

Choice Literature.

HOW THEY KEPT THE FAITH.

A TALE OF THE HUGUENOTS OF LANGUEDOC.

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued).

Once more the young Cevanol smiled.

"It is not to be expected you should recognize her as soon as I, monsieur. I needed but that one look into her eyes! Yet if I desired further proof, it is given me." He drew a small volume from his breast, and Henri instantly recognized the Testament he had seen Mademoiselle carry into church. He reached out his hand for it, and his friend quietly resigned it.

"I gave it to her the day we parted in Nismes, five years ago," said Eglantine's foster-brother.

Captain La Roche turned to the fly-leaf, and read, traced in a beautiful, clerkly hand:

"To my dear son, Rene Chevalier, from his father. June 1669."

And just below, in hasty boyish writing:

"Read it, Eglantine. I will think of you and pray for you every day."

And yet farther down, printed in the large, painstaking characters of a child, and blotted with a falling tear:

"I do try, Rene. But it is very hard to be good without you and my aunt Monique."

Henri closed the book and gave it back. His lips trembled slightly.

"I congratulate you on the possession of one treasure and the restoration of another, my good doctor. Pretty mademoiselle Eglantine was very much distressed at the loss of her book. Where did you find it?"

"Under the window, where she must have dropped it in descending. I hastened thither as soon as my work was done, in the hope of overtaking you and being of some assistance. How shall I ever thank you, monsieur, for your noble care of my betrothed?"

"Nonsense, Rene: do not let us go through that parade of gratitude again. I think we understand each other. What puzzles me is, why you did not come to her assistance yourself when you recognized her. Duty,—I see the word coming on your lips, and I know you of old. But had your foster-sister no stronger claim upon you than that frenzied mob? Is everything to be decided by the cold logic of conscience, and nothing by the warm law of the heart? Is one never to do as he wishes, unless one always wishes as he should?"

"I am sure one would never wish to do anything but what is right, M. Henri. If one could only always be sure what is right. Even a difficult duty becomes easy when one has come to know duty as the voice of God."

Captain La Roche lifted his hand imploringly.

"Spare me. To love one's duty: to wish always what is right? Such heights are too high for me, Rene, though I doubt not you find them easy climbing enough. You were always one of the good sort. I don't suppose you ever longed for the plum in another boy's pie, nor thought somebody's slice better buttered than your own."

"M. Henri gives me credit for a self-denial I had no call to exercise. I recognized him as well as my foster-sister and I knew well what my young sieur had undertaken to protect he would keep."

Once more Henri threw up his hand with a whimsical gesture of despair.

"A philosopher as well as a Demosthenes. *La grande passion* will never give you much trouble, Rene. But I hardly know whether mademoiselle is to be congratulated on so self-contained a husband. Have you not even a spark of curiosity as to her whereabouts at present?"

"She is in safety, or I would not have found M. Henri quietly seated by the roadside."

"Still the head, not the heart. *La Petite* would scarcely feel flattered if she heard you. Let me see if I cannot quicken that sluggish blood of yours. See you the cottage in the grove yonder? She is there at this moment, composing herself after the tumult, and awaiting the arrival of her aunt's coach from town. What! you do not fly? Are you marble, man? I need you no longer. You are free, I say!"

The surgeon did not move.

"My young sieur does need me," he said firmly. "I shall not leave you until I have seen you in safety to the door of your hotel. As for Eglantine, it is enough for to-day to be assured of her escape. To-morrow I will call upon her, as I have her grandfather's permission to do, at her aunt's residence. I understand M. Laval's temper too well to run the risk of offending him by what he might consider a clandestine interview."

Captain La Roche flung himself away from his companion with a contempt he no longer took pains to conceal.

