

The Cure Of St. Michel.

CHAPTER VI (Continued.)

In a seat near the prisoner's bench sat Marie, calm, pale, almost stern. Her father sat near her, and a little further on M. Pelletier. There was a long delay before the Judge arrived. He had overstepped that morning, and his brain having felt tired as the result of his rather jolly evening the night before, he had taken a long drive in the country to refresh himself. Finally with a big bundle and a great deal of pomp he arrived, and Marie's heart sank as she beheld his stern, cynical face, and small leering eyes.

A hush fell from the court. The prisoner was being led forth. How changed he was from the bright, healthy young man of a month before. His hollow, emaciated cheeks, his sallow complexion, his haggard eyes framed in great black circles, all made him look more like an old man than a boy. Marie could scarcely suppress a sob as she first saw him, and in turn, as his eyes rested upon her, he turned a shade paler and caught hold of a railing to steady himself. It was the first meeting of husband and wife in over a month but what a change that month had made in the life of both!

It is needless to detail the circumstantial evidence which was brought to bear against the prisoner. Nearly every one there felt he was innocent, yet no one could explain away the chain of events which had led to his arrest. He had been seen loitering around the house at a late hour, he had been seen running away in the direction of Fairfield's field. He had been captured there and found to have a sum of money on his person for which he could not account and which corresponded very nearly to the loss M. Bourdoin had sustained. Suddenly the court room became as still as death. Paul Thomas had been called as a witness. After talking the oath he was questioned.

"What do you know in regard to the prisoner?"

"I am in his father's employ," replied the priest, "and I know that on the night of the theft from M. Bourdoin's home, the prisoner had been entrusted with a sum of money which he was to bring to me, and that the sum corresponded exactly to that found on his person."

"By whom was this sum of money entrusted to him?"

"By a certain Jacques Cormot," said the priest, "I am sure of that."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"Yes."

It all seemed so simple, so easy, that many in the room almost laughed from the suddenness of their relief. But an instant later they became quiet.

Jacques Cormot, recalled to witness.

With slow, tottering steps the little man approached the stand, his eyes gazing about appealingly at the assembled throng. He was thoroughly frightened, and even that small amount of instinctive cunning which he possessed seemed to have deserted him.

Jacques Cormot, did you, on the night in question, entrust a certain sum of money to Francois Pelletier to carry to M. Thomas?"

"Yes, I did," stammered the witness.

"For what purpose did you send this money to Thomas?"

"Cormot was at a loss. He tried vainly to think of an excuse, but his mind refused to work, and falteringly he came out with the true reason. Because I wanted Thomas to keep it for me," he said weakly.

"A likely story," sneered the interrogator. Then he added, "If what you say is true and not a story made up so as to try and defeat the law and justice of the land, why have you kept this important evidence till now? Why did you not present it at the first request and prevent this long imprisonment?"

"Be—because," faltered the scared old man, "I—did not even remember to tell you—M. Thomas about it till last night."

"That is enough," said the Judge sternly. "Your whole evidence is a lie on the face of it. No one could forget such an important occurrence."

The little man turned a ghastly pallor, he tottered and almost fell as he left the stand. In the meantime Pere Justinien, attended by the fall of his testimony, had made a desperate resolve. He had but an instant to think, as the Judge was on the point of pronouncing the irrevocable sentence. Jumping to his feet he stepped up once more into the stand. An instant before the air had been filled with mingled cries of vexation, rage, and disappointment. Now there was a complete and tense silence. Many a strong man in that assembly trembled when he beheld the stern, set countenance of the Core as he faced the Judge and the court. The priest's words fell like stabs of a knife upon nearly everyone present.

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against his love for me. He wished to coöperate his money to my care, because he has always done so. But he knew he could not give a good reason for doing so and he did me harm. He was blinded, but at last he had come to reason and last night he told me all. For, gentlemen, he did not wish to betray his priest. I am the Core, Pere Justinien. You have hunted me long. I place myself in your hands!"

At the utterance of these last words, in a clear, ringing voice, the Judge jumped to his feet in a rage, his face purple with anger.

"Arrest that man!" he shouted. The peasants were aroused in an instant, and with one rush they surrounded the priest, resolved to protect him with the last drop of their blood. But Pere Justinien raised his hands and all were still.

"My children," said he, and his noble voice was choked with suppressed tears, "there must be no bloodshed. Even as our Lord Himself was delivered up to His enemies, so must I be. Fall back; it is my wish."

And mutely, humbly, awed by the supreme courage of the man, the crowd fell back and Pere Justinien saved himself up to death.

At the first disturbance Marie had rushed sobbing into her husband's arms, and there she hung, clinging to him even as to her life, stroking his long hair and looking fervently into the eyes she loved.

"Oh, Francois, you are free now!" she sobbed. "We are together, dear, love, never to be separated again. Oh, yes, my husband, it is terrible, I know, but dear one, comfort me, I have needed you so!"

"Thank God, my heart!" he replied earnestly. "But think, Marie, he has given his life for us! Look, I must go to him and you must come, too."

At that moment a rough hand grasped Francois by the shoulder and a loud voice shouted in his ear, "You are under arrest again for having concealed a priest. Come now, no outcry!"

Marie gave a scream and clung to her husband's side, refusing to move. But rough arms tore her away and she saw through agonized eyes her husband once more led off, this time to certain, dreadful death.

At the same instant, in another part of the hall, Jean Pelletier was also arrested, for the same crime, of having aided a priest.

Pere Justinien gazed upon the tragedy he had caused in utter stupefaction. Surrounded by soldiers he was led off to the prison as if in a dream. He had thought he was sacrificing only himself. In his haste he had forgotten that he was but bringing upon the prisoner, with dreadful certainty, the very fate from which he would have saved him at all costs, even to his own life.

That night there was more festivity than usual in the Judge's apartments. As the clock struck the midnight hour, he arose, glass in hand, "Gentlemen," he said, "this has been a fortunate day. The morning will see the death of three more enemies of our dear Republic. I give you this toast. Long live our great and new Republic! Down with religion and death to the priest!" Amid cheers he took his seat and resumed an affable conversation with M. Rameaux.

"Yes," he said, indignantly this will mean a big reward for me, perhaps an appointment to the ministry, who can tell? But be sure I shall not forget your hospitality. I have seldom enjoyed myself so much!"

And late into the night that jovial assembly kept company together.

CHAPTER VII.

ULTIMA PEREGRINA.

In one small cell of the prison the three men were confined, Pere Justinien's remorse, his heartrending self-condemnation, was a sight to arouse pity in the heart of a beast. This was a grief that could seek no worldly comfort. He felt like a Judas, a betrayer. With what agony of self-

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sign the sim, flying figure of a girl suddenly rushed before the muzzle and threw herself upon her husband's breast. She was too late. The three men died instantly, riddled by bullets. A few moments later the pure, spotless spirit of Marie also sped its way to eternal rest, there to be united forever with the husband of her soul. A stray bullet had pierced her loving heart.

From out of the crowd the high, terrifying shriek of a man was heard, and a moment later Jacques Cormot stood gasping down in horror upon the bloody corpse of the saintly Sank. With a second world cry he sank to the ground, but his cry changed to a low, hoarse chuckle which ended in a wild, demoniacal laugh. They led him away a crazy man, a driving idiot!

In the adjacent house of M. Rameaux the Judge was awakened by the noise of the gun discharge.

"A curse on them!" he muttered sleepily. "Why does that damned priest make so much noise being killed? He can't even let a gentleman rest in peace!" And he turned over drowsily on his side and was soon dreaming of new glories awaiting him in Paris.—Richard Dana Skinner.

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