

SISTER ANGELE

By CAMILLE DESCAMPS.

[Translated from the French, for the TRUE WITNESS, by Miss R. C.]

The President of the French Republic had formally promised not only to the mayor of X—, but to the member of the House of the Chamber of Deputies of which it is the principal town, that during his official visit to that part of the country he would spend a few hours at X—. Rival newspapers of the locality buried all their jealousies, they saw immense material advantages to be derived from this visit, and a thousand projects were discussed to make the occasion memorable. The month of August was the usual date for street cleaning and sidewalk repairs, but these important matters were advanced by three months, and the dilapidated railway station, the terror of travellers and tourists, was actually put into a state of respectability, as if by enchantment. No less than ten new helmets were purchased for the fire brigade, two trombones were added to the municipal band. A confidential circular was sent by the chiefs of these two important bodies to the men enjoying them to have their wives ply their needles, so that any patching required might be done to their time-honored uniforms. The ladies, wives of the well-to-do farmers, notaries and physicians of the neighborhood who were in the habit of purchasing their new toilets for the college and convent distribution of prizes, broke through their rule, and milliners and dressmakers were driven to desperation. They were all determined no matter what the weather might be to see the President and admire the decorations of his suite. On that day the college as well as the convent would proclaim a grand congé, and after all it was absolutely necessary to go since everybody else was going. Parisians who are in the habit of greeting every day, Senators and Deputies who knock up against ministers and are tired of the visits of sovereigns, have no idea of the importance that is attached in a small town of 2000 souls to such a visit as that which had been promised by the President of our Republic. The mayor had literally lost his head; the municipal council sat day and night, the local judge and his chief officer had a fustian encounter in the clerk's office because his lordship, whose official coat was not in good condition, desired that gowns should be worn, and the clerk whose toga was already yellow with age, but whose coat was his special pride, desired to appear without a toga. Teachers had brought on inflammation of the lungs in their vain endeavor to drive a cantata into the heads of their scholars, and the lieutenant of gendarmerie daily inspected the blacking of the boots of his brigade, so that they might shine in a manner worthy of the sun of this new Australis. X— is my native town, but a native town long since abandoned, a native town that has no speech for me, or, rather, the silence of whose grass-grown streets reminds me of the nothingness of life, and gives me fits of dreadful loneliness, because all the comrades of old have grown gray as I have myself, and we have lost sight of one another. I never go there. I avoid the place; nothing binds me to it; not even the grave of a venerated father or a beloved mother. The former, who was an officer of marine, was shipwrecked and his bones lie below in the vasty deep. My mother—his widow—after that wonderful event left the town to reside in the South of France, where our paternal government permitted her to manage a small tobacco store. Nothing left, I forgot! An old aunt of mine, my god-mother, who took for her share of our inheritance an old house where I was born, lives there. An old aunt who worships the souvenirs of bygone days, for the house she now occupies is three times too large for her and she is ruining herself in the payment of taxes. So my poor old aunt, to whom this visit of the President of the Republic assumed the proportions of the crash of an empire—poor old soul, wrote me not to leave her alone on such a solemn occasion. She insisted upon my coming to embrace her once more, and to receive the expression of her last wishes, in the event, that a historical occurrence of such gravity should either kill her with joy, or frighten her out of her wits.

