

Choice Literature.

HOW THEY KEPT THE FAITH.

A TALE OF THE HUGUENOTS OF LANGUEDOC.

CHAPTER I—(Continued).

"Little wonder that a bruised heart like my lady's surrendered itself to his guidance. 'If I am doing wrong, God will be pitiful to my weakness and ignorance,' she said one night, when I was helping her to undress. 'I have not much longer to live, Nannette, and for those few months I can but remain quietly where I am. God knows my heart: He sees that it is only to Him I look, only in His cross I trust. Once I thought that I could only find God through my mother's Church. now I know the way is not this creed, nor that, but Himself!'

"Will madame then send for her youngest daughter, and leave the little one to be reared in the faith in which she herself is content to die?" I asked. She gave me a strange look, sweetheart. 'I am not strong nor brave like others, but I would be broken upon the wheel before I would bid my little one leave the blessed home in which she has found shelter, for the snares and perils of this.' And then she put her arms about my neck, and laid her head upon my breast, as she used to do when she was your age, Mistress Eglantine, and had something to say she would not speak aloud. 'There are not many like M. Fenelon,' she whispered; 'none should know that better than you and I, Nannette. If I have found the light at last, it has been through a weary and winding road, and more than once I have come near missing it altogether. Would you have me take the little feet from the plain path, and the happy daylight of the open Bible, to grope their way through the night that I have known? I can hope for my little Mignonette, because I gave her the best I had when she was taken from me, but I could not pray for the other, if I put the stumbling-block in her way.' And though she was afterward induced to write to M. Chevalier, and occasionally secret letters from him and his wife in return, she held firm to her purpose not to look upon thy face, nor let thy father's people suspect thy existence. Bear this in mind, my little one, if thou art ever tempted to part with the pearl purchased for thee with such bitter pain. And who can tell through what straits thou mayest have to keep it, by the time thou art a woman grown—if the edicts grow much harsher. Even now the pastor walks beneath the edge of an avalanche, and the least incautious step or word may bring it down upon his head."

"My grandfather will not let the priests do anything to my uncle; he has promised me that, over and over again," said Eglantine, lifting her head proudly.

"He would promise you the crown diamonds, if you asked him, mademoiselle; he knows not how to say you nay. But that is quite a different matter from getting them. You have far more to hope from M. Chevalier's prudence, than from your grandfather's interference. M. Laval is not that anxious to be out of favour with the Jesuits himself; no one need be who has an eye to court favour or public preferment. But dry your eyes, my little lady. Your father's daughter may see a danger, but she should never fear it. It was your mother's wish that you should not be brought up, as she was, in ignorance of the perils about you. She made your grandfather promise that, when at last she sent for him, and touched by his loneliness and distress, and remorseful for the sorrow she had caused him, she confided to him the secret of your birth, and the names of those who had taken you in. She hoped, she said, that some day you might make up to him for the disappointment she had caused, but she bade him never forget the debt he owed to pastor Chevalier and his wife, and not to take you from them, without their consent. Above all, she made him promise to let no hope of worldly advantage tempt him to betray the secret to her husband's people, or come between you and your marriage with Master Rene, if your heart was set that way, when you were grown. Hark, Mistress Eglantine; is that not the sound of wheels on the road without? Who can be arriving so late this February night?"

The little girl had turned her head, and was listening.

"It is M. Henri's voice," she cried, springing up, and overturning a cricket on her way to the door. The old nurse shook her head, as she folded up her knitting, and prepared to follow. The tears had vanished from the warm young cheek, like rain-drops from an April rose.

CHAPTER II.

COUNTING THE COST.

The lights were out in the Huguenot temple; the consistency had dispersed, and old Basil, the Sexton, stood waiting to lock the door, as the pastor and a solitary companion came out. The face of the minister was irradiated with saintly joy but the cheek of the young man was flushed, and his slouched hat was drawn far over his brow. Godfrey Chevalier paused a moment beside the white-haired sexton.

