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THE SCOURGE OF GOD

BY J. BLOUNDELLE-BURTON.

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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, NEW YORK.

THE SCOURGE OF GOD

A ROMANCE OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

BY

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON.

AUTHOR OF DENOUNCED, IN THE DAY OF ADVERSITY, ETC.

"Prince! que j'ai honoré comme mon Roi, et que j'honore encore comme Le Fléau de Dieu!"

SAURIN À LOUIS XIV

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1898

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THE SCOURGE OF GOD.

CHAPTER I.

AWAITING THE TRAVELLER.

With all the pomp and ceremony that should accompany the dying hours of a great lady of France, the Princesse de Rochebazon--Marquise du Gast d'Ançilly, Comtesse de Montrachet, Baronne de Beauvilliers, and possessor of many other titles, as well as the right to the tabouret--drew near her end.

A great lady of France, yet a woman against whom scandal had never breathed a word; a woman whose name had never been coupled with that of any courtier in a manner disadvantageous to her fame, but who instead, since first she came into the family a bride, had always been spoken highly of. As a saint by some--nay, by many; as a Christian by all; as a good servant of the Church. Now, the priests said, she was about to reap her reward in another existence, where her exalted rank would count as nothing and the good deeds of her life as everything.

Below, in the courtyard of her great hotel--which was situated in the Rue Champfleury, still called by many La Rue Honteuse because of what had gone on in that street hundreds of years before--the huge Suisse stood at the open gateway, leaning on his silver-headed cane, which he no longer dared to thump vigorously on the ground for fear of disturbing his dying mistress, stood and gazed forth into the long though narrow street. Perhaps to see that none intruded within the crimson cord set in front of the *porte-cochère* of the Hôtel de Rochebazon; perhaps to observe--with that pride which the menial takes in the greatness of his employers--how all the noble and illustrious callers on his mistress had to leave their coaches and their chairs outside of that barrier, and advance on foot for some yards along the filthy *chaussée* ere they could enter the courtyard; also, perhaps, to tell himself, with a warm glow of satisfaction, that none below royalty who had ever approached their end in Paris had been inquired after by more illustrious visitors.

Above, in the room where the princess lay dying--yet with all her faculties about her, and with, though maybe she hardly thought so, a great deal of vitality still left in her body--everything presented the appearance of belonging to one of wealth and position. The apartment was the bed chamber in which none but the chiefs of the house of de Rochebazon were ever permitted to lie; the bed, of great splendour and vast antiquity, was the bed in which countless de Beauvilliers and Montrachets and du Gast d'Ançillys and de Rochebazons had been born and died. A bed with a *ruelle* around it as handsome in its velvet and gold lace and gilt pilasters as the *ruelle* of *Le Dieudonné* himself--for the de Rochebazons assumed, and were allowed to assume without protest, many of the royal attributes and peculiarities--a bed standing upon a raised platform, or rostrum, as though the parquet floor was not exalted enough to come into contact with the legs of the couch on which the rulers of the house stretched their illustrious limbs.

In the room itself all was done that could be done to make it a fitting apartment for those heads of this great family. Arras and tapestry hung on the walls, representing religious scenes, battle scenes, hawking and hunting scenes; upon the uncovered portions of the wainscot were paintings of members who had borne at different times the different names of the family; on *plaques* in other places were miniatures and pictures by Bordier and Petitot, Mignard and Le Brun. Also, although 'twas autumn now, all about the great chamber were placed bowls of

flowers and ferns and grasses. These brightened not only the room, but sweetened it as well, and mingled their pure perfume with the less pure Pulvilio and *Bouquet du Roi* with which the air was impregnated.

In silvery tones a masterpiece of Fromantil's struck far down the room, over the mantelshelf of the huge fireplace, by the side of which a monk sat reading his breviary, and as it did so the princess, lying on her bed, opened her eyes--large, blue-gray eyes, the brightness of which age had no power to quench, nor would have till she was dead--and spoke to a girl seated outside the *ruelle*.

"What hour was that, Manon? Three or four?"

"Three, Madame la Princesse," the other answered, rising and passing under the bar to her mistress.

"The day is fair," the dying aristocrat said, letting her eyes glance toward the windows, through the heavy lace curtains of which the sun's rays strayed. "Fair. There is nothing to impede his journey. He should be here to-night. He must have crossed from England yesterday, must he not?"

"I should suppose so, madame. This is Friday. Your courier left for London last Sunday. It is certain Monsieur Ashurst must be very near Paris now."

"Ah, Manon! Monsieur Ashurst! Monsieur Ashurst! I would, instead, he were Monsieur de Beauvilliers. Then--then----" She broke off in what she had been about to say and bade the girl go tell the holy father he might leave the room, might walk in the garden if he chose, and see if there were any roses left. His services were not now required; if she could judge by her feelings, her death was not to be yet. Send him away, she gave order.

Obedient to her commands--was she not a patroness of all the religious foundations in and around Paris, as well as a magnificent benefactress?--the monk departed. Then the Princesse de Rochebazon continued:

"If he were not Monsieur Ashurst, but were instead of my husband's side, the de Rochebazons would not have come to an end--to an end. My God! why is he not a de Beauvilliers? Yet, had he been, I might not have loved him as I do."

"'Tis pity, madame," the girl said. "Yet even as it is----" then paused, breaking off.

"'Even as it is,' you would say, 'he will inherit much--much of the de Rochebazon fortune.' Yes, 'tis true. He will be well provided for. After the Church--that first. Also you, Manon, are remembered."

"Madame!" the girl exclaimed softly, gratefully. Then went on, while as she spoke the tears stood in her eyes. "You have been always very good to me, oh! so good, so good, as ever and to all. What shall we do? What shall we do?"

"Nay, weep not. And--and--'Good!' Never say that. I----"

A tap, gentle as became the sick room, was heard at the door, whereupon the girl, drying her eyes, went down to where it opened, and after a whispered word with some domestic outside, returned to the bed and, standing outside the *ruelle*, said, "Madame is here."

"Again! To-day! She is very thoughtful. Let her be brought to me at once. And, Manon, we will be alone."

"Yes, Madame la Princesse," whereupon, bowing, she left her mistress, going once more toward the door, at which she waited until steps were heard outside, when she opened it wide and courtesied lowly and reverently before the woman who had been spoken of as "Madame," and who now came in.

A lady well advanced in years, having the appearance of being about seventy, yet looking almost more, since the sumptuous black in which she was arrayed seemed by its fashion to be suitable to an older woman than even she was--a lady stately enough, though not tall, with a white complexion and worn features, eyes that were piercing though not dark, a mouth in which there were few teeth left, those that still remained being black and discoloured.

"Aurore," she said, advancing to the bedside and passing within the *ruelle*, a bar of which had been lifted by the attendant ere she went out, "Aurore, I thank our Heavenly Father that he has not yet thought fit to take you to himself. I--I--was very desirous of seeing you again before we meet in Heaven--as I pray we shall ere long."

"Madame," the princess said, her voice calm and, for one reaching her end, marvellously clear and distinct, "to see you must always be a gratification to me, even in my extremity. Madame----"

"Cease this form of address," the other said, seating herself as she did so in a low chair by the side of the great bed. "There is no necessity for ceremony. We have always been friends, going hand in hand in God's work since--long ago--since you were wife to the Baron de Beauvilliers and

with a greater position still to come; since I was Madame Scarron only, with little thought of ever being a----"

"Queen!"

"Nay! Never that. A king's wife--but no queen."

"It rested with you. The acknowledgment might have been forthcoming had you desired it."

"Even so. Only it was best to--to--let matters remain as they are."

So far as one so feeble as the princess now was could do so, she bent her head acquiescingly; doubtless she knew also that it was best that this woman should never be an acknowledged queen. She had not been a brilliant figure of the court of France for fifty years without being aware of all that was said, all that was whispered of Françoise d'Aubigné ere she found religion--as well as favour in the eyes of the king! Also, all that was whispered after that favour was found. There were a thousand tongues for ever wagging, as well as innumerable pens--the pen of De Sevignés to hint, the pens of Rabutins and Tallement des Réaux to speak plainly. Also her first lover was remembered and spoken of with many a courtier's tongue thrust in his, or her, cheek.

But now--now! she posed as God's vicegerent in France. Religion, even God himself, as some said bitterly, had been taken under her patronage; the king trembled for his soul as she worked on the fears of his mind, and Jansenists, Calvinists, Huguenots had been driven forth by hundreds of thousands to other lands, or, remaining in France, had been dragooned, sent to the galleys, the wheel, and the flames. The "*femme fameuse et funeste*" was the greatest living saint in Europe.

And as a saint, a patroness of the Holy Roman Church, she came now to visit the Princesse de Rochebazon once more ere she died.

"Aurore," she said, a moment later, "I have come to you again, hoping to find you not yet gone before me; because--because--oh, Aurore! to--to plead once more for the sacred cause of our Church; to beseech you to consider what you are about to do. Think! Think! You have worked so much good for that Church--yet you may do more."

"More!" the dying woman said, her clear, bright eyes fixed full blaze upon the other. "Madame--well, Françoise, since you insist--what more can I do? There is no de Rochebazon succeeding to title or estate, the power to will the latter, and--and all the movables, the *argent comptant*, is mine. And it is done. Beyond a few gifts to those who have served me, beyond what I have saved from that which is not justly mine, the Church will have all--all! Can it demand further?"

"'Tis that, 'tis that, Aurore! What you have saved from that which is most justly yours? 'Tis that! You told me," and now her voice, never loud, sank almost to a whisper, as though she feared that even in this vast room there might still be some who could overhear her, "that to this young man, this Martin Ashurst--this *Anglais*--you have left those savings. A noble heritage, five hundred thousand pistoles. Oh, Aurore! Aurore! think, think! it is French money, and he is--English----"

"He is my own flesh and blood," the other interjected. "My brother's child! And he is of our Church!"

"That alone redeems it. Yet think of all our Church, here in this France of ours, needs. Money to extirpate the heretics--some can even be *bought* with money, they say; in the *Midi* there are those who will adopt our religion for a handful of Louis d'ors----"

"They must have changed since their grandfather's days!--since La Rochelle!"

"They *have* changed, though--Vengeance confound and crush them!--some are still obstinate. But, Aurore, listen. This young man, this nephew, needs not the money. He is provided for, will be provided for in his own land. He will do well--go far under the heretic, Anne. Oh, Aurore, he is your flesh and blood, I know. 'Tis but nature that you should benefit him--yet not so much, not so much. God is before man--before all earthly relations."

"He is my brother's child," the Princesse de Rochebazon repeated. "And I loved that brother. Also this one has been my care----"

"I know, I know! Supported, educated by you, given money hourly to squander in waste. Yet I speak not against that; he is of your race. But now you will give him all this--so great a sum! And France needs money. Aurore," she cried, "do you know that our--that Louis'--coffers are empty? The wars, the buildings, the pomps and vanities, the awful prodigalities of the court have left those coffers bare. And money is needed so, needed so--especially for the work of the Church--needed so much!"

And she almost wrung her hands as thus she pleaded. Yet again the dying aristocrat murmured: "My own flesh and blood. Also of our faith."

Exhausted by her own efforts, the De Maintenon--the Curse of France! as many had termed her--seemed now to desist, to be beaten back by the words of the princess. Then suddenly

seemed also roused to fresh excitement as the other spoke again--excitement mixed this time with anger, as testified by the glances her eyes shot forth. For the dying woman had continued: "Though I provide for him I must tell him the truth--tell all. I can not die with a lie on my lips--in my heart."

"Aurore!" she exclaimed--had she not been a king's wife, had this not been a sick-room, it might almost have seemed that she screamed at the other--"Aurore, your brain is gone. You are mad. Tell him all, and lead to further evil to our Church. Aurore, for God's sake say this is a fantasy of your mind. Why," she exclaimed, her passion mounting with her thoughts, "why should you, a stranger to France, a woman raised by marriage to your high position, bring scandal on the name of a noble family--reveal secrets that have slumbered for years?"

"I can not die," the other repeated, "with the truth hidden."

"The truth," Madame de Maintenon muttered through her discoloured teeth, "the truth! What has the truth to do with--what account is it when set against our faith! Aurore, in the name of that faith, recall your words, your resolve."

But the dying woman was unshaken. Even the other, whose influence terrified all France, could not affright her--perhaps because the princess knew that henceforth she had to answer to a greater than she.

"I must confess it to him--I must--I must!" she murmured faintly. "I must. I can not die with such a secret in my heart."

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAVELLER FROM ENGLAND.

A great *Berline à quatre chevaux* halted at the North Gate outside Paris, and the young man seated within the carriage let down the window and prepared to once more answer all the questions that would be put to him. Yet he also thanked Heaven, in a somewhat wearied manner, that this must be the last of it. After that he would be in Paris, with nothing before him but to drive as fast as might be to the Rue Champfleury, known long ago as La Rue Honteuse.

Then the formula began once more, was repeated and gone through with, precisely in the same manner as it had been gone through with at Boulogne, where he had landed, at Amiens, Abbeville, and half a dozen other towns and villages.

"Monsieur's name?" asked the *guet*, respectfully enough, while as each answer was made he glanced at the passport handed to him and countersigned by the Ambassador to England from "Louis, Roi de France et de Navarre, etc."

"Martin Ashurst."

"Country?"

"England."

"Position?"

"Gentleman. Also----"

But here he found that no more explanation whatever was required from him. Precisely as he had found it all along the road, whenever the inquiring eyes of warders or *guets* or gatekeepers (in some cases soldiers) had lit upon one of the many statements appended to his passport--the statement that Monsieur Ashurst was nephew to "Madame la Princesse de Rochebazon."

"Passez, monsieur," said the man, as all the other men had said on seeing this, and saluting as all the other men had saluted; after which, with a direction to the coachman to proceed, he retired into his room in the gatehouse.

"The last, thank God," the occupant of the Berline muttered, "the last. It has been wearisome, but, well, it is over. Now for my aunt."

In spite of his weariness incurred by an unhalting journey from London, in which sleep could only be obtained by snatches here and there, in spite of the dust along the highroads both of England and France having discoloured his scarlet coat and tarnished his gold lacings and rendered dirty his Valenciennes cravat, as well as having turned the whiteness of his wig to a

dirty yellowish brown, Martin Ashurst presented an attractive appearance. His features were handsome and manly, clear-cut and aristocratic--Madame la Princesse de Rochebazon, once Aurora Ashurst, had herself possessed the same features when young--his figure was slight, yet strong and well knit, his whole appearance satisfactory. Also he bore about him those indefinable traits which mark the gentleman, which, perhaps, it may be said without offence to others, mark and distinguish the English gentleman particularly. A certain calm, a self-contained air, a lack of perception of the existence of those who were unknown to him, and thereby without his ken, distinguished Martin Ashurst as it has always distinguished so many of the well-bred of our land.

Yet his life had not been all passed in England, the first fifteen years of it being, indeed, spent in France under the patronage of the aunt to whom the *Berline à quatre chevaux* was now bearing him as fast as four heavy Flanders roadsters could drag it.

Gabriel Ashurst, his father, and Gabriel's sister Aurora, had been two among the hundreds of Royalists who, in the year 1647, were taken by their parents to France as soon as it was possible to escape out of England and from the clutches of the Parliamentarians. Then, in France, in Paris, had begun for them that long career of exile against which so many of the followers of the Stuarts had repined so much at first, and which, in due course, so many had come to like and, in some cases, to appreciate. Also there had come to this exiled family a splendid piece of good fortune, the like of which did not fall often in the way of English exiles. Aurora Ashurst, a girl of twenty, had won the heart of Henri de Beauvilliers, then Baron de Beauvilliers, but with, before him in the near future, the titles and wealth and great positions of Comte de Montrachet, Marquis du Gast d'Ançilly, and Prince de Rochebazon, for the head of the house who held them all was near his end; they were almost within the grasp of Henri, as he stood at the altar with his English bride. Three months after their marriage they were his.

Time passed. Gabriel married, as well as his sister, his wife being a countrywoman of his own, also in exile with her family. Cromwell died, the Stuarts were restored. Then Gabriel and his wife returned to England, but the lad, Martin, was left in charge of the Princesse de Rochebazon, who had become by now a childless widow--was, indeed, almost adopted by her. It was true she could not make him heir to the great titles--those must die out!--but at least she could provide for him, and she set about doing it. The whole control of the de Rochebazon wealth was hers to do what she pleased with; she might, if she had desired, have left their châteaux, their woods and forests in half a dozen provinces, their hotel in the Rue Champfleury--everything, to him. Only, because she was a just woman and a religious, she would not do that, recognising that the wealth accumulated by generations of French nobles ought not in common honesty to go to one who had no tie of blood with them and who belonged to a land which was almost always at war with France. Therefore, urged partly by the promptings of her own heart and deep Catholic feelings, partly by the promptings of a priest, and partly by those of the De Maintenon, as well as by a whispered hint in the soft courtly tones of *le Roi Soleil*, now cowering under the awful terrors that too often assail the self-righteous, she left all the wealth of the heirless De Rochebazons to the Church, reserving only for Martin Ashurst the fortune she had saved out of her private purse.

Yet 'twas a fortune which would make him rich for life, place him on a high pinnacle in either France or England, cause women either at St. James's or Versailles to angle for him, and throw aside forever, as commodities too expensive to be indulged in, the men whom they loved; a fortune that would buy him a peerage in England, obtain for him the *justaucorps à brevet* in France, and orders and decorations, the command of regiments, the governorships of provinces, embassies, stars and ribbons, surround him with parasites and flatterers! Half a million pistoles! In English money nigh upon five hundred thousand guineas!

As the berline rolled through St. Ouen and Aubervilliers, the wheels sometimes sticking in a rut of the ill-kept roads--whereby the great, cumbersome vehicle lurched so heavily that the young man expected to be overturned at every moment--sometimes, too, scattering a flock of ducks and fowls before it as they sought for subsistence amid the dust and filth, while the coachman and postillion hurled curses at all and everything that came in their way, and the English man servant in the banquette roared with laughter, Martin Ashurst thought of what lay before him in the future. For he knew well enough to what he went--the princess had long since apprised him of the inheritance that was to be his--he knew that future. Yet he was not particularly enamoured of it.

"The conditions," he muttered more than once to himself, "are irksome. To live in France, yet with my thoughts ever cast back to England, to London, to St. James's and the suppers at Locket's and Pontac's, the merry nights at Chaves's and White's. And--and--to be banished from England! Faugh! whatever my aunt has to leave me can scarce be worth that."

In sober truth, although he knew he was heir to Madame la Princesse, he did not know how great the inheritance was to be. In thinking it all over, in talking it all over, too, with his father and mother, he had imagined with them that there might be some thirty or forty thousand pounds which would be his, and that, owning this sum of money, he would thereby be a rich man. But that any such sum as that which his aunt had really put aside was ever likely to come to him had never entered his thoughts.

"Also," he mused, "how serve Louis, be subject to him when my own country may require me? And though we are at peace, how long shall we be so? Marlborough, the Dutch, are restless; they itch to fly at this French king's throat. It will come again. It must. No treaty ever yet put an end

to our wars for any considerable time. Also--also--there is the other thing. In honour I must tell her that, even though by doing so I cause her to renounce me, to disinherit me. To leave me not so much as will pay the score at Locket's for suppers. She must know it."

Down the Rue de la Boucherie the berline rumbled, the dry fetid smell of the blood of slaughtered beasts being perceptible to the young man's nostrils as he passed through it, since it was still the shambles of Paris; down the Rue des Chants Poulets and past the Rue des Mauvais Garçons it went, with still the driver hurling curses at all who got in his way, at children playing in the road and at a *cordelier* telling his beads as he walked, yet glinting an evil eye at the coachman and muttering maledictions at him under his breath, and with the English servant still laughing as now he donned his drugget coat and put on his puff wig. For the driver, in between his curses and howls and whoops at the animals, had found time to mutter that the next street was La Rue Champfleury, though, *diantre!* few flowers grew there now, except in the gardens of the great Princesse de Rochebazon.

"Sir," said the man servant, glancing down through the open window in the back of the great vehicle, "we are nearly there."

"I know it," Martin Ashurst replied. Then asked suddenly, as they passed under the *Beau Dieu* stuck in a corner house of the street, "Why does he roar afresh, and why pull up with such a jerk?"

"There are red cords stretched all about the street, sir, in front of a great house; also the road is half a foot deep in tan to deaden sounds. And a fellow with a three-cornered hat as big as a table waves a gilt stick to him to stop. What shall we do?"

"Why, stop to be sure. Also I will alight. We have arrived."

Whereon he descended out of the berline, bidding the man follow with his sword, as well as pay the driver and see to the necessaries being taken off the roof. After which he passed through the cords, and addressing the Suisse, said:

"How is it with Madame la Princesse?"

"Madame la Princesse still lives, monsieur," the man replied, his eye roving over the scarlet coat and richly laced hat of the traveller; noticing, too, the rings upon his fingers and the silver-hilted rapier carried by the servant. "Doubtless monsieur is the nephew of Madame la Princesse, expected to-day."

"I am he."

With a bow the man invited Martin Ashurst to follow him, and led him through a cool vestibule to where some footmen stood about, then ordered them to conduct monsieur to his apartment, saying that possibly he would desire to make his toilet.

"The rooms prepared for monsieur are those he has occupied often before, I hear," this man of importance said. "Upon this *étage*, giving on the garden, if monsieur pleases."

And now, left alone with only his servant to attend upon him, monsieur made a hasty toilet, washing from off his hands and face the dust and dirt of the journey, discarding, too, his scarlet coat and waistcoat for others of a more suitable colour, changing his wig and shoes and stockings. Then bade the man go say that if the princess would receive him he was ready to attend upon her.

Sitting there waiting to be summoned to her presence, his eyes glancing out through the long open windows on to the fresh, green garden with its banks of roses, now drooping with the advent of autumn, he thought of all that she had done for him since first he could remember. Of how, as a child, when he lived in this great house, or went with her in the summer heats to fair Touraine--where was a castle of the de Rochebazon's embowered in woods--or to that other great château in Perche, or to still a third one which hung over the golden sands of La Gironde, she seemed to live almost to shower gentle kindnesses upon him, her brother's child. To do all for him that she would have done had he been her own; to surround him with luxuries far too good and dainty for one so young as he; to provide him with tutors and keepers, with horses and carriages and rich silks and satins, and gold pieces in his pockets to fling to beggars as other men flung sols and deniers, because she loved him, and in her love had but one regret--that he was not a de Rochebazon to succeed to all they owned.

Also, when they were separated, he in England, she at Versailles, how much she had done for him as he grew to manhood! How much! How much! Money sent over for his pleasures because she desired that, in all things, he should have the best, should be able to hold his own with those who were in the court circle and the fashion. That his early years should never know any narrowness of means which in after life might cramp him as he recalled it; also that, as he stepped over the threshold of youth and reached manhood, he should do so with ease and comfort.

"I owe her all, everything," he mused to himself as still his eyes gazed out upon the trim-kept and still luxurious *parterres* of the great gardens. "All, all! My father, beggared as he was by his

loyalty, could have done naught beyond equipping me for some simple, unambitious calling, beyond, perhaps, obtaining me a pair of colours in some marching regiment. I owe her all--the clothes upon my back, the food I eat, the very knowledge of how to wield a sword! And--and--God forgive me! I have deceived her for years, kept back for years a secret that should not have existed for one hour. Still, she shall know now. She shall not go to her grave without knowing that I have no right to own one single livre that she has put aside for me."

As he finished his reflections the door was rapped at, and the footman, entering at his command, told him that the Demoiselle Manon was without and waiting to escort him to the bedside of Madame la Princesse.

CHAPTER III.

A PARTING SOUL.

Looking down upon her as she lay in the great bed whereon had reposed so many of the de Rochebazons for generations--when they had been the head of the house--Martin Ashurst told himself how, except for the reason that he was about to lose the kindest benefactress and kinswoman any man had ever had, there was no cause for the tears to rise to his eyes.

For never was a more peaceful parting about to be made, to all external appearances; never could a woman have trod more calmly the dark road that, sooner or later, all have to pass along, than was now treading Aurora, Princesse de Rochebazon. Also it seemed as if death was smoothing away every wrinkle that time had brought to her face, changing back that face to the soft, innocent one which, in the spring of life, had been Aurora Ashurst's greatest charm; the face that had been hers when, as a winsome child, she played in the meadows round her father's old home in Worcestershire--demolished by Lambert; the face that, but a few years later, had won Henri de Beauvilliers away from the intoxicating charms of Mancinis, of Clerembaults, of Baufremonts, and Châtillons, and a hundred other beauties who then revolved round the court of the young king, now grown so old.

"You do not suffer, dear and honoured one," Martin said, bending over her and gazing into the eyes that were still so bright--the last awful glazed look and vacant stare, which tell of the near end being still some hours off; "you do not suffer, dear one. That I can see, and thank God for so seeing."

"No," the princess said, "I have no pain. I am dying simply of what comes to all--decay. I am seventy years of age, and it has come to me a little earlier than it does sometimes. That is all. But, Martin, we have no time to talk of this. Time is short--I know that." Then, suddenly lifting the clear eyes to his own, she said, "Do you know why I sent a special courier to London for you?"

"To bid me hurry to you, I should suppose, dear one. To give me your blessing. Oh!" he exclaimed, bending a little nearer to her, "you are a saint. You would not part from me without giving me that. Therefore bless me now!" and he made as though he would kneel by her side betwixt the bed and the *ruelle*.

"Wait," she said, "wait. I have something to tell you. After I have done so I know not if you will still deem me a saint, still desire my blessing. Bring that chair within the *ruelle*; sit down and listen."

Because he thought that already her mind was beginning to enter that hazy approach to death in which the senses lose all clearness, and the dying, when they speak at all, speak wanderingly, he neither showed nor felt wonderment at her words. Instead, because he desired to soothe and calm her, he did as she bade him, drawing the chair within the rail and holding her hand as he did so.

"Whatever," he said softly, "you may tell me can make no difference in my love and reverence for you--make me desire your blessing less or deem you less a saint. Yet--yet--if it pleases you to speak, if you have aught you desire to say, say on. Still, I beseech you, weary not yourself."

At first she did not answer him, but lay quite still, her eyes fixed on his face; lay so still that from far down the room he heard the ticking of the clock, heard the logs fall softly together with a gentle clash now and again, even found himself listening to a bird twittering outside in the garden.

Then, suddenly, once more her voice sounded clearly in the silence of the room; he heard her say: "What I tell you now will make me accursed in the eyes of all the Church--our Church. I am about to confide to you a secret that all in that Church have ordered me never to divulge, or I

would have done it long since. Yet now I must tell it."

"A secret," he repeated silently to himself, "a secret!" Therefore he knew that her mind must indeed be wandering. What secret could this saintly woman have to reveal? Ah! yes, she was indeed wandering! Yet, even as he thought this, he reflected how strange a thing it was that, while he had actually a revelation to make to her--one that his honour prompted him to make--she, in the delirium of coming death, should imagine that she had something which it behooved her to disclose.

Once more he heard her speaking. Heard her say:

"All deem that with me perishes the last bearer, man or woman, of the de Rochebazon name. It is not so. There is probably one in existence."

"Madame!" the young man exclaimed very quietly, yet startled, almost appalled. "Madame! A de Rochebazon in existence! Are you conscious of what you are saying?" and he leaned a little over the coverlet and gazed into her eyes as he spoke. Surely *this* was wandering.

"As conscious as that I am dying here, as that you, Martin Ashurst, are sitting by my side."

"I am astounded. How long has what you state been known--supposed--by you?"

"Known--not supposed--since I became Henri de Beauvillier's wife, forty-six years ago."

"My God! What does it mean? A de Rochebazon alive! Man or woman?"

"Man!"

Again Martin exclaimed, "My God!" Then added: "And this man, therefore, is, has been since the death of your husband, the Prince de Rochebazon?"

"Before my husband's death," the other answered quietly, calmly, as though speaking on the most trivial subject. "My husband never was the prince."

Unintentionally, without doubt--perhaps, too, unnoticed by her--his hand released hers, slipping down from the bedside to his knee, where it lay, while he, his eyes fixed full on her now and still seeking to read in her face whether that which she uttered was the frenzy of a dying woman or an absolute truth, said slowly and distinctly:

"Nor you, therefore--that I must utter the words!--the princess?"

"Nor I the princess."

"It is incredible. Beyond all belief."

"It is true."

Again there was a pause; filled up on Martin Ashurst's part with a hurtling mass of thoughts which he could not separate one from the other, though above all others there predominated one--the thought that this was the derangement of a mind unhinged by the weakness of approaching death, clouded by the gradual decay of nature. And, thinking thus, he sat silent, wondering if in very truth--since all she had said seemed so utterly beyond the bound of possibility--it were worth disturbing her with questions.

Yet her next words seemed uttered as though with a determination to force him to believe that what she had said was no delusion.

"There are others who know it--only they will never tell."

"Others! Who?"

"Madame knows it"--he was well enough aware *what* "Madame" she referred to, and that it was to neither her of Orleans nor any of the daughters of the house of France--"so, too, does La Chaise, and also Chamillart. Also," and now her voice sank to a whisper, "Louis."

"Louis!" he repeated, also whisperingly, yet not recognising that his voice was lowered instinctively. "The king! knows and permits. My God!"

"He must permit, seeing that she--De Maintenon--holds him in a grasp of steel."

"Knowing--herself?"

"I have said."

Again over the room there fell a silence, broken only by the ticking of the distant clock; also now the shadows of evening were drawing on, soon the night would be at hand--a silence caused by the dying woman having ceased to speak, by the man at her side forbearing to ask more questions.

Yet he was warned by signs which even he, who had as yet but little acquaintance with death, could not misinterpret; that what more was to be told must be declared at once, or--never. For the dying woman made no further effort to divulge more, or to explain aught which should elucidate the strange statement she had startled him with; instead, lay back upon her pillows, her eyes open, it was true, but staring vacantly upon the embossed and richly-painted ceiling, her breathing still regular but very low.

"She will speak no more," he said to himself, "no more. Thank God, the secret does not die with her. Yet will those whom she has mentioned--this woman who is the king's wife; the king himself; La Chaise, who, if all accounts are true, is a lying, crafty priest; the minister Chamillart--will they assist to right a wrong? Alas, I fear not! Ah, if she could but speak again--tell all!"

As thus he thought, the door opened and the waiting maid came in, accompanied by a gentleman clad in sombre black, his lace being, however, of the whitest and most costly nature, and his face as white as that lace itself. And the girl, advancing down the room, followed by the other, explained to Martin, when she had reached the bed, that the gentleman accompanying her was Monsieur Fagon, *premier Médecin du Roi*.

Bowing to him with much courtliness, the physician passed within the *ruelle* and stood gazing down upon the dying woman in what was now no better than twilight, but going through, as the other observed, none of the usual ceremonies of feeling the pulse or listening to the breathing. Then once he nodded his head, after which he turned away, stepping outside the *ruelle*.

"What may we hope, monsieur?" the young man asked, following Fagon down the room.

"What," answered Fagon in return, "does monsieur hope?"

"That she may be spared for yet some hours--more, I fear, can scarcely be expected. Also that she may be able to speak again and clearly. I am her nephew, and, in a manner of speaking, am--was to be--her heir."

From under his bushy eyebrows Fagon shot a glance out of his small twinkling eyes. Then he said: "So I have heard. Yet monsieur, if he will pardon me, phrases his statement strangely, in spite of his having the French extremely well. 'Was to be her heir!' Has monsieur reason to apprehend that Madame la Princesse has made any alteration in her testamentary dispositions?"

"Monsieur has no reason to apprehend that such is the case. Yet," changing the subject, "he would be very glad if he could know that some hours of life will still be granted to--to--Madame la Princesse; that he might hope she will be able to converse again."

"Sir," Fagon said, with still the little twinkling eyes upon him, "she may live two or three more hours. I doubt her ever speaking again. There is no more to be done. Sir, I salute you." With which words he departed, escorted by the maid servant Manon.

It seemed, however, to Martin as though even should his aunt recover consciousness and be able to throw any further light upon the strange story which she had commenced, no opportunity would arise for her to do so, for Fagon had not been gone a quarter of an hour, during which time she lay so motionless in her bed that more than once he gazed down upon her, wondering if already the soul had parted from the body, before the monk who had previously been in attendance came in, and going toward the great fireplace drew forth his missal and began to read it. Nor was it without some difficulty that Martin was able to induce him to quit the room.

"Depart!" this holy man said, glancing up at the tall form of the other as he whispered his request to him. "Depart, my son! Alas! do you not know that the end is near--that at any moment the last services of the Church may be required to speed the passing soul?"

"I know, nor do I intend that she shall be deprived of those services. But, reverend sir, it is necessary I should be alone with my kinswoman; if she recovers her intelligence even at the last moment we have much to say to one another. I beg you, therefore, to leave us together; be sure you shall not be debarred from ministering to her when she desires you. I request you to remain outside--yet within call."

Because he knew not how to resist, because also he was but a humble member of the Théatine confraternity who, in Paris at least, owed much to the wealth and support of the Rochebazons, also because in his ignorance he thought he stood in the presence of him who was, he imagined in his simplicity, the next possessor of that great name and the vast revenues attached to it, he went as bidden, begging only that he might be summoned at the necessary moment.

Then for a little while kinsman and kinswoman were alone once more.

"Will she ever speak again, tell me further?" Martin mused again, gazing down on the silent woman lying there, her features now lit up a little by the rays of a shaded *veilleuse* that had been brought into the chamber by Manon and placed near the great bed. "I pray God she may." Then murmured to himself: "As well as I can see--'tis but darkly, Heaven knows--yet so far as I can peer into the future, on me there falls the task of righting a great wrong, done, if not by her, at least by those to whose house she belongs. But, to do so much, I must have light."

It seemed to him, watching there, as though the light was coming--was at hand. For now the occupant of the bed by which he sat stirred; her eyes, he saw, were fixed on him; a moment later she spoke. But the voice was changed, he recognised--was hoarse and harsh, hollow and toneless.

"Henri," she murmured, with many pauses 'twixt her words, "Henri was not the eldest. There was--another--son--a--a--Protestant--a Huguenot----"

"Great God! what sin is here?" the startled watcher muttered; then spoke more loudly: "Yes, yes, oh, speak, speak! Continue, I beseech you. Another son--a Huguenot--and the eldest!"

"That a de Rochebazon should be--a--Huguenot," the now dry voice muttered raucously, "a Huguenot! And fierce--relentless--strong, even to renouncing all--all--his rank, his name, his birthri----"

Again she ceased; he thought the end had come. Surely the once clear eyes were glazing now, surely this dull glare at vacancy which expressed indefinitely that, glare how they might, they saw nothing, foretold death--near, close at hand.

"Some word, some name, madame, dear one," the listener whispered. "Speak, oh! speak, or else all effort must fail. His name--that which his brother called him--that which he took, if he renounced his rightful one. The name--or--God help us all! naught can be done."

"His name," the dying woman whispered through white lips, in accents too low to reach the listener's ears, "was----"

If she uttered it he did not hear it. Moreover, at this supreme moment there came another interruption--the last!

The door opened again. Down the room, advancing toward the bed, came a priest, a man thin to attenuation, dry and brown as a mummy, with eyes that burned like coals beneath an eyebrowless forehead, yet one who told his beads even as he advanced, his lips quivering and moving while he prayed.

Do the dying know, even as we bend over them, seeking to penetrate beneath that glassy stare which suggests so deep an oblivion, of the last word we would have them speak, the last question we would have answered ere the veil of dense impenetrable darkness falls forever between them and us?

Almost it seemed as if she, this sinking woman who had lived for years a great princess, yet, by her own avowal, was none, did in truth know what her kinsman sought to drag from her--the clew which should lead to the righting of a great wrong, as he had said.

For, as the priest came through the lurking shadows of the room and out of the darkness of the farther end, toward where the small night lamp cast its sickly shadow, the hand which Martin Ashurst held closed tighter upon his own, and with a quivering grasp drew his toward her body, placing it upon a small substance that had lain sheltering 'twixt her arm and side.

And even as thus his hand closed over hers, while that other quivered warm and damp within it, the priest knelt and, over his crucifix, uttered up prayers for the passing soul.

CHAPTER IV.

LES ATTROUPÉS.

It was October in the year 1701 when she who had borne the title for so long of Princesse de Rochebazon was laid in the family vault in the Church of St. Sépulcre. It was July of the next year when a gentleman, looking somewhat travel-stained and weary, halted his horse at the foot of the Mont de Lozère, in Languedoc--the same man who had travelled from England eight months ago as Martin Ashurst, to attend his aunt's death-bed, but who since then had been known as Monsieur Martin.

There were more reasons than one why this change of name should be made--primarily because war having been declared by England in conjunction with Austria and Holland against Louis, no subject of Queen Anne was permitted within France, or, being in, would be safe if known and identified as such. But with an assumed name, or rather with part of his own name discarded--Martin being common to both countries--and with his knowledge of the French language perfect, owing to his long residence in the country as a child, the identification of Martin Ashurst with England was, if he held his peace, almost impossible. Also there were other reasons. He believed that at last he had found traces of the missing man, of him to whom by right

fell all the vast wealth of the de Rochebazons, accumulated for centuries.

"Yet even now," he said to himself, "God knows if I shall succeed in finding him, or even should I do so, if I shall persuade him to claim what is his own. And, though he should still be willing, will that scourge of God, Louis, that curse of France, his wife, let one penny ever come to his hands? A Huguenot, and with the Huguenots in open rebellion, what chance would he have? I must be careful, more careful than ever, now that I am in the hotbed of revolution."

As he pondered thus he turned his wrist and urged his horse forward at a walk, making his way on slowly through the mountains to the village of Montvert.

"Three months," he said, "three months since I set out for Switzerland--for Geneva and Lausanne--and now, even now, but little nearer to the end than before. Coming here, I was told that it was almost impossible that Cyprien de Beauvilliers could have settled in the Cévennes without being known; travelling on to Savoy and to Lausanne, I learn at last that he did most undoubtedly come here from Geneva years ago. Shall I ever know--ever find out?"

A league or so accomplished at a walking pace, for his poor beast was almost exhausted now, it having been ridden across the mountains from St. Victor de Gravière since daybreak, and from Geneva within the last three weeks, and the banks of a river named Le Tarn being slowly followed, the rider entered Montvert, and passing across the bridge, proceeded slowly up the village street. Yet even as he did so he cast his eyes on a house at the side of that bridge and on the small trim garden between it and the stream, muttering to himself:

"Ah! Monsieur l'abbé! Monsieur l'abbé! you are one of the firebrands who stir up dissension in these valleys--you and your familiar spirit, Baville. Also your evil fame has travelled far. You are known and hated in Geneva, Lausanne, Vevey--maybe in Holland by now. 'Tis best you pray to Heaven to avert your fate. 'Tis threatened! And, if all the stories of you be true, it is almost deserved, no matter in what form it comes."

Proceeding still farther along the little main street of the bourg, he came to a wooden house also standing in a small trimly-kept garden, in which there grew all kinds of simple flowers that made the place gay with their colours, and here he dismounted, while calling to a boy who was raking the crushed shells on the path, he bade him take his horse to the stable in the rear.

"For you see, Armand," he said with a pleasant smile, "here I am back again, after a long while--yet still back."

The boy smiled a greeting and said all would be glad to welcome him, then did as he was bid and led the animal away, while Martin, going up to the door, knocked lightly on it and asked, as he threw his voice into the passage, if the *pasteur* was within.

To which, in answer, there came down toward the door an elderly gray-haired man, who held out both his hands and shook those of the younger one cordially.

"Back! Back!" he exclaimed joyously. "Ah! this is good. Come in. Come in. The room is always ready, the bed kept aired, the lavender in the drawers. Welcome! Welcome!" Then, after looking at him and saying that his journey had not harmed him, he exclaimed: "Well, what news? Or--is it disappointment again?"

"But little news; scarcely, in truth, more than before. Yet something. I met a man at Geneva who had known Cyprien de Beauvilliers, but he was very old and, alas! it is forty years and more since he set eyes on him."

"Forty years! A lifetime!"

"Ay, a lifetime--long enough for him to have disappeared from all human knowledge, to have died. That, I fear, is what has happened. Otherwise, this man says, they of the reformed faith would almost surely have heard of him."

"Not of necessity," the pastor answered. "If he so hated his kin and their religion that he was determined to break off forever from them and their customs, he may have resolved to obliterate every clew. He told the princess's husband that he renounced his name, his birthright. Other men have resolved on that, and kept their resolution."

While they had been speaking the pastor had led Martin Ashurst into his little salon, and he called now to an elderly woman to prepare the evening meal.

"And a good one to-night, Margot; a good one to-night to welcome back the wanderer."

Whereon the old servant smiled upon that wanderer and murmured also some words of greeting, while she said it should be a good one. *Fichtre*, but it should!

"*Soit!* Let us see," went on her master. "First for the solids. Now, there is a trout, caught this morning and brought me by Leroux--oh, such a trout! Two kilos if an ounce, and with the true deep speckles. *Ma foi!* he was a fool, he clung too much to the neighbourhood of the lower bridge, derided Leroux with his wicked eye; yet, observe, Leroux has got him. *Si! Si!* Half an hour

hence he will be *truite au vin blanc*, a thing not half so wholesome for him as the stream and the rushes. *Hein!*"

Martin smiled to himself, yet gravely, as always now since his aunt's dying revelation. How far off seemed to him the merry days, or nights, at Locket's and Pontac's, and the jokes and jeers and flashes of wit of Betterton and Nokes, Vanburgh and gentle Farquhar!--while still the good old pastor prattled on, happy at preparing his little feast.

"*Truite au vin blanc*. Ha! And the right wine, too, to wash it down. Ha! The *Crépi*, in the long, tapering glasses that the Chevalier de Fleuville brought me from Villefranche. Poor de Fleuville! Poor, poor de Fleuville! Then, Margot, the *ragoût* and the white chipped bread, and, forget not these, clean *serviettes* to-night, if we never have others, and the cheese from Joyeuse. Oh! we will *faire la noce* to-night, *mon brave*. God forgive me," he broke off suddenly, his voice changing, "that even your return should make me think of feasts and *noces* at such a time as this--a time of blood and horror and cruelty!"

Over the meal, the trout being all that was expected of him, and the *Crépi* a fitting accompaniment thereto, they talked on what had been the object of "Monsieur Martin's" journey into Switzerland, then neutral in both religion and politics, and offering, consequently, a home for refugees of all classes and denominations; talked also of what results that journey had had, or had failed to have. But all ended, or was comprised, in what the young man had already told the other--namely, that it seemed certain that Cyprien de Beauvilliers had at first gone to Geneva and Lausanne after he renounced his family and his religion, and that from there he had come to Languedoc, meaning to settle in the one spot in France where Protestantism was in its strongest force.

"He would thereby," the pastor said, as now they reached the *fromage de Joyeuse*, nestling white and creamy in the vine leaves, "be able to enjoy his religion in peace for many years, until--until the unhappy events of '85. Alas! that revocation! That revocation, born of that fearful woman! What--what will be the outcome of all, for even now it is but beginning to bear its worst fruits. Martin," he continued, "Martin, *mon ami*, we are but at the commencement. I fear for what will happen here ere long. I fear, I fear, I fear."

"Here! Is it as bad as that?"

"It is dreadful, appalling. My friend, they will suffer no longer. They can support neither Baville's tyranny, which extends over all the district, nor--here, in this little village once so happy--the monstrous cruelties of the abbé."

"The abbé! Du Chaila! What is he doing now?"

"Tongue scarce dare tell for fear of not being believed. In after years, in centuries to come, when religion is free and tolerant, as some day it must be--it must! it must!--those who read of what we have suffered will deem the story false. O Martin! there, in that house by the bridge, are done things that would almost excite the envy of the Inquisition, ay! of Torquemada himself, were he still in existence. And he, this abbé, is the man who will light the flame in this tranquil spot. I pray God it may be extinguished almost ere lit." And Martin Ashurst saw that even as he spoke his hands were folded under the table, as though in prayer, and that his lips moved.

"But what," he said, "what do you fear? Also to what extremes does he now proceed?"

"'Proceed!' Ah, Martin, listen. There in that house by the bridge, once Fleuville's, who was hung by De Genne upon the bridge itself, so that his wife might see the thing each morning when she rose, he tortures us, the Protestants. Keeps prisoners confined, too, in the cellars deeper than the river itself. In stocks some, naked some, some with food only twice a week. He boasts he is God's appointed, then jeers and says, 'Appointed, too, by Baville under Louis.'"

"And Louis knows this?"

"Some say not, some say yes. For myself, I do not know. But things are near the end." And again the good pastor murmured, "I fear, I fear, I fear." Then went on, his voice lowered now and his eyes glancing through the windows, opened to let in the soft autumn air, cool and luscious as though it had passed over countless groves of flowers: "Listen. Masip--you have heard of him, Masip, the guide, he who shows the way to Switzerland and freedom--he is now there, in the cellars, in the stocks, bent double, his hands through two holes above the two where his feet are."

"For what?"

"He showed the Demoiselles Sexti the road to Chambery--they went dressed as boys. The girls escaped into the mountains. Masip is doomed. He dies to-morrow."

"God help him!"

"Him! God help all, Martin. He hunts us everywhere. Some of my brother preachers have been executed; I myself am suspended, my hour may come--to-night--to-morrow. Sooner or later it must come. Then for me the wheel or the flames or the gibbet--there." And he pointed down the street toward where the bridge was on which Fleuville's body had been hanged.

"Never! Never!" Martin exclaimed, touching the old man's arm. "Never, while I have a sword by my side." Then added, a moment later:

"My friend, I must declare myself. While all are so brave, all going to, or risking, their doom, I am but a craven hound to wear a mask. To-morrow I announce--or rather denounce--myself as a Protestant. My aunt died ere I could tell the secret which would have caused her to curse me instead of leaving me her heir. Here, I will shelter myself under that secret no more. To-morrow I see this abbé in his own house, to-morrow I defy him to do his worst on me as on others. I proclaim myself."

"No, no, no!" the old pastor cried, springing at him, placing his hand upon his lips to prevent further words from being heard or from penetrating outside. "No, no! In God's name, no! I forbid you. If you do that, how will you ever find de Beauvilliers--de Rochebazon, as he is if alive--or, he being dead, find his children? I forbid you," he reiterated again and again in his agitation. "I forbid you."

"Forbid me? Force me to live a coward in my own esteem? To see those of my own faith slaughtered like oxen in the shambles and stand by, a poltroon, afraid to declare myself?"

"I forbid you. Not yet, at least. Remember, too, you are an Englishman, of France's deepest, most hated foes; your doom is doubly threatening. Yet, oh, oh, my son," he exclaimed in a broken voice, "how I love, how I reverence you! Brave man, brave, honest Protestant, I love--my God!" he exclaimed, changing his tone suddenly, desisting in his speech, "My God! what is that?"

Desisted, turning a stricken, blanched face upon the younger man, who had reached for his sword and sash and was already donning them, while he whispered through white lips, "It has come! It has come! The storm has burst," while even as he spoke he fell on his knees by the table, and sinking his head into his hands, commenced to pray long and silently.

Prayed long and silently, while from outside the bourg--yet advancing, approaching nearer every moment--there came a deep sound. At first a hum, then, next, a clearer, more definite noise, and next, they being distinguishable, the words of a hymn sung by many voices.

