



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. IX.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MARCH 25, 1859.

No. 33.

THIODOLF THE ICELANDER.

BY BARON DE LA MOTTE FOUQUER. CHAPTER XVII.

After several weeks' voyage they approached a fair land, which allured the voyagers by its high green trees, gentle hills, and noble castles, and which even Thiodolf immediately knew; for he had learned much from his uncle's teaching, and now, also, everything was pointed out to him by some old experienced seamen who accompanied him.

He forthwith went to Pietro and Malgherita, and said: "See! that is your fair France, and her north coast; I might almost say my fair France, for in her live many brave northern knights—many who are nearly related to me, as the family of Montfaucou. We have always kept in brotherly friendship, and it would be a great joy to me to go and visit them in this land; only it is asserted that these lords are the choicest knights in all the world; so that in Germany, Italy and Spain, and wherever man can go, they are held as mirrors of good courtesy. Now, how I might appear beside them none can know but the gods and goddesses of Asgard. It is therefore, most advisable that I let myself first be a little knocked about in the world, and be polished with fitting toils, before I show myself to their dainty lord-ships."

"Thou hast much of the diamond about thee," Thiodolf said Pietro, looking at him with a kindly earnestness; "and therefore must thou be diligently and sharply polished, and many a less noble stone would be ground to dust by such polishing. But when once the work is over!—Thou art a happy highly-gifted being, dear youth!"

"Well," answered Thiodolf, laughing, "even were I now fully polished and smooth, we might in no ways stop on this French coast; for we must go round all Spain until we can cast anchor before Malgherita's own beautiful land, and time is a precious thing."

"Cast anchor before my own land!" exclaimed Malgherita. "Nay, we must go to Tuscany. Or wilt thou ruin us? Dost thou not know how my father rages against us?"

"Let the old lord do that if it pleases him," answered Thiodolf. "At the very worst, thou and thy husband are under the protection of brave northern warriors; but what is much better, I have resolved to bring about a reconciliation. I have thought on that for a long time, and a good strong will can do much."

"Strange it would be," said Pietro, after some thought, "if it fell to our friend Thiodolf to bring about, with his simple true-heartedness, what so many wise Provencals and Italians, both knights and priests, have in vain attempted."

"Ah!" said Malgherita, smiling at the wonderful Iceland; "noble, hospitable hero, if thou couldst but do that for us!"

"We cannot tell for what we are destined," said Thiodolf. "It may even be that all this is now unnecessary, and that your father has of his own accord put away his anger. Uncle Nefiof and Aunt Guulidda have very often scolded me, but now I know well their hearts are sad by reason of me. To say the truth, mine, too, years after the dear old people. I so often dream of them, and wake up suddenly and find they are so far from me." He paused for a moment, and put his hand before his eyes; but then he added with a smile, "It is marvelous how men come to love one another when a little space of sea lies between them. At home, I can tell you that the good old couple were often sufficiently contrary. But now, in regard to our doings on this Provencal shore, I earnestly beg you both to let me contrive it all as I have planned in my own head, and do not worry me with many questions; for if I had to give a full regular account, it would drive me mad."

Pietro and Malgherita could not but smile at their strange friend; but as they knew that he meant kindly by them, and as, at worst, they had not much to lose in Provence, they left it entirely in his hands to carry out the whole scheme.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The shapes of the clouds, and reflections in the sea, and birds sailing by, and sweet odors mysteriously wafted, had now for many days called up before Malgherita's mind the image of her home, more and more alluring and bright.—She spoke only in the Provencal tongue in which Thiodolf could now answer her almost as well as Pietro. She hardly ever laid aside a mandoline that she had bought during the voyage, and she sang to it all the songs which had lulled her infancy. In short, she was like a flower-bud opening at the breath of approaching spring. She would fain have blown upon the sails in her sweet impatience to hasten the course of the ship; and truly both wind and weather seemed to have entered into a faithful agreement to farther the wish of the gentle beauty. Both vessels swept evenly and lightly and rapidly over the mirror-like sea; in which Malgherita, with pure rapture, saw again that deep sparkling blue which she had unwillingly missed in the north.

