

SISTERS THREE

(Continued from Wednesday)

Of the priory now few traces remained, but of the great tower very many. Another smaller tower now reared its head, as though claiming lordship over all it over looked, and a great pile of buildings about and around it still went by the name of Gaston's Keep. But a considerable portion of these lay in ruins. Tradition said that after the Priory had been swept away in the days of the Tudors there had suffered wreck in the days of the Civil War and had never been restored. And the pre-had house of Lebreton did not date back more than three hundred years. Nevertheless it presided many of the features of an old-time baronial hall, though in abundance of air and light, and the rooms were lofty and sumptuously furnished with all manner of strange and costly prizes brought from all parts of the world.

For certain among the Lebretons of more recent times had been merchant princes and traders, and had had connection with the East India Co., in its palmy days. So that the gold had filled their coffers, and their historic house held treasures and splendours which made it a veritable museum of wonders. But the wealth which had flowed in upon the Lebretons did not seem to have made for happiness. The father of Gaston, two years now dead, had grown slowly and imperceptibly into the habits and traditions of a miser. The household staff had been reduced; many perfectly legitimate expenses had been cut down. He no longer suffered his wife to leave home for

a visit of pleasure to the metropolis. His only son had been sent to public school and university, and then for a trip around the world; but he was never adequately supplied with money. He never knew the sensation of pleasure which comes with the realization of being son and heir to a man of large means. Gaston always thought that his father must have heavy losses until he came into his heritage and knew that this was not so. Meanwhile the effect of his training and his conviction had given somewhat of a new turn to his nature; or perhaps there was some throw-back in his case in the direction of the sombre Breton strain from which his house had sprung. For he was not quite the twentieth-century young man in the pleasures which appealed to the companions of his school and college days seemed to have little or no interest for him.

His passion was for the soil on which he had been brought up, the house and the lands which bore his name. He was an adept and enthusiast over all kinds of sport, but he took his rod or his gun out alone. Horses and dogs were his friends and companions, but of human companionship he knew little. In that lonely sea-girt place there were no youths now of his own age or likes of tastes. Three old men were, or had been, his near neighbors, and by the action of his father a barrier had been raised up between him and them which he was too proud or too indifferent to seek to overthrow.

As he rode slowly onwards in the direction of his home two splendid bloodhounds topped the rise in his wake, following in his tracks. For a moment, as he reigned up on the summit of one of the many green hills and hounds presented a splendid picture of magnificent power and vitality etched against the glow of the sky behind. The dark, swarthy face, with strong, deeply-cut features and eyes black as night, gloomed ever as by dark thoughts, was at once handsome and forbidding, and tinged with a melancholy which often seems the heritage of Celtic people.

After pausing a while and gazing over the sea as though lost in meditation, Gaston woke out of his reverie, and putting his horse to a brisk trot, and occasionally allowing him to break into a hand-gallop, he quickly found himself on the downward trend, which eventually led him to the bridle-path by which he could most quickly reach his home. At one point he looked down upon the square bulk of the Keep, upon

which a shaft of westering sunlight fell, touching it with a radiance. House and gardens stood upon a great plateau, and behind was a solemn region of oak and hick wood, where lay the ruins which no inhabitant of the district willingly passed after sundown. Gaston himself, fearless as a lion in all other respects, had known many a thrill of fear when exploring these ruins in childhood; and if he admitted nothing of this experience now, it was not because he was quite a stranger to a sensation of creeping gooseflesh if ever his wanderings at night brought him near to that haunted place of shadows and the burial-place of the dead.

Tradition said that a white figure walked along the fallen stones at night, which might or might not be graves. And the legend had long held credence that, if a Lebreton met face to face a white woman who wrung her hands together and moaned and looked him in the eyes as she passed him by, this was his death-token and call. Within a twelve-month—probably before—the too would be dead. For he was not quite so sure as he would have liked to admit that he had seen this ghostly apparition in the ruins barely six weeks before his death. The woman had been shrouded as in grave clothes, but her eyes were alive, and the glare in them had frozen the marrow in his bones. From that moment a chill had seized him, and he had spent his days beside blazing fires, he had never been warm again. Gaston had reached home in hot haste, summoned by the imperative wire that found him in Italy. He had been in time to hear

his father's last charges—and these had been many. But only one hour before his death had he told of the "white woman" of the ancient legend who had "overlooked" him with eyes of fire—overlooked him to his death.

