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A King's Gentleman.

"I am just in time, it seems," said Le Baron, smiling and rubbing his hands. "Remember that as no one knew how to fast more rigidly than yourself, able, so no one better understood how to feast, or could manage to do so on more slender materials."

"You flatter me, my son; and yet why should not a religious study how best to utilize the abundant gifts of Providence? Do you remember the ragout I once made from an amiable and unfortunate cat when we were upon our retreat into Canada?"

"Do I not?" And the soup from the bones the father's wife had thrown out her back door.

"Yes. But here comes Patrick with our supper; and here is Father Pinot, my confidant and assistant, who will be glad to see you after having heard so much of you."

The younger priest, a vivacious and agreeable companion, bowed courteously; a short Latin grace was said, and the three men sat down. It was years since Le Baron had found himself so nearly in his native element as tonight, and he abandoned himself to an hour of convivial enjoyment very different from the staid feasts at which he was often called to assist in the town of his adoption, or even from the pleasant but simple and brief meals at which he and Molly sat habitually in their own house. Here the cookery was delicate and refined, purely French in its character, and accompanied by French wines; the service was admirable; and the two priests, laying aside for the moment all that is severe or ascetic in their profession, showed themselves in the light of cultivated and experienced citizens of the world, quick, witty, apt at quotation or allusion, and with a range of conversation not to be found among the more quiet and homely folk. It was even a luxury for Le Baron to speak freely in his native language; for his English, although scholarly and sufficiently fluent, was always a little formal, and often spoken with consciousness of the effort at mental translation; for it is a rare and ultimate stage in the acquirement of a foreign tongue when one's thoughts shape themselves to its idioms, and Dr. Le Baron never fully reached it.

A clock upon the mantel struck the half-hour after 8, and Father Pinot, glancing at his superior, grew suddenly grave and silent. Despard nodded slightly and pushed back his chair.

"You will join us in the chapel for compline, at 9 o'clock, will you not, doctor?" asked he of his guest, who had begged him to use no title but this.

"With pleasure, if you will show me the way, please," replied he, rising from the table.

"Oh, it is not time yet! Father Pinot and I have some preparations to make, and it is our rule not to allow any festivity to exceed an hour's time. If you will remain here and amuse yourself with a book, Patrick shall summon you at 9, or a few moments earlier."

The priests left the room, and Le Baron, not caring to read just then, threw himself back in his chair and sat staring into the fire, his mind filled with chaotic thoughts, memories and associations, until a touch upon his shoulder arrested him. A rich Milanese accent recalled him to the moment and the occasion. Following the man through a passage, opening behind one of the bookcases, he presently found himself in a small and richly ornamented chapel, cunningly devised, as he afterward found, to appear from the outside like a rough addition to the house, without windows or exterior doors. Quite half this room, divided from the rest by a light bronze screen or railing, was occupied by the altar and chancel, within which stood the two priests, attended by a boy acolyte, who was busily lighting a censer in a little sacristy opening into the chancel. Outside this screen, with Le Baron, knelt Patrick and several women dressed in semi-religious robes, their heads covered by veils.

The service began, and as the words and intonations familiar to his childhood and youth fell upon the ears of the guest, as the odor of the incense reached his nostrils, accompanied by the silvery clank of the chains of the censer, he covered his face with his hands and, bowing his head, wondered if this were indeed a vivid dream, or if it were not rather true that the past bleak, bitter years of exile had been the dream, and this was reality.

From this reverie he was roused by the softly-chanted strains of the vesper hymn in which he had joined so many times at Montserrat; and, listening eagerly without raising his head, he seemed to hear again the pure and penetrating tones of the voice with which he had so loved to chime in those not yet forgotten years—that voice so peculiar in its timbre, so dead-sweet in its fearless heights, so caroling in its depths, that when Molly Wilder first sang to him in the lonely roadside farm-house, his greatest pleasure in hearing her had been that no tone of her voice resembled that voice. And now it seemed close beside him, its subtle charm piercing his very brain, and sending the blood tingling from heart and to finger-tips and back again with sickening force and tumult.

"Ave Maria, Maria sanctissima! Ora pro nobis, ora pro me!"

sang the voice, and surely it was no vision, no memory, that could sigh out the familiar words in that tender, loving tone, so vividly recalled, so never to be forgotten. Slowly and unwillingly Le Baron lifted his head, and looking toward the little group of women kneeling at the other extremity of the chancel, he saw the outlines of the head and shoulders, and as the last words of the hymn died upon the fragrant air, all bowed low their heads, awaiting the benediction.

When Le Baron raised his head he was alone, except for the servants who stood patiently awaiting him. Following, without noticing that it was through another passage than that by which he had entered the chapel, Le Baron presently found himself in a small and dimly-lighted room, where beside a marble figure of the Madonna stood a veiled woman, her black robes contrasting vividly with the cold whiteness of the statue upon which she leaned as if for protection and confidence. As the disturbed and already suspicious visitor stood looking at her, the door silently closed behind him, the woman swiftly advanced a step and knelt at his feet, throwing back her veil as she did so, and lifting her beautiful, impassioned face to his in mute and anguished appeal for pity and forgiveness.

