

CAZOTTE'S PROPHECY.

A Souvenir of the French Revolution.

TRANSLATED FOR THE CATHOLIC REGISTER.

It perhaps may not be uninteresting, during this present century year, to recall some incidents connected with the "Prophecy of Cazotte," which prophecy, confirmed by La Harpe, who was present when it was uttered, seems entitled to our belief.

Cazotte, after an honest but somewhat adventurous life, fixed his abode in France, visiting frequently Paris, where his learning and his bright mind secured him admission to the society of philosophers and the learned of that day.

Arrested August 10th, 1792, with his daughter, Elizabeth, who was his secretary, on the charge of Royalism, he was brought to the prison of Abbaye. He was on the point of being killed during the massacre of the second and third of September, when the heroic Elizabeth threw herself before his would-be assassins, crying out, whilst she protected the old man with her own body: "You will reach my father's heart only when you have pierced mine." Before this touching picture the assassins lowered their swords; Cazotte and his daughter were carried in triumph to their own home, but they were not left there long. A second time Cazotte was arrested and condemned to death after an examination that lasted thirty hours, during which his courage never failed him one single instant.

The sentence was executed 26th September, 1792. Cazotte found means to obtain converse with a priest for an hour before his execution. Having asked for pen and paper, he wrote these words: "My wife, my children, weep not for me; do not forget me; but remember above all never to offend God." He gave this message to the executioner along with a lock of his hair, begging him to give it to his daughter as a pledge of his love. When on the scaffold, before baring his head for the executioner, he turned towards the crowd and exclaimed in a loud voice: "I die as I lived, faithful to my God and to my King."

The following is the strange conversation that he had with his friends in the beginning of the year 1788. It was called "The Prophecy of Cazotte," and was published by La Harpe himself, who was among the listeners.

It seems only yesterday, and yet it was in the beginning of 1788, when we were dining with one of our fellow-members of the Academy, a great lord as well as man of parts. The company was numerous and of every rank—courtiers, lawyers, academicians, etc. We had dined sumptuously as usual. At desert the wines of Malvoisie and Constance added to the gaiety of the guests, and greater freedom of speech was indulged in. Champfort had read to us from his impious and free-thinking stories. Then followed a storm of witticisms at the expense of religion. All praise was bestowed upon the revolution Voltaire had brought about, and it was agreed that it was his principal title to fame. "He has given tone to his century, and is read in the workroom as well as in the drawing-room." We concluded that the revolution would not be much longer delayed; that it was absolutely certain that superstition and fanaticism must give way before philosophy; that we could calculate the probable time for the coming event. And who of us then present would live to see the reign of reason. The older ones complained they could not hope to see that day; the younger ones rejoiced that the future promised it to them, and congratulated the Academy on having prepared the great work—on having been the home, the centre, the leader of free thought.

One only of the guests had taken no part in the rejoicings, but had jested

quietly over our fine enthusiasm. This was Cazotte, amiable and eccentric, but unfortunately infatuated with the dreams of the Visionaries. He begins to speak, and in the most serious tone. "Gentlemen," he says, "be satisfied you will all see this grand and sublime Revolution you desire so much. You know I am somewhat of a prophet; I say again, you will see it." They answer him: "Need one be a great sorcerer for that?" "Well, perhaps one would need to be a little more for what remains to be told you. Do you know what will happen during this revolution, what will happen to every one of you here, and what will be the immediate consequence of the revolution, its well-proven effect, its thoroughly recognized results?" "Ah! let us see," said Condorcet, with a sinister empty laugh, "a philosopher is not displeased to meet with a prophet." "You, M. de Condorcet, you will die stretched on the stone floor of a dungeon, you will die of poison that you will take to cheat the executioner—of poison which the happiness of these times will force upon you to always carry about you."

There is great astonishment at first. Then they remember that good Cazotte dreams often wide-awake, and they laugh heartily.

M. Cazotte, the story you tell is not pleasant. What has made you think of this dungeon, this poison, these executioners? What can all this have to do with philosophy and the reign of reason?" "Precisely what I am telling you; it is in the name of philosophy, of humanity, of liberty; it is under the reign of reason that you will end thus; and it will be indeed the reign of reason, for she will have her temples, and in all France there will be none but the temples of reason."

