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HONOUR WITHOUT RENOWN

BY MRS. INNES-BROWN

Author of "Three Daughters of the United Kingdom"

CHAPTER IV—CONTINUED

He was now on the Boulevard Barbès, a continuation of the Boulevard Orsano to the Porte de Clignancourt. He felt a strange fascination in gazing upon the ruin outside the walls, and he would stroll in and out of the deserted houses and weave romances out of the feelings and fortunes of their previous owners.

"You are very tired, Ma Soeur," remarked Sister Marguerite, looking affectionately at the grave face and noting the languid step of her companion. "Yes, I must own to that at least! Never did I feel the distance so long or so wearisome before. I have made up my mind, now the last two soldiers have recovered, that unless Madame Corbette leaves her cottage and takes up her quarters at a more convenient distance from the Convent I cannot allow my overworked Sisters to attend upon her."

But so far the cottage has proved of great utility. Several soldiers, who were too badly injured to be moved to any distance, would certainly have died unassisted by us had it not been for that convenient harbor of shelter. It is strange how useful the tiny house has been, and how bravely it has withstood the siege!

It has been comparatively sheltered from the fire of the enemies' guns by the large buildings at the back. That will be no longer if our own are levelled against it, as they inevitably will be unless this terrible rising is quickly subdued. And, more, the Sister who traverses these streets soon will have a dangerous task to perform; and considering her arduous duties elsewhere, she ought not to be compelled to undertake it.

Kindly and motherly Sister Angela! Since the first day upon which you met that bright schoolgirl, Beatrice de Woodville, and she so nobly stood your champion—and that of the sick Sister whose journey across the Channel you were endeavoring to ease—your heart has yearned towards her with a strange love and admiration. Yet oftentimes you tremble for her, knowing so well to what heights of self-sacrifice the heart of Sister Marguerite is capable of rising.

They had now reached the small wooden porch, and, springing lightly up the steep stone steps, Sister Marguerite thrice rapped briskly with the knocker upon the rickety door. The call was immediately answered by Jeanne, who, after great persuasion on the part of Ma Soeur, had consented to resume her night watches at the cottage. Perhaps the hope of inheriting the stocking of gold reported to be possessed by the old woman encouraged the niece in her charitable ministrations. Ma Soeur walked straight towards Madame Corbette, and, addressing her kindly, sank exhausted in a chair beside her. Now, if the old woman feared any one on earth it was Ma Soeur. She could not but feel that she owed her much; still, as she turned her hard, plain face, framed in its large white cap, and fixed her bead-like eyes upon the nun, she did not forbear to remark in a sarcastic tone:

"Oh, it's better, after all, to be able to walk, even if one should feel some slight fatigue, than to be aged, decrepit, and in constant pain, as I am."

Ma Soeur looked at her, perhaps, a little sternly as she answered with quiet dignity: "Possibly so. But look at little Sister Marguerite! See with what care she has brought you a morsel of delicacy this evening. It consists chiefly of her own share of a kindly gift which she yesterday presented to me for your own table."

"One is lucky to get a few crumbs now and again which fall from the table of a religious; it brings a flavor into one's mouth of better days," was the ungrateful reply; for a Red Republican to the backbone was old Mère Corbette. "However," she continued in a grumbling tone of voice, "I cannot eat until my wounds are dressed."

"And I am quite ready to attend to them now," said Sister Marguerite, kneeling down quietly and commencing to unwrap, with clever and tender care, some of the bandages which covered the unsightly sores in the infernal old limbs. It was a most revolting form of skin disease from which the old woman suffered—one which should have received special hospital treatment; but Madame Corbette had steadily refused to leave her cottage, and the Sisters had given a promise to her husband on his death-bed to continue, if possible, their care of his abject wife, and endeavor to win her back to God ere she died. Ma Soeur could not express a shudder of horror as she saw the gaping wounds exposed; and yet it was surmounted by a feeling of sublime admiration as she watched the sweet face and movements of Sister Marguerite.

It was less than the present that had subdued the proud heart of Beatrice de Woodville, and Ma Soeur was able to measure, in a small way,

the great grace that had been needed to change that spoiled and dainty girl into the humble nun before her. Yes, surely there was a soft place in her heart for Sister Marguerite.

"But listen! what was that? Ah, their ears were too well practised to the rumbling of cannon, followed as it was instantly by the sound of a shell which exploded not more than two hundred yards from the cottage, shivering to splinters the remains of a shattered wall.