"Congratulate Armand," he said gently. "Like Peter, he denied his Master in an hour of sore temptation, but like the great apostle, he, too, has bitterly repented, and has been, he hopes, forgiven. The Church has restored him to membership."

"Is it indeed so?" asked the old man, glancing at the averted face. "Then God be praised, my young brother, and may He give you grace to stand steadfast henceforward."

"Pray for me," muttered Armand, clasping the proffered hand, but not lifting his head.

"We have need to pray for each other, if the edicts are to grow much stricter," was the heavy answer. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The minister uncovered his head, and lifted a calm, fearless glance, to the encircling hills.

"The Lord sitteth King forever," he repeated triumphantly. "Courage, Basil, 'His strength is made perfect in weakness.' Be of good comfort, my poor Armand; 'To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.' Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation."

He replaced his hat, and with a slight gesture of farewell, turned away. The two men stood listening to his footsteps until they died away down the mountain road. Then Basil turned to lock the door, sighing.

"It is not the withered trunk the bolt first smites; it is not for myself I most fear, M. le Pasteur." He glanced up not for sympathy to the penitent, but Armand had gone.

There was a light in the window of the pastor's cottage, as he opened the ivy-covered gate, and a woman's dark-robed figure stood waiting in the shadow of the porch. Monique Chevalier's cheek had lost something of its bloom, and her brow was touched by care, since the summer day so long ago, when she had given a nameless stranger shelter in her porch, but there was still the tender light in the dark eyes, and the steadfast sweetness about the grave lips, which had made poor Madame Bertrand's broken heart instinctively flow out to her in trust, and made Godfrey Chevalier, from the hour when he had first seen her, know her to be more to him than the light of his eyes—more than aught but the love of Christ and the hope of heaven. She had been a wealthy gentleman's daughter, and he only a young licentiate, then; but there had been no faltering in the hand she placed in his, and no hesitation in the feet that had quitted for him the green and pleasant paths to climb the rough and stony paths of a Huguenot pastor's lot. He loved her with a deep, silent passion, which had been inwrought with every fibre of his nature, but there was little outward token in the grave kiss he set upon her brow.

"You are later than usual; I could not help feeling anxious," she faltered, as they went in together to the cosy sitting-room, where a child was asleep on the cushions of the settle. "Poor little maid, I promised her a story, but the vigil has been too long," said the father tenderly, as he touched the golden curls of the little sleeper; and then he told the story of Armand, as he hung up his hat and cloak. His wife was setting out a slight repast for him upon the table. He noticed that her hand trembled, and that she did not answer. No music could be more sensible to a discord than the grave, scholarly man to any change in the voice or face he loved best.

"What is it, Monique?" he asked, glancing up quickly.

She turned pale, and leaned against the table.

"There has been another edict, Godfrey. Our pastors are forbidden to restore backsliders under heavy penalties."

"How have you heard?"

"Henri La Roche has just returned from Paris. He stopped to leave a packet of letters for you and finding his father here tarried awhile. They would have waited until you came, but it grew so late."

"Has our young sieur succeeded in obtaining his commission?"

"He has good hopes of receiving it at last. His uncle Reneau has the matter in hand, and will send him word next week."

"His Majesty is slow in rewarding the services of so loyal a subject, but monsieur is not of the king's religion. What are the penalties attached to the new edict, Monique?"

She gave a fearful glance over her shoulder, and drew a step nearer to his chair.

"Hard labour at the galleys—for life," she whispered.

Godfrey Chevalier started. He had not expected this. Instead of answering her, he rose and walked to the window, and stood for several minutes looking out on the moonlit hills. Then he came back slowly to the table.

"The King of kings has commanded, 'Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.' Whom should we obey, Monique?"

She could not answer; her lips trembled.

"Would you have me act otherwise to-night, if I had known?"

A moment more of hesitation, and then her dark, tear-filled eyes met his.

