

The Inglenook.

The Valley of Humiliation.

BY E. GALLIENNE ROBIN.

It was a lovely morning in summer; the door of the barn church was left open to admit the pure sea air coming across the cliffs and fields of the precipitous island of Sark. The preacher, of somewhat austere aspect was Elie Brevint, a staunch upholder of the Presbyterian faith, which had a firm foothold in the little island of his ministry. It was not so in the other islands of the Channel group; rumors reached Elie of a decline therein of the form of worship he loved so loyally, and on this Sabbath morn of the year 1625 he spoke openly and with severity of this matter; while, at the same time, he had a word of praise for his own people of Sark, who were steady adherents of the Presbyterian religion.

'Twas but a bare place, this church of Sark. The slopes of its pointed roof were raftered in rough wood laid against the thatch. The only enclosed pew was that of the Seigneur of Sark; the rest of the people sat on benches and rested their feet on the earthen floor. In the corner opposite the open door was a maiden, fair and stately, some eighteen years of age. Her sweet, rosy face wore however, an expression of discontent that ill befitted so well featured a countenance. Her blue eyes sought a ground, and her long lashes quivered as she flinched at the stern words poured out by Elie Brevint. Beside her sat an elderly woman, whose sober array and constrained demeanour contrasted oddly with the bravery and colour of the maiden, whose mother she was. Next to her was Jean Poindextre, her husband, and a most notable farmer, who idolised his pretty daughter Celeste.

When the service came to length to an end and the congregation dispersed quietly, Celeste and her parents walked home in silence. They were half-way to their home, the farm at Le Port, when they were overtaken by a tall young man clad in brown, and with no bravery about his attire beyond the sparkling brilliants he wore as shoe-buckles. But he was a goodly personage, of proud and noble carriage. Shortly it came to pass that he fell behind with Celeste, and then ensued the following conversation:

"You looked of a sad countenance during the sermon, mistress," said the tall youth.

Celeste tossed her head, "And indeed 'twas but right I should, Master Jules Carré, for of a truth Monsieur Brevint spoke, oh, so ill of Roman Catholics, many of whom I number amongst my friends."

Jules Carré frowned. "Ah! these are the people you were acquainted with in Guernsey a few weeks since, is it not so?"

"Yes, yes! Such folks as they do not live pent up in a prison like this is, where nought is stirring of any moment."

"Celeste!" the young man cried, with a passion of protest in his deep voice, "Call you this dear home of ours a prison? Nay, look around you, sweetheart, and recall your idle words."

But Celeste was white with anger because he had dared to forget himself and call her sweetheart. Well she knew he had loved her faithfully, for he was older than she by ten long years; but she valued not his

steadfast affection, seeing he was of a serious mind, and she craved only the things of earth, and put far from her devotion which was sent by the Lord of men. Quickening her steps, she left Jules Carré alone, and turned into a field which overlooked the cliffs and the sea. She threw herself down on the tender grass and fell to brooding; but she gave not one glance at the enchanting beauty around her. Far to the horizon stretched a sea of delicate blue, close at hand the great cliffs were golden with gorse and gay with wild flowers to the verge of beetling crags and dark rocks, at whose base the shadows in the water were of a royal purple. But all was nought to this Presbyterian maid, who valued not the good things given to her by the great love of her Father.

Her parents were at their mid day meal when she entered the spacious kitchen, and her father spoke playfully of her late appearing, for it was connected in his mind with Jules Carré, whom he favoured freely.

Celeste was in an ill mood, and would not even brook the playful rallies of the father who looked upon her as the apple of his eye. All the rest of the day she spoke but little, and at last, at nightfall, she opened her mind to her parents, and desired of them permission to sojourn in Guernsey for some time, seeing she would find in the city her grand acquaintances once more.

"But, Celeste," replied her mother, slowly, "these great people have not desired you to visit them yet again so soon! And you are not well acquainted with them! 'Twas but a chance that you met them; so you told us yourself, little daughter."

