

France is not good for everything that comes from our country!"

Some minutes after this queen Ingeburge was seated on a stone bench by the side of a friar, whose bald head and white beard gave him a very venerable appearance; the monk and the queen were conversing in a low voice—the two nuns stood off at a distance.

"I have confessed my faults, father," murmured the queen, her hands still joined and her eyes still devoutly lowered; "but I feel that I am still wanting in resignation to the will of the Lord. I have many desires and many regrets. I sigh for the past—the happy days of my childhood—my country—my brother—my companions. I long for some new country instead of the one to which they have brought me. I desire the attachment of some one near me—a little liberty, and the confidence and love of a husband. Alas! everything that I have not, my father. I know that it is sinning against God, thus to murmur under the weight of his chastisements. But God will pardon me, my father, for I have suffered so much and am so weak!"

The priest, who was the prior of the abbey, looked at her with a commiseration full of respect and tenderness.

"God has pardoned you already my daughter," replied he. "God pardons simple and honest souls like yours; but it is a fault to give way to obstinate despair, and to complain without ceasing. Judge whether heaven has abandoned you: the legate of our Holy Father has just arrived to cite Phillip of France once more before the council, to compel him to renounce his criminal life, and the guilty consequences of his second marriage."

The young queen shook her fair head doubtfully.

"I am but a simple maiden, mon père," said she, "and perhaps I do not understand everything; but all this was judged in the former council, and the second marriage was then condemned. Should not the first sentence be revoked, before they enter into judgment again?"

Prior Anselme involuntarily turned his eyes away.

Women and young girls possess the sagacity of a lawyer, when their private interests are at stake; and though this has been apparent to us ever since the days of our mother, Eve, we nevertheless continue always to express our astonishment at it.

"Oh! pray," resumed the queen who had observed the movement of the old man, "do not attach too much importance to my words, my dear father, I am sure that the church will sustain my cause; for the church could not be a party to any act of injustice. And these judgments and those councils...."

She stopped and the prior gave her an inquiring look.

Ingeburge finished with a still more sorrowful smile. "I desired to say that all these things could not give me back the heart of the king, my husband."

A silence ensued, during which the old priest, holding the queen's white hand in his own, contemplated her with paternal interest.

"There are some things which are beyond me, my daughter," said he at last, "but to my mind you are queen of France and were you only a poor girl, without support or protection, I should still feel myself attracted towards you; because your pure conscience is to me like a beautiful book—the pages of which I can turn over with love. If there is anything that you desire, and that is within the limits of my authority, as prior of this abbey, tell it me without fear."

The queen blushed slightly, and replied—"Is it really true that my prayer will be granted?"

Père Anselme nodded assent.

"Ah, well," said Ingeburge, "they tell me that in another and distant part of the buildings of your abbey there is an hospital for poor patients."

"You have not been deceived, my daughter," replied the prior.

"Accomplish, then, your promise, mon père," continued the young queen, and grant that

which I shall ask thee." Here I am useless to others as well as to myself. Here I can do nothing but dwell on my sorrows, and shed useless tears, which are an offence against heaven; I would rather that my days were turned to some good account. I should like to devote my time to ministering to those poor patients."

"You—the queen!" interrupted prior Anselme.

"If I was indeed queen," said Ingeburge, "I should know how to relieve the suffering and aid the afflicted in a different way—but since I can do nothing...."

"My daughter," again interrupted the old monk, whose voice betrayed his emotion, "there are too often in our infirmary, contagious diseases."

"And if I should die by their means," murmured the queen, with an angelic smile, "I should no longer have to complain that France had refused me the queen's crown, since she would have given me a holier one!"

The prior contemplated the queen with admiration and raised her hand to his lips. "Your wish shall be granted, my daughter," said he, "you shall minister to our poor patients. Have you any other desire?"

"Oh yes!" replied Ingeburge quickly, but immediately hesitated—as one about to ask a favour too ardently desired.

"Mon père," resumed she after a pause, "I am here alone—and my heart can only open itself to you. These holy women—(pointing to the nuns—who stood at a distance like two statues of old wood—stiff and severe)—who follow me always and everywhere, these holy women do not understand me. Perhaps they do not love me. Is it not possible to give me a companion of my own age? and if you cannot accord me a young girl from the North country, speaking to me my own tongue—then a young French woman."

"The orders of the king are absolute," replied the prior.

At that moment a noise was heard coming from the cloisters, the arches of which were hidden from the queen and her confessor by the trees and shrubs. Neither of them paid any attention to that noise.