"Lovely little lady," said Thiodolf to her one evening, "you must do me one single favor. We are now close to your coasts; the blue misty streaks yonder show them. But when evening darkens, go into your chamber, and hang a curtain before its little window, and do not look out till I call you. It would please me so much to be present when your blooming native land, in all the splendor of the early dawn, shines for the first time before your blooming face. Will you do this?"

Malgherita smiled and agreed, and went back into her little cabin; Pietro remained on deck with Thiodolf. And now that all was so still and quiet in the ship, and it glided with arrow-like swiftness on its way, Malgherita thought of the time when in her childhood she was waiting for the Christmas-tree and its gifts. At times she slumbered, and smiling dreams came to her, as if she already saw before her the beloved shore of Provence; and when she awoke in joy, and saw that she was yet in the ship's cabin, with a little lamp hanging before her bed, she returned again with unspeakable calm and deep delight to her quiet hopeful waiting.

As the morning began to glimmer through the veil hung up before the window, she arose and adorned herself very carefully, like a bride, in order to welcome her fair home most joyfully.—She had not long to wait before Thiodolf came and knocked at the little door, which he opened at her friendly "Enter!" and then stood as if dazzled.

"Oh, all ye gods!" cried he bending low, "how beautiful is Malgherita become! But come forth into the light of day, thou blooming child of Walhalla; the glimmer of the lamp is not nearly bright enough to give thee light."

And then as she went forth, and Pietro clasped her with loving wonder, and she from his arms looked out upon that near land, with its sunny meadows and shades of chestnut and olive-groves, and its silvery gilding streams, and her father's castle shining afar, and on the other side the princely port of Marseilles—dear reader, thou too hast a native land! it may be much less fair than that garden of Provence; but remember how joy filled all thy senses, when, after a long absence, it was allowed thee unexpectedly to see it in the blessed brightening light of early morning and of love! Malgherita stood smiling and motionless as some lovely statue, while the ship was steered with a still and even motion nearer and nearer the land. They cast anchor, and a little boat was lowered, while a troop of brave Icelanders plunged with all their arms into the foaming sea, and swam singing to the strand.—Malgherita raised her head somewhat frightened.

"That is your and Pietro's body-guard, bright lady," said Thiodolf, as he pointed to the swimmers; "and the boat is for you two and for me. I will row you to land; for at least you must touch your fair native land, and pluck her flowers, come what may afterwards of my undertaking."

"But when we are once on land, Thiodolf?" said Malgherita doubtfully, "are we safe then?" "Chide her, Pietro," said Thiodolf, turning to him; "chide her well and heartily. What, has that delicate child so brave and skillful a husband, and does she tremble while under his care? Besides, there is your body-guard yonder. I will answer on my own head for any evil that befalls you!"

The Icelanders were already on the shore shaking the water from their armor, their shields, and their spears, and then stood ranged in order, reverently waiting. Malgherita gave her hand to her knight, and let him bear her into the boat; Thiodolf with a light leap sprang after them, seized the oar, and plied it with such powerful strength, that the little vessel seemed to fly, and yet touch the shore gently without any shock.

Thiodolf looked around with a keen and rapid glance. "That wood, yonder," he said, "is just fitted to shelter Malgherita, until I bring her good news from the castle. We shall certainly find some pleasant openings in the wood, whence thou, Pietro, canst gain a sight of the sea and of the boat; two men shall remain to watch her; the rest shall go with thee into the wood. If against my expectation any mischance should befall me, I will give a blast on my horn. Thou wilt hear it easily in this chestnut-wood, if I wind it from the castle; and then rise up quickly and put Malgherita in safety in the ship."

"But what, then, would become of thee?" asked Pietro.

"Thou wilt not," was the answer, "do me the wrong to suppose that a Northman can so easily be stopped by danger, when he has none to care for but himself. But if anything do go cross with me, thou wilt notice if I am not back in an hour; and then, brother Pietro, thou wilt take the crew of the pirate's ship, thou wilt bring them to land, and come threateningly against the castle of the great baron. The rest will all be easily managed in such a case. But now, say no more of this; and let us find out the securest and pleasantest resting-place for Malgherita on the mother-earth of her beautiful Provence."