Le Baron started and quivered all through his form, as quivers the lion when the hunter's spear reaches his heart, but he did not speak, and it was she who presently murmured: "Francisco! Have not you one word for me, after all these years?"

"What word, Valerie? What is to be said between us two?"

"Forgiveness. I betrayed and denied you when you had the right to expect my loyalty."

"It is forgiven long ago."

"Forgiven coldly and formally, but not forgiven as you used to forgive my faults, Francisco! Not forgotten."

"Yes—forgotten."

"Your voice does not sound so, Francisco; and I know every tone of the voice for whose sound I have so longed so pined."

"Yes, forgotten, Valerie, but not easily. You and your falsehood became indissolubly one in my memory, and to forget one I was obliged to banish both."

"And I am forgotten!"

The words walked out upon the quiet air like the cry of the spirit denied the entrance to Paradise, and Le Baron felt a great and terrible pity stealing over his heart. Involuntarily his hand extended itself toward that bowed head, and words of gentlest soothing rose to his lips; but with a mighty effort he folded his arms across his breast and moving a step away, said gently and coldly:

"Pray rise and seat yourself, Valerie. I have already assured you of my forgiveness, if you care to have it; and, as my brother has said, we must think of you with interest and well-wishing. All else was ended for us when I left France."

"Say, rather, when you fell in love with another woman!" exclaimed Valerie, springing to her feet and confronting him passionately. "For, after all, it is only you who have been false to our early love; I never pretended to love another woman."

"Do not make a boast of it, madame," replied Le Baron sternly. "If you married a man consciously loving another, and then cherished the love your own act had made guilty, let shame keep you silent upon both scores."

"Francisco! Francisco! Have you no pity? And I have wearied so for one word; and now you are so cruel!"

"It is you, Valerie, who are cruel to both of us. Child! Do you suppose my heart is ice or stone? By this day's work you have destroyed for me the quiet years of my childhood. Cruel! What cruelty could you have devised, had you been my bitterest foe, more subtle than thus to come, and with every accessory of our purest and best association, force back upon my memory and my heart the images, the feelings, the bereavements, that I have spent years in uprooting and throwing aside, though in doing so I have shaken my nature to its depths? Do you who have shown yourself cruel, insensate, selfish?"

"You still love me, then, since I can make you suffer! O Francisco!"

(To be Continued.)

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A Ring on His Hand.

Dr. Talmage Draws Lessons From the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

The Ring of Forgiveness—The Token of Christ's Love.

Washington, D. C., Jan. 6.—In his sermon yesterday Rev. Dr. Talmage took for his subject the return of the Prodigal Son. The text chosen was:—Luke, xv., 22, "Put a ring on his hand."

I will not rehearse the familiar story of the fast young man of the parable. You know what a splendid home he left. You know what a hard time he had. And you remember how after that season of vagabondage and profligacy he resolved to go and weep out his sorrows on the bosom of parental forgiveness. Well, there is great excitement one day in front of the door of the old farm house. The servants come rushing up and say: "What's the matter? What is the matter?" But before they can arrive the old man cries out: "Put a ring on his hand." What a seeming absurdity! What can such a wretched mendicant as this fellow that is tramping on toward the house want with a ring? Oh, he is the prodigal son. No more tending of the swine-trough. No more longing for the pods of the carob tree. No more blistered feet. Off with the rags! On with the robe! Out with the ring! Even so does God receive every one of us when we come back. There are gold rings, and pearl rings, and emerald rings, and diamond rings; but the richest ring that ever flashed on the vision is that which our Father puts upon a forgiven soul.

There are a great many persons who pride themselves on their ancestry, and they glory over the royal blood that flows through their arteries. In their line, there was a lord or a duke, or a prime minister, or a king. But when our Lord, the Father, puts upon us the ring of his adoption, we become the children of the Father of all nations. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. It matters not how poor our garments may be in this world, or how scant our bread, or how mean the hut we live in, if we have that ring of Christ's adoption upon our hand we are assured of eternal defenses.

Adopted! Why, then, we are brothers and sisters to all the good of earth and heaven. We have the family name, the family dress, the family keys, the family wardrobe. The father looks after us, rubs us, defends us, blesses us. We have a royal blood in our veins, and there are crowns in our line. If we are his children, then princes and princesses. It is only a question of time when we get our coronet. Adopted! Then we have the family secrets. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." Adopted! Then we have the family inheritance, and in the day when our Father shall divide the riches of heaven we shall take our share of the mansions and palaces and temples. Henceforth let us boast no more of earthly ancestry. The insignia of eternal glory is our coat-of-arms. This ring of adoption puts upon us all honor and all privilege.