Signs of deadly strife had appeared outside. One small detachment of the National Guard, led by a brave young officer, refused to yield or join the ever increasing mob of Communists which each moment threatened to overpower and destroy them. So they bravely manned the few guns remaining in their possession, and opened a destructive fire. But the advance of the Communists continued steadily, sheltered as it was by the half-fallen and deserted buildings.

This was sport in which Harold Manfred revelled. Born to be a soldier, the clash of arms had ever made his pulses thrill, the flash of steel and whizz of bullet fired him. He would not go out of his way to fight for France, neither would he turn and flee if danger threatened him; but he would aid those around him and defend himself if need were, showing these curs how an Englishman could fight.

Eagerly he watched the strife; and when opportunity offered, without one thought of fear, seized the rifle and ammunition of a wounded soldier and advanced with the mob. He would strike a blow for liberty and France! Several shells had fallen, but all had not exploded; so far but little serious harm had been done. A small force, of which Manfred was one, had been thrown forward and was sheltering in a long, low building, the floor of which was thickly strewn with damp and well-trodden straw. Evidently the place had been occupied during the siege by cavalry; for though the roof had given way in several places, and the large windows were long since denuded of every vestige of glass, the walls were yet strong and afforded good shelter for the time.

Between this building and the next intervened some eighty yards of open ground, on which the men would be exposed to a deadly fire. An excited discussion was taking place as to the advisability of rushing it or of taking a more circuitous route, when straight through one of the open windows into their very midst hissed a shell. There was a stifled cry, followed by an instantaneous rush for safety; but quick as thought Harold Manfred seized the deadly thing and dashed with it through an open doorway. Alas! he tripped and fell; the bomb exploded, and where was the gallant Englishman?

Few had witnessed the act; men still crouched and hid behind some wall or behind what was coming when they were roused by the report of the explosion outside. But the keen eye of their leader had seen it all; and his heart was stirred with admiration and pity, as he bade the men gather gently the mutilated body of the Englishman and carry him—where? For a moment he stood and gazed in bewilderment around, then the order came: "To yonder cottage, from the chimney of which issues the curling smoke."

Back again through the crowd of howling fanatics they bore their unconscious burden, whilst many an eye gazed upon him, recognising in the face of the sufferer the proud Englishman at whom they had jeered that day.

Poor Manfred! you have paid dearly for the renown which you craved so much to earn—or has the day of reckoning overtaken you at last?

CHAPTER V

A medical man had stanchied the blood and joined the small procreation ere they reached the cottage door. Short and preternatural was the knock they gave; yet ere they halted Ma Soeur had recognised the rhythmic tramp of soldiers' feet, and knew that another case awaited them. Opening the door she gazed with pitying eyes upon the still handsome features of the Englishman. His face alone was exposed to view; the rest of his body had been mercifully covered.

"Sister Marguerite," she cried; "prepare and open at once the bed in the small back chamber."

But the shrill voice of Madame Corbette echoed loudly in their ears: "No, no, I say! Back with the wretch; he shall not enter here. Death, death to each and all the troops, and all who fight against Liberty and Freedom. To no more of the false-hearted knaves will I give shelter or rest."

"Nay, shame on thee then, old Mère Corbette, for a hard-hearted fiend," spoke one of the men. "This man is no enemy of thine; he has fought gallantly, and has struck a blow in the cause thou lovest so well."

"His last blow," commented the doctor. "Come, carry him in! We have Citizen Barry's orders to do so, and must obey."

"You lie! You are deceiving me," shrieked the woman, forgetting in her excitement the pain and helplessness of her limbs, she dragged herself into a standing position and stood without support screaming and swearing that he should not enter there. "Where are his decorations?" she shrieked; "where the glorious red that should mark him for a true patriot?"

"Behold," said the doctor, "the red dye wherewith he is stained; more than his heart's blood he could not give for France. Move on, my men, and heed her not. See, he sighs! he breathes more freely! Each minute now is worth an hour. Carry him forward quickly."

"I defy you. You shall not do it!" now yelled the old fanatic. "If you bring him in here it is at your own peril. The house is mine, and it shall not shelter an aristocrat!" The covering had partly fallen, and exposed to view the dress of an English gentleman.

"Madame Corbette," said Ma Soeur, turning with dignity towards the wretched woman, and speaking sternly and with authority, while she forced her back into her chair, "be silent! Cease once for all this disgraceful language and behaviour, or I shall leave you to your fate, and no Sister shall ever darken your doors again. You shall be left to die as you deserve, neglected and forgotten, if you dare to refuse shelter to this gentleman. The hospitals are full, and to carry him further would be to kill him. This very day did I come to tell you, that unless, you left this house, and changed your quarters, we should attend your case no longer. Now refuse your roof to this stranger, and instantly we discontinue our care of you. Do you understand me? I am not one to go back upon my word."