They went into the lofty chestnut-grove. The massive dark-leaved branches joined as if to form a shady, protecting hall, and soon a fitting place was found for the lady on the flowery grass, whence they could catch a sight of the boat between the leaves, and yet remain concealed from the view of any who perchance might be passing through the forest.

Just as Thiodolf was about to take leave of them in order to pursue his way to the castle, the joyous notes of horns sounded through the wood, and it was easy to perceive that a hunting party which had left the principal road was about to pass close to the place where Malgherita and her companions were standing. Thiodolf therefore thought it better to give her the protection of his arm and spear, until the numerous band that were approaching should have passed by. Malgherita let fall a thick veil over her face; while the northern dress she and Pietro still wore would yet more certainly conceal them from the eyes of any acquaintance who might pass.

The procession was opened by some pages on foot, clad in green and gold, bearing in their hands gilded lances. Then came huntsmen on white horses; they wore grey dresses embroidered with silver, and sounded the choicest tunes on their great silver hunting-horns. They were followed by noble knights in various gayly adorned hunting dresses, mounted on Arab horses; but the form that came after them, in the midst of other noble knights, was so dazzling and glorious that the trees around seemed well nigh to sparkle in its radiance. A tall, slender maiden, in the most richly embroidered robe, sat on a snow-white palfrey; all felt that the pomp around was merely to do her honor, and she alone seemed unconscious of this as she gazed with her large deep-blue eyes on the blue of heaven. Only as the procession passed the travellers, the pause which the escort of the lady made at their strange appearance drew her attention for an instant.—She looked kindly at the tall noble-looking Northman, greeted yet more kindly their brilliant leader, and then rode gravely on, again fixing her eyes like an eagle in the direction of the sun.

"Oh, heavens!" sighed Malgherita, after a long silence, "that was my sister Isolde." "So!" answered Thiodolf, and sank into deep thought. "I have seen her once in my dreams; but I took her then for the goddess Freya. And that, then, is the form of Isolde!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A lofty vaulted passage led into the castle of the great Provencal baron; from its open arches one looked down upon a thicket full of deer, which yet lay within the outer wall of the castle. It was a pleasant sight to look over upon the deep green summits of the trees, between which shone out now waving grass, and now the waters of little crystal ponds and of the moat. The deer could be heard rustling through the bushes, or feeding on the branches, and at times they could be seen playing together in the open parts of the wood.

A beautiful crucifix, painted on the wall of the vaulted passage, recalled to mind the founder of the house, who had been a skillful painter, altho' his wielding of the pencil had never interfered with his wielding of the sword. He was equally dexterous with both, and had painted the image of the Saviour in this spot, which was especially dear to him, that he might sanctify and soften, by the holiest thought, the joy which here flowed into him from the chase, and life in all its freshness. It was said, too, that he had concealed in the wall a very mysterious prophecy relating to some of his descendants, but the exact spot was no longer known. In short, most of the dwellers in the castle, and the great baron himself, looked with more awe than satisfaction on this part of the building; for wonderful tales were told about it, how the shade of Huldibert—thus the founder of the family was named—at times swept along the gallery, and would often appear in the same spot, taking part in the concerns of the family.

The beautiful Isolde was quite a stranger to this fear; so far from it, she loved this place above all others; and when the great baron, in the vain endeavor to turn her from her longing for the convent, almost forced upon her diversion after diversion, she would often take refuge in this spot, calming and relieving her earnest mind by prayer and reflection; for in this place, shunned by all, even her imperious father did not dare in the slightest degree to disturb her.

And so it happened that on the evening after the stately hunting party, when Thiodolf for the first time had gazed on Isolde, she went in deep thought to her beloved arched walk. Visions of a heavenly love shone about her, and, doubting whether the like could ever be realized on earth, she looked forward with longing desire to the solemn life of the cloister. She felt sure that just such a longing had driven proud, noble spirits away from the littleness of this earth to seek an invisible glory; and that thus the rules of nuns and monks were founded. She thought, also, that perchance the prophecy of the founder of her race might signify something like this, and

her burning wish was to discover the mysterious prophecy; but she too dearly loved the old wall, painted with many bright figures besides that image of the Saviour, to dare injure it on only a bare conjecture. This day, as often before, she walked to and fro in this spot with the awful but cherished wish that her ancestor Huldibert might but once give her a sign, and raise her to the mighty existence and movements of the other world, even though terror and bewildering dread might bring the gift to her.