Upon the soft night air, so calm and peaceful a moment earlier, those words rolled, the cadence falling and rising until it seemed as though it must reach the mountain tops o'erhanging the village. Rolled up and swelled, and sunk and rose again, telling how the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who came against Judah; telling how, when they had made an end of one of their particular foes, each helped to destroy another.

Again the pastor moaned: "They have risen. They have risen. God help us all!"

"Who?" asked Martin. "Who? Our own faith? The Protestants? The Camisards? Risen at last."

"At last! At last!" the old man said, glancing up from his prayers. And he began to pray aloud to God to avert the horrors of battle and murder and sudden death.

The tramp of many men came nearer. Past the foot of the garden those men went, a compact mass; in their hands and belts, and borne also upon their shoulders, swords, old halberds, musketoons and pistols, in some cases scythes and reaping hooks. And ahead of all marched three gaunt, weird men, the inspired ones, the prophets of the Cevennes, of the Camisards.

"Keep all within doors," a deep-toned voice exclaimed from out the throng, "on pain of death. Disturb not the children of God, his persecuted ones. No harm is meant to those who interfere not. Keep within doors, also appear not at the windows. All will thereby be well."

And again the psalm uprose, though now there were some who shouted: "To the vile abbé's! To the murderer's! To the house on the bridge! On! On! The soldiers first, the abbé next! On! On! To avenge the Lord!"

Then from farther ahead there rang the report of musketry, and one man fell dead pell-mell among the moving crowd, and was left lying in the white dust of the roadway, as from the window Martin could well see. But still the others shouted: "On! On! God's will be done!"

And again the pastor lifted his hands from where he knelt and cried aloud, "From battle, murder, and sudden death, good Lord deliver us."

CHAPTER V.

When Martin Ashurst bent over her who had borne for over forty years the title of Princesse de Rochebazon, and saw that, at last, the light had gone out of her eyes forever, he recognised how her dying words had changed his whole existence. Not only was he no more the heir to the wealth she had put by for him--his honour never halted for one moment in telling him that, or in dictating the renouncement of every sol that was hers--but also there had arisen before him a task which, his honour again speaking clear and trumpet-tongued, he must devote his life to fulfilling. He had to find the true Prince de Rochebazon, or, which was more likely, if he ever succeeded in his search at all, to find that man's children and put before them a plain account of all the wealth which was theirs, even though they should not be induced to accept it.

That if he could discover the missing de Rochebazon, even though he were still alive, he would find him willing to reclaim what was his, he doubted. A man who could for more than forty years renounce one of the most brilliant positions in France because of his religious convictions was not very likely now to alter those convictions, he knew. Also Martin Ashurst's acquaintance with the land over which the Grand Monarque reigned was amply sufficient to tell him that here, and under the all-powerful domination of the self-righteous De Maintenon, Louis would never allow a hated Protestant to step into the wealth and titles of so Romish a family as that of the de Rochebazons. Between these two stumbling blocks, therefore--the Protestantism of the lost man on one side, and the bigotry of the arbiter of France on the other--it was scarcely to be hoped that even though he should find him whom he sought, he should succeed in his endeavour to restore to that man what was his.

Yet, because he was honest and straightforward, he swore to at least make the attempt.

Regaining his own room, in which the lights had been placed--even with the mistress and last ruler of the great house lying dead in it, the major domo had deemed it fit that waxen candles should blaze from girandoles in every passage and room of the hotel, and that naught should be omitted which testified to its sumptuousness and magnificence--he recollected that he was still grasping in his hand the packet which the dying woman had directed that hand to, for he had forgotten almost that he had received it from her, so agitated was he during her last moments; now that it recalled its presence to him, he determined that he would as soon as might be discover what it contained.

But first he knew that there were other things to be done: Orders to be given that due proclamation of her death should be made; that, above all, the heads of her Church should at once be communicated with, since the monk now praying by her side would not, he was aware, quit the house, even though he had to leave the body while it was prepared for the grave; that a courier should be sent to Marly, where the king was; that the seals should be put on everything.

There was much to do still ere he could open that packet which might tell him all--or nothing.

Yet by midnight, before the great bell struck the hour from St. Eustache, as much was done as possible. Aurora, Princesse de Rochebazon, lay, not in her coffin; that, with its emblazonments and silver feet and coronets at its corners, as well as the great silver plaque telling of all the rank and honours and titles she had borne--unrighteously, if her own dying words were true--could not be prepared hurriedly. Instead, upon her bed, now transformed into a temporary bier, as the great room in which she had died had been transformed into a *Chapelle Ardente*. Also the courier was gone, the Church apprised of the death of its open-handed benefactress; already the Abbé Le Tellier (confessor to the king and all the royal family, and titulary bishop and coadjutor of Reims) was here, he having arrived from St. Cloud as fast as his *chaise roulante* could bring him; also the place swarmed with priests--Theatines, Dominicans, Benedictines, and Augustines; the seals, too, were on doors and coffers and bureaux.

Likewise, Samuel Bernard, *traitant* and banker to the *haut monde*, had paid a visit and been closeted for an hour with the clergy. For the Church was the principal inheritor of the de Rochebazon wealth, and the time had come for it to grasp its heritage.

Yet now, at midnight, the great house was at last quiet; the monks prayed in silence in the room where the dead woman lay; the Suisse sat behind the high closed gates refreshing himself with the flask of yellow muscadine which the butler had brought him, and discussing with that functionary what *legs* each were like to get; some women servants who had loved their dead mistress wept in their beds.

All was still at last.

Martin opened the packet in that silence--he had dismissed his own servant an hour before--and inspected its contents.

They were not numerous--half a dozen letters and a lock of hair, golden, fair as the ripening cornfield, long, and with a curl to it. But, except that and the letters, nothing else. Whose hair it was that had thus been preserved in a piece of satin Martin never knew, yet perhaps could guess.

The letters lay one above the other in the order they had been written. The first and uppermost had the upper portion of it torn away, possibly by accident, or perhaps, instead, by the

recipient who, it may be, was not desirous that the place whence it was dated should be known. At least such, Martin Ashurst fancied, might be the case. The paper it was written on was yellow with age, the ink faded, yet the words still clear and distinct, the writing firm. Because the top of the sheet was torn away some of the first lines of the communication were themselves missing, therefore the letter ran thus:

"... her fault upon me. *Soit!* I bow to what you say. Yet, if disinheritance of all that should be mine is your determination, my place in the world you can never disinherit me from; I myself alone can renounce that. The pity is great that you have it not also in your power to deprive me of the qualities of mind and heart which you have transmitted to me. Yet I pray God that I may find in myself the strength to do so, to cast away from me the pride of race, the fierce cruelty of heart, the intolerance of all that is not within my own circle of vision. Also your power of hating another for the fault committed, not by himself, but an unhappy mother--a mother driven to sin by coldness from him who should have reverenced her; the victim of a gloomy, morose nature, of a self-esteem that would be absurd even in the king himself, of a pride that might rival the pride of Lucifer.

"To reproach you, however, for sins which I may myself have inherited from you--since even you do not deny me as your son--would be useless. Therefore it is better for me to write at once that I do not oppose the disinheritance with which you threaten me. Nay, rather, I go hand in hand with you, only, also, I go to a greater extent. You tell me that if I embrace the Reformed Faith no sol or denier of the de Rochebazon wealth shall ever be mine, that I shall enjoy a barren title. This you can not force me to do. I will support no title whatever. Henceforth, neither de Rochebazon, nor d'Ançilly, nor Montrachet, nor Beauvilliers have aught to do with me. I cast them off. I forget that the house which bears those titles is one with which I have any connection. I go forth into the world alone, under a lowly name. The roof that covers me, the food for my mouth, the clothes to cover my nakedness, will be earned by my own hands. Moreover, so do I steel my heart that henceforth even my brother, Henri, will be lost to me forever. He becomes, therefore, your heir; may he find in you a better father than I have ever done. Consequently, for the last time on this earth, I sign myself,

"Cyprien de Beauvillers."

Martin laid the paper down on the table before him and sat back musing in his chair. "A stern, fierce determination that," he muttered to himself, "arrived at by a man who would keep his word. Let us see for the next."

As he read this next one it was easy to perceive what course the rupture between the father and son had taken; how the iron will of the one had beaten down that of the other. Already the elder had sued for reconciliation--and had failed.

"What you now desire," the man wrote, who had once been Cyprien de Beauvilliers, "is impossible. First, on the ground of religion, and secondly, because of yourself. I am now of the Protestant faith, have embraced that faith in Holland, to which country you appear to have tracked my steps, I know not how. Yet that you shall never be able to do so in the future, I leave it at once, and from the time when I quit it I defy you to ever discover my whereabouts. Let me remind you that this change of faith alone is a bar to my ever reassuming my position as your successor; if it were not such bar I would proceed to even other extremes to deprive myself of the succession; would draw my sword against France if by doing so I could more utterly sever myself from you and all connected with you.

"You ask me if I hate you? I reply that I hate the man who drove my mother to evil by his intolerant and contemptible pride, and, fallen as she became, I love and adore her memory. But my heart is not large enough to find space in it for aught else. Not large enough----"

There was no more. The sheet of paper turned over at the word "enough," and no other succeeded to it.

Again Martin lay back musing.

"He was firm," he murmured. "Firm. The years which have rolled by and become forgotten since he wrote these lines, now so faded, prove that; otherwise *she* would have known of his existence, his whereabouts. And--and--she was a just woman in spite of the deception of her life. If she had known that he was still alive she would never have consented to usurp all his rights. Nay, not though every priest in France bade her do so."

As the word "priest" rose to his mind he started with a new thought.

"Who were the others," he whispered, "she said who knew of it? Louis, the king! Almost it

seems impossible. Then, next, the woman--his wife--Madame! Also La Chaise and Chamillart. La Chaise, a bigot--Chamillart, the man they speak of as *une fine lame!* They all know it, and will keep the secret well. What was it she said? 'They will never tell.'"

Once more from St. Eustache close at hand the hour rolled forth; almost it seemed as if the deep boom of the great bell echoed in his ears the words he had repeated to himself, "They will never tell."

"Will they not?" he mused again. "Will they not? Neither Louis, nor his wife, nor the priest, nor the scheming politicians. Will never tell! Therefore all search must be unavailing. Yet--yet---we will see. Only, even though I should find him, even though I forced from one of them the acknowledgment that he still lived, was the true heir, would he himself consent to take what is his? The man who wrote that letter in bygone years will not have grown softer, more easily persuaded by now. Yet I will make some attempt."

He sought his bed now, and once there, still lay awake for some time longer, musing and meditating on the secret which had been confided to him; wondering, too, if what he was doing was owing absolutely to a determination to right a great wrong, or, instead, was only the outcome of that strong, latterly-embraced Protestantism of his, which, through this embrace, now caused him to desire to outwit these scheming papists. Yet he might have found the answer by studying his own feelings, his own resolves, arrived at the moment he learned of the hidden secret of the great family to which he was allied. For if he held his tongue now it was easily enough to be supposed that all which he had inherited from the dead woman would at once be made over to him. If he spoke on the subject of the lawful inheritor, not one jot of the fortune that woman had left him would ever come his way.

Only he did not so reflect, did not remember, or, remembering, did not hold that he was ruining himself in his determination not so much to outwit the Romish Church and its principal adherents as to set right the horrible wrong that had been committed--committed, in the first place, by the real de Rochebazon himself toward his children by the renunciation of all that he should have guarded for them; in the second place, by those who were only too willing to assist in depriving him, whom they doubtless termed the heretic, of what was his.

He rose the next morning with his mind made up as to what should be his future course, as to what, from this very day, he would set about doing. Rose, calm and collected, knowing that he had undertaken a task that must deprive him of that inheritance which by his silence alone might easily be his; a task that might, in the state of autocratic government which prevailed in France, lead him to a violent end.

Yet his mind was made up. He would not falter. Never. Even though he should find the last de Rochebazon still as firmly set in his determination as he had been in long-past years; even though when found, if ever, he should spurn him from his threshold with curses for having unearthed him, still he would do it. To right the wrong! To repay in some way all that he had already received from this family--his education, the luxury that had accompanied his earlier days, the profusion of ease and comfort showered on him by one who, in very truth, had no right to appropriate one crown or pistole of that family's wealth. He would do it! To right the wrong!

"Where," he said, sending for the *maître d'hôtel*, who presented himself at once before him, already clothed in decorous black, "where, do you know, is Madame de Maintenon now?"

"I know not, monsieur, unless it be at St. Cyr. She is much there now; almost altogether."

"Can you ascertain?"

"I will endeavour to do so, monsieur."

"If you will."

It was to her that, after the reflections of the night, he had determined to address himself. To her, knowing full well even as he did so, the little likelihood which existed of his obtaining any information. Had not the woman now lying dead upstairs said that she, among the others, would never tell?

Only it was not altogether with the desire to obtain information that he was about to seek her. Instead, perhaps, to volunteer some, to tell her that he knew the secret of the manner in which the existence of Cyprien de Beauvilliers had been ignored for many years; to see if there was no possibility of moving her to help in the deed of justice.

She was spoken of by some as God's chosen servant in France, as a woman who was rapidly bringing a corrupt king, a corrupt court, a corrupt land into a better path--a path that should lead to salvation.

Surely, surely she would not be a partner in this monstrous act of injustice, a participator in this monstrous lie.

CHAPTER VI.

"LA FEMME, MALHEUREUSEMENT SI FAMEUSE, FUNESTE ET TERRIBLE."--ST. SIMON.

Once past Versailles, and St. Cyr was almost reached, the horse which Martin Ashurst had ordered to be made ready for him that morning bearing its rider easily and pleasantly along. Almost reached, yet still a league off, wherefore the young man once more set about collecting his thoughts ere that distance should be compassed. Arranged once more in his own mind the manner in which he would approach "Madame," if she would consent to receive him.

After much consideration, after remembering, or perhaps it should better be said never forgetting, that what he was about to do might so envelop him in perils that his life would not be worth a day's--nay, an hour's--purchase, he had decided that he would be frank and truthful--that was it, frank and truthful--before this woman who was now the king's wife, this woman who held the destinies of all in France in the hollow of her hand almost as much as they were held in the hand of Louis.

He would plainly tell what he knew, or thought he knew; would seek confirmation of that knowledge from her into whose house, to whose presence, he was determined, if possible, to penetrate.

If she would consent to receive him!

Only--would she?

He knew that, by all report, even by such gossip as penetrated as far as London, where she was much discussed in not only political but also general circles, an audience with her was as difficult to be obtained as with Le Dieudonné himself; that, with few exceptions, none outside the charmed circle of the royal children, her own creatures, and her own ecclesiastics, were ever able to penetrate to her presence. Nay, had he not even heard it said that those on whom she poured benefits could never even obtain a sight of her? that her especial favourites, the Duchesse du Maine, the brilliant Marshals Villars, Tallard, and d'Harcourt, could get audience of her only with difficulty? And these were her friends, and he was--she might well deem that he was--her enemy.

All the same he was resolved to see her if it were possible.

His dead kinswoman had been her friend, surely his passport was there--in that.

He reached the outer gate of St. Cyr even as the clock set high above it struck one, and addressing himself to a soberly clad man servant, who was standing by the half-open gateway which led into a courtyard, he asked calmly if "Madame" was visible--if it was permissible for him to see her?

Then, at first, he feared that he had indeed come upon a bootless errand, for the grave and decorous servitor showed in his face so deep an astonishment at the request, so blank an appearance of surprise, that he thought the answer about to issue from the man's lips could be none other than one of flat refusal.

"Madame," he answered, in, however, a most respectful tone, "sees no one without an appointment. If monsieur has that she will doubtless receive him, or if he bears a message either from his Majesty or the Duc du Maine. Otherwise----" and he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I have none such," Martin replied, "nor have I any appointment. Yet I earnestly desire to see Madame. I am the nephew of--of--the Princesse de Rochebazon, who died yesterday. She was Madame's friend. If I can be received upon that score I shall be grateful."

At once he saw that, as it had been before--upon, for instance, his journey from the coast toward Paris--so it was now. That name, his connection with that great and illustrious family, opened barriers which might otherwise have been closed firmly against him, removed obstacle after obstacle as they presented themselves.

The look upon the man's face became not more respectful, since that was impossible, but less hard, less inflexible; then he said:

"If monsieur will give himself the trouble to dismount and enter the courtyard his name shall be forwarded to Madame. Whether she will receive monsieur it is impossible for me to say. Madame is now about to take her *déjeûner d'après midi*. But the name shall be sent."

Therefore Martin Ashurst, feeling that at least he was one step nearer to what he desired, dismounted from his horse, and resigning it to a stableman who was summoned, entered the

courtyard of the château, or institution, as it was more often termed, of St. Cyr. An institution where the strange woman who ruled over it brought up and educated, and sometimes dowered, the daughters of the nobility and gentry to whom she considered something was due from her.

At first he thought this courtyard had been constructed in imitation of some tropical garden or hothouse, so oppressive was the heat caused in it by the total exclusion of all air--a heat so great that here rich exotics grew in tubs as they might have grown in the soil of those far distant lands, notably Siam, from which they had been brought by missionaries as presents to their all-powerful mistress. Then he remembered that among other things peculiar to this woman was her love of warmth and her hatred of fresh air--perhaps the only subject on which she was at variance with Louis. And sitting there in the warm, sickly atmosphere, waiting to know what reception, if any, might be accorded him, he wondered how the king, whose love of open windows and of the cool breezes which blew across the woods and forests of his various palaces and châteaux was proverbial, could ever contrive to pass as much of his life as he did in the confined and vaporous air which perpetually surrounded his wife.

As thus he reflected there came toward him an elderly lady, preceded by the servitor who had received him--a woman dressed in total black, whom at first he thought might be Madame de Maintenon herself, would have felt sure that it was she had not the newcomer, bowed--nay, courtesied to him--as she drew; near, while she spoke in a tone of civil deference which he scarcely thought one so highly placed as the king's unacknowledged wife would have used.

"Madame will receive monsieur," this lady said very quietly, in a soft, almost toneless voice, "if he will follow me. Also she will be pleased if he will join her at her *déjeûner*."

"It is Mademoiselle Balbien," the servitor said, by way of introduction of this ancient dame, "Madame's most cherished attendant." Whereon Martin bowed to the other with a grace which she, "attendant" though she might be, returned with as much ease as though her life had been passed in courts from the days of her long-forgotten infancy.

"Monsieur may have heard of me," the old lady chirped pleasantly as now she motioned Martin to follow her, smiling, too, while she spoke. "The Princesse de Rochebazon knew me very well indeed--alas, poor lady, and she is dead!"

Yes, Martin had heard of her, and from his aunt, too, as well as others. Had heard of her deep devotion to the woman who now ruled not only France but France's king--had heard, in truth, that the De Maintenon might have been dead long years ago of starvation, of bitter, pinching want, had it not been for this faithful creature. Had heard his aunt tell, when inclined to gossip, of how Nanon Balbien had taken Scarron's widow to her garret after the death of the bankrupt and poverty-stricken poet; had shared her bed and her daily meal--generally a salted herring and some bread--with the woman now omnipotent in France; had preserved her life thereby and prevented her succumbing to cold and destitution and starvation. Knew, too, that there were those in France who said that in so doing Nanon Balbien had unwittingly perpetrated the greatest sin, the greatest evil, against the land that was possible. That it would have been better had she left the object of her charity to die in the gutters of the street than to preserve her life, and thereby raise up and nourish the snake which sucked the life blood from France and all within it.

Still following this old woman, through corridors from which all air was as equally excluded as from the glass-roofed courtyard they had left--corridors, too, in which there stood in niches alabaster busts of saints, and one, with above it a sacred light, of the Figure itself--Martin Ashurst went on, until at last he and his conductor neared a huge ebony door the handle of which was of massive silver and representing an angel's head--a door outside which there stood four ladies in waiting, all dressed in black, none of them young, and one only passably good-looking, yet whom he divined to be women of the oldest and best blood in France, and divined rightly, too. Three of them were high-born noblemen's daughters, one the daughter of a prince--De Rohan.

"Mademoiselle de Rochechouart," said Martin's guide, "this is the gentleman. Will you conduct him to Madame?" and she drew back now, resigning the visitor to the lady whom she addressed.

"Come, monsieur," that lady said, her voice soft and low, "follow me."

A moment later and he stood before the marvellous woman, the Protestant woman born in a prison, now a bigoted papist and a king's wife. Yet Martin remembered only at the moment the words of his dead kinswoman, "Madame knows it." Remembered, too, how she had said of her that she was one who would never tell.

Almost he thought that she had but just risen from the *prie Dieu* which stood beneath another figure of the Saviour that was placed in a niche here, as was its fellow in the corridor; that she had been engaged in prayer while awaiting the moment when he should be conducted to her presence. Thought so, yet doubted. For if she knew, if she divined upon what errand he had come, would she, even she, this reputed mask of duplicity, of self-righteous deceit, be praying on her knees at such a moment? Or, for so also he thought in that swift instant, was she seeking for guidance, beseeching her God to cleanse and purify her heart, to give her grace to speak and to reveal the truth?

But now she stood there calm, erect, notwithstanding her sixty-five years of life, waiting for him to be brought to her, for his approach. Yet not defiantly or arrogantly--only waiting.

The murmured words of Mademoiselle de Rochechouart served as introduction; the courtly bow of Martin Ashurst made acknowledgment of his presentation, then she spoke:

"My tears, my prayers, my supplications for Aurore de Rochebazon," she said--and he marvelled that her voice was so low and sweet, he having imagined, he knew not why, that it should be harsh and bitter--"have been offered up many times since I have heard of her death. Monsieur, I accept as a favour at your hands that you have ridden from Paris to see me here. Doubtless you knew that I should be soothed to hear of the end she made. Is it not so, monsieur?"

"It is so to some extent, madame. Yet, if you will be so gracious, there are other matters on which I shall crave leave to address you, if I have your permission."

"You shall have full permission to speak as it may please you. Yet, first, you have ridden from Paris. Also it is my hour for the midday repast. Monsieur," and she put out her silk mittened hand, "your arm."

And taking it she led him through a heavily-curtained door into an adjoining room. Within that room, sombrely furnished, dark, too, and somewhat dismal because of the ebony fittings and adornments, was a table with covers for two. Also upon it a silver gong. And, alone to relieve the gloom of all around, there stood upon it also a rich *épergne*, filled almost to overflowing with rich luscious fruit--peaches, choice grapes, and nectarines.

At first Madame said nothing, or little, to Martin Ashurst beyond the ordinary speech of a courteous hostess to a stranger guest; also Mademoiselle de Rochechouart and a waiting maid were always present, the former standing behind the mistress's chair and directing the latter by a glance. But at last the *déjeûner* drew to a conclusion, the meal of few but extremely choice *plats* was finished, and two little handleless cups of coffee (which Madame de Maintenon never concluded any meal whatever without) were placed in front of hostess and guest. Then they were alone.

"Now," she said, her deep eyes fixed upon Martin, "now tell me of the end which Aurore de Rochebazon made. Tell me all--all--her last words. They were those of one at peace, I pray."

Her voice was sweet and low as she spoke, yet not more calm than that of the man who sat before her, as he answered:

"Madame, it is to tell you of her last words that I have sought your presence. Yet, alas----"

"Alas!" she repeated quickly. "Alas! Why do you say that? Alas--what?"

"Her last words were scarce those of peace. Instead, the words of one whose end was not peaceful; of one who wandered--was distraught--or revealed in her dying moments a secret that should have been divulged long, years ago."

The ivory of his listener's face did not become whiter as he spoke, neither to her cheeks did any blood mantle. There was no sign that in the mind of this, woman, marble alike in look and heart, was any knowledge of what the revealed secret was, or only one such sign. A duller glance from the deep sunken eyes, as though a film had risen before them and hidden them from him who gazed at her. Then she said:

"Doubtless she wandered. Was distraught, as you say."

"Nay, madame. For she left behind her proofs--letters--testifying----"

"*What?*"

"That my aunt was not the Princesse de Rochebazon. That, instead, she and her husband usurped a position which was never theirs. That a deep wrong had been done which must, which shall be, righted."

"By whom?"

"By me, with God's grace."

* * * * * * *

The night was falling as he rode back to Paris and entered the city by the western gate, making his way to the Rue Champfleury.

Yet neither the challenge of the *guet* at the barrier nor the noise inside it when once he was

within the city, nor the crowd waiting outside a theatre to witness a revival of L'Écolier de Salamanque, which was the production of the poor decayed creature who had been the first husband of the inscrutable woman he had visited that day, had power to rouse him from his thoughts, nor to drive from out his memory her last words:

"Even if all this were true you will never find him. Even though he lives you will never succeed."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUSE BY THE BRIDGE.

"Come," said Martin to the trembling pastor, "come. We may do something, avert some awful calamity. You are of their faith. They will listen to you," and he arranged his *porte épée* and motioned to the old man to follow him.

"Not you! Not you!" the other whispered, shuddering. "Not you! You know not what will befall you if you take part in this."

"Yes, I. I must go too. I am a Protestant as much as they. I tell you, Pastor Buscarlet, I will wear the mask no longer. Come. Hark! There is firing. Come. We can do nothing here. Help neither Huguenot nor Papist."

"On my knees I beseech you to stop," the old man said, flinging himself upon them before Martin, "on my knees. You know not what you do. Think, think! If these men have risen it is at the worst but Frenchmen against Frenchmen. But with you--you are English. And we are at war again. Oh! I sicken with dread that it should be known."

"It can never be known. I have the French as well as you, or they--better than they, for mine is the speech of Paris and theirs of the mountains. Hark! they sing of Judah once more--also there is firing. Come with me or let me go alone." And he tore himself from the hands of the other.

Yet he did not go alone; even as he stepped into the garden the pastor went with him, running by his side to keep pace with his eager strides, whispering, entreating as he did so.

"Promise me, promise me, Martin," he said, "that you will take no part in any fray that is happening, will not to-night proclaim yourself. Oh, promise me! Remember," and he sunk his quavering voice even still lower, "Cyprien de Beauvilliers."

Recalled to himself by that name, recollecting the atonement of many years that had yet to be made, the wrong that had to be righted, as he himself had said, he too sunk his own voice, saying: "I promise. To-night I do nothing."

Down the street they went, therefore, together, Buscarlet's hand in Martin's, both glancing at the closed windows of the thatched houses and seeing the lights in them, with white faces against the mica panes and dark eyes gleaming from behind curtains, yet with no head showing. The orders to keep within doors were being followed.

In all the street (there was but one) no form was visible; if it had not been for the uproar at the end of it, where Le Tarn rolled under the three small bridges, and for the spits and tongues of flame that belched forth out of musketoons and carabines from the windows of the "house by the bridge," beneath the deeper, denser flames that rolled from under the eaves of that house, they might have deemed it was a deserted village or one peopled only with the dead.

Yet again the solemn chant uprose as they drew close to that house, but mingled now with something deeper than itself--the hammering of great trees, or tree trunks, on doors, the rumbling of flames escaping from the burning house, the firing from the windows, the loud shrieks from within the house itself.

"What are you?" cried a huge man as they entered the crowd, "Papist or Protestant? Child of God or Devil? Answer, or----" then ceased, seeing Buscarlet still holding Martin's hand; ceased and murmured, "Pardon, reverend; I did not see or know in the darkness. Yet begone; seek a safer place. The villain has his house full of De Broglie's fusileers to fire on us and help him. Oh, Lord of Hosts, wilt thou let them help such as he?"

"What will you--they--do?" Martin asked.

"Release the prisoners. If he resists, slay him. We have suffered too long."

"Nay, nay," said Buscarlet, "that must not be. Murder must not be done; or, if done, not by our side. Let the shedding of blood be theirs----"

"It has been for too long," the Cévenole answered sternly, his eyes glittering. "It has been. Now it is our turn. What saith the Scriptures? 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' So be it! The Papists have shed blood--our blood--like water; now let them look to themselves. You know, father, that the downtrodden have risen. At last!"

"God help us all!" Buscarlet exclaimed, wringing his hands.

"Ay, God help us all! Yet even he can not give us back our dead--those who have hung in chains on the bridges of Montpellier, Nîmes, Anduse, even here upon this bridge of Montvert. What balm is there for our daughters whipped to death through the streets, our sons sent to the galleys without trial, our pastors--your brethren--broken on the wheel, burnt at the stake? We have risen; it will not end here. That great evil king still sits in his great white palace, his reformed wanton by his side; she is old now, yet she shall not es----"

He staggered as he spoke, flung out his arms, then fell heavily to the ground to the sound of a fresh discharge of musketry. The fusileers of De Broglie had fired another volley from the windows of the abbé's house, and a bullet had found the man's heart.

"Come," said Martin, "come. We can do naught here. I may not draw my sword. No use to be mowed down here. Let us gain the bridge; there are no windows which give on that."

Half supporting, wholly leading the unhappy old man, he made his way through the besiegers who remained outside the house, some still singing their psalms and hymns of praise, while amid them moved the inspired ones, the prophets--men who were crazed with religious fervour and maddened with persecution until they did, in truth, believe that they were appointed by Heaven to direct and guide the others.

Also among this mass of infuriated peasants, some of whom fell or staggered away as fresh discharges came from the house, were three persons who had been brought from out of it. One, bent double from long confinement in the stocks, was Masip, of whom Buscarlet had spoken. The second was a girl not over sixteen, who screamed, "My back, my back, O God, my back!" if any touched her. She had been thrashed daily, because she would not be converted, by thongs steeped in pitch which had been allowed to harden ere the abbé used the whip. The third was an old man who could not stand, and with an arm broken.

Gaining the bridge, Martin and Buscarlet saw a fresh sight of horror.

The roof of the house was alight now. From between the walls and where the eaves of thatch hung over, bubbles and puffs of flame burst out and leaped toward the thatch itself, each tongue flickering higher until at last the ends of straw glowed and sparkled, then caught and began to burn. And on the sloping roof was a man crouching, his heels dug tight into the dried straw and reeds to prevent him from slipping down and over into the garden beneath, while with his hands he frantically twisted round a chimney stack a coil of white rope which another man, clinging himself to the roof, handed to him.

It was the abbé and his valet.

"Could we but save them," Buscarlet whispered, "but save them! Return evil with good, repay his persecutions with Christian charity and mercy. Oh, that we might!"

"Nothing can save them," Martin replied, watching the men's actions in the gleam of the flames from below, and also in the light of the now fast-rising moon. "Nothing. They are doomed. If they stay there they must be burned to death; if they descend it is only to be caught; also if seen now, those below will shoot them like sparrows on the roof. All are lost who are in that house--all! The soldiers too!"

He had judged right. Both men were doomed.

Infuriated by still further fusillades from De Broglie's soldiers by which two more men were killed, maddened, too, by the sight of the abbé's victims, some of whom were lying on the ground from inability to stand, the rioters determined to make an end of their first act of revenge. From the chapel, therefore, in the vicinity--into which they had also broken by now--they fetched the benches on which the worshippers sat, as well as the altar-rails and the pulpit, and piled them up in the old square hall of the house, thereby to add fuel to the flames. And also from the living rooms in that house they took the furniture and flung it on too, not even forgetting the straw mattresses which the soldiers had brought with them when the abbé applied to Nîmes for a guard, saying that he feared an attack, and on which they slept nightly.

The house was doomed.

Paralyzed with fear, terror-stricken and horrified, Buscarlet could bear the sight no longer. His white hair streaming in the night breeze, he rushed into the midst of the Camisards, screaming to them to show mercy, begging them to desist, imploring them to forget their own sufferings in the past, and to save the abbé and all within the house. Yet his appeal touched not

one single heart.

"Away, old man," said one of the inspired prophets, "away to your bed and out of this. The hour for mercy is gone; the servants of the Lord have arisen. Go preach to women and babes; leave us, the priests of men, to deal with men," and as he spoke he dragged Buscarlet out of the crowd, telling Martin also to beware lest he interfered.

The latter was nigh doing so now. Protestant as he was, with, in his heart, a hatred for the cruelties which he knew the Papists practised here in Languedoc--cruelties condemned, indeed, by many of their brother Roman Catholics, so terrible were they--he could yet scarce keep his hand from his sword hilt, scarce forbear rushing into that burning house and endeavouring to save Du Chaila's life.

For now the end was very near. If the man was not saved soon his final hope was gone. The soldiers had fired their last shots, their powder-horns and cartouches were empty, they were endeavouring to escape, some leaping from the lower windows at which they, fortunately for themselves, had been stationed, and plunging into the little river and across it; some rushing out into the crowd of fierce Cévenoles, only to be cut down to the earth by reaping hooks and scythes, or, more happily, to escape with wounds alone. There were none left now in the burning house but the abbé and his man-servant. On the former all eyes were fixed, the crowd drawing farther back from the dwelling to get a fairer view of the roof on which they could see him still crouched, or moving on to the bridge, thereby the better to observe his fate. And they gloated over it--these miserable peasants who had turned at last, these human downtrodden worms who had not been allowed to practise their religion in peace in their own land, nor permitted to emigrate to others where they might do so; they fed themselves full with revenge on this the first night of their uprising. One, a marksman, raised his carabine and covered Du Chaila as he clung to the roof--maybe his heart was not yet entirely warped nor turned to the deepest tinge of cruelty, and he wished to end the wretch's sufferings--but it was knocked up by half a dozen strong arms. A dozen voices cried fiercely:

"Help him not, assist him to no easy death. Remember our brothers' dooms, our fathers in the flames, our girls' backs raw and bleeding. Observe Fleurette lying there at your feet; let him expiate all. Then, after him, the others. There are more to suffer too. Baville--ho, Baville!--*le Roi de Languedoc*, as he is termed--the prior of St. Maurice--the priest of Frugéres--it is their turn to-morrow."

And above the roar of the flames these louder roars of threatened vengeance rose; above all else their psalms were heard telling how Jehoshaphat exhorted the people, how Jahaziel prophesied, and how the God of Battles had delivered the enemy into their hands.

The end was near.

Du Chaila, the cruellest priest in the Cévennes--the man who, under the office of Inspector of Roman Catholic Missions in Languedoc, had for sixteen years perpetrated cruelties on the Protestants which, it was said in the district, he could have only learned while a missionary in Siam--was about to expiate his merciless rigour on others.

Part of the eaves overhanging the garden had by now fallen away in great masses of charred straw. One of two things alone could happen soon: either he must perish in the flames when the roof fell in, as it would do in a few moments, or he must escape from that roof. It was the latter which he prepared to attempt, hoping perhaps that even now he might do so without his intentions being known.

Slowly, therefore, he crept away from the spot where he had crouched so long. They could see his hands and feet thrust deep into the thatch at each move he made. He disappeared from their sight, yet for a moment only; for as he left the side of the house where the rioters were, so those rioters followed below in the road. Compactly, in a mass, all went together, and silently. Their voices, their hymns had ceased; but for their footfalls there was naught to tell of how they were tracking the man from beneath as he himself moved above. Like sleuth-hounds who make no noise as they follow their trail, yet follow it unerringly, these human sleuth-hounds followed him.

They passed round the house, they stood upon the slope leading to the bridge. Between them and the house itself there ran a thick-set privet hedge, separating the latter from the road and shielding the lower rooms on that side from the dusts of summer and the snows of winter. Now, on this July night, convolvuli and roses and honeysuckle twined about it, dotting the deep green with many a delicate blossom and emitting sweet perfumes on the air. And above this hedge, between it and the roof, the doomed man was hanging at this time, clinging to a rope made of twisted bedclothes, wrenched, doubtless, from the beds of the upper rooms.

None spoke in all that crowd, no hymn was sung. Save for the sobs of Buscarlet and the moans of Fleurette, who lay in her sister's arms, no sound broke the silence--none until, a second later, while all their eyes were turned up to that frantic figure and while the moon's rays glistened on their eyeballs, a piercing shriek broke the stillness and the abbé fell headlong some thirty feet into the hedge, bounding off from one of the stakes, that supported it at intervals, into the dusty road; then lay there groaning. The roughly and hastily constructed rope had given way, and in his fall, as was soon seen, his leg was broken.

"Spare me!" he moaned--he who had never yet spared one, man, woman, or child--"spare me!"

At first none answered him, none spoke. Then amid the silence, from the lips of Pierre Esprit, the chief of the three prophets, the words fell:

"You are lost--your body in this world, your soul in the next."

"Alas!" he wailed, "even though I have damned myself, will you too do the same thing by murdering me?"

His words were the signal for his doom.

They rushed at him as he lay there and plunged their knives into his body, one man exclaiming, "This for my mother, burned at Nîmes," another, "This for my father, broken at Anduse"; a third, "This for my brother, sent to the galley, '*Le Réquin*'"; a fourth, "This for my sister, Fleurette, lying here."

When his nephew, Le Marquis du Chaila, afterward recovered his body from where they left it, it was pierced by fifty-two wounds, of which twenty-four were mortal.

"The beginning has been made," Pierre Esprit exclaimed. "There must be no backsliding. Henceforth each man's hand to guard each man's life. Now for the prior of St. Maurice, next for the priest of Frugéres. While for those who have been rescued from that man's clutches, away with them to the mountains and safety. Come, let us sing unto the Lord."

And up the slopes and pastures of the purple hills encircling the little village rose once more the chant of the army of Jehoshaphat.

Soon none were left in the blood-stained road but the pastor, Buscarlet, lying where he had fainted, and Martin Ashurst, white to the lips and endeavouring to arrange the dead man's limbs into something resembling humanity.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EXODUS.

In the coming dawn, when the stars had paled and died away, and when far off, where the Basses Alpes lifted their heads eastward, the gray light turned into daffodil and told that the day was at hand, Martin carried the pastor back into his little house.

"Rest," he said, "rest, and endeavour to sleep. I pray Heaven you may do so, after this night of horror."

"Horror indeed!" Buscarlet said, sinking into the old leather-covered *fauteuil* that for years he had sat in so calmly and happily, though solitary. "Horror undreamed of!" Then, a moment later, he went on: "I thought--nay, I knew--that they would rise at last and throw off the hideous yoke under which they bowed. Yet I deemed it would but be to release those of our religion who suffered, to prevent others from suffering too; to demand terms, even though only such terms as would permit us to seek peace in far-away lands; but never dreamed of such deeds as we have witnessed to-night. Where will it end? And how?"

"There were those who muttered in that crowd," Martin replied, his face still of a deathly pallor, "that it might not end until they stood outside Louis' gates--were within them. And there were some who seemed to know of what they spoke. Some who have been long leagues away from this lonely valley shut in by these mountains--men who know that on all sides and on all her frontiers France is sore beset. Crippled by her fresh war with Spain, the attacks made on her on the Italian border, also by the Dutch on the Rhine. Fighting as well my own countrymen in Bavaria and the whole length of the Danube, even to the borders of Austria."

The mention of his own countrymen by Martin Ashurst seemed to bring fresh trouble to the unhappy old man, to cause fresh terrors to spring into his mind; for at those words he started in his chair and regarded the younger one steadily, though with still upon his face the look of misery that the events of the last few hours had brought forth.

"Your own countrymen!" he repeated, half-dazed. "Your own countrymen! Ay, ay, *les Anglais!* Thank God, it is not known, and never will be known, that you are either English or Protestant. Baville would not spare you."

"Baville need not perhaps know that I am an Englishman," Martin replied calmly. "But one

thing he will most assuredly know ere long, when he begins to make inquiry into the doings of this past night--namely, that I am a Protestant."

"Know it!" Buscarlet exclaimed, trembling even more than before, clasping his hands frenziedly as though overcome by a fresh fear. "How should he know it?"

"I shall announce it. For a certainty, shall not disguise it."

"Martin, Martin," the old man moaned, "are you mad? Do you value your life so little, desire so much the horrors of the wheel, the flames, to have your head upon this bridge as others' heads have been, that you will acknowledge this? Martin, for the love of God, pause. Think of what such an acknowledgment would mean to you."

"I have thought all through the night, even while I watched that man's house burned beneath him as he hid on the roof; while I saw him done to death. And, thus thinking, became resolved. Henceforth no power on earth, no horror of awful death, of mutilation after death, can make me disguise, keep back the acknowledgment of the form of faith I belong to----"

"Alas, alas! it *will* bring death."

"It may do so. If it does it must be borne. Yet, at the worst, I will not think it can come to that. I am a Protestant; here, in your own land, a Huguenot. Yet I am not one of those who slew the abbé. Shall never imbrue my hands in blood. Ask only to be left in peace."

"Alas," Buscarlet exclaimed again, "that is all that we have asked--all! Yet you see the end. The woman who dominates Louis allows no free thought, no religion other than her own; has dragooned Huguenots into Roman Catholicism since the day the Revocation was pronounced, has hung and burned and broken those who refuse to change. How, then, can you hope to escape--you who were among the crowd that performed last night's work?"

"I took no part in his murder. Would have saved him if I could----"

"That will not save you. Martin, you must flee from here at once. Escape out of France. Be gone while there is yet time."

"And de Rochebazon! His children's heritage! What of that?"

Even as he uttered the words his determination to remain here at all costs and in deadly peril seemed to act upon the old man's mind, to clear his brain so clouded with the awful events of the past night, to bring back to him the power of speaking and reasoning clearly, for slowly yet weightily he answered:

"As that heritage has done before, so it must do now. Must wait, remain in abeyance. This is no time to prosecute your search. No sense of justice on your part toward a distant kinsman can demand that you should sacrifice your own life, at the least your liberty. Moreover, remember, he or his descendants may not be here in Languedoc; may be leagues away, in remote lands, for aught you know; even in your own country, the home of the oppressed since James fell."

"They said at Geneva it was beyond all doubt that he who was rightly the de Rochebazon came here."

"Grant that," the old man replied, calm now in face of the argument he had to use, must use and drive home. "Grant that--that he came here. Well, it is nigh half a century ago. Where may he not have gone to in all that long passage of years? The Huguenots are everywhere--in England, Germany, Scotland, the Americas, Switzerland, some even on the far-off shores of the Cape of Good Hope. Why stay here seeking for what is no better than a shadow, and at the risk of your own life?"

For a moment it seemed as if his argument was about to prevail. Into Martin Ashurst's face there came a look telling of deep reflection--reflection that brought with it an acknowledgment of the force of the other's words. And, observing, Buscarlet pressed his argument home.

"If alive, de Rochebazon never intends to claim what is his. If dead, he has died and kept his secret well. While if living he knows not, possibly, that those who were deemed the Prince and Princess de Rochebazon have passed away, yet also he knew that for years they usurped, although unwillingly, the place that was his, the vast wealth. If you found him at last, even here, could you force him to take back the heritage he renounced so long ago?"

Still the other answered not. What could he say? On his face was still the look of perplexity that had been there since first the pastor spoke. And again the latter went on:

"Moreover, granting even that--that--for his children's sake he would return to the possession of his own, would emerge from the humble position he has so long occupied--in France all Huguenots are humble now, here in these mountains they are doubly so; few gentlemen of France acknowledge themselves as such; all fear the court too much; if you found him, if he consented, would he be allowed to return to what is his proper place and position? You know the Romish Church which now holds all in its hands that once was the de Rochebazon's. Will *that*

ever disgorge? Would De Maintenon allow it to do so? You have seen her? Answer."

Even as Buscarlet mentioned that woman's name, Martin started. Yes, he had seen her, and seeing, knew to what adamant he was opposed. Also he recalled her words: "You may seek yet you will never find, or, finding whom you seek, will never prevail." Remembered, too, the look of confidence that had come into the livid face of the woman before him and, as he remembered, wavered.

Was it imperative on him to do more than he had already done in voluntarily renouncing all the wealth his aunt had put aside for him during years of saving? Was he now to throw his life away in seeking for a shadow, a chimera? For it was not beyond possibility, it was indeed most probable, that to such a pass he might come.

At present he had committed no act which even the ruthless Baville, of whom all in this portion of France spoke with bated breath--the Intendant of the Province--could seize upon as a pretext for hostilities to him. He had taken no part in the murder (or was it the execution?) of the Abbé du Chaila; on the contrary, he had longed to render help to the unfortunate wretch, though it had been beyond his power to do so. But--but--if he should remain in the Cévennes, still seeking for a man who, in sober truth, might for years have lain in his grave or might be, if still alive, at the other end of the world, was it certain that he would not perform some act which would place him in Baville's grasp? And as a Protestant, even though it was never known that he was an Englishman, and standing, consequently, in hideous peril in France, what chance would there be of his salvation?

Almost, as he reflected thus, he began to think that, if only for a time and until these troubles had blown over, he must abandon his search for the last of the de Rochebazons. This tempest which had arisen could not last long, he thought; Louis could soon quell these turbulent mountaineers; then again he could take up his task.

"Come," he said to Buscarlet, sitting before him watching his eyes and face to see what effect his words had on him, "come. At least I will do nothing without due thought. Will not be foolhardy. Now eat, drink something; it will restore you. Then after that some rest." Whereupon he pointed to the table on which were still the remains of the last night's little feast over which the poor old man had tried to make so merry. "Here is some of your famous trout left," he said, struggling to speak cheerfully, "and another bottle of the Crépi. Come, let us refresh ourselves."

"I feel as though I shall never eat again," Buscarlet whispered. "Never after the doings of the night--never! Oh, the horror of it, the horror of it!"

"Still cheer up," the other said, uttering words of hope which he knew could have but little likelihood of being verified, yet striving thereby to soften the old man's mental agony. "This may be the end, as it has been the beginning, on our--on the Protestant--side. When Baville, the persecutor, hears that the harryings and the burnings and the murders--for that was a murder we witnessed last night--are not to be on his part alone, he may pause. Nay, even Louis, beset in every way, at every frontier, his treasury drained, may himself give orders to stop these persecutions."

But Buscarlet only shook his head significantly, doubtingly.

"With that woman at his side, by his elbow, never!" he exclaimed. "Nay, nay, my son, he will not stop them. He is the Scourge of God; sweeps before him all who love God. He will never stop them. If he desired to do so, she would not let him."

By now it was full daylight. Over the pastor's little garden with its quaint, old-time flowers, among them many a sweet Provence rose opening to the morning sun, that sun's rays streamed down. Also they knew that the villagers were awake, if they had slept at all. Already they were calling to each other, while some of them gathered in small groups and discussed the events of the past night. Also all asked what would be the end of it.

"I can not sleep," Buscarlet said; "it is impossible. Let me go forth. They are my people. I must be among them. Give them counsel. Oh, God be thanked, there was not one of us in this hamlet who assisted in the work."

And he went out feebly through the window, Martin making no attempt to prevent him, since he knew any such attempt must be futile. Instead, therefore, he walked by his side.

"Whence," he asked, "since none in the village took part in the attack, did those men come? By their garb they are of the mountains--goatherds, shepherds. Is it there the persecutions have been most felt?"

"It is there," the other answered, "that those who have been most persecuted have fled. We may not quit our unhappy country. Every port is barred, every frontier road guarded. Where, therefore, should those whose homes are desolate flee to, whose loved ones have been slaughtered, where but to the mountains? There none can follow them or, following, can not find. Those mountains are full of caverns made by Nature, God-given as a last resort of the outcast and wretched."

They reached the open *place* by the bridge as he finished speaking; they stood outside the still burning remains of what had been Du Chaila's house--the house seized by him from the man he had caused to be hanged on the bridge, in front of the window from which the widow and orphans looked daily until they too fled into the hills. Behind the hedge over which grew the honeysuckle and convolvuli in such rich profusion, the hedge on to which the doomed man had fallen, and on one of the stakes of which his leg had been broken by the fall, they saw his body lying. Near it also they observed other bodies which had been dragged from the smouldering ruins, one being that of his valet, another that of his man cook, a third that of an ecclesiastic named Roux who had acted as his secretary. Also they learned that two friends of the dead man, themselves missionaries back from Siam, had been allowed to depart after being found hidden under a cartload of straw.