"It was your duty to take him back, Godfrey. I cannot wish you had acted differently."

He stretched his hand to her across the table. "Thank you," he said quietly; but the look and the firm, close clasp enriched her more than many words. "We will hope the edict will not be rigidly enforced. Were there aught else, Monique?"

"The singing of psalms has been forbidden in workshops and private dwellings—anywhere beyond the limits of the temple. Oh, Godfrey! I heard you chanting a verse as you came up the hill."

"I will not do it again, Monique. We will make melody in our hearts hereafter. Is that all?"

"The prohibitions against emigration are renewed, and the penalties increased. Our schoolmasters are forbidden to teach anything but reading, writing, and arithmetic, and our burials must take place after nightfall, or before daybreak. Our young sieur is on fire with indignation."

"Nevertheless we must submit ourselves blameless to every ordinance that does not contravene a higher law. The Lord's cause does not languish, Monique. Here is a letter from Charenton. M. Claude has at last yielded to the entreaties of his friends, and is to have a conference with the Bishop of Condom. Eloquent as he is, M. Bossuet will find he has no mean antagonist in the champion of the wilderness church. There will be bold words spoken for the truth. God grant the faith of more than one wavering heart may be established."

"And that our noble kinsman himself suffer no loss for his championship," added the pastor's wife.

She rose as she spoke in answer to a sleepy murmur from the settle. Little Agnes was awake—a grave, fragile-looking child, with eyes in which lay mirrored the fear that had rested on her mother's heart; and delicate features, which looked almost ethereal under the nimbus of golden hair. Monique Chevalier lifted her from the cushions, and led her to her father for his good-night kiss. The pastor gave it tenderly and looked after them with a moistened glance as they left the room. She was such a gentle flower—this, his youngest and darling—living only in the smiles of those she loved, and trembling at any rude word or look. How would she breast the storm, whose muttered thunders were already shaking strong men's souls? Could that sunny head be kept always sheltered? Would that tender hand be able to maintain its hold where the grasp of stronger ones was being wrenched away? "Thou art able to keep that well. I have committed unto Thee," he whispered, glancing upward, and then he broke the seal of the other letter that lay before him. His brow grew stern, as he gathered its purport. For several minutes he sat deeply pondering, then taking a sudden resolution, he rose and went out into the passage. A faint light gleamed from under a door at the farther end. A murmur of children's voices came down the corridor.

"It is well. They are still up and together," he murmured; and noiselessly approaching the door, lifted the latch.

The apartment was the cosy, well-appointed kitchen, in which Nanette had told her story in the earlier part of the evening. The old nurse was gone; the fire had sunk to a few glowing embers. Eglantine sat on a low cricket, drawn well forward on the blue and white tiles, her cheek resting in her hand, her gaze fixed thoughtfully upon the coals. Beside her, leaning against the massive oaken beam that supported the mantle-shelf, was a boy some four years her senior. His figure was in shadow, while hers, by some sweet law of attraction, seemed to gather to itself all the radiance that yet lingered in the room. A large volume, from which they had evidently been reading before the firelight failed, lay on the floor between the two. The little girl was speaking as the pastor entered.

"I would not kneel to the Virgin, nor make the sign of the cross, if the priests should break every bone in my body," she protested warmly, evidently in answer to some appeal from the lad, whose dark, piercing eyes were fixed upon her through the gloom.

"You should not speak so positively," he answered. "No one knows what he would do until he is tried."

"But I do know, Rene. When uncle Godfrey let the blood from my arm last month, did I not hold still without a whimper; and did not Antoine say I bore the pain like a martyr?"

"Then you had my mother to sit by and hold your hand, and my father to kiss you and call you a brave little maid when it was all over. That was nothing, Eglantine."

"Then why did you turn white at sight of the blood, and let Nannette fetch you a glass of water, like a girl? I was cool enough to mark that, Master Rene."