Celeste blushed hotly, but she set her red lips in a stubborn line, and persisted in her desire to go to Guernsey. Had not her friends there assured her that she was welcome at any period that it might please her to call upon them? And was it not, of a surety, a right thing to do, to take them at their word?

At length her mother sighed and gave her permission to do as she listed. She was to reside for a week with certain friends in Guernsey, and thus be enabled to call again upon the great people whom she favoured. And she would brook no delay. The next day but one small bark was to sail to Guernsey for sundry provisions, and with it went Celeste, overjoyed and eager for pleasure, and quite forgetful of the affront she had shown to Jules Carré, her faithful friend and would-be lover, whom she had not seen since that Sabbath morn.

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One evening some two weeks after Celeste had set sail for Guernsey, Jules Carré wended his way down a steep path which would conduct him to Le Port farm. Reaching the granite house, he entered the wide, low hall and tapped at the kitchen door. A pleasant voice bade him enter, and stepping inside he found himself face to face with Mistress Poindextre, who was spinning busily beside the open window which looked upon the cliffs and the murmuring sea.

"You are indeed welcome, Master Carré," said she; "it seems a long weary moon since last we looked upon your face. Why have you not come to Le Port of late?"

"In good sooth, madam," he answered,

not altogether at his ease "I did not venture to intrude where I feared I was not welcome. It seems I have affronted Mistress Celeste, and I am told she has been some time in Guernsey."

"Nay, nay," she said smiling. She is not there now, and she was but from home a couple of days. She returned to Sark with the bark that bore provisions from the market of Guernsey."

"Is she, then, at home, madam?" he inquired eagerly; "in the house at this moment?"

"She is away on the cliffs yonder, picking camomile to prepare tea, which we use for various maladies. Master Carré, go and seek her, if you will, and tell her that I am going to prepare a savoury supper for you all. My husband is in the fields, and will return shortly."

Jules Carré needed no second bidding, but sped away in the direction pointed out by Mistress Poindextre, and presently he came upon Celeste in a field of camomile and ferns. She was seated against a hedge of wild roses, gowned in pure white; her golden head bare, and her blue eyes sweet and sad; she looked a picture of fair maidenhood. And anew she took possession of the heart of Master Carré.

"Mistress Celeste!" he cried softly, "may I approach and greet you? Are you still angry with me for those words on that Sabbath morn?"

She hung her head and the rich rose colour flew to her soft, white cheeks; but she held out her hand with a timid gesture of welcome. He sank down beside her on one knee and whispered in her little ear, "Tell me all about it, dear heart."

Ah! this time she did not resent his tender words; but she pulled her hands from his and covering her face, she burst into tears, while he tried, in vain, to soothe her with caresses and loving phrases. Then at last she told her story, looking out to sea with her shining blue eyes.

"My mother's friends in Guernsey received me kindly, as was ever their wont, and I passed happy hours with them till I went to call upon the great people of the Roman Catholic faith. I was ushered into the presence of a company of ladies in costly apparel and full of fine chatter; and they looked upon me with scornful smiles and I heard them whisper together of my plain frock and strange cloak. And I could not understand it because the mistress of the grand house had been kind to me. But ah! it is plain enough! They were ashamed of me before the company. And then there were gentlemen who came in and spoke freely to me; and present y they mocked at the religion they profess till I could have sunk into the ground with shame and horror. But it grew worse and worse when they spoke slightly of our religion—Ah, Master Carré, I feel it is indeed mine now!—and she paused, out of breath, in sweet confusion.

He bent lower and touched her hand.

"Mistress, this is a glad day for me!"

"But see how I have been abased!" she cried.

"'Tis a sweet abasement, for it brings you nearer to me and nearer to our life here. Sweetheart, may I call you thus without fear of your displeasure?"

"Thus you may call me," she faltered, drooping her pretty head.

He laughed in triumph. "And do you desire to stay in this island? will it content you?"

"Ay, Master Carré, here will I live and die, if it please God."