Then the sieur of Beaumont uncovered his face and looked about him. The grave had been carefully covered with loose branches prepared for the purpose, and was now not distinguishable from the rest of the valley.

"It is safer so," explained Rene, in answer to his questioning glance.

"And is it for this I have served my king?" asked the young nobleman in a deep, hollow voice. "Is it for this I have known cold and hunger and weariness, and shed my blood? Is it thus Louis XIV. rewards the labours of the faithful subject who has risked his life in a hundred battles to preserve his crown, and would have cut off his right hand any time these three-score years, rather than utter a disloyal word? Unhappy monarch! Perjured, ungrateful king! Thank God I, at least, wear his badge no longer." He threw back his cloak, and turning to the awed group about him, showed them the plain dress of a gentleman, not an officer's uniform, beneath. "Ay, my friends," as a murmur ran from lip to lip, "I have resigned my commission. It was laid at his majesty's feet an hour after the rejection of the petition, from which we hoped so much. The last hope of peacefully winning our rights has been wrested from us. If my sword leaves its scabbard again, it shall be in defence of our homes, not in the service of a tyrant and a bigot."

"The petition has been rejected? Our appeal to the king has failed?" burst in horror-stricken accents from his listeners the moment he paused.

"We had not heard of this," said Rene Chevalier in an agitated voice.

"Then you hear it now, mon ami! If this night of sorrows can bear one sorrow more, I have brought it. The petition has been presented, and rejected, eight days after it was placed in his majesty's hands by the noble marquis—mark my words, my friends, in his majesty's own hands! His majesty's own lips gave us our answer. He did not deny the statements, made in our appeal. He did not plead ignorance of the infringement of our rights, and the severity of our sufferings. He was fully aware, he said, that his present policy was alienating away from him the affection of his Huguenot subjects, and must prove prejudicial to the interests of his kingdom. But he is so persuaded of the righteousness of his undertaking—so convinced that the extirpation of heresy will exalt him in the sight of God and man, that he will cut off his right hand before he will resign it. 'He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways shall cover a multitude of sins,' says the Word. Our monarch stands in need of a cloak of more than ordinary size, and nothing less than the conversion of every Huguenot in France will meet his exigencies. Do you understand, my friends? Your blood, or your apostasy, must atone for the friendship of La Montespan and La Valliere. Do you quibble—do you hesitate? The swords that are no longer needed in Flanders can be turned against Frenchmen. A squadron of dragoons has already been ordered into Poitiers."

A cry, half of fear, half of indignation, burst from his hearers. Rene caught his noble friend by the arm.

"Are you mad, monsieur?" he whispered. "Would you goad these already overtaxed hearts beyond endurance? Surely he who lies there would be the first to bid you forbear."

Henri turned upon him with blazing eyes.

"Still lukewarm?" he asked sarcastically; but melted by the sorrowful compassion of his friend's glance, instantly added:

"You are right, Rene. This is neither the time nor place for such words, and I do but thank you poorly for to-night's work. Disperse, my friends," he added, waving his hand to the group about him. "I grieve to have given you so sad a pillow after your evening's work, but we live in days when one sorrow treads close on the heels of another. You will not find me ungrateful for what you have dared for the dead, when your own hour of need comes. Henceforth, I am your brother." Once more he motioned them to disperse, and slowly and sorrowfully they obeyed, many of them pressing close to touch his hand before they went.

The minister who had performed the last rites for the dead had stood apart, thus far, a silent spectator of the scene. Now he drew near and held out his hand to the new lord of Beaumont.

"Be comforted, my brother," he said in a low, sweet voice. "The good man is taken away from the evil to come. The failure of the petition will not distress monsieur in the world to which he has gone. He has fought a good fight, he has kept the faith. The sufferings of this life are not to be compared with the glory to be revealed, either for him or for us."

Little as the words suited Henri's mood at the moment, the voice and manner of the speaker strangely attracted him. He looked earnestly into the face under the wide-brimmed

hat. It was one not soon to be forgotten, singularly youthful for one of his calling, and with a rare spirituality of expression. The dark eyes were lit with enthusiasm; the firm lips, with all their gravity, were sweet as a child's.

"Methinks we have met before," said the sieur of Beaumont thoughtfully. "Ah! I have it,—M. Rey. There have been sad changes since I parted with you last summer at my father's gate, but I owe you much for this night's work."

"You owe me nothing," was the gentle answer. "My services belong to you as well as to the feeblest of this scattered flock. Madame is gently reared for such scenes as this," he added, glancing at the slight figure, trembling with cold, at Henri's side; and the young husband woke, with a sudden rush of sweetness, to the recollection of the joy still remaining to him.

"Eglantine, I must have you home at once. What would I do if you too were taken from me?"

