

THE ROMANCE OF A JESUIT.

From the French of De Bouigny d'Hagerne.

CHAPTER XIV.

In the year 1866, fifteen years after the occurrence of the events we have related, there was much talk in Paris concerning a Jesuit, a Pere Durand, whose fervent eloquence recalled that of the most celebrated preachers of later days, and who was said to be likely to succeed Lacordaire, Ravignan, &c., in the pulpit of Notre Dame. Much was said about his past life, and about the brilliant position filled by his sister, in the Faubourg St. Germain. It was also truly said that he now only left his humble cell to go to his confessional or to preach in some parish church, the poorer the better. His superiors having yielded to his desire of being left to the performance of the humblest functions of the ministry, the rumours concerning him soon died away and he was soon completely forgotten by the world. When the war broke out in 1870, he was one of the first Fathers who asked and obtained permission to follow the troops to the field of battle.

He was first sent to Metz, where he shared the sufferings and dangers of the soldiers; and after the surrender of that town, he accompanied these same soldiers into Germany, where he especially devoted himself to the service of the military hospitals.

Having taken the small pox from his sick patients he was obliged to return to France to complete his recovery, but directly his health was restored he asked to be again sent on a mission, and his superiors appointed him as almoner to Charette's corps of Zouaves. This appointment was particularly pleasing to him, but on the eve of his contemplated departure he received counter orders and was sent to the East. Everyone remembers the rigor of the winter of 1870 and 1871. Bourbaki's army which had set out from Bourges, had advanced eastward, and after obtaining some slight advantage over the few German troops they found in that part of the country, were met by several corps of Prussians, specially Manteuffel's, 40,000 strong, who, advancing with forced marches, were intent on annihilating the handful of Frenchmen who were fighting for their country.

One evening, it was the second of January, a battalion of Seine-et-Oise "mobiles," who had been sent as vanguard, were occupying the little village of Montereux, on the road from Gray to Dampierre. The snow had been falling fast all day, but suddenly, towards night time, the sky had cleared and a cutting wind had sprung up; it was one of those terrible nights which will never be forgotten by the soldiers who endured its rigors. The adjutant-major of the battalion had just made his rounds when, on arriving at the central part of the village he entered a large farm house near the church. A superior officer was there sleeping, near the fire on a chair, and a small remnant of supper was still on the table at his side. Aroused from his slumbers he stretched himself and inviting the adjutant to approach the fire inquired as to the disposition made of the men for the night, remarking that the cold was so terrible as to rival that of Siberia. Whilst chatting with the adjutant the commandant complained bitterly of having allowed himself, a man of forty six years of age, to be persuaded into making a campaign from which his age exempted him but which the personal wishes of the Emperor had induced him to undertake.

Just at that moment the door was opened by a soldier who stood aside to allow ingress to a priest. This latter advanced a few steps into the room saying

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to the officer in charge of the Seine et Oise battalion?"

"Yes," replied the latter, without turning his head or saluting the new comer. "What do you want with me?"

"I am appointed as chaplain to your battalion, sir"

"And who the devil has sent you here?"

"My ecclesiastical superiors."

"I know nothing about them."

"My appointment is sanctioned by the General in Chief and the General of Brigade"

"In that case enter on your duties, I can not prevent you

from doing so. I will warn you, however, that my men are anything but devout and you will not find means of doing much with them."

"May I at any rate count on your good will, sir?"

"My good-will! Certainly not. All I wish is that I may see as little of you as possible for I detest the cloth. Besides your proper place is at the ambulance, and for your own sake I would advise you not to try any proselytizing."

The priest could not help feeling the rebuff contained in the officer's reception of him and remained a moment silent. The adjutant-major enquired whether the chaplain had any shelter for the night, and, on receiving a reply in the negative, offered to accompany the priest in search of some unoccupied spot where he might take his rest. Before leaving the chaplain requested the commanding officer to attach his *visa* to the credentials with which he was furnished. As the officer, with a very ill-grace, was complying with this request, his eye fell accidentally on the name of the bearer of the papers.

Durand! he muttered to himself; how strange a coincidence if it should indeed be he! Then turning round and looking at the priest he questioned him for a moment concerning himself and then asked him whether he did not recognize with whom he was speaking.

"Now that the light falls on your face," replied Father Durand, "you seem to me wonderfully like one of my former friends, Anatole Meynaudier."

"At last we have recognized one another! now sit down and warm yourself. Have you supped this evening?"

"I breakfasted this morning and that ought to suffice for the whole day."

"Little as it is, do me the favour of partaking of what I can offer you. There is but little, and yet many a man in this army has not even so much as that little to night."

Whilst the priest was eating the frugal meal, consisting of a scrap of meat, black bread and hard cheese, the two men recalled reminiscences of their young days and recounted what had befallen them since they had last met. It was settled that should the Father not find a bed at the presbytery he was to return to the officer's quarters and sleep beside the fire. And now, said the officer, let us at once come to terms together. Anatole Meynaudier will never forget that he had formerly a friend, Charles Durand, and if the said Charles Durand has need of a friend's services, provisions or purse, he can depend on Anatole as that friend. But as regards our official relations there must be a different line taken. You know my former opinion about priests and I have in no way changed it. I should, besides, lose all *prestige* with my men were I to be seen in friendly relations with you. Therefore, when together in private you will always find me your sincere friend and old schoolfellow; everywhere else, please remember that you cannot do me a greater service than keeping out of my road.

Pere Durand thanked the commandant for his frankness and personal good feeling, and then saluting him retired from the quarters; and guided by Captain de Tralin, found his way to the village presbytery, where the good old cure made him welcome.

During the first few days that followed his arrival, nothing remarkable occurred to Father Durand. The spiritual care of the 72nd Infantry had been entrusted to him also and when presenting his credentials to the colonel of that regiment he had met with a far more encouraging reception than that of Anatole. The 72nd regiment was composed principally of peasants from Franche-comte and Auvergne and the men appeared to be well disposed towards their pastor, but still his thoughts always turned by preference to the "mobiles," although these latter seemed to be so indifferent to him. In vain he profited by every opportunity of entering into conversation with the soldiers, the coldness with which his advances were received proved to him that Meynaudier had by no means exaggerated the men's aversion to religion. The almoner did not allow his first fruitless essays to discourage him, although he knew that certain of these men amused themselves at his expense and had bestowed on him the nick-name of *St. Ignatius*. Many a time after a long day's march he would be found beside the ambulance for the