"There was a curse upon her lips, boy!" the dying man had said between laboured gasps. "I heard no words, but I knew the curse was upon me. It may follow you, Gaston—it may follow you. Beware of the ruins and the woman who walks in grave clothes! Beware of them at night-time or when the moon rides high! Remember the old legend of the house—He who sees must die!"

Often and often did these words ring in Gaston's ears, whether he rode along the breezy downs or sat beside his blazing fires within thick stone walls. He had known a shiver of cold in the hottest glow of summer sun, and since his father's death his face had been chilled by lines somewhat too deep and too stern for the years which his life had numbered.

When he reached the great courtyard of the Keep he gave up his horse to a servant who was in waiting for his return, and with his dogs at his heels he strode across the ringing flags and entered by a low-browed side door which admitted him to a small stone-paved lobby into which the doors of his own rooms opened—panelled rooms where now the shadows were gathering, for though without the pure pearly light of evening lay softly, shot overhead with golden

threads, within the strong thick stone walls of the great baronial house dusk fell early and lingered long.

Gaston only paused here to put down his cap and gloves and crop, and then passed onwards and out into a passage which led to the central hall, vaulted and vast, where a swinging lamp gave sufficiency of light to show the portraits of dead-and-gone ancestors, the gleam of armour adorning lay figures, the wide shallow steps of a mounting staircase, the carving of its hand-rail, and the gallery halfway up the panelled wall.

From this hall the young owner of this huge pile passed into a warm and lambent room, where beside the fire of coal and driftwood, which blazed collops of vivid blue and green, scarlet and gold, a mother waited for the coming of her son and welcomed him with shining eyes.

But for a few moments neither spoke. Gaston came forward and stood with his back to the blaze; his mother, her beautiful white hands lying idle in her lap, for she had laid aside her work at the sound of the well-known footsteps, leaned back in her chair and quietly looked at him, as though for this sight alone she lived.

A beautiful woman still was Madame Lebreton, as she was always called, for, though English-born, she had lived much of her life in France, and had been wooed and won there by the husband for whom she now wore the deep weeds of widowhood. Her hair was of a snowy whiteness. Her face though somewhat deeply lined, was very delicate in coloring and texture, and the great dark eyes which her son inherited looked forth from under brows delicately pencilled and beautifully arched. Her voice when she spoke was low and musical, with a touch of sadness in its tones.

"Well, my son, what news do you bring from the world, Rochaven? Have you been there to-day?"

"I have been there, and I have ridden through the woods, and I have given my orders. Then I took a gallop over the downs, and so came home."

"What orders, my son?"

His young face slightly hardened. "I have ordered the closing of the path again. We have had trouble enough over that foolish claim already. These girls they will know nothing of it. Their father was my father's friend. They will not be steeped in foolish local prejudice; in fact in all probability they will never have the good road which we improved. It is only a little farther, and so the path shall be stopped. I have given my orders accordingly. I hope to be quit of that nuisance once and for all."

Madame Lebreton was silent. Gaston flung a half-impatient glance in her direction.

"Mother, why don't you speak? Surely you appear, Gaston, because I do not approve—and you know it, my boy, for we have spoken often of this thing. Bad blood has followed this foolish feud for generations. Why begin it afresh? A right is a right."

"And I say it is no right! Well, mother, we will not discuss it. Knott has my orders, and they will be carried out. That is all I have to say about the matter."

Mrs. Lebreton sighed and held her peace.

(To be Continued)

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Owing to the roads now being higher than the crossing, an additional layer of cement has been laid on the crossings.

Mr. Gordon Peckham has rented part of Miss Chilcott's house on Maple Avenue.

Mrs. Jas. Rutherford is moving into her house on King street.

Miss Mary E. Peters, 66, widow of John Peters, of Millville, N.J., became the bride of James McNeil, 68, a Millvale contractor. The bride was given in marriage by her mother, Mrs. Jane Faemire, 99 years old.

James T. Wadell, the noted strike-breaker, went to New York from Chicago in a special train in answer to a call for his services from the New York traction companies. The cost of the trip was \$3,000.

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