

Choice Literature.

HOW THEY KEPT THE FAITH.

A TALE OF THE HUGUENOTS OF LANGUEDOC.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE MORNING.

It was destined to be a night of surprises. When several hours later Pepin led his new friends into the cave beyond the waterfall, the first object that met his eye was Rene seated beside the fire, with little Gabrielle, as of old, nestling in his breast. Monique Chevalier, with a face of chastened pleasure, was seated beside her son. Eglantine and Aimee, with happy tears on their cheeks, were preparing a meal. The reunion had evidently just taken place, but without pausing to congratulate his friend the weaver led the younger of his companions up to Madame Chevalier.

"She has brought you a message from Mistress Agnes," he said in a low voice.

The mother looked up startled into the dark pitying eyes fixed upon her.

"Who are you? Whence do you come?" she faltered.

The stranger's answer was to open her hand and show a small square of tin glimmering in her hand.

"I promised her—if I could ever make my escape—I would come and tell you," she said gently. "She said it would be a comfort to you to know that she was at rest, that she had endured to the end, that she had been very happy even in the convent."

There was a low murmur from the group about her; a fervent "Thank God!" from a man who had started suddenly to his feet; a burst of tears from Eglantine. Monique Chevalier was the calmest of them all.

"When?" she asked.

"Ten days ago, as the day was breaking. She had been sick ever since she came to us. I was with her all that night—she did not suffer much." The messenger's strength had proved less equal to the rest of her journey than she had imagined. As the last words left her lips, her figure swayed, tottered for a moment, and then fell forward.

It was Rene who caught her and laid her on a pallet near by.

"Have we any wine?" he asked, glancing up for a moment. He spoke like one who had heard tidings of great joy.

It was Eglantine, with tears still raining down her face, who brought him the flask. "You do not think of yourself, Rene," she whispered.

He met her eyes for an instant.

"The bitterness of death was past when they took her from me," he said in a low voice. "I have prayed for this, day and night, ever since."

The stranger had by this time opened her eyes, and was rejecting the cup placed to her lips.

"I do not need it; I will be better presently," she murmured.

"Drink!" was the firm response. No one ever hesitated when Rene Chevalier spoke in that tone. Without further remonstrance the new-comer swallowed the draught and closed her eyes once more. Eglantine had already loosened her hood and cloak. In a few seconds a faint colour began to show itself in her face. Rene let go his hold of her wrist. "You are better now," he said quietly. "No," as she seemed about to speak; "you must be still for a while yet. You shall tell us the rest presently. We have enough to thank God for to-night." He turned to his mother. "She has seen the King in His beauty; in the land that is very far off, none shall make her afraid. Is it not best so, my mother?"

"To depart and be with Christ is far better," answered Monique Chevalier solemnly; and something in her face told Rene that from that hour her hold upon earth was loosened. The Master's presence was better than any life here.

Pepin plucked at his friend's sleeve with a bowl of potage in his hand.

"From what Joan tells me, our new friend needs food as much as she does rest," he whispered. "She is the young nun, M. Chevalier, who had charge of Mistress Agnes in the convent, and she has suffered not a little, Joan says, for her kindness to our young lady. They have kept her on bread and water ever since Mistress Agnes died because she did not give them warning of the end."

With a smothered cry the brother thrust the bowl of potage into the stranger's hands. She had by this time struggled to a sitting posture, and met his eyes with a frank smile.

"What were meat and drink to the truth that she had brought me?" she asked in a low voice, and then she looked past him to his mother. "I had promised her they should not disturb her at the end if I could help it. I kept the truth all that day though my heart was breaking. I would have died before they should have broken in on the peace of those last hours. No; do not ask me to wait longer," as Rene seemed about to interrupt, "I am more used to fasts than Joan knows; it was only the joy that was too much for me. It will be more than food to talk about Agnes, better than rest to tell you how she helped me to find the light." She paused for a moment, and looked wistfully about the circle, now hushed and listening.