"Are all of those others gone?" Buscarlet asked, turning his eyes away from the sight behind the lodge.

"All are gone, *mon père*," a man answered from the crowd. "*Pardie!* it is best we all go too. By to-night the dragoons who have escaped will be back from Alais. It is but ten leagues, and he (Baville) is there. Be sure more soldiers will come with them; we shall be put to fire and sword. And for those who are not slain--that!" And the man pointed to the post on the apex of the bridge on which the night lamp hung still alight, since none had remembered this morning to put it out; on which, too, other things of a more fearful nature had hung in all their recollections.

"You hear?" Buscarlet whispered to Martin. "You hear?"

"Yes, I hear," the other replied, calmly as usual. Then asked, "Do you flee with them?"

"Nay," the old man replied. "My place is here, by my church which I am no longer permitted to enter--the church whose keys have been taken from me after forty years. Yet I can not leave it."

"Nor I you. I stay too."

"God help us all!" the pastor said again, as he had said before, and once more he wrung his hands. That his flock were going it was impossible to doubt. They knew that henceforth Montvert was no abiding place for them; that if they would not be ridden down or burned in their beds, or hung as carrion on the bridge where when boys they had played, or taken to the jails of Alais and Nîmes and Uzès, they must go, and go at once. Later, perhaps, they might return, if it ever pleased God to soften the hearts of their persecutors. But now, after the doings of the night, this was no longer a home for them.

History repeats itself; also events in one part of the world resemble those occurring in the other. Even as in the old times before them, the people of God had fled into the deserts of the East to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh and of Ahab, even as the Covenanters had fled into the Pentland Hills, so now the Protestants of the Cévennes fled into their mountains to escape the persecutions of him whom they called the Scourge of God.

Peaceful, law-abiding men and women, asking only to be allowed to worship their Maker in their own way, or, failing that, to depart for other lands where they might do so unmolested, the refusal had turned them at last into rebels, if not against the king, at least against his local representatives--rebels who, having suffered long under the cruelties of their persecutors, had now become cruel themselves.

For the torch of rebellion was lighted at last in all Languedoc, and ere long it flamed fiercely. The "Holy War" had begun.

CHAPTER IX.

"BAVILLE! UN MAGISTRAT DONT LES EPOUVANTABLES RIGUEURS DOIVENT ÊTRE SIGNALÉES À L'HORREUR DE LA POSTÉRITÉ."--SISMONDI.

Night was near at hand again and all were gone--all except Martin Ashurst and the pastor, both of whom sat now upon the bridge of Montvert, their eyes fixed always on the crest of the hill which rose between the little town and the larger one of Alais. For it was from that situation that they expected to see at last the flash of sabres carried by the dragoons of de Broglie and the foot soldiers of de Peyre, Lieutenant General of the Province, to observe the rays of the setting sun flicker on their embrowned musketoon and fusil barrels, and to hear the ring of bridle chain and stirrup iron. That they would come on the instant that the intelligence reached Baville of what had been done in Montvert over night it was impossible to doubt. And then--well, then, possibly, since there were no human beings left to be destroyed except these two men waiting there, the

village would itself be demolished, burned to the ground. Such vengeance had been taken only a week ago on a similarly deserted bourg from which the inhabitants had fled, though silently and without revolt. It might be expected that the same would happen here.

All were gone, the men, the women and children; the old, the feeble, and the babes being carried by the stronger ones, or conveyed on the backs of mules and asses. Also the cattle were removed--they would be priceless in the mountain fastnesses; even the dogs had followed at their masters' heels; upon those masters' shoulders and upon the backs of the animals the household gods, the little gifts that had come to them on marriage days and feast days, on christenings and anniversaries, had been transported.

The place was deserted except for those two men who sat there wondering what would be their lot.

That vengeance would be taken on them neither deemed likely; but that both would be haled before Baville they both felt sure. Buscarlet was known to be one of the Protestant pastors who, from the day when the Revocation of Nantes was promulgated seventeen years before, had fought strongly against his congregation attending the Romish masses as the Government had ordered them to do. He was a man in evil odour, though against him until the present time no overt act could be charged. But now--now after the events of the past night, with those dead Things lying there behind the hedge, what might he not be accused of?

"Yet," said Martin, as he leaned over the parapet of the bridge, glancing sometimes up at the ridge which rose between Montvert and Alais, expecting every moment to see the soldiers approaching, and sometimes watching the long weeds in the river as they bent beneath its swift flow, "yet of what can you be accused? You interceded for him," and he directed his eyes in the direction of the dead abbé, where he lay covered by a cloth, "besought them to show mercy, to return evil for good. Also those men, those *attroupés*, were not of this village nor of your flock. As well call you to account for the invasion of a hostile army or foreign levy."

But again Buscarlet only shook his head, then answered:

"No, not of this village, nor of my congregation, but of the same faith--Protestants! Therefore accursed in Baville's and his master's eyes. That is enough."

As he spoke, from far up in the heights toward Alais they heard the blare of a trumpet ring loudly and clearly on the soft evening air; a moment later and, on the white road that ran like a thread through the green slopes, they saw the scarlet coats of the horsemen gleaming; saw, too, a *guidon* blown out as its rider came forward against the wind; caught the muffled sound of innumerable horses' hoofs. Then, next, heard orders shouted, and a moment later saw a large body of dragoons winding down the hillside slowly, while behind them on foot came the *milices* of the province.

"You see?" Martin said as he watched them. "Be calm. They can do you no harm."

And he leaned over the bridge again and continued to observe the oncomers.

Ahead of the main body, consisting of some hundred of cavalry and an even larger number of Languedoc *milice* or train bands, there rode three men abreast. In the middle was one clad in a sober riding dress of dark gray; the others on either side of him were rich in scarlet coats much guarded with galloon, the evening sun flickering on the lace and causing it to sparkle like burnished gold, and with large laced three-cornered hats in which also their gold cockades shone, while he on the left wore the rich *justaucorps à brevet*, a sure sign not of a soldier of France alone, but of a soldier of high social rank and standing.

"He in the middle," said Buscarlet, "is Baville, the Scourge of the Scourge. Be sure that when he comes with the soldiery the worst is to be dreaded. That he deems his presence is necessary to insure fitting vengeance being taken."

"Fear not," said Martin. "They can not execute us here to-night; afterward, inquiry will show that we have done nothing to deserve their vengeance. Be calm."

Amid clouds of dust from the road on which no rain had fallen for many days the cavalcade came onward, reaching at last the farther end of the bridge from where these two men stood side by side; then the officer on the right gave the orders for all following to halt, and slowly he with the other two rode on to the bridge itself and up the slope to where Buscarlet and Martin stood.

"It is the Lieutenant General, de Peyre," Buscarlet whispered. "The other is the Marquis du Chaila, the dead man's nephew. O God! what a sight for him to see!"

"What has been done here?" said Baville, looking down at the two men on foot who stood close by where they had halted their horses, though not until he and his companions had turned their eyes to the burned house, from which little spiral wreaths of smoke rose vertically in the calm evening air. "What? And who, messieurs, are you?"

The quiet tones of his full rich voice, the absence of all harshness in it, almost startled Martin Ashurst. Was this the man, he wondered--or could the pastor have been mistaken?--of whose

cruelty to the Protestants as well as his fierce and overbearing nature not only all the province rang, but also other parts of the land far remote from here? The man whose name was known and mentioned with loathing by the refugees in Holland and Switzerland, in Canterbury and Spitalfields?

"Who are you, messieurs?" he repeated quietly, "though I think I should know you, at least," and he directed his glance to the pastor. "Monsieur André Buscarlet, *prédicateur* of the--the--so-called Reformed Religion, if I am not mistaken."

"André Buscarlet," the old man replied, looking up at him; and now, Martin observed, he trembled no more, but answered fearlessly, "Protestant minister of Montvert and----"

"Where," exclaimed the young Marquis du Chaila, "my uncle has been barbarously murdered by you and your brood. Oh, fear not, you shall pay dearly for it. Where, vagabond, is his body?"

"Sir," said Martin, speaking for the first time, "your grief carries you into violent extremes. This gentleman whom you term 'vagabond' has had no part nor share in your uncle's murder. Neither has his flock. The deed was done by the refugees from the mountains. Monsieur Buscarlet attempted in vain to prevent it."

"Bah!" exclaimed the marquis. "You are another Protestant, I should suppose. Valuable testimony! Who are you?"

"One who at least is not answerable to you. Suffice it that no person in this village had any hand in the abbé's murder, that it was done by the men of whom the pastor speaks."

"To me, monsieur, at least all persons are answerable," Baville interposed. "I am the king's Intendant. I must demand your name and standing."

"My name is----" he began, yet ere he could tell it a shout from the foremost dragoons who had dismounted startled all on the bridge. Some of these men had been engaged in tethering their horses close by the hedge, several of the animals indeed had already begun to crop the dusty grass that grew beneath it, and they had found the bodies.

"My God, my God!" the marquis almost shrieked as he bent over the abbé's form, the soldiers having led him to where it lay after he had hastily quitted the saddle. "Oh, my God! my father's brother slaughtered thus. Devils!" he exclaimed, turning round and glancing up the long street, imagining probably that the inhabitants were all within their houses. "Devils! was not his death enough, that you must glut your rage with such butchery as this? See, Baville--see, de Peyre, the wounds in his body. Enough to kill twenty men."

Looking down from their saddles at the murdered man's form, which they could observe very plainly over the hedge from the elevation at which they were, the Intendant and the leader of the troops shuddered, the former turning white beneath the clear olive of his complexion. Yet, even as Martin observed him blench, he wondered why he should do so. Countless men and feeble women and children had gone to the gibbet, the fire, the wheel, and the rack, as well as to the galleys and the lash, at this man's orders, unless all Languedoc and every Huguenot tongue lied. Why should he pale now, except it was because this retaliation, this shifting of murder from the one side to the other, told of a day of reckoning that had begun, of a Nemesis that had been awakened?

"Baville," the young man cried again, "Baville! Vengeance! Vengeance! He has died slaughtered at his post, as he knew he would die. But last week, at our house in Montpelier, he spoke of how he was doomed because he served God. Baville!--de Peyre! give the orders to fall on, to destroy all. Otherwise I make my way to the king of the north and cry on my knees for vengeance on these accursed heretics, these bloodthirsty *Protestants*, as they term themselves. Burn down their hovels, I say; slaughter them, exterminate."

"Alas, unhappy man!" exclaimed Buscarlet, still firm in his speech now, and undaunted before the distracted marquis, who had already torn his sword from its scabbard and stood before them gesticulating like a madman in his grief and rage. "What use to destroy empty houses, barren walls? Besides ourselves there is no living soul left in all Montvert."

"What!" the two other men exclaimed together in their surprise. "What! All gone? None left?"

And now on the Intendant's face there came another look, also the return of his dark colour, as he said:

"Gone, yet you proclaim their innocence. Tell us in one breath that they are guiltless, in another that they have fled. Do the innocent flee?"

"They feared your cruelty. They knew that your Church spares not the innocent; that it punishes them alike with the guilty."

"Blasphemer!" Baville exclaimed, though still his voice was low and calm, belying the terrible accusation which lay beneath this word. Terrible anywhere in France--now pious by law!--but doubly so in the Cévennes.

"I blaspheme not," Buscarlet said, waxing even bolder. "Pause. Look back. Twenty-seven Protestants have been done to death by you in the past month----"

"Silence!" the other ordered, still in his unruffled voice, yet uttering words enough to affright the boldest, "or I will have you gagged; if that suffices not, strung up there," and he pointed to the lamp.

Then turning to the marquis, he said:

"Be sure your uncle shall be avenged. Let them flee to the mountains, yet we will have them. Extirpate them like rats in a granary. Julien, the field marshal, has left Paris to assist in the holy work. Meanwhile, de Peyre, send your men into every house in the place; see if this abandonment is true. If not, if you find any, bring them before me. As for you, and you," directing a glance at the pastor and Martin, "you will sleep to-night in Alais. To-morrow a court will be held." Then he added, under his breath, as though talking to himself:

"You must be bold men. Otherwise you would have decamped too."

"Or innocent ones," Martin replied, hearing his words, low as they were. "You yourself have said it. Asked but now, 'Do the innocent flee?'"

The Intendant bit his lips; the *riposte* had gone fairly home. Then, while de Peyre gave his orders and told off some of the dragoons to enter and search every house in the village, and the marquis, who was in command of the *milices*, bade them take up the bodies carefully and cover them decently with their capes, Baville glanced down at Martin, saying:

"Monsieur, I do not know you. You are not, I think, of this locality. Yet I observe you are of the better classes. Where is your property?"

"In La Somme, department of the Ile de France. I am a proprietor; the property of Duplan La Rose is mine, such as it is."

Had he not in truth been the owner of this property he would have scorned to shelter himself beneath a falsehood. Had he been asked his faith it was his fixed resolve to declare it, as, had it been possible for Baville to recognise that he was an Englishman--which, after his earliest years being spent in France, was not so--he had determined to avow his nationality, no matter what the consequences might be. But so far the truth alone was necessary.

When his father waited long and eagerly for the time to come for the Stuart Restoration--as no follower of the Stuarts ever doubted it would come, sooner or later--he, hating Paris and all its garish dissipations under the then young and immoral king (the king now so old and self-righteous!), purchased this property from the Baron Duplan La Rose, a man himself broken and ruined by his participation in the outbreaks of the Fronde. Purchased it because all the Ile de France and the Pas de Calais were full of English refugees waiting like himself for happier days to come; also because, when the time did come, it would be near to England. And he dying, it became Martin's property.

Baville touched his hat as an acknowledgment of Martin's explanation, perhaps also as an acknowledgment of his position, since he was a great believer in *les propriétaires* as men who were almost always opposed to the murmurings and discontents of the *canaille* and *les ordres bas*, such as the wretches belonged to who had massacred the abbé and the others. And as he did so he said:

"Monsieur is therefore a visitor here only--to--perhaps"--and his eyes rested piercingly on Martin--"Monsieur Buscarlet?"

"Monsieur is," Martin replied, "a visitor here seeking for a lost person. A connection by marriage. A man who has been wronged, has partly wronged himself. Monsieur has lodged with Monsieur Buscarlet before."

"May I demand the name of the lost man?"

"Alas, monsieur, I do not know it. He discarded his own over forty years ago. That which he has adopted I can not tell you. Also he may be dead and my quest in vain."

"Would he be," and again his eyes stared fixedly into the eyes of the other man, "would he be, do you think, of--of--well--of Monsieur Buscarlet's religious faith?"

"He would."

"I hope you will find him, sir. If you do so, use your utmost endeavours to persuade him to abjure that faith. Otherwise the province of Languedoc will be no pleasant refuge for him henceforth, even though he has been here for the forty years you speak of. Now, sir," and he left this subject to speak of that which had brought him to Montvert, "I must beg you will accompany us to Alais. As a visitor to the neighbourhood and, as I suppose, a person not interested in our unhappy local troubles, you can give us much information as to how last night's murder was perpetrated. You are, I presume, willing to do so?"

"I am willing to speak as truthfully as I can on the matter. To speak as I do now, when I tell you that neither Monsieur Buscarlet nor any of the inhabitants of this place had any hand whatever in last night's doings."

"I shall--the Court will be--glad to be assured of that," Baville replied.

CHAPTER X.

THE LIGHTED TORCH.

The night had come, and, with the exception of one troop of dragoons and one company of the *milices*, also with the exception of the Marquis du Chaila, who had remained behind with the intention of having his uncle's body properly interred, all were on their way to Alais.

And behind Baville and de Peyre rode Martin and Buscarlet, the former on his own horse, the pastor on one which had belonged to the dead man.

It was a night such as those who dwell in the south--in Languedoc, or Provence, or Dauphiné--in the height of its summer know well. A night when, up from the Mediterranean, but a few leagues away, there come the cool breezes that sunset invariably brings, and when, from the caps of the purple mountains, the soft evening air descends, passing over cornfields and meadows and woods after it has left the sterile and basaltic summits until, when it reaches the valleys, its breath is perfumed and odorous. Summer nights so calm and soft that here the nightingale remains later than is its wont in other spots and sings sometimes far into August and September, the throats of hundreds of birds making the whole valley musical.

Now, however, their trills were drowned by the clank of sabres against the flanks of the horses bestridden by the dragoons, by the rattle of chain and bridle, the occasional neigh of the animals, and by various orders given as all went forward. Also by the hum of conversation as the men talked to one another.

Suddenly upon the night air, however, there came now another sound, silencing and deadening all else--a sound that subdued and deadened even the clatter of harness and accoutrements, the voices of the men, the songs of the birds of night. The sound of the deep booming of a bell not far off which swelled and rose in the summer calm, as sometimes it rang violently and sometimes slowly and intermittently, sometimes ceased, too, and then began again, with sharp, hurried clangs, as though rung by some frightened, terror-stricken hand.

"It is the tocsin," one hoarse-throated dragoon called out, who rode in the troop behind the leaders, "the tocsin from some village church. Is more murder being done? Are more abbés being slaughtered?"

"The fellow speaks truly," de Peyre said, then roared himself at the top of his voice: "Who among you knows the locality? What village is near?"

From twenty mouths the answer came at once: "It is Frugéres. The place is close at hand. The steeple is the highest for miles around."

Even as these men spoke, their voices were in their turn silenced or drowned by still more numerous shouts from others in the cavalcade.

"See, see!" those other voices yelled. "There is a fire--a church that burns. Behold!"

"My God!" Martin heard Baville whisper to himself, though not so low but that the words were distinguishable. "The fanatics have attacked another priest, another church. This is no riot, but a rebellion."

Then he turned at once to de Peyre and said hurriedly but authoritatively:

"Order all forward. They are there. We may be in time to save some. Also to trap these mountain wolves. Forward, I say! Give the word of command."

From de Peyre that word went forth, harsh and raucous as bellowed from the lips of the rough soldier who had fought at Senef and Ensisheim and had himself taken orders from Turenne and Condé. A moment later every man who was mounted was spurring toward the thin streak of flame that rose in the night air half a mile ahead, while the *milice* followed on foot as fast as they were able.

"Pray God, no more horrors are being perpetrated," Buscarlet muttered as he rode by Martin's

side down the dusty road. Then murmured: "God forgive them. God forgive them. They are mad."

"*He* may forgive them," said Baville, who had caught his words, and paraphrasing unconsciously as he spoke the words of one by whose side he would have been accounted obscure and humble. "He may. I never will. Oh, that Julien arrives ere long! Then--then--then--they shall know what it is to outrage Languedoc thus."

The flames grew more furious as all neared the tower whence they issued. It was the tower of the church at Frugéres; behind those flames rose the thick white smoke from the burning material below. Also great pieces of the copings were falling from the summit, and sometimes a pinnacle or gargoyle fell too. And once as they drew near there came a smothered clang, followed a moment later by a deep sonorous clash, and those approaching rapidly knew that the great bell had fallen from its beam, probably by now burned through, and had been hurled far down below.

Upon the air as this happened there rose a psalm, a hymn of praise, telling how the false priests of Baal had been consumed by the flames of God's wrath in ages long since past, also the shouts and cries of many voices. Yet none of those shouts were derisive, none scornful or contemptuous. Instead, the shouts and cries of avengers who testified to justice being done on sinners; who approved of the justice, yet saw no reason for adding rejoicing to that approval.

"See," cried Baville, "they are there. Behold! They move below the tower. We have them. De Peyre, give the order to charge. At them, among them, spare none."

The belief in witchcraft was not yet dead in the world. People still believed in sorcery and enchantment. What wonder, then, that the dragoons thought there was some necromancy in the fact that, as they tore down the dusty road, their blades gleaming in the light cast by the flames, all against whom they rode vanished suddenly? Were there one moment, gone the next. It seemed incredible. Half a hundred men had been before them when they were five minutes' distance off; now that they had reached the burning church, not a living soul was to be seen. Truly it savoured of the miraculous. Yet, ere many months had passed--indeed, but a few weeks--these soldiers, and others too who were soon to join them, learned that no foe against whom they had ever been opposed possessed so thoroughly the art of sudden disappearance as did these fanatics, known later as the Camisards. For, trained in their mountain homes to every physical feat--to leaping great chasms, climbing dizzy heights unaided by aught but their strong and agile feet and hands, descending giddy precipices as easily as their own goats--they could disappear, disperse, as quickly and as thoroughly as the snow wreath under the spring sun. Could lure on bodies of their enemies to sports fraught with danger to all but themselves, into quagmires and morasses, lonely mountain passes and fatal hilltops, then themselves vanish and be no more seen.

It was so now upon this second night of their uprising.

As the dragoons charged down upon the paved, open *place* outside the church of Frugéres they charged upon empty space alone, encountered nothing that offered resistance either to their onrush or their gleaming blades. Nothing but the dead body of a man, a priest, lying on those stones beneath the tower, the head broken in, the limbs twisted and contorted.

"*Grand Dieu!* what are we dealing with?" exclaimed the Lieutenant General, wiping the sweat from his face as his men pulled up around him, while some rushed into the church on foot, their long swords in their hands, ready to be thrust through any breast that they encountered, and others to the presbytery, thinking the *attroupés* might be hiding there. "With human beings or devils?"

"Nay," said Baville, "with the children of the desert and the mountains. Yet also the children of the devil. They escape but for a time, however. Even these jugglers can not disappear when they are surrounded. And," he added, striking one white-gloved hand into the palm of another, "they shall be surrounded by such a fast-closing circle that ere long not one shall escape. I swear it here before this murdered man."

Easy to swear such an oath. More difficult to keep it. As, at last, Baville found.

"Who is he?" Martin asked. Then added in a whisper to Buscarlet: "This is murder, not justice. Cruelty, not retribution. See, he is an old man."

"You are right, sir," Baville replied, whose ears nothing ever escaped. "Yet be sure their time will come." Then, looking down at the dead priest, he also asked, "Who is he?"

"It is the reverend curé," one of the dragoons said, regarding the old man and wiping from his face at the same time the beads of perspiration, even as his leader had done a moment before. "I know him well; am of the next parish. He has thrown himself from the tower. As well have staid for the flames as perished thus, broken all to pieces."

All gazed down also as the man uttered these words, and as they did so, none speaking, they recognised that they were face to face with an awakened fury, with a vengeance that had slumbered but which now awoke even as the baited lion awakes and turns at last to rend its foes.

For more than sixteen years the *affectés*, the New Religionists, the Heretics, had bowed their heads beneath the yoke of him whom they called the Scourge of God, as well as of the priests and

the De Maintenon, the woman whom Louvois and La Chaise had once used as an instrument to work on her lover's intolerance, but who, since she had become that lover's wife, had herself carried on the system. Born a Protestant, she had seen that the king's mind became more sunken in superstition as he grew near his end, and that, to keep that mind under her subjection, the surest way was to persecute those whom she had deserted and whom she hated. Therefore she revelled in their suppression, therefore she boasted to her sister bigot, the Princesse des Ursins, that in twenty years, if Louis' life was spared, there would be no more Huguenots in France.

Meanwhile her orders were carried out strenuously wherever Protestants harboured, especially so in the Midi. "*Saccagez ces chiens des Huguenots, saccagez les, c'est la volonté du roi*," her minister, Louvois, wrote. "Drive out *ce monstre de l'hérésie, ces chaires de pestilence, ces synagogues de Satan*," exclaimed the priest. And it was done.

Swiftly to all the jails in the warm south, to the galleys waiting at Marseilles for their victims, to the lamp-posts on the town and village bridges, to the fuel in the market places, to the axe, the wheel and the rope, the Protestants were hurried.

Also the dragonnades began. The dragoons, *les cravats*, were quartered in houses, sometimes in Protestant churches. Wives and daughters were so treated that, to hide the bitterness of their shame and to escape the horror of ever meeting their father's or brother's glances again, they took their own lives. They need not have feared those glances, for, the jails being soon full to overflowing, hundreds of male Protestants were huddled off in crazy brigs and tartans and snows to the Mississippi and New France generally, where, if they were not drowned on the way, they mostly perished from the effects of the climate or by the hands of the Natchez.

For sixteen years it had gone on. By the end of that time the Protestant churches were all closed and the Protestant ministers forbidden to perform their services under pain of death; scores, indeed, had been executed for doing to, while still scores more, at the risk of death, performed those services and held Divine worship in the mountains and woods. Also none were allowed to quit the land who could be prevented from doing so, though a hundred thousand did manage to escape to other countries, high-born women and girls being disguised in most cases as muleteer's boys; high-born men of the oldest blood in France--such men as Ruvigny and Duquesne--driving pigs and asses toward the frontier, or disguised as pilgrim monks, or pushing handcarts full of fruit and vegetables or Nîmes serges, which they pretended they were desirous of selling. But these were people of wealth, people who left behind them in their flight the châteaux in which countless generations of their race had been born, left also their rich furniture and equipages and costly plate and silks and satins, and the woods and forests and vineyards to which they had been born the heirs and to the enjoyment of which they had looked forward for the rest of their lives. Or they were skilled mechanics and artisans who could gain a livelihood wherever they found themselves. But for the poorer sort there was no flight possible; if they left France they must die of hunger in other lands. They had no money, could speak no tongue but their own, often knew no trade by which they could earn their bread; understood nothing beyond the breeding of cattle and the arts of husbandry. Yet they, too, fled from persecution, though in a different manner. High up in the gloomy and, to strangers, inaccessible plateaux of the Cévennes--a region of sterile mountains on which for six months in the year the snow sometimes falls unceasingly, while for the other six the heat is almost the heat of the tropics--they sought a refuge. Here in this mountainous region, which covers an extent of one hundred and twenty miles, they found a home, here worshipped God in their own fashion and unmolested, which was all they asked, yet saw with horror, when disguised they ventured down into the plains, the misery that was still overwhelming those of their own faith. Also they knew that plans were being formed for their extermination; that from Paris was coming an army under Julien, a bloodthirsty soldier who had once been a Protestant like themselves, but who was now a convert possessing all the tigerish fury of the convert against those whom he had deserted; knew that Du Chaila was the most brutal of all priests as Baville was the most cruel of all rulers. No wonder that they groaned over the ferocities inflicted on any of their number who were caught below in the plains. The capture of the girl Fleurette and of the guide Masip ignited the flame of revenge which had long been smouldering. But even then, when they descended to Montvert, it was more with the desire of rescuing the victims than aught else. In their hearts there had been at first no intention of murdering either the abbé or the curé of Frugéres. Moreover, it was not against Louis that they rebelled but against his Church and the priests of that Church.

But Du Chaila had caused the dragoons to fire on them, and the first shot from the soldiers' musketoons had roused their passion; also it brought about a conflict of horrible cruelty and bloodshed which the passage of years alone extinguished. For now that war of retaliation had commenced which two of Louis' field marshals were successively unable to quench, and which a third only succeeded in doing, more by diplomacy and tolerance than by steel or ball.

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"What has he on his breast?" asked Baville, leaning over the dead priest and pointing to

something white that gleamed in the light cast by the flames from the burning church.

"A scrap of paper, Monsieur l'Intendant," the dragoon who had taken the most prominent part among his fellows replied, "with writing upon it. It is pinned to his vest."

"Give it to me."

Then he read aloud, not heeding, apparently, whether either Buscarlet or Martin heard the words:

"This paper replaces another containing the names of a score of men to be denounced to the monster, Baville. The man has gone before his God. Baville will follow."

"Will he?" the Intendant said to himself in a low, clear voice, which all heard. "Will he? Doubtless some day, but not now. For a surety not before these wolves have been tracked to their caves and exterminated--as they shall be--as they shall be."

And all watching him in the lurid light cast from the burning tower, saw that the white-gloved hands were opened and clenched again twice, as though he had the throats of those wolves he spoke of within them.

CHAPTER XI.

"CONSORTING WITH HERETICS."

It was midnight when all rode into Alais, and the iron shoes of the horses clattering on the cobble-stones of the street woke from their beds the few who were asleep.

There were, indeed, not many who slept that night at this hour, since all knew that the fanatics, as they were invariably termed by those of the vicinity who were not of the Protestant religion, had descended from the mountains upon Montvert and had slain the abbé. Also all knew that, two hours before sunset, the dreaded Baville had gone forth escorted by de Peyre and his cavalry as well as by the *milice* of the province--gone forth to inflict a terrible vengeance on the murderers. Had they done so? they asked each other feverishly now as the dragoons rode in, the rattle of hoofs and scabbards and bridle chains deadening the whispers they addressed to each other. Had they done so?

Perhaps it was not strange that here, in this little town nestling in its rich valleys, the slopes of whose hills were covered with cornfields and vineyards and chestnut woods, the beauty of which was so extreme that in the language of the Cévenoles it was termed the *Hort Dieu*, or, in purer French, *Le Jardin de Dieu*, all should have whispered their imaginings, since it was in Alais particularly that religious opinion was much divided, the Reformed faith numbering nearly as many adherents as the Romish. Whispered their imaginings because each feared the hostile ears to which their uttered thoughts and ideas might penetrate, none knowing as yet which side was to prevail in the great struggle. For if Baville had destroyed the Camisards, retribution would be swift and strong on all who were Huguenots; if, on the contrary, he had failed, those of the older faith might expect to find themselves victims of an awful retaliation before another night had come.

At first none could discover aught. The dragoons with their leaders and the two men--one old, the other young, who seemed like prisoners--swept onward to the Hôtel de Ville. Soon the streets became quiet again and all within the houses sought their beds, though, perhaps, with not much hope of obtaining any rest.

If, however, they did so hope, they were doomed to disappointment.

For scarce had the clatter of the men led by de Peyre died on their ears, scarce had the horses' hoofs ceased to ring down the streets, than another hubbub arose. More trampling of cavalry and the ringing of iron shoes upon the cobble-paved road was heard, more jangling of accoutrements and more shouts and calls; also the blare of trumpets and the deep, heavy roll of artillery over the stony streets. Whereon many who had but just laid down upon their beds sprang up again and, huddling on their garments, ran to their windows and doors, the Protestants asking if this were some fresh force arriving to add to their persecutions, the Catholics wondering if the fanatics had descended from the mountains again and were besieging the town? Yet soon the latter were assured that such could not be the case, while, to counterbalance the other's feeling of safety, the Protestants trembled more and more, not knowing what fresh horrors were preparing for them, for all saw at a glance these were no mountaineers clad in their white sheepskins, nor Camisards, but, instead, regular troops well equipped and armed and uniformed. Also all knew that the *attroupés* had no artillery or horses.

With different feelings, each watched, therefore, this new arrival of soldiers and saw go by the fierce dragoons of Joyeuse, the fusileers of Montluçon, the regiments of Saultz and Bearne, and one of light-horse from the far north--the chevaux-légers of Bapaume; saw, too, the artillery organized by St.-Hilaire, now dead.

"God help us!" the Protestants said, trembling behind their blinds, "God help us! was this needed too?" while one old man, crouching behind the fountain in the market place, whispered to another, "Those great guns! those great guns! See! Are they to blow our houses down above our heads?"

"Tush!" exclaimed a tall man standing by their side, a fellow bronzed and black from the winds of many wintry storms as well as from the scorching rays of the southern sun. "Tush! they are for the children of God, up there," and he turned a dark gleaming eye toward the dusky summits above the little town, over which by now there was stealing a cold gray that told of the coming of the summer morning. "Fear not for yourself, or them up there. Baville's roads are not yet made and never will be. Let us see that artillery mount into the Cévennes," and he laughed scornfully, some might have deemed cruelly.

Shrinking away from his great form, half in fear, half with dawning intelligence, the old man said: "You speak thus, as though you were of the persecuted--yet--yet--you wear the garments of--of--the valleys, the clothes of townsmen."

But the swarthy stranger only muttered:

"Peace, old man, and be silent. Has not the quarry worn the garb of the hunter before now?" Then he moved away and was lost in the crowd which had gathered afresh.

Ahead of all--of artillery, dragoons, chevaux-légers--there rode one who, but for the richness of his apparel his scarlet coat glistening with stars and traversed by a great ribbon, his hat laced and cockaded with galloon until none of the felt was visible, his gold-hilted and long quilloned sword, might, judging from his fierce looks, himself have been a refugee of the mountain plateaux and deserts above. A man with a great face in which were set fierce rolling eyes, a man from whose heavily moustached mouth there issued oaths whenever he opened it.

This was Julien, one of Louis' field marshals, who, because of his having left the Protestant faith to embrace that of the king, was spoken of in all the lands where the Protestants sheltered themselves as "Julien the Apostate." Also he was spoken of by them with hatred and loathing since once no better soldier of Protestantism had ever existed or, under William of Orange, had done better service. But William, the great champion of Protestantism, was dead now, and Julien, whose love for wealth was unquenchable, had learned that Roman Catholicism was the most paying game. Thus it was that he came this night into his own part of the country, since he was of old family in the town of Orange itself, to lay waste and to slaughter all who held the faith which he himself had once held. He was a true pervert!

With an oath he turned to the aide-de-camp who rode behind him and asked where this accursed Baville was, bidding him ride forward at once and see what preparations had been made for the reception of his forces. Bade him also ask if every Protestant house had been put under orders to accommodate them.

"For," he said to himself, "they must pay for their contumacy *fasse Dieu!* We should have good feeding here. The vagabonds are rich in all good things in this town. We must have our share."

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The next day dawned bright and fair with still no speck in the blue sky toward which the great mountains lifted their heads, and with the bright sun over all--over vineyards full of their ripening grapes, over meadows in which the cattle stood under the shadows of the chestnut trees that dotted them at intervals--lighting up, too, the cool dark woods that clothed the slopes. Also it peered into old and dusty houses, shining in on the ancient furniture and vessels that generation after generation had prized and polished regularly and been proud of.

It shone, too, into another spot--the principal chamber of the Hôtel de Ville, where on this bright July morning were assembled all the representatives of law and order in the province, Baville at their head.

He was seated now in the presidential chair of this apartment, which served as the debating room for all things connected with the municipal affairs of the town; on either side of him sat his colleagues, the field marshal being on his left hand, the bishop of the diocese, which was a newly created one, on his right. Also the mayor was there and de Peyre, several Catholic priests, and half a dozen monks of various orders who had followed in Julien's train, they being sent down by the De Maintenon because of their gifts of preaching. For, true to her colours, the unproclaimed

queen pretended on all occasions that the cruelties which were practised in the south were repugnant to her, and that it was by listening to the word of God alone, as expounded by eminent churchmen chosen by herself, that she trusted to witness the conversion of the heretics. Yet, if all written records on the subject are true, it was she who had first spurred on Louvois to give the order to "*saccagez les hérétiques*," and had, after his death, persuaded Chamillart, Bossuet, and Le Dieudonné himself to continue the Holy Crusade in the same manner.

Whether it was because Baville meant upon this occasion that there should be no doubt in Julien's mind as to who was the absolute chief here and representative of the king, the field marshal having already on their meeting overnight uttered some very decided opinions upon what steps should at once be taken in Languedoc for the stamping out of heresy, or whether it was from his determination to make an altogether splendid figure among the ecclesiastics and handsomely apparelled officers, he himself presented a dazzling appearance on the occasion. His costume was now entirely of white satin, the gold lilies being stamped upon it at various intervals and in squares; his hat, which he wore upon his head as the king's Intendant, was also white and fringed with gold; his sword was gold-handled and sheathed. Also his satin gloves were tasselled with gold thread, while, above all, he wore the *justaucorps à brevet*, or nobles' close coat. Upon his face--a handsome one, showing no traces of the fierce determination of his character--there sat this morning an easy look such as he might have worn had he been assisting at the *fiançailles* of some grand siegneur of Languedoc, instead of at a council of war, bloodshed, and extermination. He had long since learned that not only the face, but also the whole deportment of a diplomatist should be a mask and not a glass in which men could read.

"Here," he said, taking up a paper as he spoke, and glancing his eye around upon all who sat near him, "is a report of what has been done of late by these *attroupés* from the hills, dating from their first murmurings. It is best I recite them. You," and he looked at Julien, "will then know against what you have to contend."

"*Splendeur de Dieu!*" the great swashbuckler exclaimed, using one of his most magnificent oaths, "let me but get at them and will make them sing something else than their accursed Calvinistic canticles, I warrant you. Read, your Excellency, read."

The fringed glove of his Excellency flattened out the paper, the gloved finger was placed upon a line, and Baville began.

"Three months ago Adolphe Canivet was hung upon the bridge at Florac. His crime was, that he, a heretic, has blasphemed the king, also Madame De Maintenon." Baville raised his hat as he mentioned these august personages. Then, having replaced it, he continued: "Four nights afterward, Canivet's body was removed from the lamp; the next morning in its place was found the body of a dog, hung by the neck. Around that dog's neck was a label, and on it written, 'Thus will the dog Baville hang.' You laugh, monseigneur," the Intendant said, glancing at Julien and looking, for him, a little ruffled. "You forget, perhaps, that the 'dog Baville' represents the king here."

"I forget nothing," said Julien, "neither do I laugh. Go on. Later, I promise you, I will even remember the dog."

"From that time the so-called Protestants braved us in every way," Baville continued. "In spite of all our care, they have left the country in great numbers, some getting across to Savoy, some escaping by the sea, many fleeing into the mountains. Also they refuse to enter the churches to hear Mass, preferring to hold meetings in the mountains and woods."

At this the bishop groaned, but Baville, pretending not to hear him, went on:

"Many have descended from the mountains at night and demanded alms and ammunition, having none themselves, from those who possessed them. The prior of St. Gervais had his house broken into and several musketoons taken, they having been left in his charge by some of De Broglie's soldiers."

"*Malédiction!*" exclaimed Julien, "why left they their arms with a priest?"

"They were scaling the mountains to find the outcasts," Baville answered. "Being good soldiers," and he looked severely at the other as he spoke, "they depended on their swords and pistols."

"Humph!" muttered the marshal, "a soldier who parts with his weapons is a fool. He who leaves them with a priest is a double fool."

"Treachery, too, is rife," the Intendant continued, still with his finger on the paper. "Some of these heretics who have refused conversion, yet were willing to swear fidelity to the king, were put on guard on the town walls here in Alais. Also at Nîmes and Anduse. In the morning their muskets were empty. They had not been fired, consequently the charges had been drawn. Needless to suggest where those charges went."

"Also," put in the bishop, "many murders have been committed. Du Chaila and the curé of Frugéres within the last two days. What next? What next?"

"Du Chaila," exclaimed Baville, "was my right hand. He feared naught, punished with justice, though with severity; would have assisted me to stamp out these rebels, I do believe, had he lived. Now he has been brutally murdered. Both he and the curé must be avenged." After which he proceeded to tell the whole story of the abbé's murder; from the beginning as it had been told to him; at the end, as he himself knew it. And he told them, too, how he had brought back with him to Alais the only person left in the village of Montvert when he reached it with de Peyre and the marquis.

"At present," he went on, "I know not what to do with them. One is Buscarlet, who was the Protestant curé, but who has been suspended from his heretical worship for some years and has lived upon some small means he has, supplemented by gifts from those of his crew who are well to do. He is of the best among them, at least openly. Preaches submission openly to law and the Government; what he may do in secret I know not. But, unlike so many of his brethren, he has never fled. The other is a stranger to these parts and a gentleman. A proprietor in the north. Speaks too, I think, truthfully. If it pleases you they can be examined."

"It would be best," the bishop said.

Baville made a sign to the *greffier* of the court who advanced toward him; then, after giving the man his instructions, he turned to the bishop and said: "Monsiegneur, they have been sent for. In a moment they will be before you. They are close at hand."

They were so close at hand that they entered the court almost at once, escorted by the *greffier*, the pastor walking by the side of Martin and both returning the salutation of Baville, who, true to the outward bearing to which he had trained himself, bowed with civility. In his heart he had long since determined that Buscarlet was one of the most dangerous of the Protestant ministers with whom he would have to deal, for the simple reason that it was impossible to find any flaw in his conduct which would justify him in transporting him to the galleys or New France; and therefore, until that flaw was discovered, until the opening was given him, he did not betray his determination by outward rudeness.

As for the stranger who was before him, he scarcely knew what his course of action should be. The story he told of himself might be true, in which case he had no possible authority for molesting him, while, even though it were false, he would have great difficulty in proving it to be so.

Also, as happens frequently to those of the most astute minds, he had forgotten to put one leading question to this stranger: To ask him if he--who had been the lodger of this pestilential heretic, and who, by a strange chain of circumstances, was the only other witness of the abbé's murder who had remained behind in Montvert--was himself a heretic.

Had forgotten it; though now it seemed to Martin, as he stood there looking round the room filled with men all bitterly hostile to the Protestant faith, that the question could no longer remain unasked. Would that bishop, sitting there calm and impassive, also omit to ask it? That field marshal omit it too, whose apostasy and fierce vindictive hatred of those he had deserted was known and talked of wherever half a dozen of the Reformed faith gathered together to discuss their persecutions and their persecutors? Also those priests and those six hooded monks who had followed in the soldiers' train? Scarcely could he deem it possible!

Well, he was prepared with his answer. No denial would issue from his lips, no lie be told. Therefore he took the place to which the Intendant motioned him, and, sitting, down by Buscarlet's side, prepared calmly to await whatever might happen.

Had he been able to see behind him he would have observed that which, even though it had carried him no consternation, must have astonished him; for on the face of one of those cowled monks, the man even throwing back the hood from off his forehead to stare more intently at him as he endeavoured to catch a second glance of Martin's features, he would have noticed a look of profound astonishment--the look of one who sees another in the last place of all where he would have expected so to see him, and who, while thus seeing, can scarcely force himself to believe his own eyes.

"Monsieur Buscarlet," said Baville, quietly and with no accent either of impoliteness or reproof in his tones, "what happened at Montvert the other night amid some who were once your flock must be clearly told to all assembled here. From you I must demand an account, as I have the right to do. Later I shall ask this gentleman, Monsieur Martin, if he agrees with that account."

As he said the words "Monsieur Martin" the *cordelier* started. Then over his shaven face--a face unrelieved by either eyebrows or eyelashes, so that those who looked at him might doubt if indeed his cheeks were ever touched by razor and if their lack of hair was not due to a defect in Nature--there came that look of new-born recognition which all have seen spring into the countenances of others.

"Martin!" he uttered, "Martin! Ay, that was the name. The name he was called by. It is he. What does he here? He of the house of de Rochebazon, and consorting with heretics!"

CHAPTER XII.

"I AM A PROTESTANT."

An hour later the meeting in the Hôtel de Ville had broken up, yet not before Buscarlet had said words such as he had better have bitten out his tongue than have uttered; for, after he had told his tale truthfully (as nothing would have prevented him from telling it) and had described all that had taken place from the moment when, singing their psalms, the men of the mountains had passed down the village street, bidding all the inhabitants keep within doors--narrating, too, how he had besought them to spare the abbé and return good for evil--the Intendant had remarked almost angrily to him:

"Yet, in spite of all you say, the rebellion against the king's authority, the murder, and all other violence has happened, as it always happens, in a place of strong heretical leanings. Oh, you Protestants, as you term yourselves; oh, you of the Reformed faith, as you blasphemously name yourselves--ever are you at the root of all rebellion, of all eruption, all attacks upon those who are God's anointed. Yet you can never triumph. Never--here in France."

As he spoke he revealed to those around him what were his true feelings in regard to all that had taken place, though indeed some of them knew or suspected those feelings; revealed that it was the resistance to the king's power, the constituted authority, which he was determined to crush more than the resistance to the ancient and, in this place at least, cruel faith of the land. These were indeed his feelings, this his guiding motive. He was above all things a courtier, a king's man; and though for thirty-three years he never quitted Languedoc for a single day, he becoming its Intendant in 1685 and retiring from it in 1718, Versailles with its powerful master was the star on which his eyes were ever fixed. Nay, he himself had said that *Le roi était son Dieu*, and that to do him service was all he lived for. As for the outraged Romish faith, let Rome repay that outrage. His duty was to crush rebellion, and he did it well. When he finally left the province, he had caused twelve thousand Protestants to suffer either death, imprisonment, or transportation to the galleys.

But now from Buscarlet there came a denial of Baville's charges against his creed. Rising from his seat by Martin's side he spoke, while all in the room gazed in astonishment at the old man, never expecting to hear the words he uttered.

"Your Excellency," he said, "have you weighed well your words ere you uttered them? Scarcely, I think. All rebellion comes from us, the Protestants, you have said, all attack upon those who are God's anointed. Is this so? Pause, sir, and reflect. Who was it who first uttered the maxim that bad kings should be deposed? Who were those whom Henri of Valois saw force their way into his palace of the Louvre, carry off his furniture, reverse his arms, destroy his portrait, break his great seal, style him *Lâche*, *Hérétique*, *Tyran?* Was it not the Sorbonne who declared the people absolved from their vow to him, erased his name from the prayers of the Romish Church? Who slew him at St. Cloud? Jacques Clement, the monk--was he a Protestant?"

"Henri de Valois was himself a murderer," the bishop made answer. "Himself slew the Guises at Blois."

"How many Protestants have been murdered by orders of our present king? Yet there is not one in France who would raise his hand against him," the pastor continued. Then, as though carried away by one of those ecstasies which caused men, especially men among the refugees of the mountains, to seem almost inspired, he continued:

"Your Excellency has said we attack those who are God's anointed. Do we so? Who formed the rebel league to exclude Henry of Navarre from the succession? Who was it struck that great king to the heart in the Rue de la Ferronnerie? Ravillac! Was he of the Reformed faith? Who would have turned Louis off the throne he now sits securely on, have set up the Prince of Condé in his place? Who? Who? Not Protestants for sure! Name one who has slain a king or attempted to slay one in all our land."

"Monsieur Buscarlet," Baville replied, still containing himself, "there is no accusation against those of your faith as to their desiring to slay King Louis. But they have revolted against all constituted authority, against all who here rule for the king, against his priests. Your statement as to what misguided men of our own faith have done helps you not. Two wrongs do not make one right. And because it is by the Protestants that the sacred soil of France is threatened, the Protestants must go. Nay, more: those who rebel must pay the penalty."

* * * * * * *

"Monsieur," said Baville, coming in two hours later to another room in which Martin sat, he and Buscarlet having been requested to leave the apartment in which the council were, after they had both testified to all that had happened at Montvert on the night when the abbé was slain, "Monsieur, I have heard strange news of you. I wonder you did not see fit to tell me with whom I had the honour of conversing."

"With whom you had the honour of conversing!" Martin replied, looking at him in astonishment. "I think, sir, you forget. I told you my name, also where my property is--in France."

"Pardon me, you did so tell me." And, even as he spoke, Martin observed, to his still further astonishment, that the Intendant's manner had become one of almost deference, certainly of increased courtesy, though he had never been in any way impolite to him since they had met at Montvert. "You did tell me that. What you omitted to inform me of, quite within your perfect right, doubtless, was that you were of the de Rochebazon family. Sir, permit me to congratulate you. There is no nobler house in all France, in Europe."

"Your Excellency, I have not the honour to be of the house of de Rochebazon----"

"Not?"

"But, instead, a relative of the late Princesse de Rochebazon."