Madame Corbette, faint and exhausted by her physical exertions, sank heavily back into her chair. She had measured swords with Ma Soeur before today, and she knew who would come off victorious. So puckering her unpleasant face into an expression of black and sullen disapproval, she continued to matter hoarsely in an incoherent and unpleasant manner.

Rapidly Sister Marguerite had spread the little bed. Narrow as it was, the sheets were spotlessly white and a fragrant odor of lavender pervaded the tiny room. With the greatest care they raised the unconscious man and laid him gently upon the open bed. Then a sight met the Sister's eyes which well nigh overcame her. The face, arms, and body of Manfred seemed little injured, but the whole of one leg appeared to be smothered in a jelly; cloth, flesh, and bone were mingled in an indistinguishable perplexity. As high as the knee the other leg too had suffered considerably; but that, perhaps, might be saved.

"And it is the poor sullen Englishman!" thought the kind-hearted nun, as she forced herself to overcome her nausea, and bending low examined closely the ghastly features. "My God, what a dreadful thing! Will he live, doctor?" she inquired eagerly. "Not at all likely, Sister. Few constitutions could survive such a shock."

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!" she repeated to herself in English; "how sad to die alone and so far away from home; surely someone will miss and mourn him! His papers, where are they? They must be saved and examined."

"So you also are English, Sister. It is lucky for the unfortunate man; for in extreme cases like this, should men speak at all, it is almost certain to be in their own tongue. However, let us work at once and seriously, for I am told that he met his death in the execution of a bold deed; and it shall not be said that France was slow or forgot to repay a generous act."

"Bold, daring, and brave, of course he was; that goes without the saying! Was he not English?" thought Sister Marguerite, and a flash of patriotic pride lit up her face, as she remembered how unnumbered were the famous deeds of heroism recounted in history of her own dear countrymen.

Stepping once again she loosened yet more the clothing around the sufferer's throat, feeling gently about his neck and chest in the hope of discovering some cross, scapular, or medal, which would entitle her to call to the sick man's aid the kind old Abbé Marlier. But search as she would no object of piety or value could she discover, nor any clue to his identity. One waistcoat pocket contained two golden English coins, and a little change in silver; but that threw no light upon the man's identity. His linen was fine, so likewise was the cloth of his suit; but they bore neither mark nor initials. Hat he had none; doubtless it had fallen off in the fight.

Still under the effect of a strong opiate, Manfred groaned and breathed heavily. Once, as he sighed, his lips moved, as though he were endeavoring to frame a sentence, but Sister Marguerite only caught the word "water."

"There is no time to prolong the search further, Sister; you must go into it more fully afterwards. At present render me all the assistance in your power, for this is a terrible case." So saying, Dr. Arno speedily made his preparations, and with the help of the Sisters cleverly, if roughly, severed the mangled limb and bound up the stump. The leg was tended as best it could be for the time being, in accordance with the medical man's present opinion.

It was from scenes such as these that the gay Beatrice de Woodville would have turned away in sickening disgust; but Sister Marguerite braced herself to face and aid it to the utmost of her power. "For the love of Thee alone, my God, will I tend and nurse this poor stranger," she prayed; "and if he must die, let him go to Chæa with the full knowledge and trust in Thy love and mercy. Thou hast sent him somewhat strangely to my care; give me

strength and grace to aid him for Thee."

When the operation was over, the doctor could not but admire the silence, method, and dexterity with which the Sisters cleared away all trace of it. Being a kindly man, he even aided them in their labors, feeling a great admiration and pity for the bright-faced English Sister, whose hacking cough was such a constant trial to her.

Soon the small room assumed a more cleanly, peaceful appearance. The balmy air, penetrating through the open casement window, pervaded the apartment, chasing away the former stuffy atmosphere, and fanning with grateful coolness the fevered cheek of the silent sufferer. All was still save for the heavy breathing of Manfred when Sister Marguerite resumed her search amongst the patient's pockets. No letter or pocket-book was to be found; nothing that could convey the smallest clue as to the man's identity, or tell from whence he came or whither bound. It seemed as though the man had purposely left them all behind in order to perplex them. The handsome gold English lever watch, which Dr. Arno was even now examining, had once had a crest engraved upon the back of it, but rough usage had almost entirely defaced the tracing, and try as he would he was unable to decipher it.