"Scruples again, Rene? You will die for a scruple yet. I wonder, since your conscience is so tender, that you have been visited with no compunctions as to marrying her at all. Life under a Huguenot physician's roof will be a very different thing from what mademoiselle has of late been accustomed to, and what her birth and beauty might fairly lead her to expect. But I suppose your conscience has accommodated itself to that difficulty with a casuistry best known to itself. When is the wedding likely to come off? I must make the bride a handsome present, if only in memory of to-day's adventure."

He had roused Rene Chevalier at last. Two spots of vivid colour showed themselves through the mountaineer's bronzed skin.

"There is no talk of the wedding yet, monsieur. My choice of a profession displeased M. Laval long ago, and since our return he has looked coldly upon us. Probably he thinks with you, that his granddaughter might look higher, but he is bound by his promise to the dead not to force her inclinations. If Eglantine remains true to her early attachment, he has as good as promised my mother that he will not withhold his consent. If, however, she finds the pleasures of the world more attractive than a life of self-denial for the Master's sake, I have neither the power nor the wish to press my claim."

The listener rose wearily to his feet.

"Spoken right proudly, Rene. But if *La Petite* keeps the same heart she had five years ago, I fancy you have no need to fear the issue. *Parbleu*. How the pretty brows used to glower at me if I tried to steal you away for a day's hunting

or fishing. I believe she thought me her natural enemy. What are you picking up, my man—the favour? Bah, it is only a bit of ribbon, and I care not for it. But since you will be obstinate and see me back to town, let me have the help of your strong arm, *mon ami*. I feel strangely shaken."

CHAPTER VIII.

CATHEDRAL STEPS.

The sun was setting in a bank of splendour as the young men came around from the side of the church, and a stream of crimson light fell across the summer fields and touched the seal upon the door. Rene pointed to it.

"It is as I feared. The truth has been heard within these walls for the last time."

"Yet you could counsel the people to submit."

"Because I knew too well the uselessness of resistance—because I have been taught to believe that the 'weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual.' Be of good cheer my young sieur. A shut temple is but a quenched candle. The truth for which we stand is as the sun in the heaven."

"If matters go on as they have done to-day, that sun will soon be blotted out in such a night of tempest as many of us will not care to survive. Yes, I know what you would say, *mon ami*. The truth is as sure to rise again as the light to come in the east, but what will it matter to us, who have been crushed—trampled out of existence? Would to God the old days were back, when men kept the faith at the point of sword and battle-axe, and died, when die they must, like men, not sheep."

"There are those in our own day who have made the attempt, monsieur, and proved, alas, the literal fulfilment of one declaration, 'They that take the sword shall perish by the sword.' You have heard of the rising in the Vivarais?"

For a moment Henri La Roche forgot even the soft eyes of M. Laval's granddaughter.

"A rising among our people? Nay, Rene. I have heard nothing—absolutely nothing since I came back to France, but the last court-scandal and the newest bon mots. My cousin Claude cares for nothing else, and my father's letters have strangely miscarried. Quick. Tell me everything."

The Cevanol drew nearer to his friend.

"The attempt was unsuccessful, of course, monsieur. But I must make my story short, for it is scarce a safe theme for a wayside talk. The trouble began last summer at Toulouse, by the Parliament ordering the demolition of the principal Huguenot temples, on some imaginary ground of offence. The congregations appealed to the king, while the bishop of the diocese put in a request that instead of being destroyed, the temples might be turned over to him to be converted into churches. In time the answer came, denying both petitions. The total destruction of the Protestant places of worship was to be preferred, his majesty decided, as being more likely to break the spirit of the people. But the city rose *en masse* against the outrage, and two of the pastors gave notice to the Duc de Noailles that they would hold service the next Sabbath as usual. His answer was to arrest them, and confine them in his own house until after the day named, when he permitted them to leave the place unharmed. The insurrection among the people he put down with an iron hand. You are aware that he believes in strong measures, but I cannot understand, my young sieur, how nothing of all this reached you just across the Spanish border."

"Something of it did reach me, Rene, but so softened down as to appear only a town riot, quickly quelled."

