

CONSUMPTION



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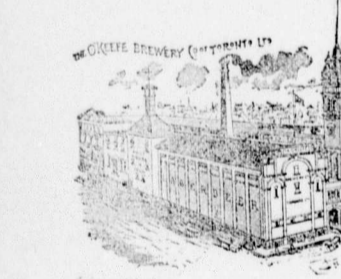
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ARMINEE.

BY CHRISTIAN REID CHAPTER XXXIII.

The next afternoon D'Antignac was alone, lying quietly on his couch after seeing the party of ladies start off for the convent...

"D'Antignac's pale, calm face brightened with pleasure, as it always did at sight of this nearest and dearest of all his friends..."

"Indeed!" said D'Antignac. He looked keenly at the other's face, as if to determine the character of the news before hearing it...

"I mean," answered the vicomte calmly, "that he had a very good case to carry into a court of law..."

"Why?" asked D'Antignac. "For the simple reason that it would have been impossible to surrender to him without a struggle..."

"I should have no alternative but to do so. My duty to those who are to come after me would demand it..."

"I understand your position," said D'Antignac. "You are bound for the sake of others to think of justice rather than of quixotic generosity..."

"Ah! common sense," said D'Antignac. "Well, that is a very good, a very useful, a highly respectable thing; but there is sometimes a sense which is uncommon that is higher and better..."

"Yes," he answered, "I think that she has a claim, though whether it can be legally supported is another question..."

"But on what ground do you think her likely to refuse?" "That I do not know. She has not spoken of the matter at all to me..."

"I hope much from his association with you. It was what he needed—contact with a man of ardent faith..."

"Neither can that be, prisoned here on this bed of pain, I am not likely to forget my friends in the sole thing that I can still do for them..."

"I have confidence in her, too," said the vicomte. "She inspires one with that feeling. Yet she is very young to decide on a matter of so much importance..."

"I desire only that she shall receive what is justly hers; and you will hardly advise her to reject it?" "I cannot tell until I hear her reasons for wishing to do so..."

"She is bound by all the rules of common sense," said D'Antignac. "Ah! common sense," said D'Antignac. "Well, that is a very good..."

"I see that you are firmly of the opinion that she will decline, and that you are also firmly disposed to uphold her in doing so..."

death is a blow from which she will never, I fear, entirely recover." "And yet it must be difficult for her not to feel the relief of the freedom which results from it..."

"I doubt if she feels it at all," said D'Antignac. "Her nature is too deeply affectionate. She was passionately attached to her father..."

"Nothing would have delighted him more. But how comes on our friend Egerton, who may well speak feelingly of the eloquence which nearly led him to death?"

"I will gladly do all that I can to this end," said the vicomte. "But let me remind you that to pray is better than to argue when the conversion of a soul is in question..."

"When Arminee heard of M. de Marigny's visit, and that he desired to see her, she evinced, somewhat to D'Antignac's surprise, the greatest reluctance to receiving him..."

"I cannot!" she said, shrinking at the mere suggestion. "It is impossible. Do not ask me!"

"It is not merely an impulsive feeling," she said. "She came and knelt down by the side of his couch..."

"I remember—to be prepared for reception into the Church." "She has never been out of the Church. But she was prepared to receive the sacraments—made a general confession and her first Communion..."

not Egerton who informed him, but myself." "Arminee had risen now from her kneeling position, and stood looking a little cold and reserved..."

"I do not think," she said, "that Mr. Egerton should have come even to you when I requested him to hold in violation a secret which he had received as a dying confidence..."

"I have every confidence in your judgment," said Arminee, with more of her usual manner. "You know that I cannot believe that he was right to disregard my wishes and bring upon me, and upon others, annoyance which I wished to avoid..."

"I can understand," he said quietly, "that there would be very little to urge you to claim what your father regarded as his right, if any struggle were necessary to do so..."

"What then?" she repeated. "Only this: that it would be a noble thing for the head of such a house to do, granting that he believed the claim to be just, but that I have no desire for the recognition or acknowledgment..."

"She looked at him with a glance which, even before she spoke, seemed to disarm his power of objection; it was at once so pathetic and so full of the meaning which greater knowledge of a subject gives..."

"My father's dying wish has a different significance to you and to me," she said sadly. "You regard it, no doubt, as dictated by solicitude for me, for my personal prosperity and happiness..."

"But M. de Marigny is entirely out of my life," she interrupted quickly. "There is no reason why I should ever see or speak to him..."

and of most vital importance to France? Ah! you do not know," she went on, clasping her hands with a familiar gesture, while her eyes shone on him full of radiance...

"It was impossible to doubt her earnestness or her resolution, and D'Antignac smiled a little—an inward and invisible smile, if the phrase may be allowed to describe the slight sense of amusement which does not always find outward expression..."

"I comprehend your position," he said after a moment. "You feel that you could not fulfil your father's wish by using anything which came to you through this claim in the way he desired; so, rather than use it in a way he did not desire, you prefer to leave it in hands where it is certain to be well employed..."

"I might do that," said D'Antignac, "and still he would be, by the nature of his position, constrained to insist on seeing you; and you have no reason that justifies you in refusing to see him..."

"I have the memory of my father's command and of my promise that I would never speak to M. de Marigny again..."

"My dear Arminee, your own good sense must tell you that you are not fettered by such a command or such a promise. Your father himself set both aside when he directed you to prosecute the claim for the inheritance of Marigny, since it would be impossible to refuse to hold communication with a man who has never injured you and who is the head of the family..."

"But I have told you that I have nothing, and can have nothing, to do with the family in one way or another," she said. "Therefore why should I be forced to do this thing?"

"The charity of our Blessed Lord and Master teaches and constrains the pastors of His Church to estimate, in their general regulations, the measure of fasting, abstinence, and other corporal self-denials, by the general conditions of those who are to be affected thereby..."

TO BE CONTINUED.

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