



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1864.

No. 28.

THE MAID OF SOLEURE.

A SWISS STORY.

The town of Soleure is situated amongst the mountains of Jura, in Switzerland, and along the fertile and romantic vale of the Balstal.

Hugo Von Bucheg was a venerable burgher and chief magistrate of the town of Soleure. He had long been regarded as the father of the council, and the people placed their reliance upon him in every time of danger.

She was yet at a tender age, when her father received a most earnest letter from his only sister, who resided in the valley of Lauterbrunn, entreating him to spare his daughter to her for a few months, representing the solitude of her own situation, and the want she had of youthful and cheerful society.

She found her aunt, who was a widow, sick and low spirited. It was a new situation for Ellen. Hitherto her life had demanded but few sacrifices; but now her duties began, and day and night she was seated by her bedside.

Nor were her associations less delightful at the hour of evening. It was to gaze upon the groups of healthy, happy children who ran to meet their parents returning from a day of labor—to see the affectionate wife preparing her little repast before the door, and all breathing the language of domestic affection.

She had gazed late on this scene one evening, and turned slowly away to pursue her path homewards. As she proceeded, she perceived she should be obliged to pass a herd of cattle which had no herdsman.

'You have saved my life,' she exclaimed. 'It was a fortunate shot,' said he, smiling. 'I don't often make as good a one, for I have been out all day, and have not brought down my game.'

'I must go to my aunt's,' said Ellen; 'but I shall need your assistance to get there.' He raised her up and gave her his arm, and they stood a minute to gaze on the powerful animal that lay stretched before them.

'This will make a feast in the valley,' said the youth; 'I will give a fete in honor of your safety; will you not witness it?' Ellen sighed to think how impossible it would be to gain her aunt's consent.

The impression upon the young girl's mind was deep and lasting. That night her aunt's illness greatly increased. A dispatch was sent for her father, but, before his arrival, his sister had breathed her last.

Two years passed away, and Ellen's recollections of the stranger were yet fresh in her mind. 'He saved my life,' said she; 'I hope I shall see him again.'

The attack had commenced, and Ellen stood gazing on the scene. She neither wept nor spoke, but was motionless as a marble statue. Her father cast one glance on her, and hastened where his duty called.

At length the tumult ceased. The thunder of the cannon was heard no longer, and the glad tidings were communicated from mouth to mouth that the enemy were repulsed, and had retreated to their encampment.

'We have,' said he, 'this time defended the walls of Soleure, and repulsed the enemy; but they will return to the attack with new vigor. Our resources are exhausted, our last ammunition expended, and the banner of Austria will soon wave over the ruins of this devoted place.'

Ellen sunk upon her knees, and pressed her father's hand to her lips; but he rushed from her into his room, and his sobs were audible.

When he came out, he gazed upon the bridge over which Ellen was to pass. Her slight figure was faintly visible, preceded by a flag of truce, and at length faded away.

Surrounded by the chiefs and nobles of his army, sat Duke Leopold, upon a seat adorned with gold and purple, which served him for a throne, deliberating with them upon the most effectual means of attacking Soleure.

Leopold looked exultingly upon his nobles. 'Has he sent his daughter to melt our purposes?' said he; 'does he think that youth and beauty can beguile our resolution? Let her enter, and we will show her that our blood is warmed only by glory.'

The duke looked earnestly at her, as did also his nobles with still greater curiosity. The effort of courage was over. Her eyes were cast down, and her whole frame trembled with emotion.

'My lord,' said the duke, addressing an old man who stood near, 'support this young woman to a seat.' He then unfolded the letter, and read:—

'Noble Prince—She who brings you this letter is my only child—all the treasure I possess in this world. Therefore, I trust her to you, relying on your honor. If the walls of Soleure fall, I shall be buried under their ruins;

but if you grant your protection to my daughter, I shall have no more anxiety for her. Give me some token that you grant my petition, and you will receive your reward from that Being who watches over the innocent, and who knows our hearts.'