While she stood in deep thought leaning against a column, a sound as of wings rustled past her. She started in sudden womanish fear; but instantly her mind, awaking to something of supernatural that perhaps was about to reveal itself according to her desire, she raised her stately form with queen-like pride, and said: "Who is it that would speak to me? Here stands Isolde, the eldest daughter of the great baron, who will not yield in courage and high spirit to the noblest of her ancestors."

Again there flew something close to her dark locks, and she saw with a quick glance that it was a beautiful falcon; at the same moment a knight in shining armor, but with a strange head-covering, sprang over the balustrade of the gallery, close to her, and said: "I know well that Isolde stands here, and for that reason do I too stand here."

She recognized the Northman chief whom she had before seen in the chestnut wood, and to whom she had given a kindly look; but now, vexed at her hope of something higher being deceived, she turned away displeased, saying:—"Return, sir stranger, whence you are come. The ear of Isolde is not open to you, and all you could say would here be an idle and useless fooling."

"I would fain know that somewhat more certainly," said Thiodolf, without stirring from the spot. "Hearken, beautiful maiden; thou art an image of all that is lovely and gracious, but yet, in sooth, thou art no goddess, and therefore thou must listen before thou canst speak; that my speech is fooling, else thou thyself art foolish, and that were pity."

Isolde fixed on him a long wistful look; her pride had well nigh vanished before his calm, simple and almost childishly expressed strength; but endeavoring to confirm her laughtiness by another thought, she said: "I know not by whose permission you stand in this place, nor, indeed, how you are come hither."

"That will I relate to thee," said Thiodolf.—"See, I came, as was seemly, to the great gate of your castle, but it was in no seemly fashion that some rude halberdiers on guard asked me my name, and who I was. I gave them for answer that theirs were bad, inhospitable manners to begin by asking a stranger after such things, and not at least to give him first a cup of honor; thereupon one of them would have made a grimace as if to laugh at me, but I struck him on the mouth so that he fell down, and then I went forth. The others were not so well satisfied with this that they should wish to follow me; so I went all round the castle, and as I am accustomed to much more rugged paths among rocks, I easily climbed over the outer walls, and afterwards up here to thee, by the balustrade of the gallery. Now, hearken to the rest patiently, and then thou wilt perceive that no foolish word shall pass my lips."

Isolde shook her head, and seated herself on the projection of the wall; she looked down for a moment thoughtfully, and said at length: "You are a strange, unheard-of guest; but yet speak to me."

"That will be easily done," answered Thiodolf; "for hearken, what sweet sounds of horns and lutes float over to us from the court of the castle. A true heart can speak out incomparably well to such sounds."

In truth, many notes from wind and stringed instruments were heard from the halls of the castle. They came from some troubadours who there held a trial of skill.

Thiodolf began as follows: "In those northern regions whence I come, there live tender spirits who cannot bear the bright day. By night and by moonlight they are allowed to trip their graceful dances; but one single glance of the keen, powerful sun turns them to stone. Now, there lived once among them a haughty maiden, who thought that unless she could dance in the sunlight, bold and proud as the strongest beings in all the world, she would not dance at all. She followed her own will in spite of all wise opposition; and she who had been but now the flower and perfection of youth, became a cold, dead stone. Wouldst thou also become a stone, Isolde?"

The maiden looked proudly and steadfastly in his eyes. "Youth," she said, "thou must forthwith depart. I perceive well that thou hast not the slightest understanding of that which stirs my heart."

"Have I not?" asked Thiodolf, smiling. "In my heart as well as in thine there arises often an

overweening pride. But I do like a true strong son of the north, and I tread her under foot till she loses all wish to speak. It is true that thou, poor weak maiden, fair and noble as thou art, canst not do the like, and I, therefore, have great compassion for thee. But thou must be patient. The Almighty has not created thee for anything stronger."