I obeyed. I was at X— on the day of the official visit of the President of the Republic. My venerable aunt had not the slightest idea of the sacrifice I was making in once more returning to my native town, tramping again those streets, disturbing the dust of things long since dead to me. She imagined she was inviting me to the most enjoyable of festivities. Dear old lady, who had never gone one league beyond it, and had never left it for an hour,—whose only journey was from the house to the church,—who had no horizon beyond the houses of the neighbors on the other side of the street,—for to her, who had never loved any one but her Heavenly Father, the poor, her garden and her birds, X— was everything. For me, who had left the tumble-down place thirty years before, it was nothing but a graveyard, cemetery of dear reminiscences, a place of mourning for things we cannot forget and which follow us everywhere. It was indeed melancholy for me to have revived some painful souvenirs, to place in review those who had disappeared and who called me back to my prime, more especially as I was certain I was no longer remembered by any of the old inhabitants of the place. However, I found the old rooms with the same old wall-paper, the same old garden, the surroundings of the old house grown older it is true, but still the same. I visited every spot, let me acknowledge not without tears in my eyes. But where did I remain longer than anywhere else? Let me avow it was beneath a grand old tree, the trunk of which served as the central pivot for a great round table. That was the general meeting place in the summer. Upon that table I had prepared myself for my B.A. examination. There, during my

boyhood days, had sat Margaret Dumont, one of the attachés of our household, the protégée of my mother, a young girl of sixteen, as innocent as she was handsome and polite, working away modestly and with intelligence, never raising her eyes from her occupation, and wearing at all times a fresh ribbon in her hair. I had loved Margaret, our little helper, and she had loved me, with the love that exists between children of the same country. She sixteen, I nineteen. We were brought up by stern parents, with healthy surroundings, and our affection was one of the heart—in a word, a beautiful dream. Such love leaves behind it no bitterness, it is one of generous illusions. The years may roll on, but in sympathetic souls, if the body grows old, if beauty fades, hearts and minds are still the same. Margaret had been the dream of my youth, the fairy in my poetic eyes, and I had been for Margaret the ideal of what a young girl conceives to be the hero of her songs, the chevalier without fear, and above all that was reprehensible. With my pen-knife I had engraved our initials beneath hearts and darts on the trunk of the old tree. But our dream had vanished when the military college claimed me for a period of three years, and that period having expired (my father was dead) my mother had left the old home and my aunt had taken possession of the homestead. The dream had vanished, for with the tunic and the sword, no doubt, my ideas had changed. If Margaret was not altogether forgotten, my aspirations were for military glory rather than to bury myself in a tranquil existence. I had indeed been ungrateful in forgetting the past, in disregarding the tender relics left behind and the sweet sayings that had been uttered beneath the old tree. I had not, up to that moment, enquired what had become of Margaret Dumont, neither had I asked what had been the fate of her honest and hard-working parents, who had been so devoted and so respectful in the days of old; but all these reminiscences come back to me and suddenly present themselves, as though they had but transpired the day before. It was, therefore, with considerable hesitation and the timidity of a little school-boy that I ventured, amidst many other questions, to ask my old aunt some information on the subject, and so as to throw her off her guard, I said, in a tentative manner:—

"My dear aunt, do you not remember a family called Dumont. I think the mother used to come to our house, and the daughter, if I remember well, her name was Margaret, (oh! what a hypocrite I am!) used to work for us; they were honest folks?"

"My aunt was a good woman, a saint, I firmly believe, but she was a woman all the same, and had a prodigious memory. All my little devices and circumlocutions did not deceive her in the least, and perhaps, after all, she had discovered a slight trembling in my voice. She gave me one long look over her spectacles, which she wore on the end of her nose, and then, with a peculiar accent, she finally said:—

"Oh! after all, you do remember something about poor little Margaret. Well, she never would get married, she refused every offer. For several years she came to ask me news about you, telling me that she was praying you might succeed in your career. Oh! she loved you, just as much as your mother did or myself."

"She surely is not dead?"

"No, but you need not rejoice, because it is now too late."

My poor old aunt, who, like all old people who enjoy good health and a youthful disposition, utterly ignored the years that had gone and saw me still in my youth talking to Margaret beneath the old tree.

"But why is it too late, my aunt," I said.