"Ah, here is something," cried Sister Marguerite, holding up to view a beautiful mother-of-pearl cigarette-case, mounted with silver—here in this corner are the letters H. M."

"Even they do not advance us very much," said the doctor, smiling. "Try again, Sister."

"Now I have found a gold match-box, Doctor; and here are the two letters again. But stay; there are three letters here; they are E. T. L. Rapidly Sister Marguerite had turned to the other side of the almost effaced crest. There has been a coronet, I think; but I cannot tell what else; the motto is still readable. It is, 'Dum spiro spero.' Poor man, that is very nice."

"I think the wisest thing to be done is to collect all these little valuables, and placing them somewhere in safety, to wait until the poor man recovers consciousness sufficiently to be able to tell us more of himself."

"You are right, Doctor," said Ma Soeur, as she assisted Sister Marguerite in folding whatever clothes were not so much damaged as to be utterly valueless; and having placed them and the aforesaid treasures carefully in a drawer, she continued: "Sister Marguerite must watch patiently for the first glimmering of consciousness, and after questioning the poor man cautiously, must note carefully his answers."

"Can either of you remain the night with him?" inquired the doctor. "No, it is against our rules to do so. But we know of a kind woman and her husband who would, no doubt, share the night watch together. If they are unable to assist us, I may, perhaps, secure the aid of a Sister of Bon Secour; many of them understand English well," said Ma Soeur. "And Sister Marguerite shall be here early and late."

"I feel particularly interested in the man," said the doctor, as he stood eying his patient with kindly, critical eyes. "There is something about him which bespeaks him to be of gentle birth. 'These hands,' he continued, taking up one of Manfred's listless ones from the coverlet, "never worked for their bread, Sister. Observe how soft and delicate they are, yet how beautifully formed for strength and power. Poor Englishman! It will be a terrible awakening for you! Remain near him, Sister Marguerite, and watch carefully for the first sign of returning reason. In fact, do not leave him until I return, for I shall pass the night here. Besides, I understand a little English, which may be of service at present. Who knows," mused the doctor, "but that his friends may be wealthy; they may also be most grateful for my care. Yes, I will certainly make it my business to tend him to the utmost of my ability. I only wish the man may live!"

TO BE CONTINUED

THE THREE SMILES OF AMERICA

By Rene Bazin

The summer of 1919 was indeed a beautiful season in our province. For the first time in four years, the wheat of the harvest had not been grown by women, but by the men who had returned from the war. The farms without doubt were short of hands; and I believe that all the good fingers had given their lives for France, for I heard no more at evening, when the cattle returned to their shelter, the voice of that young herdsman, clothed in a ragged blue blouse, who sang beneath the stars, sweet snatches of lonely airs; the while he found a ready listener in the person of a girlish little housekeeper, who was at the time busy preparing the evening meal in some distant house. Neither he nor any other mingled a human note with the last song of the marls which from its perch in the low shrub to which it has penetrated, sends a warning note to the other birds, the pinpoints still at work in the growing darkness, to the warbler swinging on a barred bough, to the squalling finches, that it is time to shut their eyes, to put their heads under their wings and to grip fast their roost with the hard little tendons of their tiny feet. I had a

poignant feeling that much of the old joy of living had left the country. For days at a time it rained but seldom. The sun traveled in a translucent sky, and the earth's sap, at the end of its strength, still nourished so many green leaves and so many flowers, that one hardly noticed that the season was already declining.

Now, one day, that fine summer, we were visited by Mme. de Moure and her daughter, neighborly people, who lived some ten miles away. They arrived, as usual, drawn by a cushioned basket cart, drawn by a very lively, tawny, fiery-eyed pony, driven by Suzanne. I still recall the skilful turn it took to swing the carriage to our doorstep. The girl's hand was as firm as that of a man, but infinitely more supple. And I recall, too, the merry peal of laughter with which she greeted us on stopping and alighting.

"Good morning, how is everything at Clair-Louis?"

"So so. How are things at Ville-aux-Genets?"

"Behind her advanced her mother, tall and beautiful as the waning summer. Mme. de Moure shook hands and was too well bred not to smile a little out of courtesy; but there was a difference of more than twenty-five years between that melancholy smile and Suzanne's girlish laughter. All during the visit, I noticed the difference in mood between the girl and the mother. When I mentioned Ville-aux-Genets, so dear to both of them, I saw Suzanne turn pale, while her mother looked at her reproachfully though tenderly, as if to say: "Ungrateful girl, why do you want to go away from it and leave me all alone? I saw the change of expression on your countenance, but I know your heart is loyal and stubborn like mine, and will not change, no matter what it may suffer."