And as he spoke he did not doubt, nay, he felt sure, that he had given himself into this man's power. If he knew so much of the de Rochebazons as he seemed to do, he must know that the late princess had been an Englishwoman. Baville would also be aware, therefore, what his nationality was. Yet, still strong in the honour which lay deep within his heart; strong, too, in his determination to profit by no evasion of the truth when the telling of it was absolutely necessary, he announced his kinsmanship with her, looking straight into the Intendant's eyes as he did so.

In an instant he recognised that he stood in no peril at present. Whatever Baville might know of the family of de Rochebazon, it was evident he did not know that the princess was not a Frenchwoman.

"Monsieur," Baville replied, "it is the same thing. And, sir, I welcome you to Languedoc, you, a member of a great family which has stood ever by the throne, the Church. I hope you will make my house--it is at Montpellier--your resting place while you remain in the Midi. You will be very welcome."

"I thank your Excellency, but it is impossible I should accept. You will remember I told you I have a mission here--one that I can not put aside even amid the troublous times which have now arisen in the neighbourhood. I must prosecute my mission to the end."

"To find the lost man you spoke of?"

"To find him."

"Is he a de Rochebazon? If so, he should be very near to a great inheritance--an inheritance which, the Franciscan tells me (the monk who recognised you as the gentleman who attended the last moments of Madame la Princesse), the Church has fallen heir to."

"The monk! What monk? Yet--I remember. There were two at her bedside: one who watched continuously, another who came at the last moment. Which is he?"

"I can not say. Yet I will bring you into intercourse with him if you desire it. He is here to assist in stamping out this accursed Protestantism, in helping to convert them to the true faith."

"Your Excellency hates bitterly these Protestants."

"I hate the king's enemies. And all Protestants are such."

As the Intendant uttered these words Martin told himself the time had come. He must speak now or be henceforth a coward in his own esteem. It was for nothing that his father had cast off forever his allegiance to James, had openly acknowledged that henceforth he abjured the religion to which James belonged. Not for nothing, since by so doing he had stood his trial before Sir Francis Wytham and Sir Creswell Levinz, narrowly escaping Jeffreys himself. Not for nothing, since he had been fined and imprisoned, he who had followed the Stuarts into exile, almost ruined.

Yet all would be for nothing--his father's tribulations, his own repudiation of the wealth his aunt had amassed for him--all would be worth nothing if now he stood here before this man and, hearing the cause reviled for which both father and son had sacrificed so much, held his peace like a coward.

The time had come.

"Your Excellency," he said quietly, "stigmatizes Protestants as accursed; also as the king's

enemies. Well, as to being accursed I know not; it may be even as you say. But I do know that I am no enemy of King Louis. Yet--I am a Protestant."

"You!" Baville exclaimed, taking a step back in sheer astonishment. "You! Yet a kinsman by marriage of the de Rochebazons. It is impossible."

"Nevertheless it is true."

Baville shrugged his shoulders, then suddenly turning round on him, he said:

"Your sympathies, then, are with these rebels here. You approve, perhaps, of what you saw on the bridge at Montvert two nights ago. Are here, it may be, to foment further troubles."

"You mistake. I utterly disapprove of what I saw. Would indeed have saved the priest had it been in my power. It is not by cruelty that wrongs are righted."

"In Heaven's name, then, if these are your sentiments what makes you a Protestant?"

"Conviction. As conviction made that de Rochebazon a Protestant whom I am here to find some traces of, alive or dead."

They had remained standing face to face with one another since the Intendant had come into the room; they were face to face still as Martin told how the missing heir to the de Rochebazon name and wealth had himself changed his religion, and, being face to face, he saw a strange look, a shade of startled perplexity, come into the countenance of Baville. Also he noticed that he paled perceptibly. Then the latter said:

"De Rochebazon, *the* de Rochebazon, turned a Protestant! turned Protestant!--*c'est incroyable!*--and came here to Languedoc. When--how long ago?"

"I do not know. Possibly forty years ago. Your Excellency," and now the clear blue eyes of the young man looked into the equally clear dark eyes of the ruler of the province, "do you know aught of him? Can you put me in the way of finding him?"

"I--no. Why do you ask? I came not here till '85. And--and--alas! that it should be so. It is their own doing. The Protestants and I have been at enmity ever since. They have made my rule a bitter one. It is their own doing, I repeat. Their own fault."

"They have not risen until now. Done no overt act!" Martin exclaimed.

"Unfortunately, they have done many. You do not know. And they have resisted the king's ordinances." Then changing the subject swiftly, he said:

"Monsieur Martin, you tell me you are here to seek this missing man; that you have no intention of aiding these rebels. I am glad to hear it. Yet, remember, if you remain here you do so at dire peril to yourself. If you take part in any act of rebellion, if you join in any way in their uprisings, proclaim yourself in the least as an opponent of the law and order which must be re-established at all costs here, then you too must be responsible for whatever may befall you. Do you think you can stay here and also remain neutral?"

"Are there not others in France who, being of my faith, are doing so? Are there not still De Colignys, De Rohans, De la Trémoilles, De Sullys in France, surrounding the king's person? Yet they are loyal to him and he molests them not; accept their service; lets them worship God in their own way."

"They are not in Languedoc," Baville said briefly yet very pertinently. "And the day will come when they will all return to their own faith. Otherwise France is not for them.[1] Nor will it be for you or yours."

Martin shrugged his shoulders at the latter part of this speech, since no answer was possible. France was not for him under any circumstances when he had once carried out his dead kinswoman's request, had found and done justice to Cyprien de Beauvilliers or his children, if he had left any, or, failing to find them, had at last discontinued his search.

"Meanwhile," continued Baville, "I would counsel you to reside at Montpellier. There, for the present at least, your co-religionists are not troublesome, and up to now I have not had to exercise the strong hand. Also," and now he bowed with the easy grace which had never forsaken him though he had been absent from Versailles for seventeen years, "if you will permit me, if you will accept of any courtesy at my hands--at the hands of Baville, the hated Intendant--I shall be pleased to be of service to you. As a connection of the house of de Rochebazon I may do that, while as a private gentleman, who does not obtrude his religious belief upon me, I shall be happy to assist you in your quest. Though I warn you I do not think you will succeed."

"You think the man I seek for never came here, or, coming, is dead?"

For a moment the other paused ere answering, his handsome face indicating that he was lost in thought, his clear eyes gazing searchingly into the eyes of the other. "I do not know. I can not say. It is most probable that if he ever came he is dead."

"Leaving no children?"

"How can I say? At least--if--if he is dead he must have died and left no trace or sign. Died without divulging who he was."

Then Baville turned to the door as though to go; yet ere he did so he spoke again, repeating his words:

"I should counsel you to make Montpellier your resting place. If aught is to be learned I may help you to learn it there."

"I thank you. Doubtless it would be best. Yet there is one request I must make to you; it is to--to deal gently with Buscarlet. On my word of honour as a gentleman, he has had no hand in these recent troubles. He besought those mountaineers who descended on Montvert to spare the abbé."

"There is nothing against Monsieur Buscarlet at present which calls for severity. Yet if he does not change his faith I know not what may be the end. If these Cévenoles do not desist, or are not stamped out, the retribution will be terrible."

"On all?"

"I fear on all. The Church never forgives. The Church will cry for vengeance against the Huguenots, and I, the ruler, must hear that cry."

"And answer it?"

"And answer it; for their resistance is rebellion, and rebellion must be crushed. Warn him, therefore, to be on his guard. To preach, above all, obedience to the king. Otherwise there is no hope. The prisons are already full of his brethren. Bid him beware, I say. They term Louis the 'Scourge of God,' and they speak truly. He will scourge the land of all who oppose him. And if not he--then his wife."

CHAPTER XIII.

URBAINE.

From the Mediterranean the warm, luscious breezes of the south sweep up to where Montpellier stands ere they pass the city and waft to the summits of the Cévennes the perfume of the flowers and the odours of the rich fruits which grow upon the shores of the beauteous sea. And from Montpellier itself, from the old *Place de Peyrou*, may be obtained a view that is unsurpassed both in its beauty and in its power of recalling to the memory the loathsome cruelties which, perpetrated in the days of Louis the Great King, have smirched forever that beauty. Far away, too, where rise the tips of the mountains of Ventoux on the confines of fair Provence, the Alps begin to show--those Alps over which the weary feet of escaping Protestants had been dragged as their owners sought the sanctuary of a more free land. Below lies a beautiful valley watered on one side by the Loire and on another by the Rhône, watered once also by the blood and the tears of the heartbroken dwellers therein. A valley teeming once again with the fruits of the earth, and with now all signs erased of the devastation which he, whose statue stands in that *Place de Peyrou*, caused to be spread around; erased from human sight, but not from human recollection.

Upon the other side lies Cette, of scant importance in these times as seacoast towns and harbours are reckoned, and dead and done with--lies there basking and smiling beneath the warm sun that shines alike in winter as in summer. Cette, the place which, in the minds of the forefathers of those who now dwell there, bore the blackest, most hated name of all the villages bordering the blue sea. For here the galleys harboured, here fathers and husbands, brothers and sons, were flung to horrors and miseries and the life of an earthly hell--a hell whose pangs knew no assuagement till death, most welcome, brought release.

From where Baville sat in his open window Cette could be seen; the harbour in which half a dozen of those galleys lay waiting for their victims. On a table before him were papers for the sending of other victims to the prisons of the surrounding towns; also the sentences of death allotted to many rebels, death in hideous forms. Some to be hung upon the bridges of their own town, some to be broken on the wheel, some to be burned in market places, some to have their forefingers struck off (a form of punishment peculiar to the neighbourhood and to those who had been captured in the present uprisings), and afterward to be hanged.

Also on tables at either side of him were orders to the colonels of local regiments to place themselves under direction of Julien; orders to others to provide forage and stabling for so many horses and accommodation for so many men; orders, too, for provisions and forage to be sent in to Montpellier and Nîmes for the victualling of the forces quartered there. And to all and every one of these he had already affixed his signature, "Baville"--a signature which here carried as much authority as if, instead, it had been "Louis."

Yet it was not about these papers that Nicholas de Lamoignon de Baville, Comte de Launai-Courson, Seigneur de Bris, Vaugrigneuse, Chavagne, Lamothe-Chaudemier, Beuxes and other places, as well as Conseiller d'Etat, Intendant de Justice, polices et finances--to give him his full names and titles--was thinking on this bright morning, nor on them that his eyes rested. Instead, upon a far smaller thing--a thing on which one would scarcely have thought he would have wasted a moment's attention--a little plain cornelian seal which he was turning over and over in his hands and regarding carefully through a small magnifying glass.

"Strange," he muttered to himself, "strange if, after all, after years of meditation and inquiry, I should thus have lit upon the clew! Strange, strange!"

He struck, as thus he mused, upon a little bronze gong that stood by his side and ready to his hand, and a moment later the door was opened and a man of about his own age came into the room in answer to the summons; a man whose plain garb, made of the local Nîmes serge, and wig *à trois marteaux*, proclaimed almost with certainty that he was a clerk or secretary.

"Casalis," the Intendant said, he having put the seal beneath some papers ere the other entered, "there is in the library a book entitled, *Devises et blasons de la Noblesse Française*, is there not?"

"There is, your Excellency. Prepared a year ago by Monsieur le Comte----"

"Precisely. Fetch it, if you please."

The man retired, and, after being absent some few moments, came back, bearing in his hand a large, handsome volume bound in pale brown morocco, the back and sides covered with fine gold tooling and with Baville's crest stamped also on each side--a splendid book, if its contents corresponded with its exterior.

"Shall I find any particular entry for your Excellency?" the man asked, pausing with the volume in his hand.

"No, leave it. I may desire to look into it presently."

Left alone, however, Baville looked into it at once, pausing at the names under "B" to regard with some complacency his own crest and arms beautifully reproduced in colours on vellum.

Then he turned over a vast number of leaves in a mass, arriving at the letter "T," and returning back to "R," finding thereby the page which was headed "De Rochebazon." And emblazoned in the middle of the vellum in red, gold, and blue was the coat of arms of that great family; above it was the crest of the house, on a rock proper a hawk with wings elevated--the motto "Gare."

"So," said Baville to himself, "he was of noble family, was a de Rochebazon. Had I looked at this book when the Comte de Paysac sent it to me, compared it with the seal, I should have known such was the case a year ago. Yet what use even if I had done so? What use? One can not recall--undo the past."

And Baville--even Baville, the "tiger of Languedoc," as he had been termed--sighed.

He took next the seal from the papers where he had pushed it and compared it with the Comte de Paysac's book, though even as he did so he knew there was no need for such comparison; the crest upon it was as familiar to him as his own. Then he muttered:

"It is pity Monsieur le Comte did not make his work even more complete. Some information would be useful. As to whom he married, to wit, as to whom this young man may be, who is related to the late princess. Also as to the family of the princess--I should know that. I would the count were still alive."

As thus he mused a shadow fell across the path that wound before his open window. From behind the orange tubs which formed a grove in front of that window there stepped out a girl who, seeing him there, smiled and said, "*Bon jour, mon père*." Then came on to the window and, leaning against the open frame, asked if she might come in, might bring him some flowers she had plucked to decorate his cabinet.

"Always, Urbaine," he said, "always," and he put out his hand as though to draw her to him. "Come in, come in."

Had this been a darkened room, a sombre cabinet into which no ray of sunlight ever stole, instead of being, in truth, a bright, gay apartment, the presence of the girl whom he addressed as

Urbaine would have made it cheerful, have seemed to bring the needed sunlight to it; for, as she stood there, her long white dress giving fresh radiance to the room, her fair hair irradiated by the beams of light that glinted in through the dark-green leaves of the orange trees, she seemed to cast even more lustre around, making even the grave, serious face of the Intendant look less severe. In her hands she carried a mass of roses and ferns on which the dew sparkled, also some large white lilies.

"Come, Urbaine," he said to her, "come, sit on your accustomed seat. When you are at Versailles you will have no father's knee to sit upon," and, caressingly, he drew her toward him, while she, sitting there, arranged the flowers into bunches.

As he mentioned Versailles she sighed and turned her eyes on him, then said:

"Why send me away, father? I do not wish to go. I desire to stay here by your side. By my mother's, too. Let me remain," and she bent forward and kissed his forehead.

"Nay," he answered, "nay, Montpellier is no place for you now. You are best away from it. At present all is not well. Urbaine, these rebels are stronger than we thought. Julien has been here a month, and what has he done? Nothing, except sustain defeat. Now we must have more troops from Paris. Montrevel, they say, will come; yet ere he does so much may happen. Nîmes, even Montpellier, may fall into their hands. Urbaine, I will not have you here to--to--fall into their hands also."

"Surely they will not hurt women. They say they attack none but soldiers--and--and priests; that, rough and fierce as they are, no woman has ever suffered at their hands. We of our side," and she sighed, "can scarcely say as much."

"Who has told you this, child? Perhaps your new friend, Monsieur Martin. Nay, I see by your blush it is so. Urbaine, you must not believe all he says. Remember, he is a Huguenot too."

"He has never spoken to me on such themes, or, speaking, has said nothing you could disapprove of. He says this uprising is wicked, unlawful; is not the way to gain their ends. Also he has told me that the murder of the Abbé Du Chaila was revolting to him; that he would have saved him had he not been powerless."

"Where is he now?" Baville asked, without making any remark on what she told him as to Martin Ashurst's sentiments. "I have not seen him for some days."

"I do not know," the girl said; "neither have I seen him. Yet he spoke of going to Alais to see his friend the pastor."

"Urbaine," Baville said, "you must speak to him before you set out for Paris. He may listen to words from you which he will not hear from me. You must warn him to leave Languedoc, to return to the north."

"To leave Languedoc! Return to the north!" she repeated. And it seemed to the sharp eyes of the Intendant as though her colour changed again.

"Ay, child, he is in deadly peril here. Can you not understand?"

"No," Urbaine replied, "no. What has he done?"

"Actively, he has done nothing. Yet he is a doomed man, because of his religion. My dear one, ere long the king will be roused to awful fury by this rebellion; there will not be a *réformé* left in France. And those who are passive will suffer the same as those who take up arms--in the Midi--here--at least. Even I shall not be able to shield him. Nay, more, how can I shield one and destroy all the rest?"

"Can there be no peace?"

"None! Peace! How can there be peace when none will make it? These Protestant rebels are the aggressors this time. Ask for no peace. It is war, a war which means extermination. A month ago I should have said extermination of them alone; now God knows who, which side, is to be exterminated. Louis is weakened by these attacks from without, from every side; all over Europe there is a coalition against France. And half her enemies are of the Reformed faith, as they term it. It is said that the old religion is to be destroyed, abolished. Yet Louis, France, will not fail without one effort; dying, we shall drag to destruction numberless foes. Urbaine, if we do not suppress these Camisards we have an internal foe to deal with as well. Do you think one Protestant will be spared?"

"I may not see him again ere I set out for Versailles," the girl whispered, terrified at his words.

"Then he must take his chance. At best he is but a quixotic fool."

"Let me remain here; if there is danger let me share it."

"Never!" Baville said. "The nobility are threatened, the 'Intendant' above all. Your place must be in safety. Oh, that your mother would go too! Yet," he added reflectively, "her place is by my

side."

"And mine is not? Do you say that?" And she touched his face caressingly with her hand.

"Your place is where I can best shield you from the least threat of danger, my loved one; where danger can never come near you." And beneath his breath he added the word "again."

Speaking thus to the girl upon his knee, a girl scarce better than a child, seeing she was now but seventeen years old, Baville--of whom the greatest of French diarists has said that *il en étoit la terreur er l'horreur de Languedoc*--was at his best. For if he loved any creature more than another on this earth--more than Madame l'Intendante, more even than his own son--that creature was Urbaine.

She was not in truth his daughter, was of no blood relationship to him, yet he cared for her dearly and fondly and the love was returned. As the history of this girl was known to many in the province, so it shall be told here.

Early in his Intendancy, when Baville (already known as an *esprit fort* by the ministers round Louis) had been appointed to this distant Government, with, to console him, an absolute authority, he had returned one winter night from a raid that he had been making on a village in the Cévennes which, to use his own words, "reeked of Calvinism" and was full of persons who refused to comply with the new orders that were brought into force by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He was then but newly married to a sister of Gourville, the colonel of a local regiment of dragoons, and his wife's welcome to him was somewhat cooled by the announcement which he made to her that an intimate friend of his had perished in the raid, leaving behind a motherless child of whom he proposed to constitute himself the guardian.

Apprised of the fact that Ducaire was the name of the intimate friend, Madame l'Intendante shrugged her shoulders and contented herself with saying that it was the first time she had ever heard of him.

Later, after reflection, she laughed a little, quoted some words of M. de Voiture as to *les secrets de la comédie* which were no secrets either to actors or audience, and, in the course of the next two or three days, uttered pointed remarks to the effect that if politics failed at any future time, doubtless M. l'Intendant might earn a pleasant livelihood as a weaver of romances and of plots for plays.

"*En vérité*" she said, with her little laugh, "Jean de la Fontaine is old, also *Racine; profitez vous de l'occasion, mon ami. Profitez vous*."

Then, because they were alone in Madame's boudoir, Baville rose and stood before his wife and, speaking seriously, bade her cease her badinage forever.

And after the conversation which ensued, after, also, the story which Baville told her, Madame did cease her flippancy, and henceforth had no further qualms of jealousy.

In truth, as the child grew up, she too came to love it, to pet it as much as her husband did, to--because she was an honest, tender-hearted woman who, beneath all her pride for Baville's great position, had still many feminine qualities in her breast--weep over it.

"*Pauvrette!*" she would sometimes whisper to little Urbaine, long ere the child had come to understanding, "*pauvre petite*. Neither mother nor father either. Ah, well! Ah, well! they shall never be wanting while we live--say, Baville, shall they?"

And the Intendant, the man of "horror and terror" to all around, looking down upon the babe as she slept in her little bed, would answer before God that they should never be wanting.

Both kept their word. Urbaine Ducaire grew up, petted, caressed, beloved, the light of the Intendant's home, the flower, as he told her sometimes, of his life; a thing far, far more precious to him than the son, who, instead of being any comfort to them, was revelling in the impurities of Paris.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ATTACK.

Between where the mountains of the Cévennes rise in tumultuous confusion, with, towering above them all, the gigantic Lozère and La Manzerre whence springs the beauteous Loire; between this vast mountainous region, which gives to the mind of him who beholds it the idea of

a world falling to ruin and perishing of its own worn-out antiquity, and the Rhône, the road to the north winds through a fertile valley--a valley where the meadows and the orchards and the vineyards run down to the river on which the rafts and boats float along until the stream empties itself into the Mediterranean at last; boats from which are wafted the perfume of the new-mown hay, or the fruits which they are conveying. A valley this in which are little houses set in among the pear trees and the chestnuts, and covered with bird-swarming ivy wherein the southern oriole builds its nest and rears its young; houses in front of which the fair roses of Provence grow in great clusters as they have grown there for centuries, and over which the pigeons whirl in their flight.

Once, not twenty years before the period of this narrative, and before a reformed wanton had urged a superstitious king (already then growing old and shuddering at the phantoms that arose from his evil and unclean past, as well as from the fear of what his enemies--the whole world!--might wreak upon him in the shape of human vengeance) to wage what he termed a holy war, this valley had been one of a thousand in France where peace and contentment had reigned. Peace and contentment coupled, it is true, with, in most cases, a simple humble life, yet still a life free from care. An existence scarce disturbed by aught more serious than some trifling ailments of the children who ran about barefooted in the long lush grass, or plunged into the cool stream that watered the land, or by the sound of the passing bell telling at solemn intervals how one who had lived there all his days was going to his rest. A life spent in the open air all through the summer time, or by the blazing chestnut logs when the snows of winter kept all shut up in their cottages, carding, weaving, combing, earning their living thus as in the golden prime of July they earned it by gathering fruit, or cutting the corn and sheaving it, or rearing the cattle.

Now all was changed, all but the beauty of the land. The red-roofed houses on whose tiles the topmost boughs of the pear trees rested, borne down with fruit, were closed; the wicker basket in which the thrushes and blackbirds had sung so joyously, not deeming their lives captivity, were empty; so, too, were the stalls where once the kine had lowed and the horses trampled as daybreak stole over the mountain tops. All were gone now. The old grandam who had looked after the children; the children themselves; the stalwart fathers; the dark-eyed, brown-bosomed women whose black tresses hung down their backs and served as ropes for their babes to tug at.

Gone--but where?

Half of the men to the galleys, to toil until their hearts burst and they died, worn to skeletons by belabourings and thrashings, starvation and ill usage; the other half to the mountains, there to meditate upon, and afterward to take, a hideous, black revenge on those who had driven them from their homes. The old women gone also, some to fester in the prison cellars of Nîmes, Uzès, Alais, Niort, and Montpellier. The black-haired mothers to do the same, to groan in the dungeons for water, even though it were but one drop to cool their tongues; to shriek to God to take their lives, even though they were sacrificed in the flames of the market place; to pray to their Creator to let them die and join their slaughtered babes once more; see again the husbands from whom the gibbet and the wheel had torn them forever in this world.

Because they were Protestants, Reformés, Huguenots! That was their crime! The crime that had roused the woman in Paris--*la femme célèbre et fatale*--to urge on her husband the devastation of the Garden of France.

Down this road now, which wound between the base of the Cévennes and the banks of the rapid Rhône, upon a sunny afternoon in September--when all the uncut corn (there being no one to gather it) was bending on its stalks upon which, later, it would rot, past a burned and ruined church, past, too, a wheel on which a dried, half-mummified body was bound and left to shrivel--there came a cortége. A cortége consisting first of a troop of dragoons of the regiment of Hérault, their sabres drawn and flashing in the sun, their musketoons slung ready at their backs, their glances wary and eager. Ahead of them rode their captain, a man tall and muscular, burned black almost from constant exposure to the sun and by taking part in many campaigns from his youth, commencing in Germany and Austria. This was Poul, a Carcassonnais, who, since the outbreak of the Cévennes rising, had been distinguished as one of the most determined opponents of the *attroupés*. Also he was a marked man, doomed to death by them, and he knew it. But over his midnight draughts of Hermitage he had sworn often that, ere his fate overtook him, many of the *canaille* should also meet theirs.

Behind his troop of dragoons, numbering thirty-five men, there came a travelling carriage, large, roomy, and much ornamented, and drawn by four horses. In it there sat Urbaine Ducaire on her way to Langogne, the first stage on the road to Paris. By her side was seated a middle-aged *gouvernante* or companion, whom Baville had told off to accompany her until she reached Avignon, where she would be safe outside the troubles of Languedoc and where she was to continue her journey under the protection of the Duchess d'Uzès. Above the carriage was piled up her valises and portmanteaux; also upon it were three footmen armed with fusils, all of which were ready to their hands; also a waiting maid who was always in attendance upon Urbaine. To complete her guard, behind the great carriage marched a company of the fusileers of Barre and Pompidon, headed by a mounted officer.

Passing the broken and mutilated corpse upon the wheel, Poul pointed to it with his glove and laughed; then, reining back his horse until the dragoons had gone by, he looked in at the great window and remarked to Urbaine:

"Mademoiselle perceives the *canaille* are not always triumphant. As it is with that crushed rat there, so it will be with all. Time! Time! Our vengeance will come."

But the girl, after casting one horrified glance at the thing which was shrivelling in the broiling September sun, had shrunk back affrighted into the depths of the great travelling carriage and thrown up her hands before her eyes while the *gouvernante*, addressing Poul, said:

"Monsieur le Capitaine, why call our attention to that? It is no pleasing sight even to a devout Catholic, moreover a bitter one when we remember the fearful retaliation that has been exacted. Have you forgotten the Abbé du Chaila, the curé of Frugéres?"

"Forgotten!" exclaimed the rough Carcassonnais, "forgotten! *Ventre bleu!* I have forgotten nothing. Else why am I here? Beautiful as is the freight of this carriage," and he made a rough bow "it needs no Capitaine Poul to command the dragoons who escort it in safety. Any *porte drapeau*, or unfledged lieutenant, could do that. Nay, it is in hopes that we may meet some of these singing, snivel-nosed Calvinists that I ride with you to-day. Oh, for the chance!"

"Send him away," whispered Urbaine; "he terrifies me. Would that my father had chosen some other officer."

Ere, however, her companion could do as she requested, Poul had turned his wrist and ridden again to the head of his troops, a fierce look of eagerness on his face, a gleam in his coal-black eyes. For from ahead of where the cavalcade had now arrived--a shady part of the road, on one side of which there rose precipitously some rocks crowned with bushes, while on the other was a meadow--he heard a sound which told him his wish was very likely to be granted.

A sound of singing, of many voices in unison. Voices uttering words which reached the ears of all, causing the dragoons and fusileers to look to their arms and the women and footmen to turn white with apprehension.

A sound of singing that rose and fell upon the soft afternoon air as though somewhere a conventicle was being held. And these the words they sung:

> Dieu! que Juda connait: Dieu! qu' Israel adore
> Salem est ta demeure et Sion ton autel!
> Ton bras de nos tyrans a rompu Tare sonore,
> La glaive qui dévore
> Et le combat mortel.

"Ha!" called out Poul, his dark face now more suffused with rage than before, "they are near at hand. Swords out, *mes dragons, avancez--en double ligne de Colonne*; here is more garbage for the wheel. *En avance les fusiliers*--the carriage behind. *Tambours battants. En avant!*"

And while the women screamed, Urbaine burying her fair head for a moment on the *gouvernante's* shoulder, the dragoons fell into double line, and the fusileers of Barre and Pompidon, passing swiftly on on either side of the great carriage formed up behind them, their drums beating scornfully.

At first they saw no enemy, scarce expected to see any, since all knew by now that these mountaineers fought on the system of those dreaded Indians whom some of this force had already encountered on the shores of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi--namely, by sheltering themselves behind every available tree or rock, or even shrub, from which they fired on their foes with deadly effect. But they heard them. Heard again the solemn hymn they sang in the hour of battle, of death, and of vengeance:

> Aux éclairs de ta foudre, à sa fumante trombe Le cœur manque an vaillant, le bras échappé au fort Le char d'airain se brise, et le coursier succombe,
> Et le guerrier qui tombe
> S'assoupit dans la mort!

Then a moment later they saw their foes, or some of them.

Upon the summit of the rock sixty feet above their heads, amid the stunted trees and bushes that grew thereon, they saw appear a strange crowd. Men, tall and swarthy, some old, some almost boys, while there was one of the latter whose fantastic attire--a vest of bleached Holland garnished with silver buttons, *culottes* of chamois leather, gold-gallooned, ivory-hilted sword, scarlet mantle and black felt hat, with long white ostrich feather--would better have become one of Luxembourg's dandy cavaliers than an *attroupé* of the mountains. Also three men, venerable-looking, yet fierce and stern, two having beards that flowed over their chests, all of whom joined in the hymn that was being sung by a larger body that was ahead of the place where the Royalist troops were--ahead, yet advancing toward those who had been caught in the snare, advancing singing and firing. And by the side of these three, who were Prophets--*Inspirés*--there stood a girl, black and swarthy, too, a bracelet on her arm and in her hands a musketoon, which she raised

and, aiming at the carriage below, fired.

With a shriek the *gouvernante* fell back on to the cushions dead; with another, Urbaine flung her arms about her, moaning, while now, from all around, the sound of firing was heard, and, pealing high, above all else, the voice of Poul, howling orders, yelling curses, laughing defiantly. Yet why he laughed none knew, for already the saddles of the dragoons were being emptied rapidly; the ground was strewn, too, with the bodies of the fusileers of Barre and Pompidon, those who still lived being driven back.

Fear paralyzes sometimes; sometimes also inspires with a terrible and desperate courage. It was thus with Urbaine Ducaire at this moment. She screamed and moaned no more, let the poor dead woman's body lie back in the carriage, put out her hand to the door that was farthest away from the rock on which the visible portion of the enemy was, and endeavoured to turn the handle.

Yet, ere she did so, she saw a sight that might well have unnerved her, have struck her dead with horror.

Upon the rock-side of the vehicle she saw Poul fighting like a demon possessed, or, better, like a doomed brave man. She saw his sabre dart through one fanatic's throat, then through another's breast; she heard his hoarse, triumphant shouts and terrible oaths, also his words of bitter scorn and hatred of the *canaille* as he thrust at them, then nearly fainted at what she saw next: A lad standing by the side of the girl armed with the musketoon, while still she fired as fast as she could load it--a lad who adjusted a huge stone in a sling, and then, watching his opportunity and whirling the latter round his head, discharged the missile, which crashed with fatal effect full on Poul's forehead. And as the brave, rough soldier, with a cry of hideous, awful agony, fell to the earth, the youth, shouting in his rough *patois* that the soul of David had descended through countless ages to enter his body, leaped down the crags of the rock, fell upon the unhappy man, and, seizing his sword, began to hack his head off.

"I can bear no more," Urbaine murmured, "no more! Pray God the next bullet fired enters my heart! Otherwise I must die of horror." And she sank to the bottom of the carriage, her head on the dead woman's knees, sank back and lay there in a stupor.

Whereby she knew not that, even as she did so, across the meadow a man had ridden on a rawboned horse as fast as he could urge it, had gained the road, and, swiftly dismounting amid the rain of bullets and stones from above, had wrenched open the carriage door and lifted her out in his arms. Knew not that in his strength he had tossed her on to the neck of the horse and quickly remounted, having but one hand to use in doing so, and that, amid a storm of more bullets, he had carried her off from where the carnage still raged, while in his ears he heard more than once the cry--

"*Voilà ton Poul!* He is well trussed. Eat him!"

CHAPTER XV.

SHELTER AND REFUGE.

That night as darkness fell upon the earth, and while, high up in the heavens, the bonfires burned which the *attroupés* lit regularly on the tops of the Cévennes in the hopes of thereby luring their enemies into their strongholds and fastnesses, Martin spoke to Urbaine, saying:

"Mademoiselle, I know not what is to be done. Had the unfortunate horse not been slain by that last bullet we might have got back to safety. To Montpellier or, failing that, to Lunel at least. Now it seems hopeless. You can go no farther and--and I can not leave you alone while I seek assistance, which, even if I did, I should not obtain. There is no assistance for--for those who are not on their side."

"I can not understand you, monsieur," Urbaine said quietly. "You are yourself a Protestant, my father told me--nay, did you not so inform me that morning in our garden at Montpellier--yet you trouble to save me from your fr----, those of your faith. I am deeply grateful to you, only I do not comprehend."

For a moment his clear eyes rested on her. In the dusk that was now almost night she saw them plainly. Then he answered very quietly:

"Is it not enough, mademoiselle, that you are a woman? Must I, because I am a Protestant, have no right to the attributes of a man?"

"I--I ask your pardon; forgive me. I would not wound you--you who have saved me. And I thank

you. Only, here, in Languedoc, we have learned in the last few weeks to expect no mercy from the Protestants."

"Like all who have turned against injustice and cruelty, they are now themselves unjust and cruel. One may respect their turning, even their uprising, yet not their methods."

Then for some moments there was silence between them.

They were seated, on this warm September night--for six weeks had passed since the murder of the abbé--upon a bank outside a deserted cottage a league or so from where the ambuscade and slaughter of Poul and the soldiers under him had taken place. Above them, all around them, in the little garden, there grew the sweet flowering acacias which are at their best in the valleys that lie between the Loire and the Rhône; the air was thick with their perfume. Also the gourds lay golden on the ground, uncut and ripening to decay. The scarlet beans trailed in rich profusion of colour on their sticks, illuminated, too, by the fireflies that danced around. And from the distance of a pistol-shot off there came the murmur of the arrowy river as it dashed down between its banks to reach the sea.

Yet all was desolation here, and death. Death typified by the poor merle that lay forgotten and starved in its wicker cage, left behind when those who once dwelt here had fled a fortnight ago to the mountains at the report that De Broglie's *chevaux-légers* were devastating the land. They fled leaving behind them, too, the three-months-old calf, and the fowls, and all the simple household creatures, having no time to do aught but shift for themselves and bear away to safety those other harmless living things, the children.

"What is to be done I know not," Martin went on. "At any moment they may come this way; they know we have escaped so far. Then--then--it may mean instant death; at best, captivity in the mountains."

"For me," she answered, speaking low, "for me? I am Baville's adopted child--the child of his dear friend. But for you--you are of their----"

Then she paused, leaving the last word unsaid as she saw again his calm, sad eyes fixed on her. Once more she pleaded for pardon.

"Forgive, forgive me," she said. "I am vile, ungenerous to speak thus. Yet we must part at last. They have no charge against you."

"We part," he replied, "when you--when both--are safe."

They knew not why at such a time as this, when action should have been everything and no moment wasted, in spite of the girl's fatigue and prostration, silence should fall upon them; why they should sit there as though courting a fate that might come at any moment, for at any moment, above the hum of the near river, there might be heard the voices of the revolted Cévenoles. Beneath the branches of the acacias that o'erhung the dusty white road would perhaps be seen the unbrowned barrels of their guns or the scythes with which, since many of them had as yet no weapons, they were armed.

A silence between these two broken only by the twitter of birds in the branches, or by a sigh that rose unchecked from the girl's breast as, in the starlit dark, she turned her eyes on the features of the man by her side.

"Come," he said at last, rousing himself, "come. It is madness to remain here. We must move on even though we encounter death by doing so. It is not likely that all have returned to the mountains after their victory; they may pass by here at any moment. Can you proceed at all, mademoiselle?"

"I can at least try. Yet to where? To where?"

"I do not know the land very well," he answered, speaking in the slow, calm voice which had impressed her so much a month ago when the Intendant had, with strange indifference (as it seemed to both of them), presented Martin to Urbaine and left them to pass some hours in the orange garden of the Intendancy, he contenting himself with telling the girl that her new acquaintance was from the north and was not of their faith. "I do not know the land very well. Yet is there not a garrison near here? I think so. Called the--the château of--the fortress of--Servas."

"Ah, yes!" Urbaine cried, clasping her hands, "the Château de Servas. Between Alais and Uzès; not far from here. If we could reach that we should be safe. The commandant is known to my father--to De Broglie. He would protect us."

"We must attempt it," Martin replied. "It is our chance, mademoiselle," he exclaimed, breaking off as he heard a gasp from her lips, "What is it? What! What new terror?"

"I forgot," she whispered, her voice unsteady, "I forgot. In this instance the case is reversed. They are all of my faith--you--you--would be sacrificed. They are infuriated with these rebels. Alas!" she almost wailed, "they would not spare you. It is not to be dreamed on. Anywhere but there."

"Nay," he said, "nay. It must in truth be there. And for me fear not. I have saved the daughter of his Excellency for them. Even though they know I am this accursed thing in their eyes, a Protestant, they would scarcely repay me cruelly for that."

"They must never know it. By silence you are safe. Oh, let us attempt to reach it. It is but two or, at most, three leagues. I have been there with my father. He will bless you, worship you for saving me."

"Three leagues! three leagues!" he repeated, "three leagues! For me, nothing. Yet for you, a delicate woman!"

"The very thought, the hope of safety, inspires me. I am strong again. Come, monsieur, come, I beseech you, for both our sakes. For yours, for you who have saved me, above all."

"Not so," he said. "I am a man who has ventured into the tiger's jaws and must take my chance. I am of poor account."

And now they prepared to set forth to reach this place of refuge, yet both knew what dangers might well be expected ere they got there, if ever. For during the time which had elapsed since the Camisards, as at this time they began to be called, had risen and commenced their resistance by the slaughter of the Abbé Du Chaila, all Languedoc had been overrun with them and was in a state of terror. Also the flight of the inhabitants had become entirely reversed. It was the Catholics and the Catholic priests who were rushing out of the province as fast as they could go, while from their mountain homes the revolted Protestants who had taken up arms were pouring down in hundreds. Already, too, the cities were in a state of siege and the inhabitants fortifying themselves within the walls. That very night, although neither Martin nor Urbaine knew of it, the ancient city of Nîmes, the Rome of France, expected to be besieged, put to sword ere dawn; for by the time that they were hoping to accomplish their night journey to the Château de Servas the few dragoons who had escaped the slaughter which had fallen on Poul's detachment, as well as the fusileers and another band of cavalry and infantry who had been routed close by while under the command of De Broglie, had ridden pell-mell into Nîmes, their weapons broken or lost, their heads covered with blood, themselves and their horses wounded. Rode in the bearers of awful tidings as to how the fanatics were led by two persons, one a lad of sixteen named Cavalier, the other a man a few years older named Roland; rode in and told how women fought on their side as the Amazons of old had fought; how men preached and encouraged them and sang canticles as they did so; of how they spared none; had beheaded Poul; had captured Baville's daughter and slain her, if not worse. Described also, with white quivering lips, how the tocsins were ringing from half a hundred churches in flames; told of priests flung across their own altars and done to death, of soldiers mutilated ere slain--all by bands of men who seemed to vanish into the air the moment after their deeds were accomplished.

Meantime Baville's daughter and her rescuer were threading their course through the meadows and pastures that fringed the wayside, because thus her feet were more eased by the long, cool grass on which now the dews of night had fallen, or slowly finding a path through chestnut woods. Sometimes, too--leaving the river behind them and knowing they were going aright since its distant hum became fainter and fainter, and since, ever before them, yet afar off, the summits of *La Lozère* and *Bouquet* stood out more clear against the heavens--they passed vineyards on which the black grapes hung in clusters, when, pausing, they moistened their lips with the soft, luscious fruit. Yet went on and on, resting at intervals, and then forward again, the girl leaning on the arm of her companion--the arm of the man whose faith she had been taught to despise and execrate.

But once they had to stop for another reason than her fatigue, to pause in a great chestnut wood where the grass which grew at the feet of the trees was as soft and silky as thistle-down, and where the deer stared at them with wide-open, startled eyes; to pause because they heard a hundred yards away the voices of a band of men which passed along the wide road.

"It is they," she whispered, trembling. "It is they. Whom do they seek?"

"Fear not," he replied, soothing her, while at the same time he drew her within the decayed trunk of an enormous chestnut tree over whose head more than one century must have rolled. "They proceed too rapidly along the road, too swiftly on their way, to be in search of us. More like they go to midnight murder, the destruction of some harmless village, the pillage of some helpless town."

"Murder! Destruction! you deem it that? You!" she whispered, her soft, pure eyes glancing up at his.

"I deem it that," he replied gravely, "retaliation though it be."

The band went on, their voices coming back to them on the still night air, the refrain of one of their hymns borne back also--a hymn still breathing of revenge blessed by God, of vengeance ordained by him.

"If you are rested again," he whispered, "we may proceed."

Still helping her, assisting her as gently as though he had been her brother, he led her on until

at last they left the shelter of the woods and stood upon a little knoll of ground, a spot from which they looked across a plain bordered on the farther side by slopes and hills that, rising one behind the other, lifted themselves finally to mountains whose ridges and summits stood out sharply against the starry sky. Yet saw, too, that now the stars grew whiter and began to pale, that all the heavens were turning to a soft primrose hue, while, far away to the east, was the warm suffusing of scarlet which told of the coming day. Afar off, also, observed other crimson streaks over which there hung dun-coloured palls of smoke that proceeded from burning towns and hamlets.

Shuddering, Urbaine directed her glance to the latter, then said, looking toward the north:

"There ahead of us is the Château de Servas. You see?" and as she spoke she pointed to where, above a low purple-crested hill, a white building hung.

"I see," he answered. "Pray God we reach it. You can still go on?"

"I must go on," she replied. "Once there we are safe. The château is well garrisoned."

Even through this plain, vineyards ran along the side of the road which led to where the fortress stood; therefore they were not so open to observation as if it had been a flat, uncultivated expanse; and across this they passed, sheltered by the vines on either side. And now there arose a chance unhoped for--one which, had it happened earlier in their journey, might have brought them to the harbour of refuge they sought before the night had gone. Grazing at the side of the road was an old mule, a creature rough-coated and long neglected and uncared for, its hide thick and coarse. Perhaps its being so poor a thing was the reason why it had not been carried off into the mountains either by those who owned it or by those who would have appropriated it if owned by their foes. Yet it served now to ease Urbaine from further toil, since Martin, catching it and placing his coat across its back as a saddle-cloth, lifted the girl on to it at once. Then instantly they set off again, he walking by the patient creature's side and directing it.

An hour later, when now the light had come and when the mountain tops were all gilded with the rays of the sun, while below on the plain the coolness of dawn was already receding before the genial warmth of a new day, they had reached their journey's end and were mounting the slope beneath the castle. And seeing the two cannon that stood on their cumbersome old carriages upon the walls, and the men-at-arms who were already regarding them curiously from those walls, Martin knew that he had saved the girl for a second time.

Also she knew it well, yet such was her emotion, such her agitation at recognising that she had escaped an awful fate, that she was powerless to express herself in words; but not too powerless to testify her gratitude by her looks and by the touch which she laid upon his hand. A touch which he understood and answered also by a glance, and by the muttered words, "Thank God!"

A moment later the wicket in the great iron-barred and studded gate opened, and a soldier came out and stood regarding them; then called down the slope:

"Who are you and what do you seek?"

"Shelter and refuge," Martin answered back, his voice clear and distinct in the morning air. "This lady is his Excellency's daughter."

"His Excellency's daughter!" the man repeated, his whole tone one of astonishment. "His Excellency's daughter, and travelling thus on such a sorry beast!"

"And travelling thus. Fortunate, indeed, to be travelling at all," while, as he spoke, he extended his hands and caught Urbaine as she swerved on the mule's back and fell fainting into his arms.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUCCOUR.

Once more the day was drawing to a close. Already across the plain the sun's rays were slanting horizontally. Soon the sun itself would have dipped behind the mountains and be gone. Another night was at hand, and Martin, gazing on the country around from the castle walls on which he stood, thanked God that it would bring no terrors to the girl whom he had saved, such as the past one had brought.

Since they had been received into the castle in the morning by the commandant, a man who had once fought in countless campaigns but who now passed his latter years as governor of this place, he had seen nothing of Urbaine. She had been escorted to a room in the west wing

immediately on their admission, where, after having been given restoratives in the shape of wine and food, and after being attended to by two or three of the few women in the place--soldiers' wives--she had begged that she might be allowed to be alone and thus obtain some rest. In was sorely needed, Martin said, speaking to the old chatelaine, sorely needed.

"And can be procured," the other replied, twisting up his great moustachios. "*Bon Dieu!* we have a room here fit for the reception of a duchess. Madame de Servas--a pretty thing---*une femme de la vieille souche* also--loves a soft nest; yet not one perched in an eyrie around which such storms blow as those that are now devastating Languedoc, the pest seize them and those who brew them!"

"Is the lady here?" Martin asked, thinking that, if so, she would be a comfort to the girl until she could escape back to Montpellier under his care.

"*Pouf! pouf! pouf!*" the old soldier said, "not she indeed. I tell you the tempest is too rough for her; she fears too much the vagabonds up there," whereupon he nodded toward where by now all the mountain tops of the Cévennes were gleaming in the morning sun. "Thereupon she is fled to Paris, the paradise of women; to Versailles--Marly. Well, she is safe there from these men," and again he nodded toward the mountains. "From other men, ho! ho!--of the court, *figurez vous*--danger may come, drawn by her bright eyes. However, there is the nest for mademoiselle. *Tant mieux!*"

But by now, as the evening drew on, those mountains were suffused by the soft *couleur de rose* that, in a near and less troubled land, was known as the Alpine glow. And Martin, himself refreshed after some hours' sleep during the day, was leaning over the castle wall looking down into the valley and the plain all flushed with the burning sunset of the golden autumn, with, far off and running through the latter, the silver thread that was the river Gardon hurrying on to join the Rhône. He was thinking now of many things, even as his eyes took in the beauties of all the fair department that lay around him--the distant woods whose leaves were scarce yet browned by the touch of autumn's fingers; the mill house on the Gardon's bank whose wheel was now still, since its owner had fled, perhaps forever; the gray convent that lay farther off and had been half destroyed by fire two nights ago; the crumbled ivy-clad tower a mile away, in which the king's father, Louis "The Just," had caused a score of Protestants to be burned alive--was thinking of many things as he regarded the fair scene. Whether he would ever see his own land once more, ever escape out of France, ever meet again in future years the pure fair girl whose life he had saved but a few hours ago--the girl whose faith and convictions were so bitterly hostile to his own, as every word she spoke, every thought she allowed utterance to, testified. Also he was wondering if the search he had undertaken for the lost de Rochebazon--the search he now deemed a foolish, Quixotic one--could result in aught but failure here in such a tempest-tossed spot as this.

"Never," he muttered to himself, "never shall I find him. France's empty coffers must swallow up all the wealth that is his, the Church he renounced must profit by my own renunciation. Find him! How? Where? Hanging to some gibbet if he has lived till these days, or learn that years ago he perished on the wheel or at the stake; that his ashes were cast to the winds. I shall never find him." Then he turned, hearing a step upon the leads behind him, and observed the commandant approaching the spot where he stood.

Already, when the old soldier had been by his side a few moments before, he had been made acquainted with all that had happened on the previous day, and of how it was only by God's mercy that Martin had arrived at the fortunate moment he did.

"I was," he said, "on my way to Valence, to which some affairs led me, where I heard the sound of firing and the shouts of men engaged in fierce conflict. And I should have stood outside the fray, have taken no part in it, but that I saw the travelling coach and observed a serving woman screaming on the top of it; saw a face at the coach window--that of mademoiselle. I could not refrain from attempting her rescue. She was a helpless, defenceless girl. It was no place for her among those men fighting like tigers. Also we had met before at her father's residency."