"You know what it is to love the truth—to love it better than houses, and lands, and friends or life—but you do not know what it is to live without it—to hunger and thirst for it, year after year, and yet never be able to find it. That was what I had done until I knew Agnes Chevalier. I had never known any home but the convent. I had never had any one to love me, that I could remember. All I wanted, all I needed, my confessor told me, I would find in God. Something in my heart, too, told me the same. Of course I did not expect that God would notice a foolish, ignorant, little child, but I thought when I was old enough to take the veil, He would begin to answer my prayers. Then, I thought, my religion will begin to satisfy me. I will be able to conquer the sin in my heart, and I can be at peace with God. But when my novitiate was ended, and I had fully entered upon my vocation, He was as far off as ever. If I seemed to climb a few steps up to Him one day, I slipped back the next. Nothing I could do, nothing my confessor could say, could take the stain from my conscience, or fill the void in my heart. Only one thing grew clearer and clearer. Through all my years of blind feeling after God, I never doubted that He would

satisfy me, if I could only find Him. And Father Ambrose had told me the blessed Saviour Himself had said, 'Seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'"

"Did it never occur to you that you might not be seeking Him in the right way?" asked Madame Chevalier gently. She was sitting beside the stranger on the pallet, holding her hand. Rene's face was in the shadow.

Marguerite shook her head sadly.

"How could it?" she asked simply. "I had no one to teach me but my confessor, and he did not point out any other way. Do not blame him," she pleaded, fancying she read disapproval in the other's glance. "If he did not guide me aright, it was because he, too, was in the dark. He gave me the best he knew, I am sure of that, and if it had not been for the deep longing for God, which he had nursed in my heart, I might not have known the truth when it came. But I did not mean to make so much of this part of my story," a slight flush rising to the delicate face; "it was only necessary to tell you something that you might understand what Agnes was to me. One morning last December my confessor sent for me. I had more than once asked him to set me some task, which would satisfy my conscience and gain me favour on high. He said he could now grant my prayer. One of the Huguenots, brought to the convent that morning, was a young girl, in whose family he felt some interest. He had interposed to have her spared the rigorous methods of conversion, to which her companions would be subjected, and, as a special favour to himself, asked of the mother superior that she might be placed under my instruction. It was a great responsibility for one so young, he said, but he had taught me carefully, and he believed I could do more with her than any one else. She was deeply prejudiced against our Church. It was necessary to allay her suspicions. 'Win her heart, before you attempt to overthrow her heresies,' he told me, and then he said I would be permitted to show her every kindness, and that if I could convert her from the error of her ways, I would not only save a soul from death, but be able to present to God a gift which must be well pleasing in His eyes."

"I wonder he was not afraid to bring a seeking soul and the light so near together," murmured Rene, looking up for a moment.

"You forget that he did not know it was the light," she answered sadly. "And you do not know how bigoted and fixed I was in my own faith, though it did not satisfy me. I had been taught that the Huguenots were a wicked, blasphemous sect, forever cut off from God; I loathed Agnes' heresies, though my heart went out to her. How shall I tell you what she was to me—you, who have known and loved her always, but have had others to be dear to you? I had never had any one to care for before. It was well for me that I did not understand what made me hurry through my other tasks to have more time to spend with her, or why I was so happy when her sad face brightened at my coming. I thought it was only zeal for her conversion which made the hours I spent with her so short and her trust and confidence so sweet. One day, when Father Ambrose warned me to let no taint of earthly affection mar the fairness of my offering, I was startled, and I think my surprise allayed his fears. For several weeks Agnes was unable to leave her bed in the infirmary. The fright and exposure had been too much for her, Father Ambrose said. Often and often as I watched beside her, I wondered at the look of peace on her face and the soft light in her eyes. One day I said to her: 'Agnes, you look very happy for a girl who has been separated from her home and friends.' Her eyes filled with tears for a moment, and then she smiled sweetly: 'I am very happy,' she said; 'no one can help being happy, Sister Marguerite, who knows that God loves them.'"

