

THE RECRUIT

BY HENDRICK CONSCIENCE

(CONTINUED.)
CHAPTER VII.

Late in the afternoon, Trien, accompanied by her friend, might be seen wandering over the heath on the farther side of Casterlee, where they had crossed the Nethe. Both were silent and much depressed, but neither had courage to disclose to the other what each feared; on the contrary, the few words which they exchanged were attempts to appear as cheerful as possible. Notwithstanding this, however, they felt that they had been cherishing a delusion, and their hearts were filled with sorrow. Since they had resumed their journey, Trien had already washed the soldier's eyes five or six times; she did not pass a brook, indeed, without trying whether it possessed the wonder-working power of the stream on the heath.

Alas! her loving solicitude became for herself and for the unhappy John a source of disappointment and despair.

Whether it was that the soldier had deceived himself when he imagined that he saw Trien, or that the cold water and the rubbing had increased the inflammation, he saw no longer, however much he strained his eyes to discern the outline of his companion's form. He could not even bear the light, and closed his eyes with intense pain whenever Trien took the shade from his head. Accordingly, the terrible conviction took possession of both their minds, that they had been the victims of a vain delusion, and that the blindness was total and incurable. A last ray of hope, to be sure, in the form of a happy uncertainty, still lived in the bottom of their hearts; but it was able to light up their quiet despair with only a passing gleam, which by contrast with the sad reality served only to make their sorrow greater.

They were sad and spiritless also on another account. Since the morning they had walked for eight hours, and were excessively fatigued; the soldier, indeed, felt quite exhausted and powerless, and often stumbled as he crept along. Unconsciously and heedlessly he tottered on behind Trien, still holding the stick, with his body bent forward and his limbs relaxed and lifeless. His feet were blistered, and had he not almost lost consciousness he would have felt warm drops of blood oozing out of his right heel into his shoe. Trien was no less weary; but she pushed steadily on notwithstanding, without saying anything—even without looking back at her companion. The poor girl was too dejected to speak. Her heart was now bereft of consolation; her hopes had vanished, her glimpse of happiness faded away. An inexpressible joy had almost deprived her of her senses as she built up for herself and family such a glorious future, and now when undecieved her grief was all the deeper; and courageous as she was, she felt quite overpowered, and bent like a slave under the yoke of intense depression. What could she say to her friend to raise him out of his despair? Should she speak of his eyes and of hope, and belie her own feelings? She could not do so; it would have fallen on her own heart as well as his like bitter mockery. She therefore walked on silently and heavily, sunk in melancholy thoughts, and scarcely conscious of her own condition.

When they had walked fully half an hour in this way, the soldier suddenly stopped, and breathing with difficulty, said: "Stop, Trien! I am able for no more."

"I am quite worn out too," replied the girl without looking

round; "we shall rest a little, and then sleep to-night in the village yonder."

"O stop, then!" said the blind man imploringly.

"We are quite near a country-house; only twenty steps farther, John, and we come to a beautiful beech-grove, and there we can sit in the shade."

"For Heaven's sake go quickly, Trien!"

Taking him by the hand she led him to the grove, and seated him with his back towards it. The young man fell like lead upon the grass, and sat with his head drooping on his breast.

Behind the spot where the soldier and his companion were seated, and in the centre of the beech-grove, there was an arbour. In it a map sat reading. He must have been very old, for deep wrinkles furrowed his countenance, and the scanty hairs which like a crown adorned his head were as white as snow. A frock-coat buttoned to the throat and a honorary badge on his breast gave him the appearance of a retired officer.

When he heard the noise the two travellers made behind him, he turned, and saw through the foliage of the arbour a soldier and a peasant girl with a knapsack on her back. The sight of this surprised him at first; but he thought that it must be a sister who was conducting her brother home, and was carrying his burden out of affection. He wondered, nevertheless, at this simple token of love, and smiled with friendly sympathy as he looked at them while resting on the bank.

Trien, meanwhile, had sat down beside the blind man, and said to him—"John, you are so quiet and melancholy! What is the matter with you? You are weary— is that the reason? Your fatigue will soon pass away, and you will feel quite fresh again."

As she received no answer, she continued in the encouraging tone:

"Keep up your spirits, John, and think that we shall be home tomorrow. It has taken twenty hours to come from Venloo hither: three hours more, and we are in our own village. If we rise early tomorrow, we can get over it all just like a pleasure-walk. We have still great cause to be contented, for it is really a great piece of good fortune that I was permitted to bring you home from among the soldiers. And as to the rest, I shall take care that you do not have much to vex you in the course of your life, John dear.—Why do you not speak?"

The young man made an effort to draw breath, and then said with a sigh:

"My heart beats, and my eyes burn like fire; let me rest, Trien." Some minutes passed in unbroken silence; gradually Trien began to think that it was grief more than fatigue which so oppressed her companion. So, with a noble effort, she repressed her own sorrow in order to pour consolation into the blind man's heart, and said cheerfully:

"But John, you are still certain that you saw me? That makes me believe that there must still be life in your left eye, although you are quite blind again in the meantime; that must just be caused by the heat, which has inflamed your eyes more than usual. Only have patience till we are at home; we shall then sell some new grain, and fetch the doctor from Wynegham. There is no fear of his being able to cure you, for he has worked many wonders, even on men who for several days were thought to be dead. Only think, John, to-morrow we shall see your mother, and grandfather, and Pawken, and then I shall lead you round all your friends to see how they are. Then, when you have rested well, your eyes will not

pain you any longer, and there is no doubt but you will see a little again. And then we shall pray together under the linden-tree, in order to thank our dear Lady for her compassion; for you may be quite sure, John, that she has heard me, and will—What is that? I see blood on your stockings! And you have said nothing about it, poor fellow!"