"Hush!" she said quietly. "There is the coach coming up the glen. Rene sent one of the men to bring it down by a way he knew, and Jean has gone on to tell them to have fire and food for us."

It was not until they had left Madame Chevalier and her son at the cottage gate and were in sight of the towers of Beaumont, that she let her full heart overflow, with her arms about his neck.

"Then you will not be comfortless while you have me, Henri?"

He strained her to his breast.

"You are my life, ma mie. If I lose you I lose everything."

"And I lose nothing while I have you!" she returned. "Henri, there is but one thing I fear—separation. Promise me you will never leave me."

It was the old story human hearts repeat so often—hewing out broken cisterns, while the Master stood with the cup, and cried:

"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

As they rolled in under the familiar archway, and the flashing torches revealed the sad faces of the miners gathered to welcome them, a strong shiver ran through Henri La Roche's frame. Then his muscles grew hard as iron.

"Eglantine," he said in a low voice. "we have walked side by side through the path of flowers. Do you love me well enough to keep step on the edge of a precipice?"

She looked up with startled eyes, and read the truth in his face.

"My noble, brave husband; you will find I am not unworthy of your trust."

And for one moment he held her passionately to his heart.

"I am no longer able to shield you from trouble," he whispered; "but at last no harm shall touch you which has not done its worst for me."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## UNDER ARMS.

There are lulls in the fiercest tempest, intervals of death-like calm between the wildest sallies of the storm, when the gale seems to pause and gather up its strength for a fresh onset, and its victims fall asleep with a sense of false security. For weeks after Monsieur's death, and the failure of the petition, a strange calm closed in about the inhabitants of Beaumont. No hint of the work going on in the distant province penetrated the Cevennes. Even the annoyances to which the mountaineers had long been subjected ceased, their enemies appeared to have forgotten the fact of their existence, and more than one heart began to ask itself if they had not been unduly alarmed, and especially among the younger men, as the spring advanced, was there apparent a spirit of hopefulness and courage. Their love for their young sieur, too, grew into a passion.

But there was one in Beaumont who was not deceived by the gloomy calm which had settled down upon Henri, after his first passionate outburst, any more than by the temporary cessation of hostilities on the part of the Jesuits. With sorrowful, clear eyes, Rene Chevalier watched his noble friend, convinced that the sieur of Beaumont, like himself, had only too good reason to believe that the emissaries of Rome were gathering their strength for a longer and deadlier spring—and persuaded, also, that Henri was not prepared to abide the result of that terrible struggle as passively as his manner might indicate. He had sullenly abandoned his threat of avenging his father's death, upon learning that monsieur's last words had been a charge to him to leave vengeance with the Judge of the whole earth; but there was a lack of openness in his intercourse with Rene, a restlessness under his glance, which convinced the young surgeon that something was being kept from him.

But so distant had Henri's manner become that he would not charge home his suspicions without positive proof. The evidence for which he waited came at last—as the April daisies were starting the emerald valley where monsieur lay in his last sleep.

Entering the cottage of one of his patients without knocking, one afternoon, he saw the man hurriedly conceal a new carbine beneath the bed-clothes.

"That is an ugly plaything for a sick man, Bartholde," he said bluntly, "and not a safe piece of property for a Huguenot and a good subject. Who did you find so reckless of his own safety, and yours, as to sell you the weapon?"

"One who has a better right to give than you to ask, M. Chevalier," returned the man sullenly, though in considerable confusion. "If the dragoons ever come to Beaumont, they will find it a harder nut to crack than they imagine."

Rene took no notice of the impertinence, but, instantly confirmed in his worst fear, set out for the chateau, immediately on leaving the cottage. There could no longer be any doubt that Henri was secretly arming the peasantry, and inciting them to resistance. Incense him, as he probably would—by interference, Godfrey Chevalier's son was resolved to utter one last protest against the error and madness of the step. He would plead with Henri for his father's sake—he would remind him of his old pastor's teachings; surely their words and wishes would not fall vainly on his ear even now. But Henri was not at home, and Eglantine rose, with a frank smile, from her embroidery-frame, to receive her visitor. The slight embarrassment she had felt in Rene's presence after her marriage had long since been dissipated by the perfect friendliness of his demeanour towards her.

"I have just sent a message down to the cottage for you," she said, holding out her hand. "Nannette is poorly to-day, and your visits always do her good."

"Then I will go and see her at once," was the quiet answer, "and come back to you, Eglantine. There is something of importance I must talk over with you and Henri."

The old nurse was fast nearing the bourne "where the wicked cease from troubling," and she did not need the lips of her young physician to impart the intelligence.