"It is too late to marry her," she replied. "She has joined a religious order. She is one of the Sisters who accompany the ambulances and live in the military hospitals. Oh! yes, she loved you very tenderly, and she confided to me the secret of her vocation. You had gone to be a soldier and she determined to be the friend and servant of the soldiers, begging of God, as a recompense of the sacrifice of her youth and beauty, no other reward than to be useful to you on the battle-field, to care for you should you be wounded, and to help you to die well; to be allowed to say a prayer on your tomb. Poor Margaret! It is now twenty years since she went away, and I am told they call her sister Angele."

We did not speak for some time. Our feelings nearly overcame us. I was profoundly touched at the proof of this affection so true, so pure and so rare as that of the little friend of my infancy. My aunt wept, possibly from the remembrance of some personal sacrifice which had made her an old maid just as that of Margaret had made of her a noble Sister of Charity. I offered my arm to my aunt to lead her to the President of the Republic, whose approach was now announced by the ringing of bells, salvoes of fireworks and the strains of the civic band. To be more at our ease, and witness everything in safety, my aunt desired that I should bring her directly to the hospital, in the court of which the President was to distribute his gifts, and where the Superiores had offered her old friend a reserved chair. There we went, and the President who had only three hours to spend at X—, reached there almost as soon as ourselves. At the request of my aunt, I had donned my uniform, and as soon as the Mayor saw me he rushed forward, seized me by the arm, and introduced me to the President as a noble son of the town and an officer of the army who had won his decorations. In the midst of the sound of instruments and of the clapping of hands of the inmates of the hospital who lined the front of the building, a Sister, still young and bearing upon her handsome features that yellow tint which the children of France invariably bring back with them from their service in the colonies, advanced modestly, escorted by the Municipal Council. The President of the republic, in his most gracious manner turned towards me and said:—

"I cannot do better, Commandant, than to hand you this Cross of the Legion of Honor, that you may pin it on the breast of this noble lady. You are both children of the same town, both soldiers of the colonies, and the brave Sister knows as well as you what it is to brave the fire of the enemy."

I made my most profound bow, took the cross from the hands of the President, and, much agitated myself, pinned it on to the brown robe of the good Sister. Imagine my feelings. There stood Sister Angele, the friend of my boyhood, Margaret Dumont. We recognized each other on the spot, for neither of us had been warned, and the whole plot was the work of my dear old aunt. Sister Angele was as pale as death. She staggered for a moment, and I thought she would have fallen. But only for a moment. She raised her eyes to heaven and returned thanks to God, and turned towards me with an expression of angelic happiness. She had received her reward, and perhaps I alone knew of the worth of the heart that beat beneath that cross and its red ribbon. During ten years Sister Angele's name had appeared regularly in the orders of the day, where mention was made of her heroic deeds. The fearful climate of Cochinchina, with its fevers, had undermined her constitution, and she was now the Superior of the hospital of X—, where she was destined to end her days. My aunt had found her there. She had not forgotten the old story of our boy and girl affection, and had managed the whole affair with that tact woman alone possesses. She, too, has been rewarded, to a certain extent, for now I return every year to X— and hug my dear old aunt and shake hands with dear Sister Angele. We are still the warmest of friends. I am serving now in the army of my country. She is the servant of the poor and God is with both of us. Sister Angele has made me a present of the cross which the President of the Republic presented to her. I have discarded my own and wear the one she so kindly gave me, and in return, at the end of each month, she receives for the benefit of the poor under her care one-third of my meagre pay. The inmates of the hospitals we look upon as our own children.

ARCHBISHOP FABRE

LEAVES FOR NEW YORK TO TAKE THE STEAMER FOR FRANCE ON HIS WAY TO ROME.