A deep silence prevailed. At length the duke said, 'Upon the line of our encampment let the banner of the Austrian army be planted, crowned with a green garland. By this token the magistrate will know that he has not mistaken Leopold. Count, to you I confide this young maiden; I know your integrity; your grey hairs, bleached in the service of your country, are a pledge of security.'

As he spoke, his son entered the pavilion. He gazed at the scene before him in speechless astonishment. Ellen, too, seemed overcome by her situation. The deepest blushes suffused her face and neck, while her eyes were cast down and her heart beat with violence.

'You wonder, my young friend,' said the duke, 'how this fair creature came among us rough warriors; but you will be still more astonished when you learn that you must welcome her as your sister. She is the only daughter of the magistrate of Soleure.'

With what delight did the young count receive this command. A tent was immediately devoted to the protegee of the duke, and Ellen, once more alone, exclaimed—

'I have found him at length—the preserver of my life! whose image for three years has filled my waking and sleeping hours. Alas! how have I found him?—in arms against my father and my fellow-citizens! Already his name has inspired me with terror, for he has been first to the attack. What is my worthless life in comparison with the liberty and safety of my country. Oh! how have I wasted years in the expectation of meeting its preserver, and now I find him my bitterest foe!'

The darkness of night came on. The rain had descended for several days, and it now fell in torrents. Yet still the young count walked as sentinel around the tent which contained his father's charge.

A tide of passion rushed over his soul. Perhaps he read his influence in the depth of her emotion. He gazed upon the tent she occupied, and wished it were his duty to share it with her. 'But this can never be,' thought he. 'To-morrow, soon as the morning dawns, I must be first to prostrate the walls of her native place, and perhaps I am doomed to destroy her father.'

'Who calls?' she said. 'It is your guard, Count Papenheim,' said he. 'May I ask a conference with you? I have business to communicate respecting your father.'

Ellen made no reply, and, raising the curtain, he entered. The traces of tears were still on her face.

'I come,' said he, 'to inform you, that early to-morrow morning we attack the walls of Soleure. They must fall; all opposition will be useless. The lives that are dear to you may be sacrificed in their defence, and the blood of your citizens deluge the streets; but it is all in vain. I come, then, to beg you to use your influence with your father to spare this useless conflict.'

When the young man entered, Ellen had flung herself on a seat pale, trembling, and shrieking from his view; and as he proceeded, the color mantled in her cheeks, and when he had ended, she stood erect. 'Rely not too much on the weakness of our resources,' said she; 'it is for freedom we are contending, and every man feels that he is a host. Do you think that if my father would listen to terms he would have sent me, his only child, among his enemies for protection? No! he will shed the last drop of his blood for his country; and were I to propose capitulation, he would spurn my letter.'

'You will know him,' said she, by his white hair, by his firm, yet mild demeanor, by his resolution to die rather than yield. But, added she with dignity, 'every citizen resembles him in this determination; all are my fathers or brothers.'

It is well known with what overwhelming fury the Aar sometimes rushed along, destroying or laying waste the country, through which it passes. Six days of incessant rain had increased its waters to an alarming height, and besides deluging the country around, its waves rose alarmingly high, and spurned all restraint.

The danger every moment increased. Nothing could exceed the horror of the scene.—The darkness of the night making more terrible the groans and cries of those who waited on the shore the frightful death that was approaching. The Austrians, who had so lately threatened immediate destruction to the devoted town of Soleure, stood with their conquering banners in their hands. What mighty arm could now help them in their need! There was but one, and that seemed already raised for their destruction.

Now were the gates of Soleure thrown open, and the inhabitants rushed forth with desperate resolution. In a moment the wild and tempestuous Aar was covered with rafts and boats.—Fearless of the death that threatened, they pursued their object, and, by their flaming torches, discovered the victims who were sinking.—Every measure was used, and the greater part saved, conveyed to the town, and the gates immediately closed.

By the light of the torches, Leopold beheld what was going forward. He saw his army in the hands of the enemy, and not a possibility of preventing it.