Rene shook his head.

"The flame only smouldered, and has been secretly spreading ever since. It broke out in the Vivarais with the beginning of warm weather. The Duc was incensed, and the troops of St. Ruth were at once ordered into the province. At first their appearance somewhat intimidated our misguided brethren. A compromise was attempted, but the terms of the amnesty were too severe, and the people once more took up arms. You anticipate the result, M. Henri? They met an a wooded slope, near the little village of Pierre-Gourde. Both were French. There was valour and desperation on one side, and on the other valour and discipline. Our poor friends fought bravely, but they were completely routed. Through the forest many escaped; many more were slaughtered, thirteen were captured; twelve were hung, and their miserable survivor compelled to act as their executioner. Nor was that all, monsieur. It was not enough that the Huguenots of Languedoc had failed in their attempt to secure for themselves and their children the right to worship God according to their conscience: they must be taught a lesson. Ten of our largest temples have been demolished. The beautiful valley of the Rhone has been desolated. The last of the inhabitants have been hunted down, and hung without the show of a trial. Those who were opposed to the appeal to arms have perished with those who chose the sword. From one end of our sunny province to the other there is death and the shadow of death. Do you wonder that I counselled the people of La Rochelle, for the sake of their wives and little one, to pause and consider?"

Henri's eyes were flashing.

"What our people want is union, discipline; leaders who will organize and train them in the arts of war, and pastors who will send them into battle with the psalms of David, not with the Sermon on the Mount, ringing in their ears. I tell you, Rene, it is the faint-hearted policy of our ministers that weakens the hands of our people. Let them but feel that the vengeance of God is in every blow they strike, and there shall yet be lit on the hills of Languedoc a fire which the iron heel of De Noailles cannot trample out. Let but the Protestants of France stand together as one man, and the conflagration shall sweep on till it reaches the gate of Versailles itself. Then let the Huguenots of to-day dictate terms to their king, as their fathers have done to his fathers more than once."

"Softly, my young sieur. We are on the public road, and woods have tongues as well as ears. The consolidation you speak of is no longer possible. We are too widely separated, too closely watched, too heavily fettered. Since the last outbreak even the purchase of firearms has been prohibited to the Protestants of Languedoc."

Once more the soldier set his teeth hard.

"I shall see that the armoury of Beaumont is well supplied, and that the mountaineers know where to find carbines if they need them. Tell me, Rene, has the storm touched our own Cevennes? I vow if one of my father's people has been harmed I will throw up my commission to-morrow. I will no longer wear the uniform of a king who permits my servants to be slaughtered at home while I am fighting his battles abroad."

"Softly once more, M. Henri, I entreat you. The inhabitants of the southern Cevennes remain faithful to their king and have been left unmolested. Even the tiger-like instincts of the Intendant seemed chained, and he has sent missionaries instead of dragoons into our hills."

"It is the crouch of the beast before he springs, Rene."

But they had now reached the bridge leading into the city and the subject was dropped by tacit consent as they threaded their way through the dark, narrow lanes.

"I would have you in to sup with me," said Henri at the door of his hotel, "but I fear you would find my travelling companions little to your taste. My cousin Claude, and young abbe, a friend of his, are journeying with me."

His friend gave him a keen but respectful glance.

"M. Renau used not to be so great a favourite with you my young sieur."

"Nor is he now: but, to be frank with you, Rene, I am indebted to him for some small losses at play, and cannot afford to offend him before my next quarter's pay comes due. So when he and his friend proposed accompanying me down to Beaumont, I had no choice but to say them yea. Well, my mentor, I read disapproval in thine eye. What is it: cards or the abbe?"

A spirit of recklessness had seized Captain La Roche. He well knew how the practice of gaming was regarded by the stricter among his sect, and what a serious defection from his early training it would appear in the eyes of Godfrey Chevalier's son. But Rene showed no intention of playing the *role* assigned him. The hour he had already spent with his noble friend had better prepared him for the revelation than Henri dreamed, and he answered the defiant gaze with one of such affectionate regret, that Henri was instantly penitent.

