

with powdered heads and white frocks passed along, some carrying on their heads basketfuls of luscious fruits and other wares; all had hitherto combined to make up one of the most charming pictures of West Indian life. But now the scene was changed.

As Lacroix made for the notary's office where in Gallifet's absence his head clerk was to carry out the business, he noted that no shops, no cafes, were open. The schools were closed. Churches stood open, receiving worshippers, all too ready now, to throw themselves on Divine protection. Fine dust and cinder from the mountain cone towering at hand clogged the tramway lines, and deadened the sound of his hurrying footsteps. Crowds of townsfolk and peasants from the country thronged the streets; many were wringing their hands and saying aloud their prayers; others stood staring at Pelee, fascinated by its gigantic smoke-cap heaving, soaring, expanding fold on fold up into the lowering heavens. Only discipline held together the cordon of troops drawn round Pierre's landward boundaries.

His notary's long outer office, Bellairs found deserted by its many clerks. But to his amazement and great joy Gallifet himself stepped out of his private room, where two clerks were hastily bundling together business ledgers and papers. To Lacroix, the clasp of his thin hand came like that of rescue. Calm and collected as ever was the little, grey-haired, sallow-faced notary.

"Voila! You did not expect to see me?" he exclaimed. "I rode back during the night from Fort de France."

He turned with a quick emphatic gesture to his clerks. "Hurry to the bank vaults, Pierre, with these packets; only there will they be safe against any calamity. Jerome, run to the Prefecture for M'sieur Lacroix's pass to Guadeloupe per this morning's packet. Haste. Ah, out of all my staff only these two have remained at their post," he remarked as the lads hurried away.

His grave expression deepened. He put his hand affectionately on Bellairs' left shoulder.

"Mons fils. Where is thy wife?"

His seriousness, his grave demeanor, much startled the younger man.

"Aimee? I left her about to go over to Fort de France. She——"

"Is she going to Madame Lestocques?" interrupted the notary.

"Yes! To that accursed half-caste. I could not dissuade her."

"And thus it is that I have returned," came the unexpected answer. "Mon fils, it is for thee and thine that I have come back." And motioning his stupified godson to hold his peace, he handed to him a letter. The familiar writing took Lacroix's eye. A sense of doom swept into him. "This, the gendarmes found on her messenger—Caton. I identified him—lying dead on the road a little way out of Fort de France. Some shocks were felt about that time so it is thought his horse threw him—he was yet warm. The Commissaire handed Aimee's letter to me, knowing I act for thee. Instantly I took horse."

"To flee—New York—with Suffren."

The words dropped from the husband's white lips as they were the last words of one dying. Aimee's note fluttered to the floor.

"Suffren! The most debauched of all the half-castes!" he uttered in a curious stifled voice. The ignominy and insult of it scared his heart. "No, she has never loved me, never been true to me in her heart. Her acts, her carriage towards me of late, have all told me that; but I could not believe any baseness of her. Never has she——"

"Mon fils," cried the old notary, "we must act instantly. Even now death may be about to knock upon our doors. Hear! the packet's first bell; she sails earlier, to escape Pelee's wrath. Do you go—or stay, for Aimee's sake?"

"But Jean! What of Jean? Jean who has been father, mother, sister and brother to me? Jean, lying at death's door, and the mortgagees foreclosing!"

"And I?"—the notary's voice came clear and solemn—"why did I return? Why did I leave life and my dear ones in Fort de France where safety is? Because I took it to be my duty towards thee and Aimee, both of whom I dearly esteem. And you? You who swore at