"By my faith," said Champfort, with a sarcastic smile, "you will not be one of the priests in those temples." "I hope not; but you, M. Champfort, who will be one of them, and a very worthy one, you will open your own veins in twenty-two places with a razor, and yet you will not die till some months after."

They look at one another and laugh again. "You, M. de Nicolai, on the scaffold; you, M. Bailly, on the scaffold; you, M. Vicq-d'Azur, will not open your veins yourself, but afterwards during an attack of the gout, you will have them opened six times in one day, and you will die in the night. You, M. de Malesherbes, on the scaffold."

"Ah! God be praised," said Roucher; it seems as if Monsieur has a grudge against the Academy; he has just made terrible havoc, and we thank heaven!" "You! you will die too on the scaffold." "Oh! it is a wage they cry out on every side; 'he sworn to exterminate all.'" "No, it is not I who have sworn it." "Then we will be conquered by the Turks and the Tartars?" "Again, not at all. I have told you; you will be governed then by philosophy alone, by reason alone. Those who will treat you so will be all philosophers. Every moment in their mouth they will have the same phrases you used an hour ago; they will repeat your maxims; they will cite, like you, the words of Diderot and of Pucelle."

They whisper to one another: "You see he plays the fool, though he spoke most seriously. Do you not see that he jests, and you know how the marvelous always is a part of his jokes." "Yes," replied Champfort: "but his marvelous is not pleasant; it savors too much of the gallows. And when will all this happen?" "Six years will not have passed till what I have told you will be accomplished."

"Here are many miracles (and this time I spoke myself), and you give me no place in them." "You will be a miracle at least quite as extraordinary, you will then be a Christian."

A great outcry. "Oh!" replied Champfort, "I am reassured; if we

perish only when La Harpe will have become a Christian, we are immortal." "As for that," then said the Duchess de Grammont, "we are most fortunate, we women, to have nothing to do with revolutions. When I say nothing, it is not that we did not always intrigue a little in them, but it is the privilege of our sex that no one punishes us." "Your sex, Madame, will not protect you this time; in vain will you have held yourselves aloof; you will be treated just as men will be, without any difference whatever."

But what is this you are telling us, Monsieur Cazotte? It is the end of the world you are preaching to us?" "I know nothing of that, but what I do know is that you, Madame la Duchesse, will be led to the scaffold, you and many other ladies with you, in a cart, with your hands tied behind your back." "Ah! I hope that in that event, I would have at least a carriage draped in black." "No, madame, greater ladies than you will go like you in a cart with their hands tied, like you." "Greater ladies! What! Princesses of the blood?" "Even yet greater ladies."

Here a perceptible movement runs through the assembled company, and the countenance of the host becomes clouded. It was felt that the jesting was being carried too far. Mme. de Grammont, to dispel the cloud, did not insist on any further answer, but contented herself with saying, in her lightest manner: "You will see he will not leave me even a confessor." "No, Madame; you will have none, neither you nor anyone; the last victim who will have one, as a favor, will be—"

He waits a moment. "Ah, well! who is then the happy mortal who will enjoy this prerogative?" "It is the only one that will be left him, and this favored one will be the King of France."

The host rose brusquely, and every one with him. He advanced towards M. Cazotte, and said with a most impressive air: "My dear M. Cazotte, there is a limit to this doleful jesting; you are carrying it too far, even compromising the society you are in, as well as yourself." Cazotte answered nothing, and was about to withdraw, when Mme. de Grammont, who wished to escape the serious atmosphere and resume the former gaiety of manner, approached towards him: "Monsieur the prophet, you tell us all our good fortune; you say nothing of your own." He was for some time silent, with his eyes cast down. "Madame, have you read the siege of Jerusalem as told in Josephus?" "Of course, who has not read that? But speak as if I had not read it." "Well, Madame, during that siege a man walked seven successive days around the walls in sight of the besiegers and the besieged crying out unceasingly in loud and sinister accents: 'Woe to Jerusalem,' and the seventh day he cried out: 'Woe to Jerusalem! Woe to myself! At that moment an enormous stone, thrown from one of the enemy's machines, struck him and shattered him to pieces.' And after this answer Cazotte bowed and departed.

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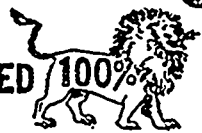
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