

A SISTER'S SACRIFICE.



THREE women were watching an approaching storm from their cosy sitting-room in the castle of Theix. When clear, one could view from its windows the whole bay of Morbihan, on the south side of Bretagne. But now the sky was covered with lowering clouds, and the shades of evening were falling fast. The sultry atmosphere thickened, big rain-drops came splashing down, and forked lightning danced on the white-crested waves. The storm that had been brooding all the afternoon broke in real earnest.

One of the watchers, a young girl, abandoned her post of observation, exclaiming,—

"What a terrible storm we shall have!"

Deep sighs escaped the lips of the other two, the elder one saying,—

"Where is our poor Paul to-night?"

She was interrupted by an old servant bringing in lights. They sat down at the table, each one seemingly busying herself with some needle-work. One of the girls, looking up from her work, saw that her mother's eyes were filled with tears. She flung her arms around her neck, saying,—

"Be comforted; Paul will return. Fate will not be so cruel as to rob you of your son, Louise of her betrothed, and me of my brother. Why should we be alarmed? So far we have received no bad news."

"'Tis the silence, Marie, that is so terrible. For three long months we have heard nothing, absolutely nothing. This suspense could drive one mad. O God, where is my darling son! Is he sick, wounded, imprisoned—"

She did not dare to pronounce the word that would destroy all her hopes.

Marie's thoughts flew to the bloody battle-fields, where the defenders of the kingdom were fighting against the victorious republic; to the gloomy prisons, where they awaited, dauntlessly, their death; to the forests and ravines, where they hid from their pursuers. There might be her brother, the last descendant of a brave and noble family, the only hope of her aged mother.

Madame de Turgis, who was living with her daughter and niece in the castle of Theix, had miraculously escaped from the persecution which had befallen at that time not only the nobles, but all that were loyal to their king. Until now, she had lived in peace, although her son had taken an active part in these struggles. But what alarming fears, what anxiety for the absent one, proscribed and pursued!

But these fears had to be hidden, for in those days no one could be trusted. Friends and servants were suspected; all might become traitors. Only among themselves could they unburden their hearts, bewail the state of their country, speak of the atrocities committed, and hope for the day when all this would be ended. Madame de Turgis possessed one true friend. It was their old servant, Henri. He loved his mistress dearly, and would have sacrificed his life for her. He was the only one they trusted.

The clock struck nine. Henri appeared, and set the table for their simple supper. While he was thus employed, Madame de Turgis asked him if he had heard any news.

"None, my lady. Yves, the fisherman, has told me that the fate of those poor prisoners has not yet been decided."

"The poor soldiers! What will be their fate?" asked Louise.

"They undoubtedly will be murdered," replied Marie. "If only Paul—"

She stopped abruptly. Did he accompany Charette, who still was fighting victoriously; had he joined Sombreuil; or had he succeeded in leaving France? Vain questions! They knew nothing, and dared not ask.

Henri had just served soup when the bell rang. The joyous barking of a dog was heard.

"That is my brother!" cried Marie, in glad surprise.

Henri disappeared with lights. Deep silence reigned, only interrupted now and then by a peal of thunder. A quick step was heard, the door opened, and a young man stepped into the room, exclaiming,—

"At last! at last!"

He clasped his mother and sister to his