She hastily drew off his shoe and stocking, and wiped away the blood with her white neckerchief. She was then just about to tell him that the bruise was not serious; but scarcely had she raised her eyes to his face, when she trembled like a leaf, saying at the same time in an anxious tone:

"John dear, what is the matter with you? You are so pale."

The young man sighed almost inaudibly:

"I cannot tell; my heart is breaking. I feel as if I were dying."

He trembled violently, his head sank powerless on his shoulder, and his arms fell lifeless by his side.

Trien screamed with anxiety and alarm, while she laid her hands on his pallid cheeks, and endeavoured to raise him up, calling out in despair:

"John! John! Poor, poor fellow! he is dead! Water! water! Help! help!"

With these words she sprang up, looked wildly round her, and ran from one side to another to see if she could find water. She then suddenly perceived an open gate, which was the entrance to a gentleman's house; and uttering a cry of joy, she ran towards it at full speed to beg assistance. As she approached the house by the winding path of the flower-garden, she saw two men come out of it and approach her. The one was an old gentleman with snow-white hair, and a countenance commanding respect; the other, though likewise advanced in years, seemed still to retain the strength of youth. A broad scar, like a sabretune, ran down the face of the latter from the brow over the mouth and chin, giving a severe character to his features. He carried a jug, two bottles, and some linen. He must have been the old gentleman's servant, for he followed him at a little distance without speaking.

"Oh, sir," said Trien in a tone of despair, "give me some water or vinegar! yonder, behind the grove, lies a poor blind lad, in a faint. For God's sake, sir, have pity! do a good work and go with me! Oh, if you would be so good!"

The old man smiled compassionately, and taking the maiden's hand, replied calmly:

"Be calm, my child; it is nothing. We are on the way to cure him. You need not be anxious, it is nothing but an ordinary faint. Your companion has exerted himself too much. Come along, and dry your tears."

Trien scarcely understood what he said; it seemed to her so wonderful that help should be at hand, when no one had told at the gentleman's house what had occurred, that in her simplicity she thought that she again discovered the kind interposition of the Virgin Mother. With mingled joy and surprise she gazed at the old man's friendly and consolatory face, which smiled on her protectingly.

"You are a brave girl, my daughter, to show such affection for a poor soldier," he said, as he walked hastily on. "From what place have you come with him? From Venloo?"

"Yes, from Venloo, sir; it is very far from this."

"And have you carried that knapsack on your back all the way?"

"Ah, sir," she sighed, quietly weeping, "the poor fellow is blind

and cannot walk easily, not being able to see the road. We were in haste, and I am strong and healthy—O God! see, there he lies, as pale as death!"

A fresh torrent of tears burst from her eyes, and folding her hands as if in prayer, she exclaimed in an anxious and beseeching tone—"He will not die yet, sir!"

With a smile the old man shook his head, and approached the lad. The servant set the bottles on the ground, and without waiting for an order, raised the soldier's head with one hand while he untied his neckcloth with the other and put aside the clothes which covered his breast. Meanwhile, the old gentleman bathed the sick man's face and hands. Trien knelt beside them, and beheld with tears the care and kindness with which the two strangers treated her unhappy friend.

To be continued.

His Last Dance

BY GROVER CLEVELAND MACLIN

"Hey, Bill, wait a minute. Are you going to the dance to-night?"

"Hello, Larry, glad to see you. Come and walk as far as the viaduct and we'll discuss the dance."

So arm in arm the two chums, Billy Carr and Larry Hayes, jaunted down the street, exulting in the bracing air, which was chilled with the first breath of autumn.

"Oh, come on and go, Bill. Why, you haven't been to a dance for a year or so, and you used to be crazy about dancing. What's got the matter with you, old scout? Has dancing lost its charm since Irene moved away?" Larry teased.

"Boy, if my brow is furrowed with wrinkles, it certainly isn't from worry over Irene. In truth, I'm still as fond of dancing as ever, for you know that it is the only means of giving expression to the music in me. And I don't think anybody was ever more chuck full of music than I am. But," he continued, the laugh fading from his lips to be superseded by a characteristic pucker around his eyes, "you know, Larry, I became a member of the Third Order of St. Francis something over a year ago, and it's that which makes the difference."

"But, good night, Bill, that don't make any difference about dancing, does it? As you know, I try to be a pretty decent Catholic, too, but"

"Let me explain. In the broad sense, members of the Third Order are not more limited in their social activities than are Catholics who do not belong to the Order, but in a particular sense Tertiaries are very much bound. We agree to be modest in our wearing apparel, and to conduct ourselves in a manner befitting children of St. Francis. Perhaps every member of the Church should do this in order truly to conform to the spirit of our faith, but St. Francis conceived this Order for laymen to counteract the very laxity that is countenanced even by some of our most sincere Catholics. In the past, I've often wanted to take part in certain affairs; but, in the light of my new obligations, I am unable to reconcile some of the present-day pleasures with the spirit of the Third Order, and this is the reason I've not been attending dances during the past year. Take this gathering, for instance, you expect to attend to-night: all the girls will be decked in the most stunning creations obtainable, and the modern styles in feminine apparel are not remarkable for their modesty, you know as well as I. And when it comes to the modern dance—well, honestly, I've about reached the place where I can't understand how any sincere Catholic can attend dances as they are 'bunny-hugged' to-day."

"But, Bill, Larry championed, "we would be forbidden to attend

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