Thereupon, she arose to take leave of us. The pony was pawing the ground impatiently. The ladies were no sooner seated in the carriage, than she started off in a long stride under the tall elm trees, and for a few seconds we had a vision of flying wheels, of waving veils and of gleams of light on the flanks of the horse.

We remained standing near the clump of rhododendrons, and instinctively followed the world-wide custom of appraising separated guests.

"What a resolute girl Suzanne is! So light withal, so robust!"

"So fresh, and so cheerful. She could circle the globe in fifty days and return as fresh as you have just seen her. But, who will her husband be?"

"He is already chosen."

"Really?"

"I am sure of it. Her mother has even now a look of sadness as if she feels that she is held on shore, while Suzanne sails merrily away."

I did not think I was so near the truth. A few days after that visit, the fanatics of Ville-aux-Genets began thrashing the new wheat, and in the farmyard occurred a scene which moved the hearts of all—like of old men, and of youngsters quick to express their judgment, and above all, of women who gossip so much while doing their housework.

Going up the wide sandy valley of the river Loire which has seen so much history, and passing the city of Nantes, if you turn some leagues to the north, you will first traverse a wooded country where a copse alternates with fields surrounded by tall oak trees; then, you will enter a brighter and more fertile region where fruit trees abound, and where the soil marvelously animates and nourishes every kind of grain received in its bosom—wheat, oats, millet, hemp, and, frequently, real sages or carnation which bloom around the houses from May till October, and voice their Alleluias as long as the sun shines mildly down.

It is there that a seventeenth century nobleman, a man of taste and quiet habits, had built, in white stone, a one-story chateau with two projecting wings and an arched roof. Away to the east was a broad meadow, where cattle were grazing, whilst upon the western slope rose a forest of old oak trees and beeches, crisscrossed by avenues where light and shadow intermingled. Mme. de Moure had marked this estate, including six important farms, one of which with its living, horses, barns, and stables, three hundred yards from the chateau, formed a sort of village under the popular trees.

In such places when the owner belongs to an old family and has won the love of the people, there still survives more than one old custom. Thus, one hot afternoon, when the thrashing machine was bumping, the farmer's wife came to Mme. de Moure in her working clothes, and with her hair powdered with the wheat chaff. She entered the vestibule where the lady was knitting woolen stockings to present to her godchildren in the fall.

"Now, Madame, won't you please come and help us?" she said smiling. "We have one more sheaf to thresh, but it is so very heavy that our men cannot lift it."

The lady, who had heard at thrashing time the same request in the same words since her early girlhood, chattered a few remarks with the farmer's wife. Then she directed the footman to take some bottles of white wine to the thrashing floor where the work was nearly finished, and calling Suzanne, started toward the farm.

When she reached the place crowded with workmen, bare headed, in shirt sleeves, and with faces covered with sweat and dust, a fine

looking boy, the farmer's oldest son, who had served in a regiment of cuirassiers, handed the young girl his pitch fork, the tone of his voice showing how deep-rooted was the friendship existing between the farmers and the de Moure family.

"There, Miss, that's the last sheaf. I tried to lift it up, but I didn't succeed! you'll know better how to do it."

Peels of laughter and words of approbation came from the thrashers who had formed a semi-circle around the machine, which was growling, racing idly, waiting to devour the ears of wheat and to cut the straw. Suzanne came forward deliberately with a light of satisfaction in her eyes; pitched her fork into the heavy sheaf near the string, braced her arms and back, lifting it above her head, over which it hung like a parasol, and carried it over to the two men who were feeding the machine. They seized it quickly and in an instant, the loosened stems were sent sliding between the rolling cylinders which were revolving at a mad speed.

When she turned, the girl saw on the ground, where she had pitched the sheaf a big bouquet of ages, gilly flowers and other delicate blossoms, which had been put there in accordance with the old custom. She took it up waved her thanks amidst hearty applause and tripped lightly around, serving the "vin d'honneur." How many ladies of Ville-aux-Genets before her had thus presided over similar harvest feasts!

As she came to fill the farmer's glass, however, the youngest son, a tall lad of fifteen whom she had taught catechism and music, in company with other choir boys, across suddenly—for he had sat down out of fatigue—and stood by his father.

"What is the matter with you, Stephen? Did you hurt yourself?"

"Miss, they say—"

"I can't bear to think of it. They say that you're going to get married."

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