"I'm a poor, worn-out old woman, Master Rene," she whispered; "too feeble to smooth out my lady's hair any longer, or lay out her gowns, far less to lay out the Lord's banner in the fight that is at hand. Perhaps He sees I would do Him but small credit in the struggle, so He is kind and pitiful enough just to take me out of the way, only giving me these few weary-pains, like chips of his cross, to carry. I never was bold and outspoken like many. Do you think He is disappointed in me, that now I am too tired to wish it were otherwise?"

"Does Eglantine love you less because it is she who waits on you, not you on her?" asked Rene Chevalier with a smile; and catching his meaning, Nannette smiled too, and was silent a space, looking out of the window at the far blue hills.

"There is one thing on my mind," she said at last; "it is leaving my young lady. I could go in peace, if I thought she could be safely sheltered from the storm; but how can I creep into the safe haven content, Master Rene, while she is without, who would never let me bear a pain she had power to still?"

"You leave her with the God to whom you go. Is that not enough, Nannette?"

"I suppose it ought to be, Master Rene, but my faith is very weak sometimes. Last night I thought my own dear mistress stood beside my bed. My young madame is dear, but it is not given to anyone to love twice in a lifetime as I loved her mother. And my lady held her eldest born by her hand. I take it as a token that Mademoiselle Mignonnette was safely sheltered long ago, and she pierced me through and through with her sweet eyes as she asked, 'Nannette, where is the other?' And I seemed to become conscious all at once that though my young madame had made a grand match, and had a brave young husband who loves the very ground upon which she steps, it would all go for little up there if she was not in the right way. And I woke cold and trembling, and my heart has been like lead all day. My young madame has made an idol of her husband, and he of her, and I feel afraid."

"Yet we have prayed for them, and God is not slack concerning his promises," was the gentle answer.

"Ay, I mind that, but there is none that I know of that says the Lord will take the thorns out of the wrong way, because we have been so wilful as to choose it instead of His. I have searched the Word through, Master Rene, and I do not find that any one, not even the man after God's own heart, was permitted to escape the punishment of his sin. 'They shall eat the fruit of their doings,' so it runs, and M. La Roche and his wife have taken the wrong way, and I much fear me they are sowing tears and trouble for themselves. Hark you," she added, laying her hand upon his sleeve, and drawing his ear down to her lips, "I am not the one to tell tales of the roof I live under and the hands that smooth my pillow, but if they will not hear my old voice, I must, for their own sakes, put the words into lips to which, perhaps, they may hearken. My young lord is not as calm and guarded in his speech at home, Master Rene, as he is abroad. There are strange sounds in the vaults at night, and other things than silks and laces in the boxes that have come down to my lady from Paris, and better reasons than some of us guess why the young men of Beaumont hold their heads so high and wait so upon the looks of their young sieur."

With a heavy heart, Rene rose to leave.

"I know what you mean, Nannette. It is that brings me here to-day," he said sadly. "but God only knows whether they will listen to my entreaties."

Nannette pressed his hands to her lips in tearful gratitude.

"Speak!" she said eagerly. "Win over my young lady, and you can do what you will with monsieur. It is the fire in her eyes and in her thoughtless words, that has wrought half the mischief."

Henri was sitting with his wife, when Rene re-entered the pretty turret-room, overlooking the valley, where Eglantine spent most of her time.

"You have something of interest to communicate," he said, when they had exchanged greetings.

"I have a protest to utter, my young sieur. For your own sake, I hope you will do me the grace to hear me patiently."

"Ha! I catch your drift, I fancy. I have just left Bartholde's cottage. Say no more, Rene. My purpose is fixed."

"I cannot see you perish without making one last effort to prevent it," returned Rene Chevalier quietly. "For the sake of our old friendship, M. Henri, hear me once more. Surely, your father's wishes—"

"My father did not live to see the swords of France turned against Frenchmen! Have you heard the news from Poitiers, Rene? No? Well, then, listen, and if you have any manhood in your breast, say no more. The dragoons, ordered into the province, have been quartered solely upon Huguenots. If upon examination, ten appeared a reasonable allotment to a household, twenty were assigned. Our unhappy brethren have had no alternative but to abjure, or suffer everything it is in the power of a cruel and unbridled soldiery to inflict. The horrors of a siege have been enacted upon every hearthstone. Nothing has been spared, from the gray hair tottering to the grave, to the infant an hour old. Every outrage has been permitted to them except murder. Even the dead have not been sacred in their graves. Do you wonder that the last spark of faith in my king has been trampled out—the last link that bound me to him has been snapped? The cup that Poitiers has drained to the dregs, will soon be meted out to Languedoc and every Huguenot home in France. Would you have me stand patiently by and witness such atrocities, Rene?"

(To be Continued.)

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