"*Ponz! ponz!*" said the commandant, "you did well. *Nonc d'un chien*, you did well for yourself and her. Baville will not forget. She is the apple of his eye, although no blood relation, yet the child of a loved friend, confided to him in death. Also his own child is a trouble to him. The Intendant spends all his heart on this girl. They say he worships her tenderly, fondly, because of her father. Ask Baville for aught you desire when you return to Montpellier and you will get it. He will repay you as fully as if--well!--as if, had you injured her, he would have cut you into twenty thousand atoms."

"I shall ask him for nothing. One does not save a woman's life for a reward."

"That I know," the commandant replied, a little ruffled by the rebuke. "Yet, having saved her life, as well let Baville show his gratitude. He is all-powerful here in the province; his interest, too, is great at Versailles." Then, changing the subject, the old man said:

"If we had but enough men you and she should be sent to Montpellier to-morrow. Yet 'tis impossible. We have but sufficient here to garrison the place and to rush out and hurry any of those *scélérats* whom we can catch in small bodies. I can not spare any men to form a guard.

Meanwhile the Intendant probably deems her dead by this time. God help all who fall into his hands after this!"

"How is it with her to-night?" Martin asked now, thinking that since the sun was set she must surely by this time have slept off much of her fatigue.

"She is refreshed and rested, the woman tells me who has been placed in attendance on her. Yet, too, she is very sad. She thinks much on her father's and mother's grief if they knew, as they must, what has befallen her, which they doubtless deem death. Oh, that I could communicate with Baville! Yet 'tis impossible. I can not spare a man."

"You can spare me," Martin answered gravely and with a seriousness that told he meant what he said. "Give me a horse better than the poor thing on which mademoiselle finished her journey here, and I will go; will undertake to reach Montpellier."

"You?" the commandant exclaimed, his eyes lighting up at the suggestion. "You? So! 'tis well. Who better than he who saved her to carry the good news to her father? Yet, yet," he said in his next breath, his face falling, "'tis impossible. You would never reach the city. They are everywhere, *on dit* two thousand strong already. And they spare none; above all, they will not spare the man who saved the Intendant's loved one."

"I may avoid them. Even if I do not there may still be a chance of my escape," Martin added, remembering that he was of the same faith as these rash unhappy rebels, although not in sympathy with them. Certainly not in sympathy with their cruelties.

"Escape? Yes, you may, even as by God's grace you escaped so far as to reach here. But such chances come not more than once together--who throws the ace twice! Moreover, if they know 'twas she who has slid out of their claws they will be over all the land, 'neath every bush, behind every stone, like painted snakes. There is no chance. You must remain here till some of Julien's or De Broglie's troops come to assist. Yet if you could have done it, have repeated your last night's valour, Baville would have worshipped you. Still, still you have done well. *Bon Dieu!*"--and the old man slapped the young one on the shoulder--"*vous êtes un homme fort*."

Looking away toward where now the purple shadows of the September evening were resting over all the plain, glancing over to where the white dusty road that followed the course of the Gardon stood out plain and distinct in the clear pure air, Martin saw that which told him that no further opportunity for a repetition of last night's valour, as the commandant had termed it, was like to come to him.

Already it seemed as if assistance was at hand.

"See," he said, "see! Even now the succour you pray for is near. Behold some of the troops of those whom you name--De Broglie's or Julien's! Look! the last rays sparkle on gorget and fusil-barrel. Thank God! She will be restored to her father. Perhaps to-night. To-morrow at latest."

It was as he said. Along that white dusty road which twined beside the river there came a body of cavalry, plain enough to be seen even by the age-worn eyes of the elder man. A troop numbering about thirty soldiers, on whose rich galloon, sword hilts, and bridle chains the last beams of the fast-sinking sun sparkled, it lighting up, too, the rich *bleu du roi* worn by some and the gallant scarlet of the others.

"*Pardie!*" exclaimed the commandant, "the slaughter could not have been as great as you imagined, my friend. Those men have at least escaped. Observe, the blue are the dragoons of De Broglie, the red are those of Hérault. Surely they were in the attack of yesterday," and he turned his eyes on Martin almost questioningly, as though wondering whether, for his own self-glorification, he had exaggerated his service to Urbaine.

"'Tis strange," the other answered, "strange. None escaped, I do believe, who were escorting mademoiselle's carriage. There must have been another party of the king's troops who were set upon, and these have belonged to them."

"May be," the commandant said, willing enough not to believe that this man (who had at least placed the existence of one of the most precious women in the province beyond danger) was a braggart. "May be, yet they have done more than escape, too. See, they bring prisoners. Fanatics. In chains, observe."

Looking again, Martin did observe that he spoke truly. Ahead of the cloud of dust which the horses raised on the chalk-white road he saw a band of men on foot; could count six of them, all shackled together by the wrists and shambling along, one or another falling now and again and causing the cavalry thereby to halt until they were once more on their feet. No doubt Camisard prisoners.

"Ha!" exclaimed the old man, leaning on the buttress by his side, his knotty hands placed above his eyes to shield them from the sun's last rays, and perhaps, also, to focus the advancing cavalcade, "they turn by the mill. Therefore they approach to succour us. Good! To-morrow mademoiselle will rejoin her father."

Then they bade the sentry on the walls fire a salute from the old saker which had stood them since Ru de Servas had held the castle for Henry of Navarre.

It was answered by a blast from a trumpet far down in the valley, after which the two men standing there, watching the oncoming relief, traced its progress until at last the band were on the slopes beneath the castle gateway.

"You are welcome," the commandant called out to one who rode ahead of all the others, richly apparelled in the *bleu du roi* coat, and wearing a well-powdered, deep wig *à la brigadier* which hid all of his head except his features beneath the great felt hat that he wore above the peruke; "welcome in the name of the king for whom I stand here. Are you sent, monsieur, to increase our garrison or to escort mademoiselle, his Excellency's daughter, to safety?"

"Mademoiselle, his Excellency's daughter, to safety!" the young officer exclaimed, repeating the other's words in evident astonishment--an astonishment equally testified by all at his back. "His Excellency's daughter! Is she here?"

"She is here. Did you not know it?"

"Not I! or be very sure we would have been here before. Her safety is indeed precious." Then at once he commenced an explanation of their appearance at the château.

"Monsieur," he said, "I am the nephew of M. de Broglie, and with these others have escaped the fate which has fallen on his followers. Also, by good chance, we have taken these six villainous *attroupés* prisoners. Yet, since they delay our progress to Alais, we have come here to ask your permission to imprison them in your château. They will be safe with you."

"Ha!" laughed the old commandant, "*mort de ma vie* they will. Safe! Yes, till they stand with their backs against the wall of the courtyard and with a platoon of musketeers *en face*. Oh, yes, very safe! Bring them in, monsieur, the gates shall be open; also to yourselves. You must not proceed to-night ere you have supped and slept----"

"It is impossible," the nephew of M. de Broglie answered. "It is impossible; we must journey on to Alais."

"And I say it is impossible you can do so. What! refuse a bite and a sup, a bed with a comrade, also the acquaintance of Monsieur l'Intendant's daughter? Fie! Nay, more, you must turn back at dawn and escort the lady to Montpellier. Ho! 'twill not be long ere you find yourself brigadier after that service."

Again the young officer protested, again said it was impossible. They must proceed even though they missed a sight of *les beaux yeux de mademoiselle*. Yet, even as he so protested, the commandant saw signs of his yielding and urged his plea still more.

At last, however, he won upon the other. After still more refusals, M. de Broglie's nephew, having consulted with a second officer of the troop, yielded by degrees, saying finally that they would remain until daybreak; would so far forego their duty as to sup and sleep in the castle.

And now the great gate of the château opened and all the dragoons of De Broglie and Hérault came in, the horses being tethered in the courtyard, while the wretched prisoners were told roughly by the second in command that they could throw themselves down there. Soon, he said, they would sleep well enough. Need neither pillow nor bolster!

"Yet give us bread," one whispered, "bread and to drink, though only water. Kill us not before our time."

"You shall have both," the commandant replied. "We do not starve those to death who are reserved for other things."

They all turned away after this, leaving the prisoners amid the troopers and the horses, the commandant inviting the two officers to accompany him and Martin to the platform of the castle, there to await the supper and the pleasure of being presented to his Excellency's daughter, while, as they went, Martin, who had been regarding M. de Broglie's nephew from the first moment when the troop had appeared under the castle, could not resist saying to him:

"Monsieur, I can not but think we have met before. Your face is familiar to me."

"Possibly, monsieur," the other replied with a courteous bow, though one that, Martin thought, scarcely savoured of that ease and grace which a member of the De Broglie family should possess, a great house whose scions were almost always of a certainty trained to all the courtlinesses of Versailles and St. Germain. "Possibly, monsieur. I am much about in various places. Can monsieur, *par hazard*, recall where we may have met?"

"Nay, nay," Martin said, "nay. And 'tis but a light fancy. Doubtless I am mistaken."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RUSE.

Nevertheless he was convinced that he was not mistaken. Yet where--where had he seen this nephew of De Broglie before?

As one racks his brain to call up some circumstance or surrounding in connection with a face that puzzles him, to recollect some action associated with that face which shall assist the struggle of memory to assert itself, he racked his brain now. Yet all was of no avail, even though he brought before his mind every scene he could recollect since first he had returned to France.

Of no avail!

The full deep wig *à la brigadier*, the laced blue coat, the ivory-hilted sword of the young aristocrat, helped him not in the least; refused rather to assimilate themselves in his memory with the features which teased his recollection so. Yet, even as he meditated thus, while these four men--himself, the commandant, the man who perplexed him, and the officer under him--sat at supper in the old banqueting room used by generations of the De Servas, he found himself repeating those very words which had risen to his mind, "the young aristocrat."

Young aristocrat! Well, if so, a strange one, and surely not possessing the marks of breeding which a De Broglie should be the owner of! He ate roughly, coarsely, almost it seemed greedily; also he drank as a peasant drinks, in great copious draughts; laughed noisily and loudly. Moreover, from out of the ruffles of Valenciennes there protruded hands that scarcely proclaimed him a member of a well-born family. Hands broad and with ill-shapen fingers, the nails of which were flat and broken and none too clean; not the hands of one in whose veins ran the blood of countless well-born men and women!

"Pity 'tis," this scion of *la vieille roche* muttered to the commandant, "that mademoiselle does not honour us to-night. Tired, you say, after the fatigue of her escape from those base fanatics? Ha, *sans doute!* May she always escape as easily! 'Twill be well for her."

As he spoke, Martin, removing his eyes from his face, saw a sight that startled him--a sight that told him something terrible was in the air.

Far down, at the end of the old room, there was a small door, it not being the main one; and at that door, which was open about half a foot, he saw the face of Urbaine Ducaire, with, on it, an awful look of horror--a horror which had brought to her face a whiteness such as that which is upon the countenance of a corpse within its shroud; in her eyes a glare such as is in the eyes of those who have seen a sight to blast them. A glare, a look of agony, piteous to see.

At first he knew not what to do, yet even as he hesitated, undecided, he felt sure he must not draw the attention of those at the table to her, unless indeed he could attract the attention of the commandant alone, for it dawned on him, though he could not have explained why, that she, standing there behind the door, showing only that white face and those terror-haunted eyes, had been endeavouring to make the old man see her without being observed by the others.

What did it mean? What portend?

The conversation was eager between the remaining three at the table, the commandant advancing a plan for trapping the Camisards in their mountain fastnesses which Julien had a week or so before propounded, the nephew of De Broglie and his companion listening, it seemed scornfully, certainly deriding such plan.

"It will never succeed," the first of these two said; "never, never," and he laughed. "We, we of the king's forces, shall be driven back by these vile fanatics, or led into a snare, or *guet-apens* up in the mountains. And then woe, woe to all! Not one will return to the valleys, to the towns, to tell the tale."

Yet as he spoke, uttered such predictions of disaster, it seemed almost as though he gloated over the picture he drew.

And still Martin saw ever before him the terrified face of Urbaine Ducaire peering from behind the far-off door, the eyes glaring into the room like the eyes of one who knows that behind her comes some awful thing. With, in them, too, as it seemed to him, a piteous glance, a glance of agony that she could not attract the gaze of the man she sought--the commandant.

He could bear it no longer. Somehow he must reach her, communicate with her, know what it was that has struck such fear into her soul.

An excuse for him to leave the table seemed easy. The room had grown very hot. Already the nephew of De Broglie had protested he must remove his great wig. The commandant had said

they must have air.

"I will go and open the door," Martin said, rising from his place. To open the windows would have been impossible since they were set high up in the walls, as was the case in most châteaux of the day, and could not be reached without a ladder. "The one at the farther end." And as he went toward it he prayed Heaven none would follow him. Also he saw that the girl's face was withdrawn as he rose from his chair, the door closed-to gently. Then, a moment later, he reached it.

Setting it open, he glanced into the narrow passage that ran outside, the farthest wall of this corridor having several low windows in it which gave on to the courtyard; and, turning his eyes into its dimness, he perceived Urbaine standing there, her back against the wall, her arms extended droopingly against it too, as though thereby to prevent herself from falling.

"Mademoiselle," he said, in a low voice, advancing toward her, "mademoiselle, what has distressed, terrified you thus? I fear that----"

Was she gone mad, he wondered! As he spoke she put both her hands out in front of her, removing them from the wall and extending them from her body as though to ward him off, to defend herself from him. Also she pressed her body back against that wall as if thereby she might shrink into it--away from him.

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed, amazed. "Mademoiselle----" but paused again, for still she drew herself away from him as from some unclean, loathsome thing. Then her white lips moved; he heard the words that issued from them.

"Traitor!" she said. "Perfidious traitor! Come not near me!" and with her hands she drew her travelling robe close round her as though to prevent even that from being contaminated by him.

"Are you distraught, mademoiselle?" he asked. "Are----?" yet stopped once more in his speech, for now, in the dusk of the night, he saw those staring eyes, which he had deemed so lovely but a few hours ago, glancing out through the passage window to the courtyard below; saw them rivetted upon something beneath in that courtyard; saw, too, that she shuddered as she gazed.

Then he too looked forth into it.

Upon the stones where the six *attroupés* had been flung down in their chains he saw those men standing now, free and unbound, in their hands naked weapons. The light of a newly lit flambeau flickering on one of their blades showed that it was deeply stained red. Also he saw that they too were now clad in scarlet and blue, their own rude mountain clothes discarded, flung in a heap in a corner.

And more he saw! Some were lying dead, or dying, in that courtyard; men who had but a few hours ago formed part of the garrison; the men whose clothes the others had already donned.

Like the lightning's flash there came to his mind what had happened; he understood all. The ruse was successful. The Camisards, disguised in the uniforms and trappings of the defeated soldiers of the day before, had surprised and captured the château; the trick of transporting those false prisoners had been a perfect one. Also he knew now where he had seen M. de Broglie's nephew. The deep powdered wig, the rich costume, served as disguises no longer. He recalled him! Recalled him as one who, young as he was, had taken a leading part in the massacre of the Abbé du Chaila, in the attack on Poul's convoy.

He understood, too, Urbaine's bitter words now. He was of these men's faith; she deemed him one of them! Also that he had brought her here only to betray her later into their hands. Bitter words that had sunk into his heart perhaps forever, yet she should see.

He drew his sword, advanced a step nearer to her, then retreated.

"I ask your pardon," he said, speaking very low, "that I have come near to you again. That I must address you. Yet, 'traitor' as I am, my place is still by your side. I interfered to save you yesterday. I must go on with what I have begun. One moment to warn the commandant--if--they have not slain him--then--then--mademoiselle--to save you from these men of my own faith."

But now she spoke no more, only--her eyes were fixed upon him with a strange look--he could have sworn that in the almost absolute darkness of the night which was upon them he saw her bosom heave pitiably. Then from her lips he heard beyond all doubt a gasp come.

"Fear not," he said, "they will not murder a woman. Can not, at least, murder you while I still live. Remain behind the door while I re-enter the room."

Whereon, leaving her, he pushed open the door and advanced within, his sword in his hand. As he did so he saw he had no chance; believed that he was doomed.

The room was full of men, of the mock soldiers--the Camisards disguised in the uniforms of De Broglie and of Hérault; doubtless they had entered by the main door while he had been in the passage. Also there were lights in it--two flambeaus placed in old sockets in the walls, and white-

wax candles in a great lustre on the table.

In front of him was the "nephew of M. de Broglie," his powdered wig off now and his head showing a mass of long fair hair, while in his hand he too held his drawn sword. At the table, his face fallen forward upon it and his arms outstretched, was the old man, the commandant, done to death.

"You craven hound!" hissed Martin, and as he spoke his rapier darted full at the other. "You craven hound, you eat of that old man's dish, drink of his cup, and murder him! Defend yourself, assassin!"

And, forgetful of any wrong that this man's (his own) faith might have suffered at the hands of those of the commandant's creed, remembering only that he was a gentleman face to face with one whom in his heart he deemed the *canaille*, remembering, too, that he was a murderer, he lunged full at him.

"*Malédiction!*" the Camisard exclaimed, driven back by the skill of the other (skill acquired in many a *cours d'escrime* in Paris, and the fence school of the Guards at Kensington gravel-pits), and knowing too, himself, but little of sword play except the rough cut-and-thrust which he had practised in the mountains. "*Malédiction!* You shall pay dearly for this! *Au sécours mes frères*."

He called for succour none too soon. In another moment Martin's blade would have been through his breast. None too soon! Fortunately for him it was at hand. Like tigers rushing on their prey, half a dozen of the disguised Camisards hurled themselves upon Martin; two threw themselves on him behind, one knocked up his sword arm, two more secured him. He was disarmed, captured, at their mercy.

"Shall we knock him on the head or cut his throat, brother Cavalier?" one asked, while as he did so Martin knew that he stood before one of the two chiefs of the Cévenoles, a man whose name was a terror by now to all Languedoc, and, two centuries afterward, is still remembered.

"No," Jean Cavalier replied, "he is a bold man, of the tyrants' side though he be. Most of them will be ours now we have risen. We will spare him, for the present at least."

Then he turned to Martin, who stood there calm and contemptuous (remembering that the fellow before him had been a baker's apprentice a year or two back, as he had heard--the latter almost felt degraded at having his life spared by such a man as this), and said with an attempt at ease which he invariably adopted, and with, also, the fury he had shown gone:

"Monsieur, it is the fortune of war which puts you in our power. You must abide by it. What parish do you belong to?"

"None you ever heard of. One in the north of France. I am a stranger here."

"A stranger!" Cavalier repeated incredulously, "a stranger!" And as he did so Martin saw all the followers of the Camisards' chief gazing astonishedly at him. "A stranger! If so, what are you doing here? What have the affairs of this unhappy province to do with you? Also, why in this château?"

What answer Martin might have made to his questions, if any, was not given, since at this moment three of the men who had left the room returned, bringing with them Urbaine Ducaire. They had found her outside the door listening tremblingly to all that had happened within, rooted to the spot, almost insensible.

Yet now, as she advanced between those men, something had given her courage, had nerved her to strength. She trembled no more and, although very white and with still a strange gleam in her eyes, she walked erect; almost, to Martin observing her, it seemed defiantly. What, he wondered, had stung her to this courage? Perhaps the contempt that she too felt for her captors.

With a bow, Cavalier welcomed her, then asked:

"Have I the honour to stand face to face with the daughter of his Excellency the Intendant?"

"I am the adopted daughter of the Comte de Baville," she answered calmly. "When do you intend to slay me, as you have slain the others?" and her eyes stole to where the commandant's body lay stretched over the table.

For a moment Cavalier looked at her with a strange glance, surprised, perhaps, at her calmness; it may be, stung by her absolute indifference to his power. Then he said:

"Mademoiselle mistakes those whom she addresses. Doubtless, in these surroundings, thinks she has fallen into the hands of papists or those of similar faith. People who slay women burn them on the *grandes places*, belabour their bare backs. I would not be discourteous, yet mademoiselle will pardon me if I remind her that we are not of the same religion as herself, or monsieur by her side."

Or monsieur by her side! Unanswering her captor, scarcely regarding him, she stood there, a look impenetrable to Cavalier upon her face, yet with her mind full of wonderment.

Or monsieur by her side! They did not know then that he was one of them, in faith and belief at least--that--that----

"God!" she whispered to herself, still gazing beyond--through--the Camisard chief, yet with no thought of him in her mind. "God! what awful wrong have I done him again to-night, how misjudged him? To be by my side as a protection still, to share my fate, he does not avow himself a Protestant; consents to be deemed their enemy--a Catholic. And he is not a woman. There is naught to save him."

Even as she so thought her eyes stole round and rested on him standing there calmly near her side, avowing, denying nothing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LA DIVINÉRESSE.

The violets and the primroses grow in the chestnut woods that fringe the base of La Lozère, yet disappear as the roads wind up to the summit, giving place to the wild foxglove and heather which, in their turn, disappear as still the ascent continues. Also, the chestnuts themselves become more sparse and infrequent, until at last the woods cease altogether, and the mountaineer trends only on the soft, crisp brown grass that, lying warm beneath the winter's snows, springs but into existence to be consumed later by the fierce southern sun that beats on it.

Finally, with far beneath his feet the valleys basking in the warm sun, the wanderer stands upon a dreary upland with, around him, the mountain tops of the Cévennes huddled in wild confusion, as though thrown down from the palm of some great giant. A confusion of barren crags in some places, of, in others, great hills clothed with forests or upland pasturages, or, in a few cases, plots of cereals--a confusion over which in summer sweeps, without warning, a torrent of hail, or amidst which rise fogs that envelope all; that in winter is buried in snow over which the tempests howl. Here, too, wherever the eye turns, torrents are seen that, when Spring unlocks their floods and turns the frozen snow to water, leap down and hurl themselves over boulders and, in some cases, precipices until at last they reach the rivers beneath. Here also are bare walls of rock in which are the caverns that sheltered the Camisards whom Louis and Louvois, Chamillart and De Maintenon had driven forth into the mountain deserts. Yet not only Louis, le Dieudonné and his myrmidons, but, before him, that other Louis, his father, surnamed "The Just," who had, under the sword of the brutal Marshal de Thémines, also driven countless Huguenots to take refuge in these wild, stony citadels, and had forced them to fortify their mountains against their persecutors. To close their caverns with bronze doors secretly conveyed to them by Jeanne d'Albret, Protestant Queen of Navarre.

It was in one of these vast caves, a week after the Château de Servas had been burnt to the ground by the orders of Jean Cavalier (of how the garrison was put to death, none being spared, the peasants still tell nightly to all who care to hear), that there was gathered a vast company of men and women. A company assembled to sit in judgment on another man and woman who were in their power, to say whether the hour had come for the death of those captives or was still to be postponed. Postponed, not abandoned! For they were Catholics, persecutors. And, therefore, doomed, sooner or later. But first the prophets and the prophetesses had to speak. On them depended much; a swift doom that night or one that might be reserved for another day.

"You understand, mademoiselle?" the man said to his companion, seated by his side; "you understand? Our sentence depends on those gathered together round Cavalier. After they have spoken we shall know whether 'tis now or later."

"I understand," Urbaine Ducaire answered, the cold tone in which he spoke causing more grief to her heart than the awful import of his words. "I understand." Then her eyes sought his, met them, and were swiftly withdrawn.

They had been here a week, being treated well, allowed to roam about the vast caverns unmolested, yet never once allowed to form the most illusory hopes that there could be but one end to their captivity. The knowledge had been conveyed to them by now and then a word from one or from another, by a look from a third, by even a glance from Cavalier himself or from Roland, that for some of the Protestant men and women slaughtered by the Papists they were to furnish an expiation--a retaliation--as many other Catholics had already done who had fallen into their captors' hands.

Yet it was not the crowds of fierce Camisards who now surrounded them in this great cavern, lit by torches at its farthest end, and by the rays of the October sun which streamed in from

where the great antique bronze doors, placed there a hundred years ago, stood at the hither end; nor the unpitying, cruel glances cast by the prophetesses at the girl, which caused the grief she felt. That came from another cause; from the cold disdain of the man by her side--the man to whom she owed it that she had not been slain in the attack made upon her escort. Disdain for the words she had uttered against him that night in the passage outside the banqueting hall of the Château St. Servas, for the manner in which she had misjudged him. Misjudged him as she had recognised well from that night itself, from the moment when, being himself a Protestant, he had refused to profit by the fact, but, instead, had remained silent when accused of being one of their captors' enemies. And his reason for doing so was certain; not to be doubted. So that he might still be by her side, still near to protect her, still near, if any chance should arise, to aid her escape. And now the time was at hand when their doom was to be determined, and yet he continued to hold his peace, would be ready to share her fate, and, she told herself, to despise her to the end.

"You are very noble," she had said to him that morning when they had been brought into the great cavern from the cells which each had had assigned to them, "and I, oh, God, how base! I wish the world had ended on that night, ere I uttered the words I did."

"It matters not," he said; "is worth no thought. You misjudged me, that is all."

She bowed her head before him, meaning thereby to acknowledge how utterly she had indeed misjudged him. Then she said, her eyes fixed on his:

"Yet--yet you will not let them continue in their ignorance of what you are? If--if they decide to slay, you will announce your fellowship with them? Is it not so?"

But to this he would make no answer, turning away his head from her.

"It needs but one word," she continued, "and you are free--free to go in peace."

He knew as well as she that it needed but one word; nay, he knew more. It needed but another word--the statement that he was an Englishman--to make him something more than free, to cause him to be received with acclamation by their captors, welcomed as a friend. For England was Louis' bitterest foe and the most powerful; a force slowly crushing the life out of France and her king, as she had been doing since first she shattered his great fleet at Barfleur and La Hogue. Also she was the home of every outlawed refugee and Huguenot; her people supplied them with help and succour; even to this remote spot money and arms were often secretly sent. And, further, 'twas whispered among the Protestants that an attack was to be made ere long on France's Mediterranean coast by one of England's admirals, after which there would not remain one frontier or border of the land that did not bristle with Protestant enemies.

It did indeed need but the words "I am an Englishman" for his safety to be assured. Yet he had sworn to himself that he would die at his captors' hands ere he uttered them or made the statement that he was of their faith, ere he would go forth and leave this girl here, alone and doomed.

"I do not desire," he said, "to earn my release by proclaiming myself a Protestant. I pity them for what they have suffered; yet--yet I am not in sympathy with their retaliation. I shall not proclaim myself."

But now the hum of voices from the crowd near them became hushed; from their midst one of the prophets, or, as they called them, "*Les Extasés*," was speaking. "Mes Frères," they heard him say, "the God of Battles fights on our side, even as once he fought upon the side of Joshua. Also he has inspired me to read the future. I see," he went on, extending his hands, "the time approaching when over all the land of France the Huguenots shall worship in peace in the way that most befits them; when no longer a tyrannous king, his married mistress by his side, shall send forth armies to crush them. Nay, more, I see the time at hand, ay, even in that king's lifetime, when he, reaping the fruits of his errors, shall find us the allies of his bitterest foes. I see our brother, Cavalier, leading his troops to victory against France, against France's own children in a distant land. I see a plain strewed with their bodies, crimson with their blood shed against France. But not yet, not yet."[2]

"Ay! not yet. And, my brother, tell us what of the present your holy visions disclose," Cavalier exclaimed. "I too can forecast the future when inspired by God. Speak, therefore, my brother; let us see if God has revealed to both of us alike."

Whereupon, again, the seer took up his strain.

"Languedoc shall be free at last," he said. "I see in the far distant future the altars overturned at which the children of the Devil worship, the priests of Baal slain, the gibbets empty, the flames burned out. Yet blood must be shed--the blood of all who bow to false gods, idols of wood and stone, cruel gods who have spared none of our faith, as now we will spare none of theirs. 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth.' It is the Mosaic law; let it be carried out. Spare none." And even as he spoke his own eyes lighted on the man and woman sitting there awaiting their doom. Then, lifting up his voice, he sang, all joining in his song who stood around him, all holding up their hands to heaven:

Seigneur, entend ma plainte, écoute ma prière,
Ne detourne pas ta paupière
De ma détresse, Ô Dieu vivant.
Je pleure, je gémis, j'erre dans les ténebras
Comme aux fentes des tours les hulottes funèbres
Et les oiseaux du Désert.

And as he spoke, in truth he wept, then flung himself upon his knees and prayed in silence. Yet looked up at last, and, pointing to Urbaine and Martin, while down his cheeks the tears rolled, exclaimed: "They are of Baal. They must die."

"You hear?" Martin whispered to his companion, "you hear? There is no hope; be brave."

"Save yourself," she whispered back. "Save yourself, or," and now her eyes sought his boldly, "I proclaim you--save you."

"You dare not, I forbid you: command you to hold your peace. If you proclaim me one of them, I will deny it. Be silent."

It seemed as if there would be no time for her to do as she threatened; their doom was at hand.

Down the long cavern the Camisards advanced slowly. Ahead of them strode Cavalier; yet even as he came he turned to those behind him and said some words as though endeavouring to calm them, to at least retard the hour of their vengeance; yet also, as it seemed by his face, with little hope of being able to do so.

Ahead of all came the women. One, who limped as she walked, Martin recognised as the girl Fleurette who had been dragged moaning from the Abbé du Chaila's house; another was the girl whom Urbaine had seen fire the shot which slew her companion, the *gouvernante*. Also there were others, some old, some middle-aged, some almost children. And, perhaps to nerve themselves to what they were about to do, one told of how her babe had been cast into the flames at Nîmes "by order of Baville--her father," pointing as she spoke to Urbaine; another of how her boy had hung upon a lamp post at Anduse "by order of Baville--her father"; a third of how her old mother, gray and infirm, had also been consigned to the flames "by order of Baville--her father."

She, standing there, did not flinch as they approached; stood, indeed, calmly awaiting whatever they might be about to do to her--she who had shrieked as the shot was fired at Poul's escort, who had seemed as one blasted to death by what she had discovered in the Château de Servas. Neither flinched nor blanched, indeed smiled once into Martin's eyes as he, close by her side, took her hand gently in his; glanced swiftly up into his eyes as though asking if, at this supreme moment, he forgave.

"We die together," he said. "Remember, be brave."

"Thus," she whispered, "I fear nothing." Then murmured, even lower, "My God! how great, how noble you are!"

Suddenly, while now the Camisards were all around them and while Cavalier's voice rang out through the vaulted cavern, bidding them halt until they had decided what form of death should be meted out to the prisoners, a woman's voice rose high above all the others, commanding them to harken to her words, listen to the spirit of prophecy that was upon her.

"It is the Grande Marie," they said, "La Grande Marie. Hear her, hear her!" and stood still as they spoke, glancing at her.

Grande she was in stature, big and gaunt, with wild, misty eyes that seemed to glare into vacancy; her hair iron-gray and dishevelled, her voice rich and full as it rang down the cavern, silencing all other voices.

"The skies whirl round in starry circles," she said. "The voices of whispering angels are in my ears, the heavenly host are telling me strange things. Also the voice of God speaks to me; asks me a question. Asks me who it is we are about to slay? My brethren, answer for me."

"Who?" they shouted, "who?" Cavalier alone standing silent, his eyes upon the Grande Marie in wonderment. "Who? A stranger, who is of the persecutors' faith. A woman also of the devil--the child of Baville--the persecutor--the murderer."

The misty eyes roamed over all around her as they spoke. Then suddenly she moved toward them, her hand extended, one finger pointing. And with that finger she touched Cavalier on the arm, then the Camisard next to him, then another; then a woman, and another woman.

"All," she whispered, while a great hush was now upon those in the cavern, "all are God's children, all servitors of the Cross--all, all, all."

Again she went on, passing slowly by those in the cave, her finger touching each and every one, missing none. Peering, too, into their faces with those wild clouded eyes, penetrating them with her glances.

And now the silence was extreme. She had touched, had looked into the face of every one there except Martin and Urbaine.

Again she moved and approached him, standing tall, erect and calm, yet not defiantly, before his captor.

Her fingers advanced and touched his breast beneath where the lace of his cravat fell. With every eye upon them, she brought her face close to his, and for one minute seemed as if through her own eyes she would see deep into his brain. Then moved a step farther and stood before Urbaine Ducaire.

The girl, standing herself motionless, her hand clasped in Martin's, divined rather than felt that the finger of the prophetess was on her breast; saw that, as she opened her lids which she had closed when that wild form drew near her, the eyes of the seer were looking into hers. Then shuddered as they were removed.

"Away!" La Grande Marie exclaimed, as now there were no more to touch, no more to penetrate with those terrible glances, "away to your work in the valleys and the towns, to devastate, to destroy, when the moon which is the sun of the outcast is on high. Away, I say, to destroy, to devastate. Your work is not here. Our God has blinded you, led you astray. In this, our refuge, there is no child of the devil, no Papist. You are deceived. Those whom you would slay are of our faith!"

CHAPTER XIX.

LEX TALIONIS.

Over all Languedoc there was an awful terror at this time--the terror that is born of successful rebellion, and that rebellion the outcome of a religious strife.

An awful terror which filled now the breasts of those who had erstwhile been the persecutors, even as, not long before, it had filled the breasts of those whom they had persecuted.

In truth there were none in all that fair province, none--from those who dwelt on its southern borders washed by the sapphire-hued waters of the Mediterranean, to those who, on its northern boundary, gazed toward the fertile provinces of Linois and Auvergne, or, looking west, saw the rich rolling lands of golden Guienne stretched out before them--but felt, and feeling, dreaded, the threatening horror that at any moment might engulf them. For now no longer were the dungeons of the cities filled with Protestants moaning for water, food, or air; no longer did Huguenot women offer their jailers the few miserable coins they had about them so that their babes might taste a drop of milk; no longer did men of the Reformed Faith offer their little bags of secreted livres and tournois to their warders, so that thereby they might be allowed to sleep one hour--only one little hour!--without disturbance; without horns being blown at their dungeon doors to awaken them, or blank charges fired from musketoons and fusils with a like intent; without their bodies being pricked and stirred up by point of lance or sword at the moment that a heartbroken slumber fell upon them.

A change had come! Some of the jails were emptied now; in the smaller towns and villages they existed no longer. Some of those towns and villages were themselves erased from off the face of the earth. Down from their mountain homes the Camisards had stolen, creeping like phantoms through the night, like panthers on the trail of those whom they track to their doom, like adders gliding through the grass. One by one these men of vengeance mustered outside doomed bourgs or hamlets till all were assembled in a compact mass, sometimes to lay violent and open siege to the places, sometimes to be admitted silently at dead of night, or in early dawn, by those who, disguised, had already stolen in. Then the massacre took place, the jails gave up their victims who were not already dead, the hateful gibbets and the iron-bound wheels helped to light the fires that consumed the villages, and in the morning there was no sign left either of avenger or of victim. Of the former, all had stolen back into their impenetrable fastnesses; of the latter, nothing remained but burning houses and crumbling walls, a church destroyed, an altar shattered, and at its base a slaughtered priest.

Even in the greater cities--in Montpellier and Nîmes, Alais and Uzès--the haunting fear, the terror, the horror was there, even though those cities were fortified and garrisoned, full of soldiers and *milices*. Yet of what use were these? Of what use dragoons who had fought in close

ranks and knee to knee against William of Orange's own English and Dutch troopers? Of what use infantry who had stood a solid phalanx of steel under Bouflers and Luxembourg? Of what use a homely militia, when the enemy was unseen and intangible--an enemy which crept in man by man through gates and barriers, disguised as peasant and farmer bringing in produce, or sometimes, in bitter mockery of their foes, as Catholic priest or Catholic seigneur? It was not strange that against such a foe as this all Baville's plans were unavailing, all Julien's military knowledge helpless. And the question which every man asked his neighbour was, Would Montrevel, the new field marshal now on his way from Paris with an enormous army, be able to succeed against such crafty and resolute enemies any better than his predecessors had done?

Baville asked himself the same question now, as he sat where he had sat a month or two before, on that morning when across the room had fallen the shadow of Urbaine as she came in from the garden, her hands full of freshly gathered, dew-sprinkled flowers--his loved Urbaine. Yet he told himself, even as thus he meditated and doubted, that if force could do it, it should be done.

Upon his face as he sat alone in his cabinet there was a look which none could perhaps have interpreted, yet which none could have failed to observe; a look that had brought an appearance of age to his face which his fifty years of life should not have placed there; also a look of deep, fierce determination which, cruel as he had ever been, had not hitherto been perceptible upon his handsome features. On the table before him there lay a great chart of the whole Cévennes district; attached to the chart by a silken string was a paper referring to it; on the back of that chart was written in a bold, sprawling hand, the words, "Mon plan pour la grande battue des attroupés que je projete," and signed "Julien."

"Bah," Baville exclaimed, after throwing down these papers angrily, "*sa grande battue! Son plan!* What will come of it? What? Nothing. These dogs are as slippery as snakes. No battue will surround, entrap them. And--and--even though they, though this swashbuckler, who thinks more of the bouquet of his Celestin or the aroma of his white Frontignan than of our province's safety, should prevail, it will not bring her back to me."

And Baville, on whose soul there lay heavy the slaughter of countless innocent women--their only fault their faith--buried his face in his hands and moaned. "Urbaine, Urbaine," he whispered, "*Ma mignonne, ma petite rose blanche*, to think of you in their hands, you whom we have nurtured so soft and warm, you who, I swore to your father, should be my life's charge, the star of my existence! Fool! fool! fool! to ever let you go thus. Though God he knows," he whispered still, "I did it for the best; did it, knowing the dangers that threatened, that were surely coming, that must above all else strike at Baville and his. Deemed I could save you, send you away to peace and safety."

And still he sat on there, his head in his hands, while from between his fingers the tears trickled as he muttered still, "Urbaine, Urbaine!"

"She is dead," he said after a pause. "She must be dead. Of all, they would not spare her--my lamb. That is enough--to belong to me! O God!" he cried, springing from his chair and clasping his hands above his head, "nothing can give her back to me. Yet one thing thou canst give me: Vengeance! vengeance! vengeance! On him, above all, on that treacherous Huguenot, that viper who, when there was still a chance left, dragged her from the carriage, gave her up to his accursed brethren. Give me that! Place him but once in my hands and I ask no more. Urbaine can never come back, but at least she shall lie in her grave--where is it?"--and he shuddered--"lie in her grave avenged. Why did I ever trust him--kinsman of the de Rochebazons as he is--why not execute him that night at Montvert?"

After the rout of Poul's escort and of De Broglie's soldiers in an adjacent place by the Camisards, some half dozen of the dragoons of Hérault had managed to escape from the former slaughter, as well as many more from the latter. As has been said, they fled to Nîmes, where Baville was at the time, bringing with them the full account of what had happened to both detachments, and in their dismay and confusion making the disaster none the less in the telling. Now, among those who had thus escaped was one, a young *porte-guidon*, or cornet, who had by chance ridden also with De Peyre's detachment to Montvert when in attendance on Baville and the abbé's nephew. And there this lad had seen Martin upon the bridge with Buscarlet, had heard something of the conversation which ensued; knew, too, that he had returned to Alais with them. Therefore he was acquainted with Martin's appearance so well that, when the distracted Intendant had demanded from those who had escaped where his child was, he was very well able to inform him.

"My God!" Baville exclaimed, sitting in his rooms in the old Roman city, with the lad before him and surrounded by half the councillors of the place, sitting there white to the lips, "you saw it, saw him drag her out of the carriage, ride away with her."

"I saw it, your Excellency, beyond all doubt. And had it not been that I dared not take my eyes off these Camisards who were attacking me--one of the villains was armed with a reaping hook--I would have made a stroke to save mademoiselle; have hamstrung his horse, run him through. But, your Excellency sees," and he pointed to his hand, a mass of rags and bandages, "two fingers are gone; cut off as I wrested the brutal weapon from the man."

"Which road did he take?--yet, why ask?" Baville had said. "Which road would he go but one--that toward their accursed mountain dens? And he--he was of their faith."

A moment later he interrogated the young dragoon again.

"Can you by no chance be mistaken about this man? Think, I beseech you! Of all, she could have fallen into no worse hands than his."

"It is impossible, your Excellency. It is the man who sat on the bridge with the curé when we rode into Montvert--the man who returned to Alais with us. Also, I have spoken with him in Montpellier when your Excellency made him welcome at the Intendancy."

Beneath his lips Baville muttered a bitter imprecation as the young officer recalled this fact. It was, he saw now, a fatal error to have committed. Yet--yet he had done it of set purpose, for a reason. No, he would dwell no more on that. And now weeks had passed since Urbaine's disappearance. She must be dead, he and his wife had told each other a thousand times by night and day.

"Every hope is gone," he said to her more than once, "every hope. She was mine--known to a hundred mountain refugees from Montpellier to be ours. They would not spare her. There is nothing left but vengeance, if he, that kinsman of the de Rochebazons, ever falls into our hands, as he must, as he must. They can not triumph forever. Can not win in the end."

Madame l'Intendante came in to him now as he sat in his room, a gentle, handsome woman on whose face the grief she felt within was very plainly apparent; came in, and, touching his forehead softly with her hand, sat down by his side.

"Nicole," she said, "a thought has come to me that--that--my God that I should have to say it!--if Urbaine is still alive, might lead to her rescue."

"A thought!" he exclaimed, his face brightening. "A thought! What thought? Yet what can a thousand thoughts avail? She is Baville's. That dooms her."

"*Mon mari*, suppose--only suppose--they have not slain her--nay, deny me not," as her husband made an impatient movement, "suppose they have not slain her yet. Remember, she would be a great hostage, and they, these rebels, boast they seek not warfare, but only peace--concessions; offer to lay down their arms if--if--all they ask for their unhappy, mistaken religion is granted."

"Well," Baville replied, yet looking eagerly at her, "well, what then?"

"To bring about a truce, obtain those concessions. They may have spared her life, if only for a time, if only for a time," she repeated, sobbing now.

"Even though they have done so," her husband replied, "concessions are impossible, though I myself desired them. Julien is maddened at his total failure; he will grant none. Montrevel comes full of pride at gaining his long-desired *bâton*. It is not to make peace, grant concessions, that he is on his way. Rather to cause more slaughter, extermination. And for *her*--there," and his eyes wandered toward the direction where, hundreds of leagues away, Paris and the great white palace of Versailles lay, "will she grant any?"

Madame l'Intendante knew well enough to whom he referred--to *la femme funeste et terrible*--and shook her head sadly, while Baville continued:

"She bars all, blocks all, Alice," and he lowered his voice instinctively. "Alice, it is she who has lit this torch of rebellion through all Languedoc. Chamillart writes me that Louis has known nothing until now of what has been happening. She has kept him in ignorance until forced by my demand for a great army and the services of Montrevel to tell him."

"My God! What duplicity!"

"It is true. She holds him in the hollow of her hand, winds him round her finger as a child winds a silken thread. Will she grant concessions, do you think?"

"But, Nicole, listen. If she, Urbaine, lives, there may be still time. Montrevel is not yet here. His great army moves slowly. Time, still."

"For what?"

"Have you forgotten? Her real father--that friend of yours--Monsieur Ducaire--have you not often told me he was himself of their faith--a Huguenot?"

"Mon Dieu!" Baville exclaimed, "it is so. He was. Yet, again, what then?"

"If--if she does still live, and it could be communicated to them, they would perhaps spare her. Surely, among the old of those refugees--even among those who are now but elderly--there may be some who would remember her father, could recall this Monsieur Ducaire----"

She paused, alarmed at the strange effect of her words, for Baville's face had turned an ashen

hue as she spoke. Almost it seemed to his wife as though his handsome features were convulsed with pain as he, repeating those words, whispered:

"Recall Ducaire? Remember her father? Oh! Dieu des Dieux, if they should do that, if there should be one among those who surround her, if she still lives, who could do so! If there is but one who should tell her----"

"What, Baville?"

"No, no, no!" he whispered. "No, no! If so--yet it can not be!--but if it is, if there is any still living to tell her that, then better she be dead. Better dead than bear it."

"Husband," Madame l'Intendante said, "I know now, something tells me--alas! alas! ever have I suspected it, feared it," and she wrung her hands; "you have deceived me, trifled with me from the first. Baville, is it you? Are you in solemn truth her father? Is Ducaire another name, known once in the far-off past, for Baville? Would she be better dead than alive to learn that? Answer me."

"No," he said, "no; you do not understand, can not understand; must not know yet. But I am innocent of that wrong to you. I swear it. And Alice, my wife," he continued as he bent over her and kissed her brow, "Alice, my love, if you knew all you would pity me. Alice, I swear it to you--swear that it is not what you think."

Then, as again he kissed her, he murmured the old French proverb:

"Tout savoir c'est tout pardonner," adding, "Oh, believe in me, counsel me, my wife."

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT IS THIS MYSTERY?

The swallows were gone--a month earlier in this mountainous region than in the rest of the golden south of France. Below, the corn had fallen ungathered from its stalks, since of those who remained in the valleys, and faithful to the iron rule of Baville, none dared reap it, for fear that, while doing so, from its midst might spring up a body of the dreaded Camisards. Already, too, high up in the mountains, the first flurries of snow had sprinkled the ground; autumn had come. And still Baville was no nearer to finding Urbaine, or to gathering news of whether she was alive or dead, than he had been before. Neither did he know what had become of the man who, he deemed, had betrayed her into his enemies' hands; who, he believed, had sent her to her death.

Meanwhile, Montrevel had arrived. Montrevel, the general and newly created field marshal, second only to Tallard, who next year lost Blenheim, and to Villars, who was ordained later to bring peace to the distracted land. Montrevel, of whom it was said that he fought like a Paladin of old, made love like a Troubadour, and had the air of a hero of the stage or the leader of a chorus in the newly invented operas.

With him came a vast army--one which, to any other rebels but the all-triumphant Protestants, harbouring defiantly in the mountain deserts on high and in the inaccessible caverns, would have brought fear and terror. To them, however, this army brought none. "*Nous sommes les rochers que les vents combattants en vaine*," they cried, and even as they so taunted their late persecutors they stole down by night and by unknown paths, sacked a fresh village, provided themselves with fresh food, more arms and more ammunition, seized on costly uniforms and laces, and, when possible, horses and cattle, while once more like phantoms they vanished quietly afterward from human sight. Vanished as the crawling Indians whom some of their adversaries had encountered on the Mississippee or the St. Lawrence; vanished, after devastating lonely settlements and townships; disappeared as disappears the snowflake which falls on the bosom of the ocean, is seen a moment, and then is gone forever.

In that army, sent to destroy the men whose retaliation of half a century's persecution was now so terrible, came soldiers who had never yet known defeat. From Italy the Marquis de Firmacon brought back the men of a regiment of cuirassiers who had fought like victorious tigers at Cremona and had even driven back the fiery Eugene and his soldiers before their rush; in that army also were the guards of Tarnaud, De Saulx, and Royal Comtois; marines who had faced Russel's and Shovel's squadrons; dragoons of Saint-Sernin who had seen Marlborough ride all along the line giving orders to the great English force to advance, and had observed, but a year or two before, the consumptive invalid, William of England and Holland, stand undismayed beneath a hailstorm of bullets while superintending the siege of some great fortress in the Netherlands. Also there came the brigade of Lajonquiére which had followed Turenne in victory

and defeat, and that of Marsilly which had stood shoulder to shoulder awaiting the orders of Condé to charge. And still there were others who might have struck more terror to any mountain rebels than these trained battalions; a regiment of men, themselves mountaineers, whose fierceness and brutality were a byword through all the South.