"You know very well that was because I could not bear to see you hurt." A sudden leap of the dying flames showed a swift leap of scarlet into the olive cheek. "It is hardly fair to taunt me with that, Eglantine."

Godfrey Chevalier, who had been listening unnoticed, laid his hand upon his son's shoulder. The boy looked up with a quick smile, which spoke volumes for the friendship between them, and Eglantine, with a cry of delight, started from her cricket, and threw her arms about her uncle's neck.

"Softly, thou small whirlwind," he cried, laughing, but he drew her tenderly to him as he spoke, and taking a seat on the settle, beckoned Rene to a place beside them.

"I have had a letter to-night which concerns both you and Eglantine," he said. "Hold up your head, little maid, and tell me how old you are?"

"Twelve this mid-summer, Uncle Godfrey."

"Full young to be sent out to meet the world, the flesh, and the devil, but your grandfather will have it so. What were you speaking of, my son, when I came in?"

"We had been speaking first, my father, of the new edict, which M. Henri brought us word of to-night, and then I had read to Eglantine the story of sweet Philippa Lunz, and we were supposing that those old days were to come back again, and we should have to hold the faith as hardly as our forefathers did. And Eglantine was sure she would be as steadfast as the noble martyr herself."

"And you were trying to convince her that it would be no easy task? Right, Rene, if you looked at it from the standpoint of our frail human hearts, but only half right unless you pointed her, too, to the strength that is made perfect in weakness. Light the candle, my son. I will give you a watch-word to-night, little maid, that you are to keep in your heart all the years that are to come." He drew a small volume with silver clasps from his breast, and by the light of the candle which Rene brought, Eglantine read the words pointed out: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

"Not from yourself, little one; your own heart and your own hand will fail you in the day of trial: your best resolutions wither like withes in the furnace of temptation. Put your trust in Him who 'knoweth neither variableness nor shadow of turning'; He alone is able to keep you from falling. He alone is able, with every temptation, to make a way of escape."

"Is my grandfather going to take me away?" asked the child, recalling the words he had spoken when he first came in.

"M. Laval stopped at La Rochelle on his way to Paris, and met an aunt of your mother's, his wife's eldest sister. Madame Cartel would have her young kinswoman come to her for a year or two, little one, that you may have proper masters for music and the languages, and be cured of what your grandfather is pleased to call rustic manners."

"But you will not make me go?—you will not send me away from you?" cried Eglantine, starting from her covert in his arms to look anxiously into his face.

He drew her gently back. "I will help you to do what is right and best, Madame Cartel is a member of the Reformed Church, and promises not to neglect that education which I hold most important. But she says, what is very true, that you cannot in these wild hills obtain the advantages which become your mother's daughter, and it is also true what your grandfather adds, that you should see something of the world before deciding irrevocably upon the home Rene has to offer you."

Eglantine glanced up with tearful eyes at the quiet figure beside her.

"I will never love anybody better than Rene, if I see the whole world," she said, warmly. Her uncle smiled, and a strange, soft light, transfigured his son's face.

"I would have to leave you soon, Eglantine, to go to Montauban," said the boy, gently.

"If you love each other, a few years' separation will make little difference," added Godfrey Chevalier. "The shadows thicken about our Reformed Church, and I know not how long my home may be a safe shelter for those I love. It will be a comfort to me, little one, to think of you as protected by powerful friends, until Rene has a home of his own to offer you. You speak of Montauban, my son. You have yet to hear what M. Laval says to you. Take the letter and read. You must decide for yourself."

The boy took the packet quietly, and going to the table, sat down and began to read. The pastor and his little foster daughter watched with different emotions the face now clearly illumined by the candle. Plain, dark, strongly marked, it was already shadowed with thought beyond his years. Monique Chevalier's son had inherited the strength, if not the beauty, of his mother's face, and the grave, firm lips bespoke a nature that, like hers, would be patient to wait, as well as bold to keep. He returned the letter to his father with a grave smile.

"M. Laval would have me abandon the study of medi-