"Nay, do not look as if I am altogether a castaway, *mon ami*; I only spoke of the cards to tease you. I am indebted to my kinsman for much kindness as well. We came to know each other better last winter, when he turned aside on his way from Madrid to spend a few weeks with me in camp; and as soon as he heard of my wound this spring, he sent down his own coach and leech to bring me up to his chateau on the coast, where the sea air has done wonders for me, I must admit. How long will you be in La Rochelle, Rene?"

"Until the arrival of the Southampton schooner, monsieur. I have sent over to England for the books and instruments I cannot purchase here."

"So your business here is not altogether of the heart? I might have known it. Well, Rene, I will see the hills and the mother, and Agnes before you then, for I propose to start for Beaumont to-morrow. What, the next day then, the first morning I can keep a steady hand on the bridle. Leave your address with me, and if I need a surgeon before I leave, I will send for you. Otherwise, I shall not of course encroach on *La Petite*'s prerogative upon your time."

He passed on wearily into the house, and Rene turned in the direction of the quiet inn where he had his lodgings. He had not gone more than a couple of rods, when a hand caught his sleeve.

"Pardon, monsieur; but you are the gentleman who spoke to us in the temple, and counselled us to submit."

By the fading light, Rene saw a shabbily-dressed, artisan at his side.

"I am," he said, "but this is not the place to discuss the matter, my friend."

"Come with me a moment, and I will show you an argument on the other side you cannot answer."

"Have you the watchword?"

"The Lord of Hosts is with us."

"The God of Jacob is our refuge; I follow my brother."

The man led the way round the corner, and up four steep flights of stairs, into a miserable attic. The light was brighter there than in the street below, and Rene could see that the only furniture of the room consisted of an empty loom in one corner, and a bed, on which sat an emaciated woman, with an infant on her lap. Two sallow, hollow-eyed children crouched on the hearthstone.

"There," said the man in a harsh, grating voice. "Master Barbeau would have no workmen who did not go to mass, and Aimee said I had better give up the work and trust in God, and this is what it has come to. No work for the last six weeks, and the children have not tasted food since the day before yesterday, and the babe is dying because the mother has stinted herself to make the food last as long as it has. Do you tell me a man is to sit calmly down and bear a wrong like that?"

The woman glanced up for a moment. She had a sweet, gentle face, though its expression was unutterably sad.

"I think the little one has brightened up since you went out," she said softly.

Rene stepped to the bed and laid his finger on the tiny wrist. Anything more emaciated than the little creature he had never seen. The skin was drawn tight over the fleshless brow; the little hands were like the talons of a bird. It was plainly a case of slow starvation. The pulse was just flickering.

"How long has he been like this?" he asked the mother.

"Only for a fortnight. We had a little put by, and we sold everything before we let the children want."

Rene tore a leaf from his note book, pencilled a few lines, and handed it to his new friend.

"It is the Sabbath, and we cannot purchase anything; but take it to the auberge at the foot of the street, and bring quickly what they send."

The man hesitated. "I did not ask alms," he said sullenly.

"Take it in Christ's name. The child may live if you make speed."

"Have we not asked God to help us? Do not let us refuse what He has sent," added the wife imploringly, and the father took the paper and went without another word.

Rene sat down on the edge of the bed. The mother's hollow eyes were fastened upon his face.

"Do you think it is possible to save him even yet," she asked.

"I hope so. We will do all for him that we can."

The slow tears began to trickle down her face.

"I knew I would not trust my God for nothing," she said brokenly. And Rene knew that the faith had been kept in that dreary attic through as sore a stress as in any dungeon of the Inquisition.

(To be continued.)

DR. ROBERT JEFFREY and Mr. A. B. MacEwan preached at the 151st anniversary of Greyfriars U. P. Church, Glasgow.