These were the Miquelets, a body of six hundred Pyrenean soldiers under the command of a rough one-armed free lance named De Palmerolles. From sunny Roussillon and Foix these men came, their faces burned black, their bodies half clad in red shirts and trousers, resembling sailors' slops in vastness, *espardillos*, or shoes of twisted cord, upon their feet, in their belts two pistols on one side, a scimitar dagger on the other, while in their hands they bore the long-barrelled *gyspe* peculiar to the Pyrenean. Also, to render greater Montrevel's chance of defeating those who were termed rebels to the king, he brought with him twenty large brass cannons, five thousand bullets, four thousand muskets, and fifty thousand pounds of powder--enough, in truth, to defeat all the rebels in the Cévennes, if they could only be got at.

From far up on the height of La Lozère, sheltered in a small copse of wind-swept firs, Jean Cavalier, looking down on the road which wound from Genoillac to Alais, laughed lightly as he turned to the companions by his side--his comrade, Roland, and his prisoner, Martin Ashurst.

"In truth," he said, "'tis a brave array of men. Yet what will they do against us? They can never get up here in spite of Baville's recently constructed roads, while as for us we can get down and back again as we choose." Then, turning to Martin, he said politely, and with that attempt at gracious ease and condescension which he never forgot to assume:

"Monsieur, I know we are safe with you. When you and your charge, Mademoiselle Ducaire, have left us you will betray no secrets."

"No more," replied Martin, "than I should betray any of Monsieur Baville's to you. You know now that, though I am of your religion, I am no partisan of either side. I pray God the day may come when all of our faith may be free, happy."

"We pray so, too," both chiefs answered, while Cavalier continued:

"'Tis what we seek. Peace--peace above all! And we are no rebels to the king. Let him but give us leave to worship in our own way and unmolested, earn our bread undisturbed, pay no taxes that go to support his own Romish church--the other taxes we will willingly pay--and he will find he has no more loyal subjects than the Cévenoles. Nay, have we not offered our services to him against his enemies, offered to furnish a Protestant regiment to aid him in Spain against the Austrian claimant, to fight against all his foes except the English, our brother Protestants? Yet he will not consent that it shall be so, or, rather, those who dominate him in his old age will not let him listen to us."

"Therefore," said Roland, "let him look to himself. See--hearken to those Miquelets who tread the plains now, shrieking their barbaric songs. Do you know what their war-cry is? 'Tis 'war to the knife.' So be it; 'tis ours too. And ere we cease to shout it Louis will have given in to us. While one Protestant remains in these mountains we shall never yield. The king may conquer Europe, drive back all his enemies; us he will never conquer."

* * * * * * *

After La Grande Marie had uttered these words of hers, "Those whom you would slay are of our faith," there had fallen a great silence on all within the vast vaulted cavern--a silence begotten of wonderment, yet a wonderment which had in it no element of disbelief; for of all the prophetesses, she it was who was most believed in by the Camisards, her inspiration the one which they had never yet known to be at fault. She had advised the descent to Montvert, fortelling how, on that night, the abbé should atone for his crimes at their avenging hands in spite of their not seeking his death. She also it was who had bidden them attack the convoy of Urbaine under the hated command of Poul, and the detachment under the equally hated command of De Broglie. Had prophesied, too, that in that convoy should be found one whose capture and death would wring the heartstrings of the tyrant Baville as nothing else could wring them, would beat him down to misery, might even force him in his despair to abandon all further cruelties toward those of his creed.

And what she had prophesied had all come to pass. Baville's daughter, as most of them supposed Urbaine to be, was in their hands, her death assured. Therefore now, also, they believed her prophetic visions and utterances, though, in believing, a victim thereby escaped them. Even the women--whose bitterness, born of the horrors practised on their own helpless babes and their old back-bowed mothers and fathers, as well as on themselves, was more intense than that of the men who, in their hearts, felt for the white delicate girl who stood a prisoner before them--even the women paused, wondering, amazed.

"Of our faith," they muttered, "of our faith. Yet the wolf's own cub, the persecutor's own blood. Marie, sister, think again of what you say. Pause and reflect."

"I know what I say," La Grande Marie murmured, the misty eyes still fixed upon the girl before her, her hand half raised. "God has entered my heart, given me the power of divination. She and he, this man by her side, are of our faith. Is it not so, little one?" and she leaned forward to a child near her upon whom also the gift of prophecy was reported to have fallen.

"It is so, Marie," the child lisped.[3]

"What is the mystery?" Cavalier asked, standing before Urbaine, his voice expressing the surprise he felt at the turn matters had assumed, expressing also his awe, for he, too, was sometimes visited with the impulse of prophecy. "In God's name explain, mademoiselle."

"There is no explanation to offer. Your prophetess is wrong. Since my father adopted me I have known no faith but the true one."

"Adopted you!" he repeated, while all round them stood listening eagerly. "Ah! yes, I have heard; remember you said such was the case at the Château de Servas, yet had forgotten. Mademoiselle, what is your name since it can not be Baville?"

"Urbaine Ducaire."

"Ducaire?" he repeated, "Ducaire? There is no name such as that in the lists of our unhappy brethren. Mademoiselle, *was* your father of our religion?"

"I know not," the girl replied, while in her manner, in her eyes, too, was the haughty indifference to her captor which had surprised Cavalier from the first. "I know not. Yet, since he was M. de Baville's friend, it scarce seems possible he should have been."

"Listen," cried the Camisard chief, addressing all those who stood around, "listen, my brethren. Among you are many no longer young, many who can cast their memories back to the years ere this--this demoiselle--could have been born. Some, too, who come from far and wide, from where the waters of the sea lap our southern shores; from where, also, Guienne on one side, Dauphiné on the other, touch our border. Heard ever any of you of a Huguenot named Ducaire?" and as he spoke he cast his eyes around all within the cavern.

But there came no affirmative answer. Only the repetition of that name and the shaking of heads, and glances from eyes to eyes as each looked interrogatively at the other.

"There must be some who, at least, have heard this name if--if La Grande Marie divines truly--if this lady is in truth of our faith. Yet--yet--the gift may have failed her now, have misled her."

"Test that gift, Cavalier," La Grande Marie exclaimed from where she stood now among the others, and speaking in a clear voice, while her filmy eyes, which seemed ordinarily to be peering into far-off space, rested on him. "Test that gift. The woman is not the only one named as being of our faith. Ask of the man."

As she spoke the eyes of Urbaine and Martin met, the minds of each filled with the same thought. The knowledge that whereas hitherto to have declared himself of their captors' faith would have led to his being set free and no longer able to share her doom, his doing so now would almost beyond all doubt prevent that doom from falling on her.

The acknowledgment that La Grande Marie had divined justly in his case would cause them to believe that she had also done so in Urbaine's.

And knowing this--as she too, he felt, must know it--he did not hesitate.

"She has pronounced justly," he said. "I am of the Reformed faith. A Protestant."

Amid the murmurs that arose from all who surrounded those two prisoners, amid their cries, in some cases exultant ones, that La Grande Marie had never yet been mistaken and was not, could not be so now; amid, too, their strongly expressed opinion that, since she had been right as regards the man, therefore also she must be so as regards the woman, Cavalier exclaimed:

"In heaven's name why not say so before? Also why risk your life as you have done at the Château de Servas and here?"

"She was alone and defenceless," Martin exclaimed. "I desired to protect her."

"Knowing that she too is a Protestant, by birth at least?"

"Nay, knowing only that she was a woman."

"Yet Baville's cherished ward?"

"Yes, his cherished ward."

Cavalier shrugged his shoulders and turned away. Perhaps the bitter sufferings of all of his, of their, faith were too present to his mind to make that mind, young as it was--he being not twenty--capable of understanding such magnanimity. Also he did not know that the man before him belonged to a land where, for now nearly fifteen years, none had suffered for their religious opinions as over all France they suffered horribly and were to suffer for still some years to come, and that, consequently, he could not feel as strongly as they themselves felt.

Whatever Cavalier might think, however, of the motives which had prompted a man who avowed himself a Protestant to protect the worshipped idol of the Protestant's greatest persecutor in the most persecuted part of France, one thing was very certain: neither would be put to death--the one because he was undoubtedly of their faith, the other because, not being the actual child of Baville, she might in truth have been born a Huguenot, as La Grande Marie had had revealed to her. La Grande Marie! in whose auguries and predictions they believed for the simple reason that, until now, all that she had foretold, all that she had uttered as prophetic inspiration, had come to pass.

They were safe so far!

CHAPTER XXI.

"YOU WILL NEVER FIND HIM."

"When you and your charge, Mademoiselle Ducaire, have left us you will betray no secrets," Cavalier had said to Martin, as they stood side by side watching the army of Montrevel on its way through the province? Yet some weeks passed, and still they remained in the hands of the Camisards, well treated, yet still there.

For their accommodation two large caverns had been prepared as sleeping rooms; prepared, too, in such a manner as would indeed have astonished the Camisards' enemies, the dwellers in the valleys below, had they been able to observe them. To observe that Urbaine's chamber--if such a name could be given to the vault in which she slept--was furnished not only with comfort, but indeed luxury, her bed, which had been constructed expressly for her by one of the *attroupés* who was a carpenter, being covered with fine white linen and made soft with skins and rugs. Also the sides of the vault were hung with tapestry and brocade; the ewer from which she poured water was solid silver; the floor on which she trod was covered with carpets made at Aubusson. Yet the girl shuddered as, nightly, daily, she glanced round this luxuriously furnished cavern, knowing full well, or at least being perfectly able to divine, whence all these things came; for none who had ever knelt, as Urbaine had done since her earliest recollection, at the altar of any church of the Ancient Faith could doubt that that silver jug had been torn from some such altar which had been devastated with the edifice itself; none who had seen the luxurious fittings and adornments of the *noblesse* of Languedoc could doubt that the tapestries and hangings and rich fine linen had once adorned the château of Catholic noblemen or gentlemen. Everything which surrounded her, all--even to the choice plate off which they both ate their meals, and the crystal glass from which they drank the Ginestoux and Lunel placed before them--told the same story; the story of robbery and pillage, of an awakened vengeance that spared nothing and hesitated at nothing.

Both, too, were free now, free to wander on the mountain slopes, no parole being demanded, since escape was impossible through those closely guarded paths and defiles, a little mule being at the girl's service when she chose to use it, an animal which had been captured from Julien's forces during a defeat sustained by him and while bearing on its back two mountain guns. Now those guns guarded, with other captured cannon, one of the approaches from the valley, and the mule was given over entirely to her service. Yet she rarely rode it, preferring, indeed, to sit upon a high promontory whence, at sunset, she could see the spires of distant cathedrals or churches sparkling far down in the valley, sometimes with Martin by her side, sometimes alone.

"Monsieur," she said to him now one crisp, sunny October afternoon as together they strolled toward this promontory to watch the sunset, "monsieur, why do you not go away, return to your own land? You will have the chance soon to escape out of France forever. You heard what the chief said last night, that an English agent was at Nîmes endeavouring to discover what chance the fleet in the Mediterranean will have of invading us there."

"You forget, mademoiselle. I am in their power; you forget that----"

"Nay," she exclaimed, "why speak thus? I know that you are free to go to-morrow, to-night; that you might have gone long since had you chosen. That you remain here only because you will not leave me alone in their power. I know, I understand," and the soft, clear eyes stole a glance into his.

"I saved you once, by God's mercy," he said. "I shall not leave you now. Not until I return you to your father's arms. And take heart! It will not be long. Whether Montrevel or my countrymen effect a landing from the sea, you will be soon free. If the former happens, it will be a rescue; if the latter, you will be detained no longer, since they deem you beyond all doubt a Protestant."

"The woman was mistaken," she answered. "It is impossible."

"Yet Cavalier thinks he has confirmation of the fact. You know that he has been in the valleys lately, even in Montpellier, disguised. He has met one, an old woman, who knew Monsieur Ducaire, your real father. You know that?"

"She has said so, yet I deem it impossible. Who is this woman?"

"She will not say. But he seems confident. And--and--even though my religion is so hateful to you--think, think, I beseech you, of what advantage to you it is to be deemed here one of our faith. Mademoiselle, if that strange seer, that prophetess whose knowledge astounds, mystifies me, had not proclaimed you one of them and a Protestant, you would have been dead by now," and he shuddered as he spoke.

"You wrong me," she said, "when you say that the Protestant--that your--faith is hateful to me. It is only that I have been taught from my earliest days to believe so strongly in my own, to regard nothing as true but that. Also," she continued, "because it is yours, the religion of you who have saved me, it could never be hateful to me."

And as she spoke the soft rose-blush came to her cheek and her eyes fell. To her, and to Cavalier, Martin Ashurst had given a full account of himself, concealing nothing, and at last not even hesitating to avow himself an Englishman, a fact which, if known in any other part of Louis' dominions but this Protestant and rebel stronghold, would have led to his instant destruction. For England was pressing France sorely now, trampling her under the iron heel of the vast armies headed by Marlborough, attacking her on every coast she possessed, even now sending a fleet under Sir Cloudesley Shovel to attempt a landing at Cette and Toulon to succour and aid the Huguenots. Also it was to her principally that France's cruelly-used subjects had been fleeing for years, by her that they had been warmly welcomed and humanely treated. What hopes of anything short of a swift and awful death could an Englishman hope for at this time if caught in France?

Yet that he was safe in telling Urbaine Ducaire who and what he was he never doubted, even though she, in her turn, should tell Baville; for, since he meant himself to restore her to Baville's arms, it was not too much to suppose that this restoration would cancel the awful crime, in the eyes of the man who cherished this girl so, of being a British subject.

Also he had told both of what had brought him to Languedoc--his quest for the last of the de Rochebazons--and of how that quest had failed up to now, must fail entirely, since it was impossible that any investigations could be carried on in the distracted state of the province at the present time. Nor did Cavalier, whose mind would have better become a man of forty than one of twenty, give him any encouragement to hope that he would ever find the man he sought.

"For, *figurez vous*," he remarked, "this land, this sweet, fair Languedoc, has been a prey to dissension, slaughter, upon one side only up till now" (and he laughed grimly as he spoke, perhaps at the change which had come about), "to misery and awful wrongs for how long? Long before this present king--this *Dieudonné*, this *Roi Soleil*--came to the throne, and when his father *Le Juste* was harrying our fathers. *Le Juste!*" he repeated with bitter scorn, "*Le Juste!* A man who had a hundred virtues that became a valet--witness his love for shaving his courtiers, for larding his own fillets of veal, for combing his *mignon's* wigs--and not one that became a master, a king, except dissimulation! My God! he had that royal gift, at least. You know what he and that devil incarnate, Richelieu, did here in the south, did at Rochelle?"

"I know," Martin replied. "Alas! all the world knows. Yet it must have been after his time that Cyprien de Beauvilliers, as he then was, came here."

"If he came," said Cavalier, "he came under another guise, a mask; under another name. And it is long ago; you will never find him."

"I fear not."

"Moreover, even should you do so, of what avail to you, to him? Will Louis disgorge the de Rochebazon wealth, will the Church of Rome release one dernier of what she has clutched? Monsieur, you have flung your fortune away for a shadow, a chimera, since you yourself will never get it now. Better have taken it, have got back to your own land, have enjoyed it in peace."

"It would have been treachery to the dead--to her who believed in me and died deeming that I was a true child of her own faith. And," he added, "she was a good woman in spite of that faith."

Cavalier glanced at him, then shrugged his shoulders. Yet as he turned away he muttered:

"I begin to understand why your country is so great, so prosperous. Understand! if all Englishmen are like you."

That conversation was not to end thus, however, with a delicate compliment to Martin's honour, since, ere Cavalier had strode many paces from him, he came back and, taking a seat by his side in the great cavern where they then were, began to talk to him about the future hopes of the Protestant cause, in Languedoc especially. "We shall win," he said, "we shall win! What we want, which after all is not much for Louis to grant, we must have: Freedom to worship as we choose, freedom from paying taxes for a Church we have revolted from, freedom to come and go out of France as we desire. Let Louis grant that and I will place at his disposal so fine a regiment that none of his dragoons or *chevaux-légers* shall be our superiors. None! He shall say to me what he said to Jean Bart, the sailor."

"What did he say to him?"

"He sent for Jean Bart one day at Versailles, received him among all his grinning, shoulder-shrugging courtiers, and, looking on Jean and his rough, simple comrades, said, 'Bart, *mon ami*, you have done more for me than all my admirals.' And I love Bart for his reply when, casting his eyes round on all the admirals and captains who stood in the throng, he answered, '*Mon Dieu! je crois bien*. Without doubt! That is, if these *petits crevés* are your admirals and captains.'"

Martin smiled at the little story, then he said:

"I would to God your cause, my own faith, could prosper here. We have gone through much stress ourselves to make it secure and safe in England. Discarded our king, who was of the family more dearly loved in England than any that have ever sat on her throne, yet we were forced to do it. But the Protestants of England can make a stronger boast than those of your land, Monsieur Cavalier. They alone have suffered; they never retaliated as you have done."

"As we were forced to retaliate," he exclaimed, striking the table in his excitement. "My God! think of what we have suffered. And not our men alone, but our wives, our sisters, our old mothers. Have you ever seen a gray-haired woman stripped and beaten in a market place? Have you ever seen a young innocent girl stretched naked on a wheel, the shame of her exposure even more frightful than the blows of *la massue?* Have you ever stood on board a galley laden with Protestant slaves or smelled the burning flesh of old men at the stake? We have, we of these mountain deserts, and--and--my God!" while even as he spoke he wept, brushing the tears from his eyes fiercely, "I wonder that that girl, Urbaine Ducaire, is still alive, Protestant though she be. Wonder she is spared, since she is the loved treasure of that tiger, Baville."

"Protestant though she be!" Martin repeated. "You know that? From some surer source than the divinations, the revelations of La Grande Marie?"

"I know it," Cavalier said, facing round suddenly on him, "I know it now for certain. Ducaire was a Protestant living at Mont Joyre. I have discovered all. And I curse the discovery! For otherwise we would have repaid Baville a thousandfold for all his crimes, wrung his heartstrings as he has wrung ours for years, slaughtered his pet lamb as he has slaughtered hundreds of ours. But she is a Protestant, therefore safe."

"When will you release her, let her return to him?"

"Ho! *la, la!*" the other replied. "That must be thought upon. Even now she is a great hostage in our hands, a card that may win the trick. And--and--you and she are very intimate; yet can I tell you something without fear of its being repeated to her?"

"I will respect any confidence you place in me so long as it thrusts not against her welfare."

"It will not do that. Yet listen. Ere she leaves us there is something to be told her as regards Baville's friendship for her father, Ducaire. And, when she has heard that, it may be she will never wish to return to him, to set eyes on her beloved Intendant again."

"My God! What is to become of her then?"

For reply Cavalier only laughed. Then he said:

"There is always a home for any Protestant here, and she can not complain of how we have treated her. I think myself she will elect to stay with us, unless----"

"Unless?"

"Something more tempting offers," and again he laughed. "She might, monsieur will understand, fall in love. With--say--some hero."

For a moment Martin wondered if Cavalier alluded to himself; in another he *knew* that he did so. There was no mistaking the glance in the Camisard's eyes. But he gave him no opportunity of saying anything further on the subject, asking instead if he might be confided in with regard to the strange story which, when told to Urbaine, was to quench every spark of love and affection in her heart for Baville, the man who, with all his faults, had cherished and loved her so fondly.

"No, monsieur," Cavalier replied. "That can not be--as yet. Later you will doubtless know all, know the reason why Urbaine Ducaire should change her love for him to an undying hate.

Meanwhile I have to ask a favour of you."

"A favour? What is there in my power to do?"

"This: The power to help us end this war--you, a Protestant, an Englishman."

"I can not understand. God knows I desire nothing better."

"*Soit!* Then aid us. Thus: The English agent is at Nîmes, disguised. He passes under the name of Flottard, and has plans for the use of your admiral, who will bring his fleet to Cette or Toulon when the time is ripe. Unfortunately, however, this man, this *soi-disant* Flottard, has not the French very clearly. As for us--poor weavers, carders, husbandmen--what should we know of other tongues? We can not speak a word of your language. Monsieur Martin, you are a Protestant, an Englishman. Before God I think you English the greatest of all. Help us, help us to be free without more bloodshed, to worship the Almighty as we see fit, to bow our necks no more before the Scourge of God. Help us! Help us!" he repeated, "us of your own faith."

Stirred to the heart's core by the man's appeal, though he scarce needed such impulse, every fibre in him, every drop of blood in his veins, tingling for those of his own faith, of his own loved religion, he answered quietly, saying again:

"What I can do I will," and adding, also quietly, "or die in the attempt."

CHAPTER XXII.

I LOVE YOU.

Urbaine and Martin sat together on that night which followed the sunny afternoon when they had been alone together on the promontory, in one of the smaller caverns that opened out of the large one--a cavern which, of late, Cavalier had used as that in which they ate their meals--Roland, who shared with him the position of chief of the Camisards (and indeed claimed to be the absolute chief), being rarely in this part of the mountains. To-night, however, Cavalier was absent too, he having gone on one of those terribly dangerous visits to the valleys which he periodically made, sometimes to spy into what the following of Baville were doing, or what the king's troops; or to head some sanguinary raid upon a place where arms or ammunition, food or clothes, were likely to be obtained.

But to-night he had gone forth on a different mission: to precede Martin on his way to Nîmes, to see if all the mountain passes were free of their enemies and, should such be the case, to conduct him into the city, there to have an interview with the English agent.

Therefore Urbaine and Martin were alone together, save for the Camisard woman who waited upon them at their meal, and who did not obtrude herself more than was necessary into the cavern they were in.

As with the larger one and with those which each of them used as their sleeping apartment, its furnishing and surroundings would have created intense astonishment to any of the outside world who should have been able to observe it. Hung with skins in some places, with rich and costly tapestry and arras in others, all of which were the results of successful forays upon châteaux and *manoirs* which, a few hours after the raids, were nothing but smoking ruins, the onlooker might well have believed that, instead of a natural vault originally fashioned by Nature's own hands, he stood within the hall of some ancient feudal castle, such as the De Rohans or the Ruvignys had once possessed in the vicinity. Also he might have thought that the table at which those two sat was one prepared for the reception of guests at Versailles.

A table covered with the whitest napery, on which sparkled many pieces of the prized *vaisselles* of the *noblesse* and the *haut-monde*, so prized, indeed, that laws and edicts had been passed preventing the sale of such things or their transposition from one family to another; adorned as well with *verres-fins*, and with silver-handled knives and silver forks. Also for provisions there were upon this table a *poularde* and the remains of a choice ham, a bottle of Ginestoux and another of Lunel, a silver basketful of delicate, white chipped bread, and a crystal bowl of mountain fruit. Yet the glass and the silver bore no two crests alike. The arms that were broidered on the napery represented still a third family. All was spoil torn from half a dozen ruined and sacked mansions.

"I pray God, mademoiselle," Martin said, after having in vain pressed his companion to eat more than the shred of *poularde* she had trifled with, and to drink at least one glass of the Ginestoux, "that this task on which I go may end all your grief. You know that Cavalier promises on my return, our object accomplished, to allow me to take you away from here, to return you in

safety to your father's--to M. Baville's arms."

"Yes," she answered, looking up at him, "yes, to return me to my father's arms."

"You will pray, therefore, for my success? It means all you can most desire, all that you can hope for till these troubles are past. Once back in his house, no further harm can come near you; you are safe with him. Nay, even though he were in danger through any further success of theirs, you are still safe. They deem you one of themselves."

"I will pray," she said, "for your success, your prosperity, now and forever--for all that you may undertake. Yet--yet--do you know?--I have almost ceased to pray at all now."

"Oh, oh, God forbid!" he exclaimed, his heart wrung by her words.

"To whom am I to pray? What am I, how am I to approach Him? If I am a Protestant I must pray for his, my father's, downfall; if a Catholic, for the destruction of what I----" She did not finish her sentence, but added instead: "Best never utter prayer at all; forget that from my childhood I have been taught to worship humbly and to never know a petition unheard. Oh," she said, thrusting her hands through the great coils of golden hair that adorned her head, "oh, that I had died on the day you saved my life, that the bullet which pierced my poor *gouvernante's* breast had found mine instead!"

Profoundly touched, moved to the deepest pity and sympathy by her words--the words of one so young and fair, yet, alas! so distraught--he moved nearer to her and, unaware even, perhaps, of his action, took her hand.

"Why," he said, speaking very low, yet with a voice that seemed as music in her ears, "why feel thus, suffer thus? In spite of all the dissensions between our faiths--grant even that you are no Protestant--we worship the same God though we see him with different eyes. Urbaine," he whispered, forgetting as he spoke that he had broken down the barrier of formality which had been between them until now, "if you can not pray for me to-night, can not pray that my efforts may meet with success, how can I depart and leave you here? How go, knowing that your heart is not with me?"

"Not with you?" she whispered in her turn. "Not with you? Alas----" and again broke off, saying no more.

"Urbaine," he continued, emboldened now to repeat softly her name, and perhaps not understanding her repetition of his words, deeming, it may be, that the repetition confirmed them, "Urbaine, your heart, your wishes must go with me, with the cause I undertake. It is the cause of peace and reconciliation, of strengthening your king's hands by winning back his subjects to him. For if this fleet can but get a foothold for its men on shore, Louis must make terms with all who are now beating him down; not only in this fair Languedoc, but over all Europe a lasting peace may ensue. A peace," he continued, still gently yet impressively, "between your land and mine. Yours and mine," he repeated, dwelling, it seemed to her, pleasantly on the coupling of their interests together--"yours and mine."

For answer she only sighed, then she said a moment later:

"Yet to go on this mission may mean death to you. If Montrevel or Julien caught you--O God! it sickens me to think of your peril. They might not know, might not even believe, all that you have done for me. The end would be awful."

"Yet remember also that they would not know, can not know, that I am a Protestant--worse than all else within their eyes, an Englishman. And, not knowing, nothing would be suspected."

"Still I fear," she answered. "Am overcome with horror and anxiety. Oh!" she exclaimed again, "oh! if your reward for your noble chivalry to me should be nothing but disaster. If--if we should never meet again."

"Fear not," he said. "We shall meet again. I know it; it is borne in upon me. We shall meet again. I shall restore you to your father's arms."

Yet, even as he spoke, he remembered the words that Cavalier had uttered under the seal of confidence, the words: "When she has heard what is to be told, it may be she will never seek to return to him, to set eyes on her beloved Intendant again." Remembered them and wondered what they might portend.

As he did so there came into the cavern one of the Camisards, a man who had been deputed to lead him at a given time to where Cavalier was to await his coming. A guide who said briefly that the horses were prepared and ready to set forth at monsieur's pleasure, then went outside to wait for him.

"Farewell, Urbaine," Martin said. "Adieu. Nay, do not weep. All will, all must be, well with you, otherwise I would not leave you. And, remember, once my task is accomplished you are free. It is for that, as for other things, in other hopes, that I go. Bid me Godspeed."

It seemed, however, as if she could not let him depart. Weeping, she clung to his arm, her cheeks bedashed with the tears that ran down them, her hands clasping his. And then, overmastered by her misery, he said that to her which he had never meant to say until, at least, happier days had dawned for both--if, as he sometimes thought, he should ever dare to say it.

"Urbaine," he whispered, "Urbaine, be brave; take heart; pray for me. Listen, hear my last words ere I go. I love you--have loved you since that night we sat beneath the acacias after I had saved you. I shall love you ever--till I die."

* * * * * * *

The moon shone out through deep inky clouds that scurried swiftly beneath her face as Martin and the guide set forth to descend to the spot where Cavalier was to await them. Up here there were no precautions necessary to be taken, since to the higher portions of the Cévennes it was impossible that any enemy could have penetrated from below. The paths that led up to the caves which formed the barracks and dwelling places of the two thousand men who now kept all Languedoc in dread and two of Louis' armies at check were of so narrow and impassable a nature that Thermopylæ itself might have acknowledged them as worthy rivals; and, even had they been less close and tortuous, were so guarded at intervals by pickets of Camisards that none could have surmounted them. Also in many places the route had been made to pass specially over terrible chasms and ravines, since, by so doing, it enabled the defenders of the passes to construct drawbridges which could be lowered or raised at their own pleasure, or, in case of necessity, destroyed altogether.

Yet one precaution had been taken for their journey--a precaution never neglected by those dwellers of the mountains, in case they were forced to take to flight and desired to leave no trace behind them--their animals were shod *backward* on their fore feet, a method which, in conjunction with the usual shoeing of the hind feet, was almost certain to baffle those who should endeavour to follow their tracks.

Beneath that moon which shone fitfully from the deep masses of rain-charged clouds the two men paced in Indian file down the narrow passes, seeing as they went that which, for now many weeks, had been visible to all eyes in the province--namely, the flames of villages on fire at different points of the compass; hearing, too, as they were borne on the winds, the distant ringing of alarm bells and tocsins from many a beleaguered church and monastery. For not only did those flames spring from edifices wherein the old faith was still maintained, but also from the villages and hamlets where some Protestants continued to dwell and worship in their own manner, hoping ever for better, happier days. Already it was calculated that more than forty Romish churches had been destroyed, with, in many cases, the bourgs in which they stood; ere all was over the number was doubled. And already, also, more than that number of Protestant places of worship, with the villages around them, had been pillaged, sacked, and burned by Montrevel and Julien, while, in their case, ere all was over the number was almost trebled.

Thinking of his newly declared love for Urbaine, thinking, too, of how, in whispered words, she had declared her love for him in return, of how in their last hasty embrace, which had been also their first, they had sworn deathless fidelity to each other, Martin took but little heed of those midnight sights telling of happy homes ruined forever which he had now been forced so often to gaze upon from the heights where the Camisards dwelt. He had grown accustomed to these beacons of horror, in spite of the unhappiness they caused him.

But now he saw a new phase of stern justice and punishment at which he could not fail to shudder.

High up upon three gibbets at the wayside by which they passed--gibbets so placed that, when their ghastly burdens should rot from the chains which held them now, they would fall down and down until they reached the bottom of the ravine a thousand feet below--there hung three corpses; swung waving to the mountain air, while ever and anon upon their white but blood-stained faces the moon glinted now and again, making those faces look as though they perspired in her rays, were clammy with sweat. And two grinned hideously in those rays, a bullet wound which had shattered the mouth of one giving to his face the appearance of a man convulsed with laughter, while the smirk of the other face was, in truth, the last grimace of the death agony. The features of the third told naught, since, from a wound in his forehead, there had run out the blood which was now caked and hardened to a mask, hiding all below.

"My God!" exclaimed Martin, with a shiver, "who are they? Men caught here and executed as spys, troopers made prisoners and done to death by the avengers?"

"Nay," replied the man, while he made a contemptuous gesture at the loathsome things that at the moment executed a weird fantastic movement in unison as a fresh gust of wind swept down from the mountains above, making them sway and dance to its cold breath, "nay, vagabonds, *marauds*. Murderers these, not soldiers. Those men are of our number--were of our number--

Protestants--ourselves."

"What, traitors?"

"Ay, traitors--to humanity. Listen! They caught one, a good woman, Madame de Miramand, a Papist, yet a kindly creature who succoured all alike. Also she was young, not twenty, and beautiful. She was *en voyage*"--again Martin shuddered, thinking of another woman young and beautiful who had also been *en voyage*, and almost caught--"had with her her jewels, also her *vaisselles*. Well they slew her even as she knelt before them, stabbed her, left her to die, left her thus as she prayed God to pardon them."

"Go on," Martin said, seeing that he paused.

"God may pardon them," the guide said. "One, however, would not. Cavalier! We caught them, tried them; you see the sentence. It is not women *we* war upon."

As he finished, again the loathsome figures swung to the breeze, again they danced and pirouetted in their chains, while from behind a rock Cavalier himself strode forward.

It was the spot that had been the meeting place appointed with the guide.

"It is true," he said. "We war not with women. Let Montrevel or Julien do that. Or their master--Louis!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"LOVE HER! BEYOND ALL THOUGHT! AND SHE IS THERE."

With the rapidity of wildfire the news had run over all Languedoc at this time--was known, too, and shared by Catholics as well as Protestants--that the English, who once they drew the sword never sheathed it until its work was done, meditated an attack on France in a fresh place, that place being her Mediterranean seaboard, the one spot still free from their assaults up to now, also a spot more vulnerable, since there were scarce any troops to defend it, the armies of Montrevel and Julien being sufficiently occupied in endeavouring, without success, to prevent the terrible reprisals the Camisards were at last making.

And now indeed the desolation of Languedoc was supreme; now, like a torch that flareth in the night, was visible an awful terror upon all of the old faith, as well as the adherents of Louis, who dwelt therein. Men of that old faith barricaded themselves in their houses, refusing to either quit them or let any of their families do so, or to receive bread into those houses in any other way than by baskets raised by cords, either for fear that they should be stabbed to the heart on their doorsteps or that they should add one more body to the many that hung upon the branches of the trees by the wayside--bodies having affixed to their dead breasts the label bearing the words, "*Tous qui tomberont entre les mains des vengeurs seront traités ainsi*." Verily, Languedoc was, as its greatest churchman, Fléchier, said, but one vast gaping wound!

Yet not only was it the avengers who caused the wound. Maddened by defeat, by merciless retaliation on their enemies' part, by their fierce determination to never give or ask for quarter, Baville, Montrevel, and Julien enacted more awful cruelties than had ever yet been practised upon those of the Reformed faith. Again the dungeons of the prisons, the vaults of the cathedrals, which living prisoners shared with the coffined dead, re-echoed with the groans of the former; *les places publiques* were foul with the odour of burning flesh and of corpses that rotted on wheels; the very roofs were laden with carrion birds waiting their opportunity to swoop down and plunge their beaks into the dying; even mothers slew the babes in their arms sooner than see them perish slowly before their eyes from the pangs of thirst and hunger. But still the war went on, if such oppression, such retaliation, could be dignified by the name of war. Went on because from Paris the word still came that none should worship God in their own way, or in any other method than the priests of Rome directed--priests who declared with their lips that the God they served was one of love and mercy, yet sowed with full hands the seeds of violence and trouble, of blood and death.

And now to add to all the terrors that the papists felt at last, to all the fierce joys that the Protestants had begun to thrill with, it was rumoured through the country that some great admiral of the accursed English race, backed up by the Duke of Savoy, was about to land an army at one of the ports with the full intention of assisting the Protestants, and of, so those papists said, establishing Protestantism over all the land. No wonder, therefore, that the priests fled from their churches, that the archbishop said (forgetting how he and his had outraged God for years) that "God had deserted them."

Clad like muleteers in some cases, in others like travelling weavers, and in still others like husbandmen and horse-dealers, some scores of Camisards were making their ways by ones and twos at this period toward Cette, avoiding Montpellier and leaving it to the east of them, and threading the low lands that lay between that diocese and the sister one of D'Agde, for *they* knew where the landing was to be attempted; knew likewise when the English assistance was to be expected. Also--though few were aware of it, and Baville alone, on his side, suspected that such was the case--from Holland, from Geneva, from the villages of the Vaud and Valais, from Canterbury and Spitalfields were coming refugees, some making their way by foot and some on horses. They had been summoned from the lands they had fled to, summoned to return and take part in what was now to be done.

Amid a small band which at this moment drew near to Frontignan there rode Martin Ashurst, his companions being some of the noblest Protestant blood of the province. Also by his side there rode the English agent known as Flottard, a Huguenot whose father had escaped long since into England and who spoke that language better than his own, or rather than the *langue d'oc* which had been his father's.

"And now, *mes frères*," said one of these companions, Ulson de la Valette, who as a boy had been forced to stand before the scaffold of Greonble holding his fainting mother's hand while they witnessed the decapitation of his elder brother *pour cause d'hérésie*, "we must separate, to meet again by Heaven's grace as followers of the English admiral. Monsieur, read the route to our friends," and he turned to a man clad as a monk. He had in truth been one who had but recently been unfrocked at Rome on suspicion of heretic principles, and had now openly avowed Protestantism, while still retaining the gown as a disguise.

"This is the route," the monk answered, producing from his breast a paper which, in the clear light of the dawn, he read from. "You, De la Valette, and you, Fontanes, will pass straight on to Frontignan. You, *messieurs les Anglais*," and he glanced at Martin and Flottard, "will proceed through La Susc; the rest must distribute themselves and travel through the villages of Sainte Bréze, Collanze, and Le Test. Yet, remember, Baville has warned every *aguet*, every watchman, every village consul and river guard. Capture and discovery mean death."

"The meeting-place," said Ulson de la Valette, "of all of us is the plain of Frontignan, 'twixt that and the great port. The signal will be the landing of the first English troops, the entry of the first ship of war. The password is 'God and his children.' My friends, farewell; yet, as you ride, forget not to pray for success. If God is on our side now we are avenged and Louis beaten down under our feet. We shall triumph."

A moment later all had parted, dispersing quietly after a hand-shake round, and each going alone, Martin and Flottard remaining behind for some little while so as not to follow too hurriedly upon the footsteps of the others.

"Yet," said Flottard in English, which he spoke like a native, "we must part too, Monsieur Martin. I have to enter Bouziques if I can; 'tis full of disguised Savoyards and some of your--our--land. You will, I should suppose, join Sir Cloudesley Shovel?"

"As agent," Martin replied, "not combatant. My mission is to lead his troops if possible to Montpellier and Nîmes, to act as guide."

"It will not save your neck if you are caught," Flottard said with a laugh.

"There is no thought of that," Martin answered, hurt and annoyed that the man should suppose this was his consideration. "But--but--I have other things to do. To me are to be confided the arms, ammunition, and money which the English fleet brings. Also, with the exception of you and me, there is no one who can speak English."

"And," repeated Flottard, "there is no one the French will punish as ferociously as they will punish us--for I am English too now--if we are caught."

"They can do no worse by us than by their own," Martin replied quietly.

Afterward, when they had parted, Flottard taking his way to Bouzique while Martin rode on quietly toward Cette, he, musing deeply on all which might be the outcome of the proposed attack by the English admiral, told himself that, even were it possible for his punishment to be made five thousand times worse than anything which had ever been dealt out to the Protestants, nothing should stop him now but death. He loved Urbaine Ducaire; had loved her, as he had said, since first he saved her life, since they had sat together beneath the sweet-scented blossoms of the acacia trees on that soft summer night amid the desolation of the land; he should love her till the end. And--and Cavalier had promised that, if he helped their cause now, on his return he should lead Urbaine forth a free woman; should return her safe and unharmed to Baville's arms, even though Baville was the most hated name the Camisards knew.

Cavalier would keep his word. That he never doubted. Only there was the future to be thought upon--the afterward. His love for her and hers for him. How was that love ever to be brought to a happy fruition? How? How? How? Would Baville give her to him, a Protestant, even though it were proved, as Cavalier had said it could now be proved beyond all doubt, that Urbaine was herself born in that faith? Give her to him, an Englishman, a native of the land which had

wrought much disaster on France through innumerable centuries, that was even now closing its grasp of steel upon France and crushing the very life-blood out of all its pores? Would Baville, the Tiger of Languedoc, ever consent to such a union as they projected, the fulfilment of the troth which they had plighted?

One hope there was, he reflected: a hope that at least the question of faith might not prove an insurmountable object. For though Baville was of the old faith, though in the name of that faith and at the instigation of its chiefs he had wrought innumerable cruelties, had broken countless hearts and driven thousands to despair, religion had been but a war cry with him, a banner under which to march. As a papist he was but an indifferent one. He had said, had owned as much more than once, that it was duty which led him to be severe, to crush down rebellion, to exalt the King's authority. He would have acted in precisely the same manner as he had recently acted had France been Protestant and had the *attroupés* been papists. "*Il est plus royaliste que le Roi!*" Urbaine had said of him once in speaking to Martin; "and to him the soil of France and the power of Louis are the most sacred things he knows, except one other, his duty. The King made him governor of Languedoc; in his mind Languedoc exists for the King alone. Forgive him all for his loyalty, his obedience to duty."

As he reflected on this, trying to pierce the future, endeavouring to see one glimmering ray of hope amid all the darkness which enveloped that future, he drew near to where the port of Cette was; in the warm autumn air with which these southern plains were suffused, it seemed almost as if he scented the breezes of the great blue sea beyond. Also it seemed as if already the balm of the myriad flowers which adorn its shores was surrounding him, as if, with the bright rays of the sun, a promise was heralded of peace and happiness at last.

It behooved him to be careful how he progressed, for all the countryside was in a state of alarm. The English fleet had been seen out at sea two days before! Also it was known to all the King's followers that a descent was intended, while a regiment of dragoons marching swiftly to the coast had given the information that, from the towers of the cathedral at Montpellier, that fleet had been seen approaching Maqualone. While even a worse cause for alarm was the rumour that Cavalier with six hundred Camisards had passed by a circuitous route toward Cette, and was now waiting on the beach to welcome the English invaders.

Yet, furnished with papers which Flottard had caused to be procured from Paris, not only Martin but most of the refugees who had of late returned to the south of France managed to reach the coast ere night fell, to reach the shore, there to await the coming of those who were to land and succour them--a shore upon which were those Camisards who, setting out with Cavalier long after Martin had departed, had by a forced march contrived to reach Cette ere he and his companions were able to do so, owing to the *détours* they had made; a sandy, shingly beach, from which, as now the warm night closed in on them, all gazed upon what they saw before them.

Two large ships of war (their names were afterward known to be the Pembroke and the Tartar) which through that night made signals frequently that, none understanding, remained unanswered. Signals arranged by the Earl of Nottingham (who, after many compunctions against assisting rebels in arms, even though in arms against a king hostile to England, had consented to Shovel making the attack), the key to which he had forwarded to Peytaud, a Protestant but recently returned from Holland. But Peytaud had been caught that morning ere he could reach Cette; the signals had been found upon him, and, at the time that the Pembroke and the Tartar were showing their masthead lights, the unfortunate man's body was lying broken all to pieces on a wheel in the crossroads outside Aiguësmortes.

And there were no duplicates! The signals remained unanswered. Later on Cavalier said that he did not know these were the ships of war, but in the darkness took them to be fishermen's boats. Had he known, he averred that he would have swam out to them rather than have missed so great a chance.

In the morning when day broke the topsails of these vessels were seen to fill. Soon they were gone.

The hoped-for chance was lost, and lost forever. The tide no longer served; nothing could have been then landed from the English ships, nor could they have remained where they were. Already the galleys armed to the teeth had put out in dozens to attack them. On the horizon there rose the topmasts of a great French fleet coming swiftly from Toulon.

And by Martin's side upon the desolate shore stood Cavalier, the picture of despair.

"The opportunity is gone," he said; "gone also our last chance for making peace. It is war now to the end. Yet had your countrymen but got ashore the struggle would have been over; hampered on all sides, Louis must have yielded, have made terms. God help us all!" and he turned away to bid his followers disperse and make their way back by the routes and by-paths which they knew of to the mountains.

As he did so there came through the crowd of Camisards one whom Martin had seen before, a gaunt, haggard man, with an arm missing--an arm which, it was said, had withered under the cruelties the Abbé du Chaila had practised on this Cévenole while he had him in his power at Montvert, so that, when at last the man was freed, it had to be removed.

"Cavalier," he said, "Cavalier, friend and leader, bid them also hasten on their way; lose no time. You have heard the news?"

"No! What?"

"Montrevel and Julien have forced the passes, taking advantage of our absence. Roland, too, is away. The caverns are besieged. All in them are lost."

"Lost! Pshaw! They will stand a siege of all Louis' armies."

"Ay, they will. But it is not for siege that the *battue* is arranged. Those in the caverns are caught in a *blocus*; they can make no *sortie*. Outside, fires have been made. Hurry! or you will find nothing but smoke-dried corpses when you return."

As he spoke there fell upon his ears a heartbroken gasp. Turning his eyes, they lighted upon Martin--Martin who, white to the lips and palsied with horror, could only mutter, "Urbaine! Urbaine. And she is there!"

"Ay!" said Cavalier fiercely, "she is there. The blow falls as heavily on Baville as on us----" Then paused in his speech. Paused to say in an altered, gentle tone a moment later to Martin, "I see! See all! You love her?"

"Love her! My God," Martin replied, "beyond all thought! And she is there!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"AN ERRAND OF LIFE OR DEATH."

Through the fair, sweet land known as the *Département Hérault* Martin rode north, toward where the mountains lay, in the darkness of the autumn night, like purple shadows hovering over the earth; rode recklessly, as though caring little whether he or the horse he bestrode found death at the next step. Recklessly, as it seemed to the startled shepherds guarding their flocks of Narbonne sheep in their huts of reeds and clay, and peering out as the horseman dashed by, the moon illuminating his pale face so that, but for the clatter of the creature's hoofs, they would scarcely have known whether 'twas a spectre or a living thing which flew past. Recklessly, too, as it seemed to peasants sleeping in their cottages, and aroused by that clatter only to turn on their beds and sleep again. Recklessly, threateningly, as perhaps it may have seemed to startled fawns and timorous hares and rabbits, fleeing helter-skelter into vineyards where grew the luscious Lunel and Genistoux grapes, or into underbush where lurked the famed and dreaded viper of the south.

But reckless as that hurried course might seem, wild and furious as the ride of Gary from London to Edinburgh, to tell James that the great Queen was dead and he was King of England as well as of Scotland, it was not so in truth, and, though swift and unhalting, was neither foolhardy nor rashly impetuous. He was too good a horseman, also too kindly-hearted a man, to spur a willing beast above its best endeavours. Yet he knew well enough that beyond breathing spells in cool copses, where the moon flung down on to the thick grass the shadowy lacery of leaves which quivered in the night breezes, and beyond halts at trickling rivulets so that the panting creature might drink and be refreshed, there must be no delay. None if he would reach Montrevel or Julien ere the worst had fallen; if he would be in time to tell them that, amid those whom they sought to murder and burn in the caves they had surrounded, was the fairest woman in all Languedoc, the child of Baville's heart, Urbaine Ducaire.

Also he knew the dangers that lurked in his path; knew how, all along the road he went, were countless soldiers out seeking for *attroupés*; men who, not knowing what his mission was and perceiving that he bore no signs about him of royal scarlet, or lace, or accoutrements, would send a dozen bullets at his back, any one of which would hurl him from his saddle to the ground a corpse. Nay, once such had almost been the case. Refusing to halt at the village of St. Jean le Bon, from a tavern had come a shower of such missiles, which, by God's mercy, had only hissed harmlessly past, though by the shock he felt beneath him he knew that his saddle had been struck.

The dawn was nigh as at last he neared Lunel. He knew it by the deeper chill of the air, by the changing lividness of the summits of the distant mountains, and by the vanishing of the purple darkness from their caps and spurs and ridges. If the horse he rode could reach that town he might get a change of animal and so ride on and on, and on again, until he was within the outlines of Montrevel and Julien.

"Away!" Cavalier had said to him as, after weary waiting, the evening fell over Cette and he

was free at last to commence his journey. All day he had fretted and stormed at having to remain until the night came, though forced to do so, since to have started on that wild ride by daylight would have been, in the state of the locality, simply to invite destruction. "Away! God grant you may be in time! If they spare her they must spare the others, as, if they slay them, they must slay her. And--and--we shall be close behind you. If Montrevel and Julien have got into our mountains, may the devil, their master, help them! They will never get out again; we have them in a trap."

And he laughed bitterly while repeating aloud the word "Away!" Also he added, "If you can but induce them to hold their hands for twenty-four hours we will do the rest."