Still further, when Christ takes a soul into his love and puts upon it the ring of adoption, that ring is not a whim of mine. (Hoshea, ii., 19.) "I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. At the wedding altar the bridegroom puts on a ring upon the hand of the bride, signifying love and faithfulness. Trouble may come upon the household, and the carpets may go, the pictures may go, the piano may go, everything else may go—the last thing that goes is that marriage ring. For it is considered sacred. In the burial hour it is withdrawn from the hand and kept in a casket, and sometimes the box is opened on an anniversary day, and as you look at that ring you see under its arch a long procession of precious memories. Within the golden circle of that ring there upon it are your joy and sweet recollections to revive, and you think of the great contrast between the hour when, at the close of the "Wedding March," under the flashing lights and amid the aroma of orange-blossoms, you set that ring on the round finger of the plump hand and that hour when, at the close of the exhaustive watching, when you knew that the soul had fled, you took it from the hand, which gave back no responsive clasp, from that emaciated finger, the ring that she had worn so long and worn so well.

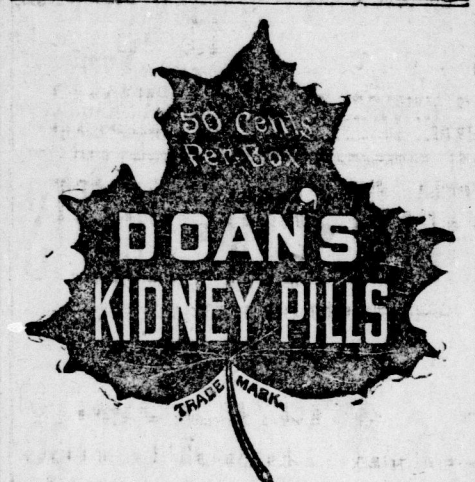
On some anniversary day you take up that ring, and you polish it, and you can see in it the flash of eyes that long ago ceased to weep. Oh, it is not an unmeaning thing when I tell you that when Christ receives a soul into his keeping he puts on it a marriage ring. He endows you from that moment with all his wealth. You are one—Christ and the soul—one in sympathy, one in affection. There is no power on earth or hell to effect a divorce after Christ and the soul are united. Other things have turned out their companions when they are weary of them, and when they drift from the palace gate. Ahasuerus banished Vashti; Napoleon forsok Josephine; but Christ is the husband that is true forever. Having loved you once he loves you to the end. Did they not try to divorce Margaret, the Scotch girl, from Jesus? They said: "You must give up your religion." She said: "I can't give up my religion." And so, they took her down to the beach of the sea, and they drove in a stake at low water mark, and they fastened her to it, expecting that as the tide came up her faith would fall. But the tide began to rise, and came up higher and higher, and to the girdle, and to the lip, and to the last moment, just as the wave was washing her soul into glory, she cried: "I am here, Jesus!"

I go a step further, and tell you that when Christ receives a soul into his love he puts on him the ring of festivity. You know it has been the custom in all ages to bestow rings on very happy occasions. There is nothing more appropriate for a birthday present than a ring. You delight to bestow such gifts upon your children at such a time. It means joy, hilarity, festivity. Well, when this old man of the text wanted to tell how glad he was that his boy had got back, he expressed it in this way. Actually, before he ordered sandals to be put on his bare feet, before he ordered the fatted calf to be killed to appease the boy's hunger, he commanded: "Put a ring on his hand."

Oh, it is a merry time when Christ and the soul are united. Joy of forgiveness! What a splendid thing it is to feel that all is right between my God and myself. What a glorious thing it is to have God just take up all the sins of my life and put them in one bundle, and then fling them into the depths of the sea, and never to rise again. Pollution all gone. Darkness all illumined. God reconciled. The prodigal home. "Put a ring on his hand."

Why, religion lightens all our burdens. It smooths all our way. It interprets all our sorrows. It changes the jar of earthly discord for the peal of festal bells. In front of the flaming furnace of trial it sets the forge on which sepiers are hammered out. Would you not like this hour to come up from the swine-feeding and try this religion? All the joys of heaven would come out and meet you, and God would cry from the throne: "Put a ring on his hand."

THE HYMANES.
Toronto, Jan. 7.—The Hyman brothers came up in the police court yesterday morning on the adjourned charge of conspiring to murder Mrs. Harry Hyman in Dec. 1894, and Jan. 1895. Mr. O. Leger, manager of the French department of the Montreal district of the Sun Life Insurance Co., testified to coming to Toronto from Montreal to insure Mrs. Hyman, and told of dealings with the brothers. At first he was told it was Mrs. McDougall he was to insure; afterwards this was contradicted, and Mrs. Hyman was stated to be the person. Dr. Byron Field, testified to having been requested to examine Mrs. Hyman for insurance. The amount was to be \$100,000.



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