

INTRODUCTION

MICHEL AND ANGÈLE

IF it does not seem too childish a candour to say so, *Michel and Angèle* always seems to me like some old letter lifted out of an ancient cabinet with the faint perfume of bygone days upon it. Perhaps that is because the story itself had its origin in a true but brief record of some good Huguenots who fled from France and took refuge in England, to be found, as the book declares, at the Walloon Church, in Southampton.

The record in the first paragraphs of the first chapter of the book fascinated my imagination, and I wove round Michel de la Foret and Angèle Aubert a soft, bright cloud of romance which would not leave my vision until I sat down and wrote out what, in the writing, seemed to me a true history. It was as though some telepathy between the days of Elizabeth and our own controlled me—self-hypnotism, I suppose; but still, there it was. The story, in its original form, was first published in *Harper's Weekly* under the name of *Michel and Angèle*, but the fear, I think, that many people would mispronounce the first word of the title, induced me to change it when, double in length, it became a volume called *A Ladder of Swords*.

As it originally appeared, I wrote it in the Island of Jersey, out at the little Bay of Rozel in a house called *La Chaire*, a few yards away from the bay itself, and having a pretty garden with a seat at its highest point, from which, beyond the little bay, the English Channel ran away to the Atlantic. It was written in