Isolde smiled proudly at Thiodolf, or strove to do so; but he said very earnestly: "Oh, make not so hateful a grimace; it becomes thee ill, believe me. Yes, I can say yet more; your white Christ certainly never looked so in His whole life."

"How sayest thou—your Christ? Art thou, then, a heathen?" answered Isolde, bewildered. "Whatever I may be," cried Thiodolf, "in this moment I am truly better than thou, for thou haughtily wouldst send me away, and I bring thee joy and peace in rich abundance." "Show me the joy and peace, if I am to believe in them," said Isolde, without being able to raise her eyes from the ground. A blush like dawn's morn passed over her cheeks.

"Ah, thou messenger of the gods!" sighed Thiodolf, "when thou lookest so lovely, like a heavenly flower, I must humbly confess all to thee. This is what I meant: thy father must forgive that poor gentle Malgherita, and then I will carry away by force from her castle that proud, disdainful thing, Isolde, who thinks that there is no knight good enough for her, and marry her after the Christian fashion. I shall afterwards take her away with me. Thus would it be well with us all. Thy father will have married his eldest daughter, and in sooth, to the son of a Northman prince; Pietro and Malgherita will find grace with him; Isolde's proud spirit will be broken, and I—well, then, a brave man must always think of himself last, and my wife may be perverse as she will, yet will she not be able to embitter my delight in daring adventures."

"I must be dreaming—thou art mad!" said Isolde, putting her hand to her forehead. "Nay, lady," answered Thiodolf, "thou art not dreaming; but thou hearest how a brave Northman will deal with his wife if she is such an one as I had imagined thee to myself. But thou wilt be far otherwise. Dear, lovely, noble Isolde, what I did for the sake of Pietro and his wife, I now do for my own sake alone. Oh, give me thy fair, proud hand. I pray thee, dear Isolde, hearken how the harps breathe to us from afar. They may urge my suit; I feel that I, a poor, rough Northman, cannot do it so well."

It seemed almost as if Isolde were about to answer this strange speech mildly; but the strains which but just before had only breathed in soft whispers, now suddenly arose in triumphant and stately measures, so that Isolde drew herself up like a queen, and said: "Hence, thou bold, dejected man! What passes for enchantment in thy poor snowy north, here happily avails nothing. Thy daring is now known to me, and I tell thee that I will never stop myself to thee, the less because thou hast shown thyself so overbold."

"Oh, ho!" said Thiodolf, "the aspect of things is changed. Now must I return to the plan which I had first formed. Pietro and Malgherita must on no account be the sufferers, and I will soon see how I can overcome thee, thou fair, unruly thing."

So saying, he took Isolde in his arms, and bore her down the steps of the arched walk. In the same way he passed through the garden, and she was far too stunned and terrified by this unexpected attack to be able to call for help; and, perchance, no help would have availed against Thiodolf's anger and heroic strength.

(To be continued.)

REV. DR. CAHILL ON FRANCE.

(From the Dublin Catholic Telegraph.)

During the period of the last seventy years, that is, since the memorable, the disastrous revolution of 1789, France has passed through an eventful series of changes in constitutions, thrones, and laws, unknown within the same length of time in any other country of Europe. The historian can propound many a useful lesson to posterity, from this teeming collection of religious, political, and social facts; and mankind, like a large class of listeners before their historical professor, can lay up a store of warning and of wisdom from every page of the singular records of this great country. The principal conclusion to be drawn from this whole case is the old truth to be discovered in all the ancient empires of the world—namely, that the talent, the energy, the ambition, of one man acting on the discontent of a nation, has brought about these results, which have convulsed the neighboring countries, altered the character and the tenure of monarchy, and even wounded religion for a season. Whether the people of France have been made more wealthy, more moral, or more free, by these organic mutations and disturbances, is not the object of the present article; the intention of the writer in the present instance is to point out the variety of political phases which France has hitherto assumed when urged and led by the bold genius of a single commander; and thence to infer that the same people placed in similar circumstances at any