Lunel came nearer and nearer now. He thanked God again and again that still the horse beneath him did not falter, still swept on in an even, easy stride. Already he could see in the morning air, now clear and bright, the great wooden spire of its church, which up to now had escaped destruction. And he remembered how Cavalier had told him to have no fear in entering it, since neither papists nor Protestants had made any attack upon it because it was principally inhabited by Jews from Marseilles, who, from the days of Philip of Valois, had been permitted to dwell within it, they taking, as was natural, no share in the troubles with which the province was torn.

Nearer and nearer, close now, its one peaked, *calotte*-roofed tower, which faced to the south, standing up like an arrow pointing to the sky in the cool light of the swift advancing dawn.

Close now, and hammering on the great gray storm-beaten door of the ramparts, against which for centuries the *mistral* and the *bise* had howled and flung themselves on winter nights and days; on which all through the summer the southern sun had glared. Hammering with pistol-butt and clenched hand, loud enough to arouse the dead, and calling:

"Awake! Open! Open! In God's name open!"

"*Hola!*" a voice shouted answeringly from within. "No more. Cease. I come! 'In God's name.' Good! You give the password. 'Tis well!" the utterance being mingled with the grating of a key in a lock and the rumbling of a bar. And Martin divined that by a chance, a miracle, he had uttered the royalist sign.

A moment later the gate was open wide. Before it stood a lean, gray-haired warder, the very counterpart of Cervante's hero, fastening the tags of his jacket with one hand as he threw back the door with the other.

"Monsieur rides in haste," he said, seeing that he had a gentleman to do with, though no soldier clad in *bleu royal* or scarlet, as he had expected. "What is the news you carry? Have the accursed English landed, the vile Protestants captured the port?"

"Nay," answered Martin, "but I ride on an errand of life or death. I must reach Baville; above all, Montrevel or Julien. They know not what they do."

"What they do! What is't? I have heard they barricade themselves in Uzès and Alais, yet thousands strong! Soldiers! Bah! Tosspots and *vauriens*, afraid of a beggarly set of goatherds. *Dieu des Dieux!* 'twas not so when I rode behind Condé."

"You are mistaken. They are in the mountains, putting all to fire and sword. Above all, to fire. And among those whom they will slay--they know her not--is Baville's child. Friend, as you have loved ones of your own, help me to a fresh horse. This one is spent."

"It is," the warder said, all action now and regarding the smoking flanks of the poor beast. "Antoine, *petit*," he called, "out of your bed, *dindon*. A bucket of water, quick. And for you, monsieur, a sup," whereon he ran into his lodge and came back carrying a great *outre*, from out of which he poured a flask of amber-coloured liquor. "'Tis of the best," he said, and winked as he did so. "Hein! 'tis Chastelneuf. Three years in vat. Down with it."

"Another horse, another horse!" Martin exclaimed after he had swallowed the wine and thanked the man. "In Heaven's name put me in the way of that. I must on--on."

"Off!" said the man to a boy who had now come from his lodge, half dressed, as though he had but just tumbled out of his bed; a boy who was by now holding a bucket to the horse's thirsty mouth. "Off, Antoine, to the Jew. He has the cattle. If you have money," he added to Martin. "Without it you will get naught from any of his tribe."

"I have enough. Fifty gold pistoles."

"Show them not to him, or he will want all. Bargain, traffic, *marchandise*. 'Tis the only way."

Led by the boy and leading now the steed, with the warder calling after him that it was strange he had heard naught of what he related, "for his part, he believed he was misinformed, and that Montrevel and Julien were doing nothing but eating and drinking up all in the land like locusts," Martin went down the street, none of the inhabitants seeming yet awake. It was as silent and empty as a deserted city.

In front of a cross in a market place--a cross which the fiery Anjou had caused to be erected there to remind the Jews of their fathers' sins, as he said--the boy paused and, pointing to a house with large, capacious stables by its side, observed:

"'Tis there that Elie lives. Beat him up, monsieur, beat him up," and Martin, following his advice, seized the great copper knocker and hammered with it as lustily as, some minutes earlier, he had hammered to arouse the warder.

Because strange, fantastic thoughts and memories come to us even in our most bitter moments, so to Martin there came now the thought that the face, which a moment later appeared at a window above, might well have served Nokes, the comedian, whom he had often supped with at Pontac's, for a model of the apothecary in Mantua. A face lean and hatchet-nosed, fleshless almost as the face of one dying of starvation, the eyes deep sunken above the beak-like nose.

"What is't?" this man asked. "What does monsieur desire at such an hour?"

"A horse. A horse at once that will carry me to----"

"Horses are dear just now. The army needs all."

"I will pay well. Come down and supply me. Quick, every moment is precious."

"So are horses. Yet I will descend. I have a good animal, but it cost me much."

A moment later he appeared at his door, a thick cudgel in his hand as though to guard against any sudden attack that might be made upon him, and said:

"The animal I have is worth a hundred gold pistoles."

"Bah! I have not so much about me."

"How much have you?"

"Twenty."

"Twenty for such an animal! Father of Abraham and Isaac! Twenty gold pistoles for such a creature!" and he made as though he would re-enter his house.

"Let him go, monsieur," whispered the boy with a grin, "he will come back. *N'ayez pas peur*. Oh! *avec ça*, we know him."

The lad spoke truly, for even as Martin, cursing himself for trafficking thus at such a moment, resolved to fling his purse of fifty pieces down before the man and bid him bring out the horse, the Jew's vulpine beak and pendulous underlip appeared again from behind the door.

"Will you give twenty-five?"

"Show me the horse."

A little later, in accordance with some whispered instructions to another person behind the door, a Jewish maiden was seen leading a horse from out the stable yard at the side, an animal of an ordinary type, yet looking sturdy and as though quite capable of carrying Martin to Alais and the mountains beyond.

"Twenty-five?" the Jew asked, leering.

"Yes, twenty-five. Help me"--to the boy--"to change saddle and bridle," which the lad did willingly enough. But the Hebrew's instincts were stronger than aught else. As they began to do this he shrieked:

"Ah, mother of Moses, the girl is mad. She has brought the wrong beast. Oh! Oh! Oh! This can not go under fifty pistoles."

"It is too late to change," Martin said grimly. "The beast is mine," and he produced his purse and told out twenty-five pistoles. Then, tossing the boy a crown, he said: "Keep my horse for me until I come this way again or send for it, and I will reward you well. Treat it carefully. Farewell. The road to Nîmes and Alais? Where is the gate?"

The boy indicated it amid the shrieks of the Jew, who now yelled he was robbed; that he meant twenty-five gold pistoles with the other's horse thrown in; how else could he part with such an animal for a beggarly twenty-five? And amid a tussle between the lad on one side and the Abrahamite and the girl on the other, in which the former seemed quite able to hold his own and retain his charge, Martin rode down the street to the Nîmes gate.

Once more he was upon the road. Nearer to his love, to her who had dawned a star above his life--the woman in deadly peril for whom, as he tightened rein and pressed flank, he prayed God's mercy. Prayed also that he might not be too late, not too late.

The autumn sun beat down upon his head, fierce as July suns in more northern lands. The

skies were like brass. There was no air to fan his cheek except that which his own swift passage caused. Yet he never felt or heeded the former, nor missed the latter; there was but one thought in his mind--Urbaine! Urbaine! Urbaine!

Lunel was left behind him, had dwindled to a spot. He cursed the leagues of *détour* he had to make to reach Nîmes first, find Baville, and warn him of the awful danger of the girl if still she lived--oh, God! if still she lived!--procure his order to those battue-making butchers to hold their hands, possess himself of it, and hurry on to the mountains, That, that was all he could do, yet he would accomplish it or reel from his saddle to the road--dead.

Through Vergese he went, seeing the cool wooden slopes of Les Vaquerolles on his left, shouting the password he had by Heaven's grace learned so opportunely to all who endeavoured to arrest his flight; on, on to Milbaud and Saint Cesare. And at last Nîmes was ahead of him. He saw it now. The Temple of Diana rose before his eyes, solitary and majestic as the Romans had left it two thousand years before; rose, too, beneath the brassy shimmer, the white marble columns of Agrippa's sons and the city walls.

Yet also arose something else toward the heavens which startled, amazed him.

Stealing up into the yellow haze, a spiral column twined snakily until it seemed to be merged in the sky, a column white and fleecy at first, then black at its base, and, later, black up all its length. Next, tinged flame-colour--soon flame itself. Flame which leaped up in countless tongues as though with its great flecks and flickers it aspired to lick the canopy above, flame in which now were mixed black specks and daubs borne up upon its fiery breath.

Nîmes was burning. It was impossible to doubt it.

Set on fire by whom? Camisards descending from the mountains, or perchance, though that seemed impossible, by Camisards returning from Cette. Or by the King's forces. Yet, why that? It was the royalist stronghold, the royalist base. It could scarce be that.

Spurring his horse, he urged it to its fullest speed through the last remaining half-league of road running through fields of crimson-flowered sainfoin and beneath the yellow-green, sweet-scented limes. On, while now above the broadleaved trees the smoke rose thicker and thicker. On, scarce knowing why he rode thus or what he had to do in Nîmes except to find Baville if he were there; to tell him no burning city mattered one jot to him in comparison with what was doing, might be done by now, up in those mountains five leagues off which lay bathed in the golden haze of the noontide heat.

He saw the great southern gate open before him, no warders by it. Doubtless they were in the city trying to save it from the flames; from the gate itself he saw people issuing, running. Some--among others two old gray-haired people, man and woman--wringing their hands; also a great burly *cordelier*, his fat face suffused with an oily smile.

"What--what is it?" he cried, reining in his horse. "What fresh horror now?"

"Murder! Cruelty unparalleled!" the old gray-haired man said, his look of terror awful to behold. "Wickedness extreme! Montrevel is there, Julien is there; they have caught the Protestants in the great mill, have barred them in, they can not escape. And they are burning it. All, all must perish."

"Montrevel--Julien--there! It is impossible. They are in the mountains burning the Protestants *there!*" Martin exclaimed.

"Nay, nay, my son," the greasy monk exclaimed, chiming in, "that was but a heaven-inspired ruse to catch the others in the trap. They are here. They slaughter the heretics, *par le fer et par le feu*, as Montrevel says. Here! Here! My son, make your way in. Join the good work."

CHAPTER XXV.

PAR LE FER ET PAR LE FEU.

He made his way in.

Entered by the Porte des Carmes, to find himself in the midst of a seething mass of people who shouted and gesticulated while pushing each other to and fro, some doing so in their anxiety to escape from out the city, others endeavouring to force themselves farther into it and toward the Canal de la Gau, which was near the gate. A mass of people who seemed infuriated, beyond the bounds of reason, to frenzy, who shouted and screamed, "*Au glaive, au glaive avec les*

héritéques. Kill all! Burn all! Now is the time." While others shrieked, "To the mill, to the mill!" as onward they went in the direction of the canal.

He had put his horse up in a stall behind the gate, tethering it to a peg alongside one or two other animals which, by their trappings, evidently belonged to some dragoons; and now, borne on by the crowd, Martin went the same way, keeping his feet with difficulty yet still progressing, progressing toward where he saw the flames ascending, darting through dense masses of black smoke, roaring as a vast furnace roars. Toward the mill that, all said, was the place which was on fire; the mill in which there were three hundred people--women, children, and old, decrepit, useless men, old, aged Protestants who could not take to the mountains--being burned to death; the mill in which they had been worshipping God in their own fashion.

"Tell me," Martin besought a bystander, big, brawny, and muscular, whom he found by his side and who, in spite of his splendidly developed manhood, wept, dashing the tears fiercely away from his eyes every moment. "Tell me what has happened. Tell me, I beg you."

"Murder! Butchery! A crime that will ring down the ages. Montrevel is burning three hundred helpless ones in Mercier's mill." Then he paused, casting his eyes over Martin's riding dress (stained now with the dust of his long rides) and upon his lace at breast and throat, smirched and dirty from continued wear. Paused to say: "What are you? a *seigneur*, I see. But of which side? The butchers or the slaughtered?"

"I am of the Reformed faith."

"Of Nîmes?" the man asked. "If so, God help you. Your mother or your babe may be burning there and you powerless to succour them. Montrevel's wolves surround the mill. He is there too, mad with wine and lust of blood. If there is any woman or child you love in Nîmes at this moment, God help you."

"She whom I love is not here. But, alas! can we do nothing? You wear a sword as I do? We can strike a blow----"

"Do! What can we do? There are two hundred dragoons there. What will our blades avail, though we were the best *ferrailleurs* in France?" Then suddenly he cried, "See, there is the slaughter-house!"

He spoke truly. The burning mill was before them.

A sight to freeze one's blood, to turn that blood to ice even beneath the sky of brass, even before the hot flames that darted forth, licking up, devouring all.

It stood, an ancient building of stone foundations and wooden superstructure. They said the former dated back to Cæsar's day, the latter to that of Charles le Bel, upon the banks of the canal as it would never stand again, since now it was nothing but a mass of burning fuel. Also a human hecatomb, there being within it the ashes of three hundred human beings whose bodies had that morning been consumed. And Martin blessed God that he had not been there to hear their piercing shrieks, their cries for mercy and their supplications.

Around the nearly destroyed mill, except on one side where it adjoined an inn, "La Rose de Provence," the front of which was all singed and scarred, he saw the executioners, the men who had been soldiers, fierce yet valiant, until this morning, but who were now worthy of no nobler name than that of cowardly murderers. Dragoons, Croatian Cravates, now Prance's most bloody swashbucklers with one exception, the Miquelets, those fierce Pyrenean tigers, as well as *chevaux-légers* and countless numbers of the *milice*. And near them, his sword drawn, his face inflamed with drink and fury, his breast a mass of ribbons and orders, was Montrevel upon his horse, a scandal to the *bâton* he had lately gained.

"Murderer! Assassin! Brave butcher of women and babes," howled many in the crowd, one half of which was Protestant, "noble papist! you have done your work well. Yet beware of Cavalier and Roland!"

And even as they so shouted, from more than one window high up in the roofs there came little puffs of smoke and spits of flame, showing that he was aimed at. Only the devil protected him. His time was not yet come. He was mad now with fury or drink, or thirst for human blood. Mad, stung to frenzy by resistance and contempt, even in spite of all that he had done that morning, of having glutted his ire on the helpless, which should have sufficed, all heard him roar:

"*Finissons!* Nîmes is heretic to the core. Make an end of it. *Avancez, mes soldats*. Burn, destroy, slaughter. Kill all." And he turned his horse toward where the crowd was thickest and bade the carnage begin, marshalling his troops into companies the better to distribute them about the doomed city.

But now there stepped forth one--Sandricourt, Governor of Nîmes--who forbade him to do that which he threatened; warned him that if one more house or street was injured he would himself that night set forth for Paris, and tell Louis that Montrevel was unworthy of the command he held in this distracted province.

"Ha! Sandricourt, 'tis Sandricourt," whispered one in a knot of Protestants standing near to where Martin and the man he had accosted were. "He is the best, he and Fléchier, bishop though he is. If all were like them--if Baville were--then--then we might live in peace, not see nor know the awful terrors we have seen this day. Oh, the horror of it! the horror of it!" and he buried his face in his hands as though to hide some sight that he feared might blast him.

Baville! The name recalled the man to Martin's memory. Nay, it did more, far more than that. Recalled his love, Urbaine. Set him wondering, too, if by any chance this holocaust had taken place at the Intendant's suggestion; if this was a vengeance on those who had destroyed her. For he must deem her dead by now; weeks had passed since she disappeared. Had he set the shambles fresh running with blood to avenge her loss?

He must see Baville at once, must tell him she was safe. Thereby, perhaps, more slaughter might be averted.

"Where is Baville?" he asked, turning to the group of terrified Protestants by his side. "Is he in this carnage?"

"God, he knows," one replied. "Yet he has not appeared. Not since this commenced. Were you here at the beginning?"

"Nay, I arrived but now. Is it true, can it be true there are three hundred destroyed within that?" and he glanced toward the *débris* of the mill, the superstructure now nothing but ashes and charred beams, with, lying above them, the red tiles of what had been a roof ere it fell in, burying beneath it--what?

"It is true, it is true," the man wailed. Then, composing himself, he told of all that had gone before. "They were at prayer," he said, "in there, in Mercier's mill. I myself and Prosper Roumilli," indicating one of the men by his side. "Also Antoine La Quoite and Pierre Delamer," nodding to two others near him, "were hastening to join them; all grieved that we were too late. Late, *grand Dieu!* What have we not escaped?"

"Death and destruction," whispered La Quoite, trembling.

"Ay, death and destruction. *Hélas!* they raised their songs of thanksgiving too loud. Their *cantiques* told where they were, reached the ears of that murderer there who was at his breakfast----"

"He was," again interrupted La Quoite, "with the woman, Léonie Sabbat. A fitting companion. She can drink even him beneath the table."

"Furious he left that table, summoned a battalion, passed swiftly here, surrounded the mill. Furious, too, because as they passed the cathedral he heard the organ blow, knew that Fléchier worshipped too, mad and savage because during such time we should also worship God in our own way."

"Yet our day will come," murmured Pierre Delamer, "it will come. I am old, yet shall I not die until it comes."

"The soldiers burst open the door," went on the original speaker, "rushed in among them sabres in hand, slew many. Yet this was too slow for him----"

"It was," exclaimed La Quoite. "He said they would be three hundred minutes slaying three hundred people thus. Too slow! He drew off his men, closed the doors, set fire to the mill. You see the end," and he pointed to the ashes of the ruined place, ashes that were also something else besides the remains of the mill.

Again the first speaker took up the story, Martin feeling sick unto death as he stood by and heard.

"From within there came the shouts of the lost, the piercing cries, the heartrending shrieks. Midst burst walls, at windows, upon the roof, we saw the death-doomed appear. Flying spectres, phantoms, upon them the wounds the soldiers had made, black, singed by the flames. And then, O God! the sight passed man's endurance."

"What next?" asked Martin, white to the lips.

"What next? This: With their new weapons, the accursed *baïonnettes*, the soldiers thrust back into the flames those whom the could get at; those whom they could not reach they fired at. We saw them fall back shrieking. Yet in God's mercy their shrieks ceased soon--there were none left."

"But one," exclaimed the man called La Quoite, "a girl, *pauvre petite fillette!* She escaped so far as to reach the ground unhurt, to escape their blades, although they held them up as she jumped from the window, so that thereby she might be impaled. But they missed her, and, running toward Montrevel, she shrieked for mercy. Poor child, poor child! not more than fifteen--than fifteen!"

"His lackey," struck in Delamer, "had more mercy than the master. He helped her to escape

from out the hands of the soldiers."

"Thank God there was a man, a human heart, among them," murmured Martin.

"Ay, yet it availed little. The brigand ordered her to the hangman's hands, also the lackey. The gibbet was prepared. Both would have died but that a Catholic woman, *une sœur de la misériсorde*, upon her knees--Heaven's blessings light upon her!--besought him by the God whom all worship equally to give them their lives."

"And he yielded?"

"He yielded. He spared these two, though an hour later the lackey was thrown outside the gate of Nîmes, his master bidding him go hang or drown himself, or join his friends, *les Protestants*, whereby once more he might fall into his hands."

"There is one good piece of news yet to be told," whispered La Quoite, who was a man of fiercer mood than the others. "In the *mêlée* the soldiers sabred many of the Catholics unwittingly. God be praised!" and he laughed harshly.

And now the end of this day's work had come. Montrevel had left the spot. Behind him went the dragoons and *milices*. The butchery was over. He should have been well satisfied with his morning.

Yet it scarcely looked as though he were so. His eyes glared around him as he rode off, his hand clutched convulsively the sword laid across his horse's mane. No wonder that they said afterward, when his recall came and the noble and merciful Villars replaced him, that on that day he was mad as the long-chained and infuriated panther is mad. He had met with nothing but defeat and disaster since he had marched into Languedoc *tambours battants*; nothing but scorn and contempt and derision from the mountaineers whom he had sworn to crush beneath his heel; had received nothing but reproof from headquarters.

"Baville must be somewhere near," Martin said to La Quoite as they watched him ride forth from the scene of carnage. "Where is he?"

"I know not; yet, doubtless, not far. And he too is mad for the death of his loved one. God grant he is not close at hand; that none of us fall into his clutches. He would spur Montrevel on to fresh attempts."

Yet La Quoite's prayer found no echo in Martin's heart. He wished to find Baville, desired to see him, to stand face to face with him and tell him that Urbaine was safe. For safe she must be even after this massacre, safe even though in Cavalier's hands.

Had he not said that he knew for certain she too was a Protestant, as they were--*une Huguenote!*

NOTE.--Justice requires it to be said that, of all the Roman Catholic writers who have described and written upon the slaughter at the mill in Nîmes, not one has approved of it, or attempted to exonerate Montrevel. In truth, this awful outrage was the brutality of a rude, ungovernable soldier and not of a priest; and Fléchier, Bishop of Nîmes, was loud in its condemnation. It led to Montrevel's recall and to the arrival of Marshal Villars, who at last restored peace to Languedoc by the use of clemency and mercy. Such peace was not, however, to take place for some time.

Also it should be stated that Baville was quite free from any part in this matter, and that Louis XIV knew nothing of what had happened, nor indeed of any of the terrible events which occurred about the same time, it being the system of Madame de Maintenon and of Chamillart to keep him in ignorance of what was being enacted so far away from Versailles. It has been told that when he heard of the massacre at the mill he was observed to weep for the first and only time in his life. He might well do so!

CHAPTER XXVI.

DOOMED.

Remembering that his horse (which he would require ere long to carry him to the mountains, since although, as he had thanked God again and again, Urbaine was in no danger, Baville would doubtless desire him to obtain her release at once) had been left in the stables behind the Porte des Carmes, Martin made his way there. Went toward the gate, resolved to fetch it away and

place it in some more secure spot than the one in which several dragoons had tied up theirs ere dismounting.

Reaching the yard, he found the animal; found also that the dragoons must have preceded him, since now all their horses were gone excepting one, which, by its caparisons and trappings, by the great gold sun upon the bridle, the throat-plume and saddle-flaps, as well as by its fleecy bear-skin saddle-cloth, was plainly an officer's.

"A fine beast," he mused as, ere he removed his own horse, he held a bucket of water to its mouth, "a fine beast. Too good to be employed in carrying its rider to such work as he and his men have been about to-day."

As he thought thus he heard the heavy ring of spurred boots upon the rough flags of the yard, also the clang of a metal scabbard-tip on them, and, glancing round, saw coming toward him a young dragoon officer, his face flushed, perhaps with the heat, perhaps with the business that he and his troops had been recently employed upon.

"*Peste!*" the man exclaimed as he came up to his own steed and began unfastening the bridle from the staple to which it was attached. "*Peste!* Hot work, monsieur, this morning, what with the glaring sun and the flames from the mill. *N'est-ce pas, monsieur?* Yet, yet I wish those heretics had not been of the feeble. It is no soldier's work slaughtering babes and women and *vieillards*. My God!" he broke off, exclaiming, a moment later, "So it is you, villain!"

"What!" exclaimed Martin, astonished at this sudden change of speech and regarding him as though he were a madman. "What! *Villain!* To whom does monsieur apply that word?" and the look upon his face should have warned the young man to be careful of his words.

"To whom," the other sneered, however, "to whom? To whom should I apply it but one? Who else is there in the stable-yard but you to whom it would apply? And if there were fifty more, I should still address it to you. Also the word murderer."

"To me! Are you mad that you assault a stranger thus with such opprobrium? Answer, or, being sane, draw the weapon by your side."

"Which is that which I intend to do. Yet I know not whether you are fit to cross blades with. You! You!"

"You will know it shortly," Martin said quietly, as now he drew his own sword and stood before him, "unless, that is, you have some very tangible explanation of your words to offer."

"Explanation! Explanation! Oh, *avec ça!* you shall have an explanation. Are you not the fellow who sat on the bridge when De Peyre's dragoons rode into Montvert after the murder of the Abbé du Chaila? Are you not the man who led the attack on the Intendant's daughter, dragging her from her carriage, carried her off to the mountains, to your accursed *attroupés*; doubtless assisted in her murder? Answer that, *maraud*, and tell no lies."

And even as he spoke he struck at him with the gauntlet he held in his hand, muttering, "I loved her, I loved her, and I will slay you." Then said again, "Answer ere I slay you."

"I will answer you," said Martin quietly still--so quietly, yet ominously, that, had the man before him not been a soldier, he would have been well advised to flee from out the yard. "But it must be later; when I have stretched you at my feet for your insolence. You shall have the explanation when I have paid you back that blow, when your soul is hurrying to join your victims of this morning."

His blood was up now. The abusive words of the soldier; the sting of the heavy gauntlet still upon his cheek; perhaps, though that he scarce recognized, the feeling of hate against this swashbuckler for having dared to dream of loving Urbaine--all combined to make him resolute to kill the man before him. Also the horror, the disgust, that every effort he had made, every danger he had run, should be subjected to such misinterpretation, added to the accusation, if any addition were needed, that doubtless he had murdered her. For the first time in the course of this unholy war his weapon was unsheathed, about to be used. It should not find its scabbard again till it was wet with this man's life blood.

"Have I been mistaken?" the soldier said, astonished by his words, above all by his calm. "Made some strange error?"

"You have. No greater in your life than that foul blow. Put up your weapon before you, or I run you through as you stand here. Quick, *en garde*. I am neither 'woman, babe, nor *vieillard*.'"

"If it must be, it must----"

"It must!"

"*Soit!* If you will have it so."

The yard was large enough for any pair of *escrimeurs* to make fair play in, yet had it been smaller it would have well sufficed, as the dragoon found. Found that he had his master here

before him, a man in whose hands he was a child; a fencer who would not let him move from the spot he was on, except backward slowly to the wall. And that not by his own desire, but because the iron wrist in front of him rendered resistance to its owner's will impossible.

Sword-play such as this he had never known, nor an adversary who parried every thrust as he made it, yet never lunged himself, reserving, doubtless, all his strength for that lunge at last. Strength to thrust through muscle and chest-wall the blade which would pierce his heart.

He felt that he was doomed. There rose before him an old *manoir* with a window high up in a *tourelle*, a window from which he knew that, even now, a gray-haired, sad-eyed woman--his mother!--watched as she had often watched for his coming. Ah, well, he would never appear again to gladden her. Never, never, through all the years that she might live. Never!

There was a click, a tic-tac of steel against steel that told him his reflections were but too true and just, that the gray-haired woman's chance of ever seeing him again would be gone in a few seconds now. Also he experienced that feeling which every swordsman has known more than once, the feeling that the wrist of the opponent is preparing the way for the deadly lunge, the feeling that his own guard is being pressed down with horrible, devilish force, that the lightning thrust will be through him in a moment.

For a moment he was saved, his agony prolonged by an interruption. Two men--warders--had appeared on the roof of the gate, and, seeing what was going on below, stood there watching the play of the swords. Joking and jeering, too, about his incompetency in spite of the scarlet and gold he wore, bidding him take heart; that soon it would be over; also that the pain was not great after the first bite of the steel.

And disturbed, agitated, he but clumsily endeavoured to guard himself from that awful pressure, knowing that the thrust must come directly.

Astonished, he found it did not do so. Instead, the pressure relaxed. A moment later his adversary spoke to him.

"Those fellows agitate you. Take breath," and the dreaded blade was still. Soon both weapons were unlocked.

"You are very noble," the dragoon said. "I--I--no matter. Let us continue," and muttered to himself, "as well now as three moments later," preparing for the death he knew was to be his. Or rather thought was to be his, not dreaming that it would never be dealt to him by the calm and apparently implacable swordsman before him. For Martin, his blood cooling as he learned how poor a foeman he was opposed to, a swordsman unworthy of his steel, had resolved to dismiss him, strike up his weapon and give him his life, with some contemptuous words added to the gift.

Not understanding, however, all that was in the brain of the man who, as a boy, had been sent across the Alps from Paris to the best *maestri di scherma* of Padua and Florence to learn all they could teach in the use of small arms; not knowing this, the other prepared himself for his fate, seeing now that the men on the roof jeered and fleered no longer; instead, stared with a look of apprehension at the entrance to the yard.

Started, too, at a voice which Martin heard, as the others heard.

"Strike up that man's guard," the voice cried. "Secure him. For you, Montglas, touch him not at your peril. Arrest the English spy."

The voice of Baville! As Martin knew well enough ere, contemptuously disarming the dragoon by a *flanconnade*, he turned and faced the Intendant. The man whose child he had saved, yet who now denounced him as an English spy; who had learned by some means that he was a subject of France's bitterest foe.

Behind him there stood six Croatian Cravates, part of the Intendant's guards, swarthy fellows whose very name caused tremblings to all in France, though they themselves had trembled once before Prince Eugene's soldiers, and were to tremble again as Marlborough hedged them in with English steel later--men who now advanced to seize the English spy.

"Take his sword from him," Baville said. "If he resists, knock him on the head. Yet spare his life. That is mine to deal with."

For a moment the glittering blade flashed ominously before the Croatians; glittered, too, before Baville's eyes. Then the point was lowered to the ground, and Martin spoke.

"What," he asked calmly, "do these orders mean?"

"Mean?" echoed Baville. "Mean! You ask *me* that? They mean that you are in my hands. That to-morrow you die."

"Upon what charge?"

"Bah! I equivocate not with such as you," and he turned to go. "Nay," he exclaimed violently, looking round as Martin again addressed him. "Speak not. I require no answer. If you reply I shall

forget that I am the King's Intendant, shall remember only that you are the murderer of my child, shall bid these men despatch you here upon this spot."

"The--murderer--of--your--child!" Martin repeated. "Of--of----"

"Of Urbaine Ducaire."

"You believe that?"

"Believe it? I know it. This man whom but now you attempted to slay, le Baron de Montglas, saw you drag her from her carriage, carry her off. Enough. Answer me not. Take him," he said to the Croatians, "to the citadel." Then, once more addressing Martin, he said, his voice calm now, his tones gentle:

"To-morrow you will have your chance to speak, even you, an English spy, you, the murderer of an innocent woman, will not be condemned unheard. The Court will sit at the earliest moment possible."

"What if I tell you that Urbaine Ducaire lives, is well, happy? What then?"

As Martin spoke he saw the handsome face of the Intendant flush, the dark olive complexion become suffused with a warm glow, the dark, full eyes sparkle beneath their long black lashes. Saw, too, that he took a step forward toward him, whispering, "Lives--is happy!" Next, turned away again with a movement of contempt.

"What then!" he exclaimed, once more addressing Martin. "What then! What, you ask, should I say or do? Say it is a lie, such as you told before, only of five thousand times a deeper dye--a lie such as the lie you uttered when you proclaimed yourself a *propriétaire* of the North. Shall do that which no power on earth, not Louis' own, can prevent. Slay you as I have sworn a thousand times to do if ever by God's grace I had you in my hands again."

At the feet of the soldiers there was a clang--the clang of Martin's sword as he flung it on the paved stable-yard.

"Bid your bravoes pick it up," he said. "For yourself, do with me what you choose. It will never be sheathed by me again till you have heard my story before the Court you speak of. Packed as it may be, packed as all the courts of Languedoc have been by Monsieur l'Intendant from the beginning, packed by every one of your creatures whom you can gather round you, they shall all hear to-morrow morning my story, if I am not done to death ere I can tell it."

"Lies, bravado, will avail you nothing. Le Baron Montglas is witness against you. Come," he said, turning to that person. "Come."

And he strode from out the stable-yard after bidding the Cravates to follow with their prisoner.

Yet when he was alone in the house which he occupied at Nîmes his mind was ill at ease. Ill at ease because, in the calm bearing of this prisoner, in the contempt which that prisoner had shown for him and his authority as he flung his sword at his feet, he saw something which was neither guilt nor fear. Instead, contempt and scorn.

Also he had said "Urbaine Ducaire lives, is well, happy," and in saying it had spoken as one speaks who utters truth.

Yet how could he believe that such as this could be possible? Montglas, whose life had been at this man's mercy as he entered the stable-yard, had seen the other in the *mêlée*, had seen him tear Urbaine from the coach, lift her on to his horse, ride off with her. To what, to where? To death, to the mountains where the Protestants sheltered. And, if further confirmation was needed, had he not caused to be brought before him one who had escaped from the massacre of the Château St. Servas, one who plainly told how ere the Camisards attacked the castle disguised as royalists, this man, the Englishman as he now knew him to be, had brought Urbaine there, to wait doubtless for his accomplices? Also that very day he had heard, had been told by some who had returned from Cette, that among the Cévenoles who had been on the beach waiting for the landing of the English, this man had been recognised. His own spies had seen him; there could be no possibility of doubt.

"Yet if, after all, they should be wrong," he mused to himself; "if, after all, Montglas, the escaped one from St. Servas, the spy, should be deceived! Or, not being deceived, Urbaine should still live! What then? What if in truth he has in some manner managed to protect her, to save her! What then?"

Even as he muttered these words, these surmises, he wiped the heat drops from his brow. For--and now almost he prayed that this man might be lying--if all were wrong in what they accused him of, if instead of leading Urbaine to her death he had saved, protected her, all the same he was doomed. Doomed beyond hope!

He had communicated with Paris, with Chamillart, with the woman who ruled the King, had asked for information about this stranger who stated that he was a kinsman of the de

Rochebazons in search for one who was the De Rochebazon himself, and not a week since had received in return his orders from Paris. Orders written by De Maintenon's own private secretary to arrest the man, to put him on trial as an English spy found in France during a time of war, orders to have him condemned and executed without appeal--his nationality, which was undoubted, to be the justification for that execution.

And again, as he remembered this, Baville almost prayed that Martin's words might not be true, prayed that, if they were true and Urbaine still lived and was safe, *he* at least might not prove to be her saviour.

Her saviour! Yet doomed to lose his life at the hands of the man who worshipped the girl, the man who, instead of doing that saviour to death, should, instead, have poured out at his feet all that would have gone to make his life happy, prosperous, and contented.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HER FATHER, URBAIN DUCAIRE.

It was in a great hall, or chamber, of the Hôtel de Ville that Baville now sat, splendidly apparelled, as was ever his custom when assisting at any great public function. Once more he wore his white satin jacket with, over it, the *justaucorps-à-brevet*, and with, upon his satin waistcoat, the gold lilies of France emblazoned. Also his hat--which, since he represented the King, he did not remove--was white and fringed with gold lace, his ruffles were of the finest point de Malines, his gloves gold-fringed, his sword ivory-hilted and gold-quilloned. The rich costume suited well the handsome features of the terrible Intendant of Languedoc--*le fléau du fléau de Dieu*, as he had been called. That superb dress, combined with his dark olive complexion, classic outline, and soft dark eyes, shaded by their long lashes, caused Baville to look, as indeed he was, the handsomest man in Nîmes that day.

Beneath him sat a group of men of the law. Three judges in scarlet and ermine; the *Procureur du Roi*, also in scarlet, but with ermine only at his cuffs; *greffiers* and clerks, as well as two men who were termed *abréviateurs* and practised the shorthand of the day, with, near these, many other persons of importance in Nîmes. Sandricourt, the governor of the city, was there, as also Montrevel, his fierce eyes rolling round the Court as they glared from his inflamed face; Esprit Fléchier, Bishop of Nîmes, a good and righteous man, reverencing deeply his ancient faith, yet shuddering with horror at all that had been done in Languedoc, and was still doing, in the name of that faith; and many more. For it was known to every one in Nîmes, Protestant and Catholic alike, that to-day a man was to be tried who was himself a Protestant, an ally of the Camisards in the mountains, an English spy who had been one of those waiting on the shore of the Mediterranean to welcome the English invader. Tried! tried! Nay, rather brought up for condemnation and sentence without any trial to a doom which meant either the flames in the market place or the wheel by the cross in the Cathedral *Place* below the *Beau Dieu*, or perhaps the lamp whose post was highest. All knew this, Protestant and Catholic alike; all knew, the former shuddering and the latter gloating over the knowledge, that this was to be no trial, but a sentence; no execution, but a murder.

The Court, or great chamber, began to fill with spectators, also with those who were to act as guards to all who presided at or took part in the proceedings. That guard would indeed be necessary, since none could say, among those who represented what was termed the *Partie Royaliste*, how soon its services might be required to prevent them from being attacked and done to death, even as, in Mercier's mill yesterday, they had attacked and done to death those of the other side. None could say how, at any instant, sweeping down from their mountain homes, from their impenetrable fastnesses and caverns, might come the dreaded *attroupés* headed by either Cavalier or Roland, with their tigerish blood on fire to revenge the hideous massacre not yet twenty-four hours old, or with a fierce determination in their hearts to save the man who had been their friend and ally. At any moment a shout might be heard, o'ermastered by the pealing of a solemn canticle from a thousand throats; at any moment a psalm might break upon the ears of all, as it rose to Him whom they termed the God of the Outcasts, even as, to the swell of that hymn, was heard the clash of steel, the shriek of those who were in the avengers' grasp, the cry of despair from those who fell before the avengers' glaives. It was well those guards should be there.

They came in now, the fierce Cravates whose eyes gleamed like dusky stars from beneath their heavy brows, whose faces were as the faces of wild beasts that rend and tear others, not so much because rending and tearing is necessary to their own preservation as because it is their sport and delight; men from whom women drew back shuddering as they passed, and before whom their fellow-men felt their blood tingling with the desire to measure themselves. Also the Miquelets were there, the wolves of the Pyrenees who fought with their short, thin-bladed knives,

yet slew as surely as others slew with heavy-handled swords or by shot of musketoon. Outside were the dragoons and the Chevaux-Légers, even the humble militia of the province, proud yet half timorous of the company they were in.

Scarcely could even Cavalier, the undefeated, have made his way with his followers into that hall, or, being there, have done aught to avenge the butchery of yesterday or to save the one who would shortly be doomed to-day.

The guard set outside and in, every precaution taken. Those of the citizens who chose to enter and were able to find standing room were allowed to do so. They were a strangely assorted company. Some were of the class known as the *nouveaux convertis*, men whom misery and fear of poverty had turned from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism, men who could not endure to face the flames or the gibbets. These were mostly old--too old to seek the mountains and fight for their lives and their faith, *vieillards* who told themselves that the only fire they needed was that of their own hearths to warm their blood, and who persuaded themselves, though with many a tear dropped unseen, that one religion was much the same as another. Yet by their sides came others now who should have put their weakness to shame: old women brought up in the same faith as they, yet scorning to change to save their skins; women who now mouthed and grimaced at Baville as he sat in splendour on the dais which acted as a substitute for Louis' throne, and seemed by that mouthing and grimacing to defy the Intendant to injure them that morning. Also, too, there came in shepherds and goatherds clad in fleeces of the Narbonne sheep that grazed on the hills around, with knives in their girdles; men known to be of the new faith, yet men who were safe to-day, since the butchery of yesterday would not bear repetition. Even Montrevel knew this, knew that he dared take no vengeance at present on those mountaineers who scowled at him over the shoulders of his own scowling soldiers, and nodded to one another and whispered as they glanced toward where he sat, while they gazed inquiringly into each other's eyes, as though asking a question. What question? One, perhaps, as to whether it would not be well to o'erleap the barriers and cut from ear to ear the throat of the beribboned and bestarred swashbuckler who sat glaring before them! It may well have been such a question as that.

The soft yet piercing eyes of Baville saw all who entered by the great porte that gave into the chamber--*nouveaux convertis*, mountaineers, monks and priests, prohibited Protestant *pasteurs*, old women and men, soldiers off duty, and some members of the *noblesse* (*grande et petite*) from the surrounding towns and villages. Those eyes missed not one face, yet seemed, judging by the calmness that dwelt in his glance, to observe nothing; a calmness that told no more than a mask or a marble bust tells, yet only served to cloak a hell which raged within him. The unhappiest man in Languedoc that day was Baville, the most heartbroken.

Ere the dawn had long been come, the Intendant, a prey to his own thoughts, to his own self-reproaches, not knowing whether he had not committed an act that was irreparable in handing Martin over to the judges as an English spy, had left his bed and made his way to the cell in which Martin had been placed.

"I must see him," he whispered to himself as he hastily donned a dark coat and cloak, vastly different from the splendour of the costume he now wore in open court. "I must see him, for I fear--O God, how I fear!--that I have sent to his doom the man who has saved Urbaine. His manner, his words, were the words, the action of truth. What hideous reparation may I not have made!"

Thinking thus, musing thus, he had taken his way from the apartment he occupied in the citadel when at Nîmes to the place where Martin was detained, a room stone-flagged and built into the wall, and strong enough to detain the most ferocious and determined prisoner who should once find himself within it.

"Unlock the door," he said to the man, one of the local *milice*, who was appointed to sit outside on guard over the prisoner within. "Open. You know me, do you not?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I know you," the soldier said, springing to his feet and preparing to do as he was bidden. "Yet will monseigneur venture within? The man is, they say, a dangerous----"

"Bah! Open."

And a moment later the Intendant was gazing down upon him whom he had denounced to the law, the man for whose trial, a few hours later, he had already issued orders and summoned the judges.

Upon a low pallet Martin Ashurst lay sleeping as peacefully as though in his own bed in his far-distant home, nor was he disturbed by the grating of the key in the lock nor by the entrance of Baville. He had slept but little for some nights past, and his long rides and exertions had worn him out at last.

Gazing down upon him, observing the fair hair and handsome features of his victim, Baville knew that here was no guilty man capable of betraying a young and helpless girl to her death. The calm and peaceful figure beneath him could scarce be that of one who would descend to such villainies. Murderers of the young and innocent looked not so innocent themselves! And if any confirmation of his thoughts were needed, he had it now. Upon Martin's face there came a soft

smile; his lips parted and he murmured the name of Urbaine.

"Urbaine!" he whispered. "Urbaine! My love!"

Had an adder stung the Intendant standing there, or the lightning stroke blasted him, neither could have been more terrible. His love! His love! His love! Therefore he must have spoken truth when he said that she was well, was happy.

"God help me," Baville muttered. "Have pity on me."

Even as he did so, Martin's eyes opened and he saw his enemy, his captor, looking down upon him.

"What," he asked, the softness of his face all gone, his glance one of contemptuous disdain, "do you desire of me? Is my hour come, and are you here to show me the way to the scaffold? Is that the reason of your presence?" and as he spoke he rose from the pallet and stood before the other.

"Nay, nay," replied Baville, veiling his handsome face with the end of his cloak, as though he feared his emotion might be too palpable. "But--but--I have judged you too hastily. I have learned that but now. Have indeed misjudged you. All pointed, all evidence pointed, to one thing: that, by treachery unparalleled, you were the betrayer of Urbaine--to her death."

For a moment the clear eyes of Martin, all traces of slumber vanished from them, looked into the equally clear ones of Baville with a glance that the latter could scarce fathom. Then Martin said, quietly: "And you believed that evidence? Believed that I, whom you had made welcome to your hearth, had made known to your child, should do *that!*"

"Almost I was forced to believe," Baville answered, his voice thick and hoarse, his eyes lowered to the ground. "You were in the *mêlée*, the attack upon the escort. You were at the Château St. Servas, and she too was there. After that massacre--I--I--was compelled to believe."

"Do you still believe?"

"No," the other answered, his voice still broken, his eyes still on the ground.

"What has changed your belief against the evidence you speak of?"

"You murmured her name but now in your slumbers, spoke of her as your love. Is she that? Do you love--her?"

"Yes, I love her. Before all, beyond all else in this world, I love her." Then he turned his face away from Baville and whispered low: "Urbaine, oh, Urbaine!"

The dawn had come now, saffron-hued, bright with the promise of a fair day; had come stealing in through the *œillet* high up in the wall. Through the cross of the *œillet* the morning sun streamed, also throwing one ray athwart the features of the two men standing there face to face.

"And--and "--whispered Baville now, the voice, usually so rich and sweet, still blurred with emotion, almost indistinct, "and she loves--returns--your love?"

"Yes," Martin answered, "yes."

"Has told you so?"

"Ay, with her own sweet lips to mine." Then suddenly, his tone changed, speaking loudly, clearly, he exclaimed: "Man, you can not rob me of that! Make one more victim of me in your shambles if you will, yet, as I die, my last word, my last thought, shall be of Urbaine. My recompense, her hate and scorn of you."

"No, no, no!" Baville exclaimed, his hands thrust out before him as though groping for something he could not touch, or as though to fend off the denunciation of the other. "No, no, not that. Never that. You must be saved--for--for her sake. For Urbaine. She is my life, my soul. Sorrow must never come *anigh* her again. Already I have done--O God!--have done her wrong. Enough. Listen. You will be tried to-day, condemned as an English spy; the De Maintenon has said it----"

"The De Maintenon!"

"Ay! You are the heir to the wealth of the de Rochebazons--to much of it. You are English. It is enough. Tried, I say, condemned! Yet you shall be saved. Here, in Languedoc, *I* am Louis. *I* am France," and once more Baville was himself, erect, strong, superb. "It shall be done--it--it--it; there must be no sorrow," he repeated, "for Urbaine."

"You forget one thing--the Church."

"The Church! Bah! Theirs is a sentimental power; mine is effective, actual. You must be saved. I am Louis, the King, here. Shall be recalled for what I do; be broken, ruined. Yet, *until recalled*,

the King. Go to your trial, but say nothing. Refuse to plead; that shall suffice." Then changing the subject, he said eagerly, feverishly almost, "Where is she? Where have you left her?"

"In the mountains. Under the charge of Cavalier."

"Cavalier!" Baville exclaimed recoiling, his face a picture of suspicion and doubt. "With Cavalier! Under the charge of Cavalier! My God! They will slaughter her! And you profess to love her!"

"She is safe; as safe as in your own arms. They will protect her."

"Protect her! Protect her! They! Protestants, like yourself!"

"Yes, Protestants, like myself. And, as they believe, nay, as they know, perhaps as you yourself know, Protestants like--Urbaine Ducaire!"

Through the thick moted sunbeams that swept from the *œillet* across the dusty room, passing athwart of Baville's face, Martin saw a terrible change come into that face. Saw the rich olive turn to an ashen hue, almost a livid hue; saw the deep, soft eyes harden and become dull.

"They know," he whispered, "they know that! That Urbaine is--a--Protestant? How--can--they--know--it?"

"One of their seers, a woman, divined it, proclaimed her no papist. And Cavalier has discovered those who knew her father, Urbain Ducaire."

"My God!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BAVILLE--SUPERB!

There was a hush over the Court. Yet a hush broken and disturbed by many sounds. By the sobs of more than one woman, by the shuffling of many feet, by muttered ejaculations from those who strove to force their way nearer to where the judges sat beneath the Intendant, and once by a ribald laugh from a painted woman who leered at all around her and flung nods and smiles toward Montrevel--the woman Léonie Sabbat. By pushings, too, administered by brawny men who were possibly mountaineers to the Miquelets and even the Cravates, since if they were the former they feared not the latter; they had met before. Once an oath was heard muttered and the ominous sound of a blow, then a girl's shriek of horror. Yet at last some semblance of order was obtained, the proceedings were about to commence.

"Bring in the prisoner," exclaimed the presiding judge, Amédée Beauplan, a harsh and severe man who had sentenced countless Protestants to the various forms of death dealt out to those of that religion; and his words were re-echoed by the *greffiers*.

A moment later Martin Ashurst stood before all assembled there. And as he did so many women were heard to weep afresh. Perhaps his handsome manhood recalled to them some of their own men who had once stood where he was standing now. Alone among her sex Léonie Sabbat, who was eating Lunel grapes from a basket, laughed.