"God cannot love you until you abandon your errors," I returned hastily, but I was afraid to continue the conversation, and went away. I could have answered arguments, but that tone of loving confidence was something I could not reason with. Was it possible that her religion had done for her what mine could not do for me? All that night I knelt on the cold floor of my cell, fighting what seemed to me a suggestion of the evil one. The next day I told my confessor I thought it was time to begin to wean Agnes from her heresies, and he gave me a book to read to her. She looked troubled when she saw it. 'I will never change my religion,' she said earnestly; but when I pleaded with her, if she loved me to listen, she was too gentle to refuse. After that, I read to her every day. She listened so quietly that I was much encouraged. As soon as she was able to leave the infirmary she was given a cell adjoining mine, and I was permitted to take her occasionally into the convent garden. One morning, by Father Ambrose's direction, I led her without warning into the chapel. But no tears, no entreaties, could persuade her to kneel with me before the image of the Virgin. 'It is written, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image; thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them,' she whispered in her faint sweet voice, and from that we could not move her. My confessor was bitterly disappointed. He said we had been too lenient with her, and ordered that she should be kept for a week in solitary confinement, to think over her obstinacy. Meanwhile he took good care I should not lack occupation, by assigning me the task of arranging the convent library, long disused. He little guessed the treasure he was placing in my reach, when he did so. The very first day, in removing some old tomes, which looked as if they had not been touched for years, I came across a Latin Gospel of St. John. I cannot think who could have left it there, but I shall always feel that God meant it for me."

Marguerite paused for a moment, overcome with some deep emotion.

"The seeker and the Word had met at last," said Rene Chevalier, looking up with his rare sweet smile.

"Yes," she sighed, "but the seeker was still blind. I read only one verse, and then in terror closed the book and thrust it back into its hiding-place. It was forbidden, and I had committed a terrible sin. Yet some impulse—I could not analyze it then—made me resolve to keep my discovery a secret, and all through that troubled week, wherever I went, the book seemed drawing me, until sometimes even in the night I felt as if I must rise and go to it."

"And the Word?" asked Madame Chevalier softly.

"It was the Lord's answer to His disciple. I could not understand it then—'Have I been so long time with thee, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?' Now it seems to me as though I had heard it from His own lips." The nun's eyes filled with tears, and there was a tender silence, which she was the first to break.

At the end of the week I was permitted to see Agnes once more. She welcomed me with a bright smile. It had been a

very happy week to her, she said. I was shocked to see how wasted she had grown in those few days. For the first time I noticed the far-away look in her eyes. The truth flashed upon me: she was dying. And with that truth, flashed another. The heart I had vowed to God alone, I had permitted to entwine about this gentle girl, with a strength it was no longer in my power to break.

"Agnes," I asked despairingly, "do you know you cannot live much longer?"

"To my surprise she smiled gently. 'I have known it for a good while,' she said. 'Father Ambrose told me yesterday that I had only a few more days to prepare.'"

"And you still persist in your errors—you will break my heart by dying out of the Church!" I cried. Before I could say more, she put her arms about my neck and kissed me.

"I know you love me," she said in her soft, husky voice. "That has been one of God's tender mercies to me here; but you ought to be glad to let me go. Think of what it will be to be like Him, and to see Him as He is." And as I burst into tears, she went on to tell me of how near God had been to her, and how she had been praying for me, but had never dared to speak before. I knew I ought not to listen, but I had no power to put away the soft weak arms about my neck; I could not put her away, as I had done the written Word. Nay, the very words she spoke held me, too. Was not this what I had longed for all my life, and never been able to find? Yet what madness to think it could have been hidden from my confessor, and revealed to her! When I stammered something like this she smiled. 'If you want to know whether it is the right way, only try it,' she whispered. 'Oh, Marguerite, if we only had a Bible, it would be so easy to make it plain to you. You could not doubt God's Word.' I remembered the hidden Gospel in the library, and made up my mind to be shut out from it no longer. But Agnes had already had more excitement than was good for her, and I only told her I would think over what she said, but that seemed to content her, and then for the first time she spoke to me about you all." Marguerite glanced around with a soft sigh at the circle of tear-wet shining faces. "Ah, how different it all was from the selfish, narrow lives I had known—from what I had been told of the world without! But I have not time to dwell upon that now. A strange thing happened that evening. I had been to take Agnes her bowl of bread and milk, and as I came out, closing the door behind me, two of the older nuns passed me in the corridor."