"I am told that you have much influence over my dreaded lord, King Phillip Augustus," continued the young queen, in a supplicating and caressing voice, "mon père, I pray you on my knees: it would do me so much good to hear the gentle voice of a young girl; she would soon love me. Oh, I am sure she would soon love me; and should I not love her who would consent to share my afflictions." The old man could make no reply; the noise in the cloisters increased, and they could distinguish the voice of a woman behind the thick bushes.

The attention of the queen and the prior was not yet aroused. A tear from the beautiful blue eyes of Ingeburge was coursing down her pale cheek.

"I do not insist," murmured she, "for if you refuse me, mon père, you, who are so good—it must needs be because my demand is unreasonable. I will try to forget the foolish wish which I have so nourished, of not being always alone and abandoned—and of having the heart of a friend always near me—a heart which might have received the overflowings of my grief. Alas! it is too true, when I reflect upon it—it would have been too much joy."

She wept and the good old prior felt that he was about to do the same; but he sought not to encourage a hope in her, that he could not share; for in all that related to Ingeburge the king had shown himself inexorable.

The young queen put her hands to her burning brow, and spoke no more, but her sobs bespoke her deep distress.

At that moment the noise behind the bushes redoubled and seemed to draw nearer. Ingeburge still paid no attention to it. What could that noise signify to her? but the old prior raised his head and listened.

All at once, among the confused murmurs, a clear and sweet voice arose—it was the voice of a young girl—and that voice said:

"Angel—my sister, Angel!—where art thou?" The young queen rose with a convulsive start;

her brow became paler, her eyes wandered—she threw back the ringlets of her long fair hair—and muttered in accents full of fear—

"Oh! I am becoming mad!"—the prior himself knew not what to think.

Again the voice repeated, "Angel! where art thou—my sister, Angel?"

The queen pressed her cold hands to her temples—then, as though she would combat that madness, which for a moment at least had made her happy—she fell on her knees, exclaiming—

"Here! Eve—my sister, Eve!"

Suddenly the rustling foliage opened, and a young girl, clothed all in white—fair and charming as the queen herself, flew like an arrow across the grassplot and precipitated herself into the arms of Ingeburge.

It was our little Eve, who was no longer master Adam, and who had laid aside for ever her disguise as a mason's apprentice.

Breathless and agitated, it was long before Eve could find words to tell her joy to the laughing, weeping queen, who threw her arms round Eve's neck, looking at her affectionately a long time, without speaking.

"My sister! my sister!" murmured she—without knowing that she was speaking—"Oh! my sister! do I see thee again?"

"Oh, my queen!" exclaimed Eve in the Norse language, "I have suffered much to reach thee, but I see thee. I kiss thy dear hands, and I have nothing left to do but to bless the goodness of God!"

Ingeburge continued to contemplate her as though she dared not trust the evidence of her eyes and ears.

At that moment the old nuns hastened forward and each seized Eve by an arm.

"What does this woman want?" said they in one voice—"We have orders to prevent any person whatever from speaking to the princess of Denmark."

At that word you would have no longer recognized the young maiden, whose portrait we have just been sketching—she rose suddenly into a strong and proud woman.

The prior had no time to speak for her.

"To the queen of France!" said she slowly, while her haughty look disconcerted, for a moment, the two nuns.

"To the queen of France," repeated one of the nuns who still held Eve by the arm—"be it so; that title avails you nothing, madame—and you will never miss it, by the respect you show for it." There was an ironical bitterness conveyed in these last words.

"My daughter," said the prior, moving towards Ingeburge, "the orders of the king are strict."

But Eve, drawing a parchment from her bosom, interrupted him—

"I am here by the orders of the king," said she.

The nuns could not conceal their incredulous smiles. The old priest himself seemed to doubt, while Eve extended the parchment towards him.

The queen seized it in its passage, and eagerly sought for the king's signature. When she had found it she kissed it respectfully, without knowing the contents of the order.

Then she returned the parchment to the prior who read it:

"The young girl does not lie," said he; "the king wishes her to be the companion of madame Ingeburge, the queen."

The two nuns withdrew, muttering to themselves. The battalion of frère servants, and other keepers of the monastery, who had chased Eve through the bushes, did the same, on receiving a sign from the prior, who at the same time laid his two hands upon the fair head of Eve.

"Thou hast a good heart, young girl," said he; "I pray God that he may give thee back the consolations and joy, that thou hast brought to our poor recluse. May this day," added he, turning towards the queen, before whom he bowed, "be the commencement of a happier life."

The queen extended to him her two hands, which he kissed, and withdrew with a slow step.

(To be continued.)