On the occasion of the departure of Mgr. Fabre for Rome, on Thursday last, His Grace was the object of a very cordial demonstration. An itinerary service was held in St. James Cathedral, at which a great number of the priests of the archdiocese, as well as the representatives of all religious orders of Montreal, were present. Mgr. Fabre left by the 6.20 train for New York, from which place he will sail for Europe on the French liner La Bourgogne. A large escort accompanied His Grace to the Bonaventure Station. The procession was headed by the Police Band and a detachment of forty patrolmen, under the command of Captain Charbonneau. Mgr. Lafleche, Bishop of Three Rivers, and his Secretary, Rev. Mr. Beland, accompanied Mgr. Fabre to the train. Following are the members of the clergy who were in the procession—Rev. Canons Trepanier, Racot, Bourgeault, Bruchet, Archambault, Vaillant, Cousineau, Martin, Savaria, the Superiors of the Jesuit, Redemptorist and Oblat Fathers; Rev. Fr. Lecocq, Superior of the Grand Seminary; Rev. Fathers, Bastien, P. S. S.; Gauthier, Roy, Dauth, Chamy, Dupuis, Rioux, Kelly, C. S. C.; Gervais, Comtois, Fournier, Bonin, Godin, Maréchal, Rabreau, Giguère, Adam, Lepailleur, Ste. J. Dubuc, and 30 brothers of the Christian School and Viator Brothers, besides a great number of other members of the clergy, and a great many of the laity.

During the absence of His Grace the Grand Vicar, Rev. Mr. Bourgeault, has been appointed administrator of the Archdiocese. His Grace will first go to Paris, thence to Rheims, France, where he will be present at the celebration of the 14th centenary of the baptism of King Clovis. Rev. Mr. Dubuc, Chaplain of Hochelaga Convent, will accompany Mgr. Fabre as Secretary.

DREYFUS ESCAPED.

HELPED AWAY FROM THE ISLAND ON WHICH HE WAS CONFINED BY HIS WIFE.

LONDON, Sept. 3.—Capt. Hunter, of the British Steamship Nonpareil, which has arrived at Newport, Monmouthshire, from Cayenne, French Guiana, reports that Captain Alfred Dreyfus, formerly of the French Army and attached to the Ministry for War, who was sentenced to be publicly degraded and confined for life, after having been convicted by court martial of selling plans of French fortifications, mobilization schemes, etc., to a foreign government, has escaped from the Isle du Grand Salut,

where he was taken after leaving the Isle de Re, off the French coast. In an interview Captain Hunter is quoted as saying that Captain Dreyfus escaped on board an American schooner with the help of his wife, who at the urgent request of the prisoner had received permission from the French Government to join him at his place of imprisonment.

Mme. Dreyfus was always a firm believer in the innocence of her husband, and when she reached Cayenne, the French authorities there offered her the use of a steam launch to take her to Du Grand Salut Island, where her husband's prison was situated, but she declined, saying that she wished to become accustomed to the climate before going to the island. Thereupon the steam launch left Cayenne. According to Capt. Hunter Mme. Dreyfus must have lost no time in perfecting plans for her husband's escape, or else she must have had assistance from her sons, who had reached Cayenne some time before she did, for the same night he says an American schooner, with Mme. Dreyfus, appeared off Du Grand Salut Island, sent a boat ashore and brought off not only the prisoner, but several men who had been detailed to guard him. Appearances indicate that everything was arranged for the escape before the prisoner's wife reached Cayenne. Captain Hunter says that the schooner left the coast, heading in a northerly direction, and it is believed that Captain Dreyfus and his wife eventually reached the United States.

Captain Dreyfus, arrested in October, 1894, was tried by court-martial, and was sentenced to be publicly degraded and confined in a fortress for life. His formal degradation took place on January 5, 1895, on the parade ground of the Military School and in the presence of 5,000 troops. His sword was broken, his buttons and insignia of rank were cut off and he was compelled to go through what is known as the "Execution parade," being marched, with drums beating, along the four sides of the square composed of the soldiers detailed to witness his punishment. He was cursed as a traitor, but always maintained his innocence, and claimed that it would eventually be proved, a belief that was shared by a number of people at the time, it being claimed that he had been made the victim of a foul conspiracy.

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