'Shame! shame!' he cried, 'unheard of cruelty, to seize such a dreadful moment of public calamity to satisfy their murderous thirst for human life, to condemn their fellow beings to a second death! My brave soldiers and companions, would that you had sunk beneath the wave! It is frightful; it deserves revenge, and shall have it—bloody revenge. The walls of Soleure shall be laid prostrate, and every citizen pay with his life this horrible outrage; and as for

Dueberg—ha! well thought of,' cried he, starting up, 'have I not the weapon in my hand that will pierce his heart? The ungrateful wretch. Did I not receive his daughter with the tenderness of a parent? did I not give my word to protect her? His baseness exceeds human comprehension. Go,' he exclaimed to one of his attendants, 'bring the girl here. Her father shall bitterly repeat of his outrage.'

At this moment Ellen appeared. She was pale, and evidently suspected some new calamity awaited her. The father of the young count gazed sternly upon him.

'What means this unwonted excitement?' said he. 'Is it for mercy only you plead? I marked your confusion the first time you saw this young woman in the pavilion of the duke; what am I to believe?'

'My dearest father,' said the count, 'seizing his hand, 'it was not the first time that I had seen her. It was on a visit to my uncle in the valley of Lauterbrunn that I met her. I knew not her name, and though I have often thought of her, had given up all expectation of seeing her again. I see, my prince,' continued he, raising his eyes to the duke, 'that you bear my acknowledgment with scorn and suspicion. It is now too late for concealment. I love her, and kneeling, implore your mercy for her.'

The duke looked angry and perturbed, and cast gloomy and threatening glances around him. His nobles spoke not a word. All was still; even the storm was hushed, and the roaring of winds and waters had ceased. Ellen had supported herself to the utmost, but, overcome by terror and emotion, was sinking to the ground when the young count rushed forward to support her.

'Away!' exclaimed the duke, 'they shall both be put under guard.'

At this moment a page entered, and informed the duke that his army were returning with the magistrate at their head.

'Oh, my father,' exclaimed Ellen, springing forward.

The duke and his nobles gazed upon each other with astonishment.

'Let him enter,' exclaimed the duke, sternly. In a moment the venerable Bucheg appeared before him.

'My lord,' said he, 'I deliver to you the men whose lives we saved. All that their forlorn situation required we have administered. I come in the name of my fellow-citizens to restore them to you as fellow men. To-morrow it will be our hard lot to fight them as foes. But I have one condition to make. Twelve of our citizens have lost their lives in saving your army. Their families are left destitute. Should you enter our town as a conqueror, protect the widows, orphans, and aged parents of these victims to humanity. When Soleure is no longer free, I shall be no more; but I die willingly for my country, confiding in the protection you have promised to my daughter.'

Overcome by the magnanimity of Bucheg, the duke sprang from his seat, and threw his arms around him. 'My heart will cease to beat,' said he, 'and the blood to flow in my veins, when I enter Soleure as a conqueror. Witness, thou, its venerable magistrate, and you, ye nobles, hear me, when I declare to you, what I will repeat in the face of the world. In the name of the Emperor Frederick, I declare Soleure a free and independent State. To-morrow morning I will enter its walls, not as a conqueror, but as a guest and with your permission plant upon its walls my banner, that it may remain as a token of my friendship and gratitude to future generations, and towards the noble magistrate, the father and protector of his country's freedom.'

'But I have another duty to perform. Count Papenheim, my old and well-tried friend, will you grant a request from your Prince?'

A smile from the old man said more than words. 'My new found friend?' said he, addressing Bucheg, 'will you take this young man, whom I love as a son, for a son-in-law? If your daughter declines, I have nothing more to say.' The look of joy, of tenderness, of blushing modesty, that she cast on the young count, as with a soldier's impetuosity he threw his arms around her, spoke no aversion even to the unprepared father.

'Take her then,' said he, 'it is all mystery, but I trust in the goodness of that Being who has already changed our mourning to joy.'

From this time Soleure has been joined to the Helvetic League, and acknowledged as a free and independent State.

THE END.