"If Father Ambrose does not take care, our Saint Marguerite will become too fond of the little heretic," I heard one say; and the other answered:

"Yes, blood will tell. I never thought it was safe putting the two together," and then she dropped her voice to a whisper. "They say her mother's attachment to the Church was only formal, that it was because she was found teaching tenets to the child that they took her from her."

"Hush! The holyfather would be very angry if that should get to sour Marguerite's ears," warned the first speaker, and then they glided on, little dreaming that they left me behind in the shadow. A few days before the revelation would have overwhelmed, but now a window of hope seemed opened above me. Father Ambrose had always told me that my parents had died within the pale of the Church. Was it possible that in the truth had slept an untruth? Had my mother really at heart been attached to the religion that Agnes loved? Had she tried to teach it to me, her child? Was it for that I had been separated from her? Then she must have prayed for me, as Agnes had said her mother was doing for her! Was it in answer to those prayers that the Gospel had been placed in my path, and Agnes had been sent to me? Why had my confessor been afraid to tell me? Did he anticipate the instinct which would demand to see and choose for itself? I had been assigned to a penance in the chapel that night. As soon as the convent was asleep, I crept into the library beyond; I had been entrusted with the key; while I was dusting and arranging the books, my great fear was that the one I longed for might have been moved, but it was still in its place, and by the aid of the taper I had brought with me I began to read. After that I had only one other fear—of being interrupted before I had finished, and I soon forgot even that. Even you, who love the Word, cannot know all that that hour was to me—any more than we, who have already seen, can imagine what the rapture of sight must have been to the man who 'was born blind.' All the years I had been seeking, He has been close beside me, and yet I had 'not known Him.' And then for many minutes the nun was silent, gazing with shining eyes into the fire.

"Go on," pleaded Eglantine at last.

"The Word is sweeter to us even than the name of her we love," added Rene.

She looked up with a smile. "Agnes said it would be so, but I cannot put much in speech. It was midnight when I began to read; when I closed the book it was daylight in the world and in my soul. I had 'seen the Lord.' I knew now why Agnes felt no need of priestly mediator, or saints to intercede; why she could not kneel to the Virgin; why she was not afraid of death. It had all been made clear in Him, and what I was not yet able to bear, He would teach me in time. When I should stand before my confessor there might be some questions—as it had been with the blind man and the rulers of the synagogue—that I might not be able to answer. But of one thing I was certain: He had opened my eyes."

"When I carried Agnes her breakfast she asked no questions."

"You were seeking God; I knew you would find Him," she said joyfully. And when I told her it was she who had led me to the light, her cup ran over.

"I wish my mother could know; she would thank God for sending me here," she said, and then she asked me why I would do about praying to the saints, and worshipping the mass.

(To be continued.)

BURLINGTON ROUTE.

But One Night Chicago to Denver.

"The Burlington's Number One" daily veribule express leaves Chicago at 1:00 p.m., and arrives at Denver at 6:30 p.m. the next day. Quicker time than by any other route. Direct connection with this train from Peoria. Additional express trains, making as quick time as those of any other road, from Chicago, St. Louis and Peoria, to St. Paul, Minneapolis, Council Bluffs, Omaha, Cheyenne, Denver, Atchison, Kansas City, Houston, and all points West, Northwest and Southwest.