"*Tiens!*" she muttered, addressing herself to an elderly decorous-looking woman who was close by her, but who shrank away from the courtesan as though she were some noxious reptile, "*regardez moi ça*. A fool! One who might have had wealth, vast wealth. Now see him! Doomed to death, as he will be in an hour. I know his story. *Tout même, il est beau!*" and she spat the grape seeds out upon the floor at her feet.

Baville's eyes, roaming round the Court, yet apparently observing nothing, he seeming indeed supremely oblivious of all that was taking place, lighted casually upon two persons hemmed in by many others. A man well enough clad in a simple suit of russet brown, who looked somewhat like a notary's clerk, his wig *en pleine échaudé* covering the greater part of his cheeks, so that from out of it little could be seen but his eyes, nose, and mouth. An idle fellow, the Intendant deemed him, a scrivener who had probably brought his old mother to see the *spectacle*. For he held in his hand that of an aged woman whose eyes alone were visible beneath the rough Marseilles shawl with which her head was enveloped, and with, about her brow, some spare locks that were iron-gray.

The pair were not, however, always visible to Baville even from his raised seat; sometimes the movements of others by whom they were surrounded--of a fat and gloating monk, or of a weak

and shivering Protestant, or of a crowd of gossips from out the streets--obscured them from him momentarily. Yet, as the trial went on, they came across his view now and again, the youth holding always the old woman's hand. And seeing that woman's hollow eyes fixed on him always, Baville shuddered. He knew her now, from a far-off yet well-remembered past; her face rose as a phantom rises.

That Martin, standing there, calm, almost indifferent, his hands folded on the rail in front of him, should be the principal object of attention in that crowded place was natural. For he was, as all knew, awaiting a sentence that must indubitably be awarded ere long. All knew also that the trial was but a preliminary farce leading up to the great *dénoûment*.

That trial, such as it was, drew near to its close. Witness had been heard; Montglas, who had seen Martin snatch Urbaine Ducaire from her coach and ride off with her; also the one man who had escaped from the massacre at the Château St. Servas; also the three men who had been present on the beach near Cette and had seen the English spy hand and glove with the Camisards--all had testified, Montglas alone with regret and emotion.

"You swear this is the truth?" Beauplan said to him, looking up from the papers on his desk before him. "There is no doubt?"

"It is the truth," the young dragoon had answered. "Yet I would that other lips had had to speak. He spared my life but yesterday when it was in his hands."

"He has led to the death of many others. Also he is an English spy. *Mes frères*," he went on, turning to each of the other judges and whispering low, so that none but the silent Intendant sitting above could hear, "what is our verdict? We need not long deliberate, I imagine."

Both those others fixed also their eyes upon him acquiescingly, yet neither spoke. Words were not wanted.

Then Beauplan, turning his head over his shoulder toward the man who represented the King's majesty, and seeing that he sat there calm and impassable, statue-like, inscrutable, rose from his seat and made three solemn bows to Baville.

"We await permission to pronounce sentence," he said.

"Pronounce--it," and Baville drew a long breath between the two words. Yet the handsome face changed not. Or only grew more ivory-like--so ivory-like that those standing in that hall, both enemies and adherents, cast back their thoughts to their dead whom they had seen lying in their shrouds ere the coffin lid closed over and hid them forever.

"What does he see that blasts him?" whispered Montrevel in Fléchier's ear, and the bishop, turning his own white face to the inflamed one of the great bravo, muttered, "God, he knows, he only."

In the crowd beyond the railed-off place where the principals sat the effect was the same. Among all who now fixed their eyes on Baville, the greater number asked: "What does he see?" and glanced over their shoulders as though expecting themselves to see something terrible.

"Can the dead rise?" exclaimed one swarthy Cévenole who, in any other circumstances than the present, would have been arrested for an *attroupé* ere he had been an hour in Nîmes; have been borne to the earth by the Cravates and loaded with chains ere hurried to a dungeon, so certain did it appear that he was a Camisard. "Can the burned ashes of our loved ones come together again, the limbs that have rotted on the gibbets be restored to life? Has one of those come back to paralyze him?" And he laughed bitterly.

"*Il est lâche*," whispered Léonie Sabbat through her small white teeth. "*Mon Dieu! il a peur. Fichtre pour Baville!*" and she pressed her plump jewelled hand on the shoulder of her unwilling neighbour as she craned her neck over the balcony to observe the man she jibed at.

Yet he was no coward. Only his heart sickened within him. With fear, but not the fear of either phantom risen from the dead or of fierce Camisard ready to send him to join the dead. Sickened at the sight of that aged woman who never took her eyes off him, who seemed about to address all assembled there. For he remembered her. Recognised her face now beyond all doubt. Remembered one night--how long ago it seemed!--when all the land lay under the snow, and when, at the foot of the mountains the *tourbillon* whirled down from the heights above great flurries of other snow which froze as it fell, and struck and cut the faces of those riding through the wintry storm as knives or whipcord strike and cut. Recalled how he himself riding through the *tourmente*, followed by a dozen of his guard, had to strike breast and body to prevent this freezing snow from ensheathing him in its swift, hardening masses. Yet of what account such memory as that compared to another which followed swiftly in its train!

The memory of a humble peasant's cot, a man stricken with years reading his Bible by the fireside, a child playing at his feet, rolling about the floor laughing and crowing as it teased a good-natured hound that endeavoured, unavailingly, to sleep before the crackling logs. Then a word from the man, another from him--O God! how fearfully, horribly misunderstood! Next, the room full of smoke and the smell of powder, the man gasping out his life, gasping, too, one last

muttered sentence, whispering that he, Baville, was forever smitten by God's frown. And on the rude staircase that led from behind the deep chimney to the room above a comely woman standing, the little child clasped in her arms, her face distorted with terror, her voice shrieking that he was a murderer, an assassin.

A comely woman then, now an old one and before him, there, in the body of the Court.

What if she and Urbaine should meet? What if they had met?

The doomed man, the man upon whom Amédée Beauplan was about to pronounce sentence, had said that Cavalier had discovered those who knew her father, Urbain Ducaire. Was she one of those whom the Camisard chief had discovered, and had she told all?

"Is he mad?" some in the Court asked again, while others answered, "More like stricken with remorse or fear." Yet surely not the latter, since now he repeated his last words referring to the sentence.

"Pronounce--it."

Yet with his eyes never off that woman's face.

A moment later and it was done; the sentence delivered, even as it had been delivered again and again in Nîmes and Avignon, Montpellier and Alais within the last few months by red-robed legal functionaries, and, in countless bourgs and villages, by rough soldiers acting as judges. A sentence of death by the flames before the *Beau Dieu* of the cathedral, to take place at the time ordered by the King's representative, Baville. The ashes afterward to be scattered to the winds.

Yet, as Amédée Beauplan's voice ceased, others were heard in the Court, rising above all the noise made by the movement of the spectators passing out into the street, by the orders shouted from officers to men to clear that Court, and by the loud murmurings either of approbation or disapproval which were heard.

"It will never take place," one clear, high-toned voice was heard above all others to cry, "never. Ere it does, Nîmes shall be consumed to ashes."

And Martin, turning as the warders prepared to take him back to his cell, saw from whose lips that cry had come. From Cavalier, the man dressed in russet-brown and with his features hidden by the long black wig.

Perhaps, too, Baville suspected who might be the utterer of that ominous threat, for now he rose from his seat once more, again he stood erect and commanding; except for his pallor, which still remained, he was himself as ever.

"Stop!" he cried, his voice ringing like a clarion above all the other sounds, the shuffling of feet, the murmurings and mutterings, and the clank of sabres; "stop and hear my words!" And seeing that all eyes were turned toward him, he continued, his tones as firm and unshaken as though the events of the past hour had had no actual existence:

"In this hall to-day are present--I know it well--many who are rebels to the King's, to my authority. Men whose lives are forfeit even as the lives of countless others have been forfeited. Enough! To-day they are safe. This Court is open, but for to-day only. Let those rebels therefore take heed. For so sure as there is a God above us, so sure as I, Baville, Intendant of Languedoc and representative of his Majesty, stand here, those rebels who are found in this city at nightfall shall follow the same road their brethren have trod before them. You have called me the Tiger of Languedoc, and, by the splendour of Heaven, a tiger you shall still find me. Till rebellion is crushed forever from out this province, so long as I live, never will I spare one who takes up arms against the anointed King of France. Now," and he sank back on to his chair, "begone all of you out of Nîmes. To-night I cause a house-to-house visitation to be made--ay! a search from room to room. Those found here die. Begone, therefore, while there is yet time."

Then, without waiting to hear what answer might be made to his threats by any in the crowd, he rose and, passing to the heavily curtained door which led from out the Court, left them. Yet ere he did so, and even while the attendants held back that curtain for him to pass through, he paused once and, facing all there, gazed on them calmly.

A moment later he was gone; gone without hearing the curses and objurgations muttered by many lips, the loud "Brava" which Montrevel gave utterance to, or the little rippling laugh that issued from Léonie Sabbat's lips as again she struck her unwilling neighbour on the shoulder with her white hand and exclaimed, "*Avec tout, il est superbe*."

Had she seen him, however, the instant after the heavily figured arras had fallen behind him, she might have deemed he was less strong and masterful than she had a moment before grudgingly allowed him to be. For even as he passed down the passage which led to the door at which his heavily-gilt state-coach awaited him, an exact facsimile of that in which Le Roi Soleil himself travelled from Versailles to Marly or from St. Germain to Fontainebleau, he walked unsteadily and his white brow was moist and damp.

"If she should have met Urbaine," he muttered as he passed along the passage, "or if she should meet her, and tell all!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"HER FATHER'S MURDERER."

"I have not yet decided," Baville said that night to Beauplan as they sat together in the new citadel, "when the sentence will be carried out. Have my doubts as to whether I shall not release him."

"Release him!" the other echoed. "Release him! Such a thing is unheard of. He, an Englishman, a consorter with the Camisards, a man under the ban of Versailles! Surely you would not dare----"

"Dare!" exclaimed Baville, though very quietly, "dare! Monsieur Beauplan, you forget yourself. Since I have ruled in Languedoc no man has *dared* to use that word to me before."

"Yet," said the judge, a member of an ancient family in the south, who had always rebelled against the authority of this stranger to the customs, as well as the *noblesse*, of Languedoc, "though none here may question your authority, there are those in the capital who can do so."

"There are. But you are not of the number. Monsieur Beauplan, I have nothing more to say. I wish you a good-night."

"I understand," Beauplan replied, "understand very well. And your conduct is natural; also natural that there should be an exchange of prisoners, that your child's release should depend upon his. Yet beware, Monsieur l'Intendant! I was at Versailles two months ago, as you know, and--and--they said----" and he hesitated a moment while a slight smile came into his face.

"What did they say?"

"That not only might a substitute he sent in place of Montrevel, but of----"

"Baville! Is that it?"

"It is that."

"The substitute to be, perhaps, Amédée Beauplan."

"Nay, that is impossible, as you are aware. In Languedoc none can rule as Intendant who are of the province. Yet I warn you, if you set free this man even in the desire to obtain the freedom of Urbaine Ducaire, neither Chamillart nor Madame de Maintenon will forgive."

"You mean well, doubtless," Baville replied, "yet I shall act as I see best. Beauplan, you have children of your own, also a high post. If the life of one of your girls were balanced against that post, which should you prefer to protect?"

To this the judge made no answer, leaving the Intendant alone a moment afterward. Yet, as he sought his own great sumptuous coach, he acknowledged that, much as he detested Baville, what he was undoubtedly about to do was natural.

Left alone, the other took from his pocket a paper and glanced at it as, before the judge had appeared in his room, he had glanced at it a dozen times--a paper on which were written only a few words. They ran:

"Urbaine Ducaire will be restored unharmed to none other than the Englishman sentenced to death to-day. If he dies she dies too. Nothing can save her, even though she is a Huguenot. Decide, therefore, and decide quickly." And it was signed "Jean Cavalier."

"So," he mused, "he was in the Court to-day, or sent this message by one of his followers, knowing well what the sentence would be. Yet the decision was made ere this paper was smuggled in here, God knows how! It needed not this to determine me."

He struck upon the bell by his side as he thus reflected, and, on the servant appearing in answer to it, he asked:

"How came this paper here which I found upon my table?" and he touched with his finger the letter from Cavalier.

"It was left, monsieur, by a woman."

"A woman! Of what description?"

"Old, monsieur, gray and worn. She said, monsieur, that it was of the first importance. A matter of life and death."

Again, as the lackey spoke, there came that feeling to the other's heart of icy coldness, the feeling of utter despair which had seized upon him earlier, as he saw her face in Court. For he never doubted that the bearer of the missive was the same woman who appeared as a spectre before him at the trial--the woman who could tell Urbaine all.

"Where have they disposed the man who was tried and sentenced to-day?" he asked next.

"In the same room he has occupied since he was brought here, monsieur."

"So! Let him be brought to this room. I have to speak with him."

"Here, monsieur!" the man exclaimed with an air of astonishment which he could not repress.

"Here."

Ten minutes later and Martin was before him, he having been conducted from the wing of the citadel in which he was confined to the adjacent one in which Baville's set of apartments were.

His escort consisted of two warders who were of the *milice*; nor was there any need that he should have more to guard him, for his hands were manacled with great steel gyves, the lower ends of which were attached by ring bolts to his legs above his knees. Yet, since they could have had no idea that there was any possibility of one so fettered as he escaping from their custody, the careful manner in which these men stood by their prisoner could have been but assumed with a view to finding favour with the ruler of the province.

As Martin confronted the other, their eyes met in one swift glance; then Baville's were quickly lowered. Before that man, the man whom Urbaine loved, the man who had saved her life, who could restore her once more to his arms--if, knowing what she might know, she would ever return to them--the all-powerful Intendant felt himself abased.

"Who," he said, addressing the warders, "has the key of those irons?"

"I, monsieur," one answered.

"Remove them."

"Monsieur!"

"Do as I bid you."

With a glance at his comrade (the fellow said afterward that the Intendant had gone mad) the one thus addressed did as he was ordered. A moment later and Martin and Baville were alone, the warders dismissed with a curt word, and hurrying off to tell their mates and comrades that the rebellion must be over since the trial of the morning could have been but a farce.

Then Baville rose and, standing before Martin, said:

"You see, I keep my promise. You are free."

"Free! To do what? Rejoin Urbaine?"

"Ay, to rejoin Urbaine. For that alone, upon one stipulation."

"What is the stipulation?"

"That--that--she and I meet again!"

"Meet again! Why not?"

Instead of replying to this question Baville asked Martin another.

"Was," he demanded, speaking swiftly, "Cavalier in Court to-day, dressed in a russet suit, disguised in a long black wig?"

"Yes," the other replied, "he was there."

"And the woman with him, old, gray-haired, is she one of the dwellers in the mountains, one of his band?"

"Nay. Her I have never seen."

"She can not then have met, have come into contact with Urbaine?"

"How can I say? It is a week since I left Urbaine there, safe with him in those mountains. Since then many things have happened, among others the horrors of Mercier's mill."

"It was not my doing," Baville answered hotly. "Not mine; Montrevel is alone answerable for that. I was away at the beginning, on my road back from Valence. None can visit that upon my head. Yet--yet--rather should fifty such horrors happen, rather that I myself should perish in such a catastrophe, than that this woman and Urbaine should ever meet."

As he spoke there came to Martin's memory the words that Cavalier had uttered to him. "Ere she leaves us there is something to be told her as regards Baville's friendship for her father, Ducaire. And when she has heard that, it may be she will never wish to return to him, to set eyes on her beloved Intendant again."

Was this woman of whom Baville spoke the one who could tell her that which would cause her the great revulsion of feeling which Cavalier had hinted at?

"Why should they never meet?" he asked, the question forced from him by the recollection of the Camisard's words joined to Baville's present emotion.

"Because," the other replied, his face once more the colour of death, the usually rich full voice dull and choked, "because--O God! that I should have to say it--because I am, though all unwittingly, her father's murderer. And that woman knows it."

"You! Her father's murderer!"

"Yes, I." Then he went on rapidly, his tones once more those of command, his bearing that of the ruler before whom stood a prisoner in his power. "But ask me no more. It was all a hideous, an awful mistake. I loved Urbain Ducaire; would have saved him. And--and--by that mistake I slew him. Also, I love his child--his!--nay, mine, by all the years in which I have cherished, nurtured her. Oh, Urbaine, Urbaine, *ma mie, ma petite!*" he whispered, as though there were none other present to see him in this, his dark hour. "Urbaine, if you learn this you will come to hate me as all in Languedoc hate me."

"Be comforted," Martin exclaimed, touched to the heart by the man's grief, forgetful, too, of all the horrible instances of severity linked with his name, "be comforted. She must never meet that woman, never know. Only," he almost moaned, remembering all that the knowledge of this awful thing would bring to her, "how to prevent it. How to prevent it."

"I have it," Baville said, and he straightened himself, was alert, strong again, "I have it. I said but now I would, must, see her once more. But, God help me! I renounce that hope forever. To save her from that knowledge, to save her heart from breaking, I forego all hopes of ever looking on her face again, ever hearing her whisper 'Father' in my ear more. And you, you alone, can save her. You must fly with her, away, out of France. Then--God, he knows!--she and I will be far enough apart. Also she will be far enough away from that woman who can denounce me."

"But how, how, how? Where can we fly? All Languedoc, all the south, is blocked with the King's, with your, troops----"

"Nay, the Camisards can help you. Can creep like snakes across the frontier to Switzerland, to the Duke of Savoy's dominions. You must go--at once. You are free, I say," and he stamped his foot in his excitement. "Go, go, go. I set you free, annul this trial, declare it void. Only go, for God's sake go, and find her ere it is too late."

"I need no second bidding," Martin answered, his heart beating high within him at the very thought of flying to Urbaine, of seeing her again and of clasping her to his arms, and, once across the frontier, of never more being parted from her; of his own freedom which would thereby be assured he thought not one jot, the full joy of possessing Urbaine forever eclipsing the delight of that newly restored liberty entirely; "desire naught else. Only, how will you answer for it?"

"Answer!" Baville exclaimed. "Answer! To whom shall I answer but to Louis? And though I pay with my head for my treachery, if treachery it is, she will be safe from the revelation of my fault. That before all."

"When shall I depart?" Martin asked briefly.

"Now, to-night, at once. Lose no moment. A horse shall be prepared for you. Also a pass that will take you through any of the King's forces you may encounter on the road to the mountains. Once there, you are known to the Camisards and--and she will be restored to you."

"Will they let me pass the gate?"

"Let you pass the gate! Pass the gate! Ay, since I go with you as far as that. Let us see who will dare to stop you."

An hour later Martin was a free man.

Free, that is, in so far that he had passed the Porte des Carmes and was once more upon the road toward the mountains, toward where Urbaine Ducaire was. Yet with all around him the

troops of Montrevel, the field marshal having sallied forth that morning intent upon more slaughter and bloodshed, and with, still farther off, the Camisards under Cavalier in one division and under Roland in another, descending, if all accounts were true, upon Nîmes and Alais with a full intention of avenging mercilessly the burning of their brethren in the mill.

Yet, sweet as was the sense of that freedom, sweet, too, as was the hope that ere many more hours would be passed he and Urbaine would have met once more never again to part, he could not but reflect upon the heartbrokenness of Baville as he bid him Godspeed.

"Save her, save her," he whispered as they stood at the Great Gate, "save her from France, above all from the knowledge of what happened so long ago. Fly with her to Switzerland and thence to your own land; there you can live happily. And--and--tell me ere you go that from your lips she shall never know aught. Grant me that prayer at the last."

"Out of my love for her, out of the hopes that in all the years which I pray God to let me spend with her, no sorrow may come near her, I promise. If it rests with me you shall be always the same in her memory as you have been in actual life. I promise. And perhaps when happier days shall dawn, you and your wife and she may all meet again."

"Perhaps," Baville replied, "perhaps." Then from the breast of this man whose name was execrated in every land to which French Protestants had fled for asylum, this man of whom all said that his heart, if heart he had, was formed of marble, there issued a deep sob ere he moaned: "Be good to her. Shield her from harm, I implore you. She was all we had to love. Almost the only thing on earth that loved me. Farewell!"

CHAPTER XXX.

FREE.

The mountains again! And Martin free! Happy, too, because, as the cold blast swept down from their summits to him as he rode swiftly through the valley toward the commencement of the ascent, he knew that it came from where, high up, Urbaine waited for her freedom and for his return. Knew it beyond all thought and doubt; knew, divined that daily those clear, pure eyes looked for him to be restored to her, was sure that nightly, ere she sought her bed, she prayed upon her knees for him and his safety. Had she not said it, promised it, ere they parted? Was not that enough? Enough to make him turn in his wrist another inch upon his horse's rein, press that horse's flanks once more, urge it onward to where she was?

Yet though he travelled with Baville's pass in his pocket, though he went toward where the Camisards were, who would receive him with shouts of exaltation and welcome, he knew that again he rode with his life in his hands as, but a night or so before, he had thus ridden from the seacoast to Nîmes. For there were those abroad now who would be like enough to tear Baville's pass up and fling it in his face if he were caught, soldiers who served Montrevel and Montrevel alone, men whose swords would be through his heart or the bullets from their musketoons embedded in his brain, if he but fell into their hands. For on this very night the great bravo had broken with the Intendant ere he had quit Nîmes to march toward the Cévennes and make one more attack upon the strongholds of the "rebels"; had sworn that ere Villars arrived, who was now on the way from Paris to supersede Julien, he would wipe out those rebels so that, when Louis' principal soldier should appear on the scene, he would find none to crush.

Also he had sent forward on the very road which Martin now followed a captain named Planque (a swashbuckler like himself) and a lieutenant named Tournaud, in command of three thousand men, all of whom had declared with many an oath that they took their orders from their commander and from no governor or intendant who ever ruled.

At first Martin had not known this, would indeed not have known it at all, had not his suspicions been aroused by finding that, as he rode on swiftly toward where the principal ascent to the mountains began, near Alais, he was following a vast body of men, among whom were numbers of the hated Pyrenean Miquelets; men who marched singing their hideous mountain songs and croons, such as in many a fray had overborne the shrieks of the dead and dying.

"I must be careful," Martin had muttered to himself, as he drew rein and moved his horse on to the short crisp grass that bordered the road, "or I shall be among them. Where do they go to?"

Yet, careful as he was, he still determined to follow in their train, to observe what road they took when farther on in their march, for he knew, from having been much in the neighbourhood a year before, and ere he had set out for Switzerland on his first quest for Cyprien de Rochebazon, that ere long they must take one route of two. If that to the left, which branched off near Anduse,

their destination would be undoubtedly the mountains; if they kept straight on, then Alais was their destination. And if the latter, they would not hinder him. He was soon to know, however, where that destination lay.

High above the chatter of the Miquelets and their repulsive chants--on one subject alone, that of slaughter, rapine, and plunder combined--high above also the jangle of the bridles, bridoons, steel bits, and the hoofs of the dragoons and *chevaux-légers* ahead, the orders were borne on the crisp icy air: the orders to wheel to the left--to the mountains.

Therefore an attack was intended there, or what, as Julien had himself termed it, when planning that which was now to be carried out, *une battue*.

That it would be successful Martin doubted. Never yet had the royalists forced their way far up those passes, never yet had they been able to possess themselves of one square yard of ground above the level of the valley. And he recalled the treacherous drawbridges constructed over ravines and gullies, as well as the other traps, which he had seen and had pointed out to him as he descended from the Cévennes to meet Cavalier. He doubted if now this enlarged attack would be any more successful than former and less well-arranged attacks had been.

Yet Urbaine was there. That unnerved him, caused him to shudder. For if at last, if now, at this time, success should come to these troops, as both Julien and Montrevel had sworn it should come eventually, what then of her! Those in command might not know, or, knowing, not choose to believe that she was Baville's cherished idol. And to think of his beloved one in the power of those fiends, the Miquelets, was enough to cause his heart to cease beating.

Or, better still, to beat more fiercely with a firm determination of seeking her than even he had experienced an hour before; the determination to get to where she was before these heavily accoutred soldiers could do so, if they ever got there at all; to join her, save her, protect her. But how to do it! How! How!

How to get ahead of this band; how gain the ascent before them, warn the Camisards. Above all--ay, that was it--above all, how save the girl he worshipped and adored! That, or one other thing: die in the attempt.

He knew a moment later that the turn was made toward the mountains. From beneath the tree where he had halted he saw, in the rays of the now risen full moon, the sparkle of the breasts and backs and gorgets of the dragoons as they wheeled to the left, also the glitter of aiguillette and steel trappings. Perceived, too, that a deep silence had fallen on all that moving mass. Even the Miquelets ceased to sing and chatter. Nothing disturbed the silence of the night but the thud of countless horses' hoofs, with now and again a neigh and now and again the rattle of scabbard against charger's flank. They were in, or near the country of the insidious, unvanquished foe. Doubtless the order had gone forth for silence.

He must get ahead of them--reach the pass or mountain road before them. Otherwise, what of Urbaine if they should win?

But, again, how to do it!

To the left of him, and still farther yet to the left of where the battalions marched after wheeling, there was a stream, a branch of Le Gardon; in summer a swift-flowing river beneath whose gliding waters the reeds bent gracefully; now half frozen and seemingly without current. If he could cross that, there was on the other side a wide open plain, on which for centuries peasant landlords had been endeavouring to cultivate grapevines, to redeem from the marshy soil that was so common in the south some of the thousands of useless acres which abounded. And across that plain, dotted here and there by countless poles on which no vine had ever grown in man's memory, and on which many sheep had browsed upon the short grass salted by the spray (brought in from the Mediterranean on the wings of the Circius) until the Cévenoles had descended and raided them, he might make his way, might cut off by a short *détour* that advancing force, get before it to where the ascent began, be the first to reach the mountains, the home of the outcasts.

Only he might be seen. And then--then--though the heavily accoutred dragoons would undoubtedly not be able to leap the stream and chase him, the balls from their musketoons and fusils would perhaps reach him; one alone out of the number sent hurtling after him might reach its mark. And that would be enough.

Yet all the same it should be done.

The horse he rode was a strong black, handsome creature, its nostrils red and fiery, its eyes possessed of that backward glance which tells the horseman ere he mounts what he is about to bestride, its legs as thin and agile as a cat's. Well, he would see. Now for the stream, fifteen feet across if an inch. Then he found the animal knew what was meant even as his knee pressed beneath the holster, even as his wrist turned inward to draw tighter the rein and as he sat down firmly in the saddle. There was a rush upon the short, crisp grass--crisp both from the salt of the distant sea and from the night frost--a quiver from the body beneath him, a loosened rein now, a flight as of an arrow, as smooth, too, and as swift. Then the animal's feet were upon the other side; the rivulet was skimmed as though by a swallow. Over and away, the black steed bounding

like a ball beneath him.

"Thank God!" he said, "thank God!" And, ere he settled into the saddle again, patted the firm, iron-sinewed neck beneath his hand.

Off through vine poles, over another and a smaller rivulet unseen by him for the moment, yet clear as day to the keen eyes of the noble creature that bore him; off now parallel with the dragoons, across the plain--parallel with the dragoons so dangerously near! And with over all, both them and him, a cloudless sky and a full bright moon.

Then, next, a shout from that advancing force, a hoarse clatter that all know and recognise who have ever heard firelocks wrested quickly from saddle-rests, white smoke curling on the night air, spits of flame from twenty different spots near together, puffs of bullets past his face, puffs such as the droning beetle makes as it flies by us; a numbing shock against the saddle-flap, yet on, on, on! The horse uninjured and still going fleet as the deer, or even fleeter still, because of fear and nervousness. But still on, and followed by a dropping fire that ceased almost directly. The musketoons were useless by this time; they were out of range and he was ahead of the others. Nothing could stop him now, the danger was past. Nothing, unless the horse reeled in its stride, was wounded. Yet that he knew was not so, or else that swift, even motion below him would have ceased ere this. "Heaven be praised! Where is she?"

The night wind blew more piercingly as he felt the earth rising beneath the steed. Far up he saw more and more plainly the burning lights that burned near false bridges and declivities, to fall down which meant death and destruction. The air was nipping even to those two whose bodies were heated by their last hour's motion together. The ascent had begun. The horse breathed more heavily now, threw out great snorting gasps from mouth and nostrils, yet hardly halted, or only so far as to change from canter to trot and from trot to walk. But still went on up, until at last one of the red flambeaux on the hilltops was winking and flickering close by.

He was near Urbaine now. Another hour and she would be in his arms.

At that moment three forms sprang lightly into the mountain road from behind a piece of fallen rock, the moon showing that each bore in its hand a firearm--a firearm raised and pointed at the advancing man and horse.

"Who goes there?" one cried. "Quick, your answer, or this," and each weapon's butt was brought to the shoulder.

"The Englishman," Martin called out in reply. "The man doomed to death to-day at Nîmes for consorting with you."

"So! Advance, Englishman. Yet in the name of the Holy One how came you here?"

"To seek for her who was my fellow-prisoner with you," he replied as he got off his horse. "Is she well?"

"She is well--"

"Behind. Up there," and he cast his eyes toward the summits. "She descends with brother Cavalier to-night."

"With Cavalier to-night! Is he back already?"

"Ay, he is back, three hours ago. Now, to-night, he descends. Nîmes is doomed. You would have been rescued by the morning. It was brother Cavalier's second plan. He warned the tyrant, Baville, to free you at pain of the girl's death, but *tout de même*, he meant to have you out himself. Yet," he repeated, "Nîmes is doomed."

"But why, why, since I am free?"

"To repay the slaughter at the mill. Ho! Doubt not! That goes not unrewarded. Nîmes first, then Alais, then Montpellier. 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' It is our holy shibboleth."

"It can never be----"

"Never be! Why not?" asked the man who alone had spoken among the three. "Why not? What shall prevent the Lord's children from outrooting their persecutors? Why not? You are on our side. Is it not so?" and he looked menacingly at Martin.

"You do not know," the latter replied. "Advancing here not two hours behind me there comes a vast body of royalist soldiers in two battalions. Among them the Miquelets. And, though they may never scale your mountain passes, never reach the plateau, yet surely they will bar your way to Nîmes. Even though your full force descend, they will outnumber you."

The man, whom Martin remembered well when he was a prisoner in the caverns and whom he had heard addressed as Montbonneux, pondered a moment; then he said suddenly, with a slight laugh:

"Perhaps they will reach the plateau. Perhaps we shall not bar their way. One catches the rat by leaving the trap-door open, not by shutting it," and as he spoke his companions laughed too, while as they did so Martin again remembered the *oubliettes* and snares prepared for any who might wander up into the gloomy refuges of the *attroupés*.

Ere he could reply, however, or announce his intention of proceeding to where Urbaine might be ere setting forth with Cavalier, there rose a sound close to them. A sound borne on the night wind toward where they were, a sound that told him and them that down from their mountain home were coming the Camisards. A chant that, rising above all else; spoke of revenge decided on, of fierce unsparing retaliation:

"Quand tu te léveras, oh, notre Roi celeste!
Pour délivrer enfin les élus d'ici-bas,
Le vent de ton tonnerre à nos tyrans funeste
En Balaiera le reste
Au gouffres du trépas.
Venge--Venge----"

"'Tis he, Cavalier," the man Montbonneux exclaimed, "'tis he who comes."

CHAPTER XXXI.

BETRAYED.

They had met again. Were together, never more to part unless parted by one thing, Death! Death that was imminent at any moment, that might overtake them that very night, or to-morrow, or the next day; for Cavalier was on his way down to the plains to make those reprisals of which Montbonneux had spoken. God only knew what might be the end of all.

She, riding on the captured little mule and enveloped in costly furs--as usual, part of a spoil of a successful foray made by the Camisards on a more or less unprotected *manoir*--had seen him as the large body of Cavalier's followers had rounded a point in the mountain pass, and, springing from the animal's back, had thrown herself into his outstretched arms, unheeding those who came behind her and the Cévenole chief, thinking of naught at the moment but that he was safe and with her again, deeming all else insignificant beside that one supreme mercy vouchsafed by God. For she knew in what awful danger he had stood not many hours before; knew that, not more for the purpose of exacting vengeance than for that of rescuing him, was this descent from the mountains being made. And now he was safe, by her side again.

He drew her apart from where Cavalier stood with all his followers behind him; drew her apart and whispered words of love and thankfulness at seeing her once more. Then suddenly, observing on the fair young face and in the clear, pure eyes a look that he had never seen before, he murmured:

"What--what is it, Urbaine, my sweet?"

But she would not answer him, only contenting herself with saying, "Not now, not now," while even as she did so he saw beneath the light of the full moon that her eyes were full of tears. Felt, too, the warm hand which he held quiver in his grasp.

And as he noticed those symptoms of unhappiness he wondered if she had learned while among these Camisards that secret which one at least of them knew--that secret which, to prevent her from ever learning, had caused Baville to bid him fly with her out of France, away, anywhere, so that she might never know it. Never know that her father's death lay at his door.

"Come," said Cavalier, approaching them and speaking very quietly, after having carried on a hurried conversation for some moments with Montbonneux and the other two men, "come, we must move forward. Thank God, you are free, out of the tiger's claws; for your sake and ours as well, if what my followers report of the news you bring is true. *Is* it?" and he looked piercingly at the other in the moonbeam's light.

"It is true if they have told you that a large force is making its way toward these mountains. They must have left Nîmes some time before me, since I followed them a considerable distance before coming up with their rear, and I have outstripped them by perhaps two hours, though not longer, I think."

Then he told Cavalier that Baville had himself released him.

"Baville released you! Because of my threat?"

"Because of----" yet since Urbaine was by his side he paused and told no more, or only with a look which Cavalier understood sufficiently well, for he also now knew of the Intendant's part in the death of Urbain Ducaire, understood that his love for Urbaine had grown out of his remorse.

"Come," he said shortly, after meditating for a moment with his eyes fixed on the ground, "come, we must go forward now. Best meet this force and check it, or part of it. How many strong are they, do you suppose?"

"At least a thousand. Perhaps more. Composed of dragoons, *chevaux-légers*, and Miquelets. Can you cope with those?"

"If we are united, yes. But Roland is away, ahead, with half our men; yet, stay. We have to meet at the Tour de Bellot. If we can join them before these soldiers reach that, then we can win. If not, if they catch Roland's force alone, then God help Roland!"

As he spoke, from afar off there came a sound that none in all the vast band which had descended from the mountains could have mistaken, unless it were Urbaine alone. A sound deep, muffled, roaring. That of cannons firing. Heard first down in the valley, then reverberating high up amid the clouds that capped the summits of the cold mountain tops.

"You hear?" he said. "You hear? We must on at once. On, on! What will you do with the lady? She is yours now. You see, I remembered my promise. I was bringing her to you, knowing full well that either by threats or siege we would have you out of the hands of Baville. Yet I thought not you could have been free to-night, so soon."

"My place is by her side forever now. Where she is, there am I."

"Be it so. Will you go back with her? Yet I know not, if they gain the passes, the caverns will be surrounded and--and--if they succeed we shall not be there to help or succour. God, he knows what is best!"

"Can they do that, gain the summits?"

"Scarce can I say. Yet now at last I fear. The prophets see visions, speak of rebuffs at last. The *extasées*, the woman seers, the female children--all foretell disaster. Even I, who have ere now believed that I could read the future, am shaken, not in my courage, but my hopes."

His last words were lost, or almost lost, in the dead muffled roar that rose once more from far down in the valley, and as the sound was heard again Cavalier started.

"We must not tarry, even for her. Decide, therefore, and decide quickly," while, as he spoke, he gave orders briefly to all who surrounded them and commanded that they should be transmitted along the line of Camisards which stretched far behind and up to where the great plateau was.

"I have decided," Martin answered. "That firing is some distance off, some five or six miles at least. At the foot of the mountains there are many side-paths leading east and west. I can convey her by one of those to some haven of shelter, out of harm. Let us accompany you to the valley; then, Cavalier, we part."

"Do as you will," the other answered. "I gave you my word that all should be as you desired when you returned from Cette. I keep it to the last. We part to-night forever. Remember me in years to come as one who was an honourable man."

Then, as though he wished no more said, he gave another order for the band under his command to set forth again upon its descent, and, quitting Martin, went forward and placed himself at its head.

And now Martin took his place by the side of her he loved, walking by the little mule, holding her hand in his beneath the richly-furred cloak. Also he told her what was decided on as best for her safety. Once, too, he asked, after he had informed her of the arranged plan:

"You do not fear? Are content?"

"Content! To be with you!"

And the glance that rested on him, and plainly to be seen beneath the ray of the moon, told more than further words could have done.

"We shall be together forever and always now," he continued, speaking clearly though low, so that she might catch his words above the deep thud of the Camisards' tread as they swept down the mountain road. Above, too, the roar of the cannon that grew louder as they approached nearer and nearer to the spot whence it proceeded. "Forever and always, once we are across the frontier and in the Duke of Savoy's dominions. Man and wife, *ma mie*, in a week's time if we

escape to-night. Will that suffice?"

And once more she answered with a glance.

They were descending fast now toward the plain, yet, as they neared it, it almost seemed as though the booming of the cannon grew less continuous, as if the pauses were longer between each roar. What did it mean? the Camisards asked each other. Was the cannon becoming silent because Julien and his detachments had been caught in some trap, or had the royalist troops been driven back again as they had been so often driven back before? Were the outcasts, the *attroupés*, again successful, still invincible? Above all else, above that thud of mountaineers' heavy feet and the clatter of musketoon and fusil shifted from shoulder to shoulder; above, too, sword scabbards clanging on the ground, Cavalier's voice arose now.

"Down to meet them!" he cried. "Down! Down! Faster and faster, to join Roland and sweep the tyrant's soldier from out our land, or perish beneath their glaives. On, my brethren, on!" and as he spoke the tramp of the men was swifter and heavier, the march of the band more swinging.

The plain was reached. They poured out upon it, no longer a long, thin line, but a compact body now which marched not only on the straight, white road that gleamed a thread beneath the moon's rays, but spread itself over the sodden marshy lands bordering that road; went on swift and fast, while as they almost ran they saw to the priming of their firelocks, and buckled rough goatskin baudriers and bandoleers, wrenched from many a dying royalist, tighter round them, and loosened swords and knives in their sheaths.

Yet, as they went, the firing ceased or rather rolled farther away from them, sounded now as if coming from where, beneath the moonlit sky, the cathedral spire of Nîmes lifted its head. Surely, all thought, the enemy must be driven back. Otherwise the booming of the cannon would not have ceased altogether; at least would not become more distant, farther off.

And now they were near the Tour de Bellot, the rendezvous, the spot where Roland was to have joined forces with them, if all was well. So near that the solitary and lofty structure--once the round tower of an ancient feudal castle that had stood many a siege in days as far off as those of the Albigensian crusade, but on to which, in later years, had been built a farmhouse, now a ruin also--could be seen rising clear and pointed to the heavens; clearer than the more distant spire of Nîmes itself.

And Roland was not there, nor any of his force. One glance showed that, long ere they reached it, the battle which had been going on for now more than two hours was farther off than they had at first supposed.

The place was deserted, except for the shepherd who dwelt within it, a man holding the creed of the outcasts, one who had also at that time two sons in their ranks.

"Where is Roland?" demanded Cavalier of this man as they all streamed into the place, leaping over the stone walls which surrounded the pasturage and rushing hastily into grange and granary, there to snatch some rest, even though but half an hour's, ere they might have to set forth again. "Where? Where?"

"Forward toward Nîmes," the fellow answered, speaking stolidly and, as it seemed to Martin, who stood by, stupidly; "toward Nîmes. He has driven them back."

"God be praised!" exclaimed Cavalier and many who stood around. Then the former asked: "And followed them toward Nîmes? Is that so?"

"Nay, I know not," the other replied, seeming even more stupid than before. "I know not. They are not here. The battle was afar. I did but hear it."

"We can do nothing as yet," Cavalier said, "nothing. Can but wait and abide events. Yet 'tis strange, strange that of all his force he could not send back one messenger to tell me of his doings, his whereabouts. Our rendezvous was to be ten of the clock; 'tis past that now. Strange!" he repeated, "strange!" And his eyes followed the shepherd searchingly as he moved about preparing rough, coarse food for as many of the band as he could supply. He had been warned that the descent was to be made that night from the mountains, and also to prepare as much bread and wine as possible; and now he produced all that he had, he said, been able to obtain without arousing suspicions.

At this time Martin was standing beside Urbaine, she having been placed in a rude armchair possessing neither pillow nor covering, which had been set in front of the fire for her; and to them Cavalier now addressed himself, saying:

"For you to go forward now would be madness; nay, madness even to quit this house and seek any road either to right or left. For--for--Heaven forgive me if I am wrong, yet I misdoubt me of this man, one of us as he is and the father of two others."

"I have Baville's pass; they would respect that. Would not harm her. Even though the men in command have never seen her, they would understand. And--and--it is imperative that I convey her across the frontier to Savoy without loss of time." Then, drawing the banished chief away

from the close neighbourhood of Urbaine, he said in a lower tone, "He dreads that she should learn from any here that he caused her father, Urbain Ducaire's death!"

With a swift glance the other looked up into Martin's face, far above his own; looked up with a glance that was almost a mocking one.

"He dreads that, does he?" Cavalier replied. "*Malheureusement pour lui!* he dreads too late. He should have taken steps bef----"

"What?"

"She knows it."

"Great God! 'Tis from that her fresh sorrow springs. How--how did she----?"

But ere he could finish his question there came an interruption which prevented it from ever being answered.

Across the broken flags of the farmhouse kitchen there came a man, one of the prophets, known as *Le Léopard*, because of his fierce staring eyes, a man in whose belt there was a long knife, the hilt of which he fingered savagely, and on whose back was strapped a long military carabine, another spoil of the enemy. And, reaching Cavalier's side, he muttered hoarsely from beneath his ragged, dishevelled mustache:

"We are betrayed. There has been no battle. Roland is not within leagues of this spot. The cannon was a snare, a lure. And--and--come forth into the moonlight and see what is without."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BITTERNESS OF DEATH.

From that old, dismantled farmhouse, built on to the tower, there sloped down, toward where a small stream ran some four hundred yards away, a long stretch of bare land, covered sometimes in the summer heat by short, coarse grass, while in the winter time it was, if any of it were left uneaten by the sheep, frost-bound or snow-covered. It was so now on this clear, cold winter night, its surface being dotted by innumerable folds and pens into which those sheep had once been driven, but which, since the mountaineers had been forced into revolution and had raided the place, were empty. They were so on this night, of sheep. Yet not of other living things, unless the moon played strange tricks with the eyes of those regarding the pens. Instead, were being filled rapidly with human forms creeping like Indians or painted snakes toward them, wriggling their bodies beneath the hurdles they were composed of, entering by that way into the ready-found ambush--the forms of the Miquelets, the most hated by the Camisards of all the troops which had been sent against them; the men whose extermination was more vowed and determined than the extermination of either dragoon, *chevau-léger*, or *milice*.

"You see?" whispered Le Leopard to Cavalier and Montbonneux as they stood together sheltering themselves from observation behind the great stone posts of the farmhouse's antique stoop, "you see? They first, then next the cavalry. Observe, beyond the stream; look through the trunks of the trees across it. The moon sparkles on breast and back and the splints of the gorgets. You see?" Then added, "And hear?"

For from down toward where *Le Léopard* had directed the other's attention there rang that which told beyond all doubt that the foe was lurking there; discovered them to the surrounded, hemmed-in Camisards. The neigh of a horse, long, loud, and shrill, taken up a moment later by others in their company and answered.

After that no need for further disguise or hiding. The presence of the enemy was made known. An instant later the trumpets rang out the "Advance!" Across the stretch of bare land the cavalry of Montrevel were seen riding fast.

"To arms! To arms!" sounded Cavalier's voice on the night air, it rivalling almost in distinctness the clear sounds of the royal trumpeters. "To arms! The tyrants are upon us. To arms! I say," and ere, with one wild shriek in unison from the throats of the Miquelets, the latter sprang from their ambush, the Protestants had leaped from the floors where they had flung themselves and were in the open, face to face with the Pyrenean wolves.

Instantly the whole surface of the earth beneath the bright rays of the moon was changed. Soon no moon was seen. The smoke from countless firelocks covered, obscured her. Smoke dispelled for an instant now and again by volleys of flame belched forth from fusil and carabine,

flame that showed Miquelets dashing at huge mountaineers' throats, their long knives in their hands or 'twixt their teeth as they so sprang and clutched; that showed, too, these savage creatures forced to release their grasp, hurled to the earth, their brains clubbed out by butt and stock. Showed also the dragoons in the midst of all, sabring, thrusting, cutting down, overriding ally and foeman indiscriminately, reeling back themselves over their chargers' haunches as, from the windowless apertures of the tower, came hail after hail of bullets from Camisards ensconced therein.

But still the battle raged. Still from the Protestants' throats rang their war cry, "For God and his children!" from those of the royalists, "For God and the King!" from those of the Miquelets, in their hideous shrieking falsetto, "Guerra al Culchielo!" "Guerra al Morté!"

"Save yourself and her," cried Cavalier, rushing back for a moment to the farmhouse kitchen and stumbling over the dead body of the treacherous peasant, Guignon, who had been poniarded by *Le Léopard* the moment he was certain that the man had betrayed them, "save yourself--and her. There is a backway by the fosse to an ancient passage 'neath the old castle; save yourselves. We are lost, lost! Outnumbered! Save yourselves!"

Then in a moment he saw that neither Martin nor Urbaine were there. Gone! either to destruction or safety, he knew not which, yet gone. And he rushed back to his doomed band; rushed back to see that the tower was in flames, that all of his men who were in it were beyond earthly salvation. Already it seemed to rock beneath the great spouting flames that leaped forth from roofless summit and openings where windows might once have been. Doomed!

Le Léopard came near him at this moment, an awful spectacle--bleeding from a dozen wounds, his vast and iron-gray beard crimson, yet with his eyes glaring as ever. Came near, staggering, reeling, yet able to gasp:

"To the fosse, to the fosse! You can save some that way. To the fosse!"

"Come you also," muttered Cavalier, "Come----"

"*I* come!" *Le Léopard* exclaimed. "Nay, never more. See!" and he tore open his rough coat, showing on his breast a hideous gaping wound. And as he did so he reeled more heavily than before, then fell across the body of a dragoon lying close by.

But still, all around, the fight went on; the sabres swung and the volleys rattled, while from the tower there rose now the death song of those within it. Above all else that was heard a hymn of praise to the God of Battles, the God also of the outcasts--a hymn blessing and magnifying his name. And as it rolled through the fumes and the grime there came next an awful roar, a vast uprising of a monstrous sheet of fresh flame, and, with a crash, the tower came to earth, burying beneath its ruins not only those within it, but also many others around, Camisards and royalists.

"They are bringing their culverins," cried one now above all the tumult, "to play upon the house," and in answer there rang out now another voice which all knew, the voice of Cavalier, the words he shouted being: "Disperse, disperse, my brethren! Children of the mountains and the clouds, disperse as do the clouds themselves. Not to-night is our triumph, yet it will come. It must come."

He spoke truly. The triumph was to come ere long now. The Camisards were to gain their cause at last, but it was not to be to-night, nor by the sword. Instead, by the gentle mediation and mercy of one whose name is still spoken gently in the Cévennes--the name of the great and good Villars.

"You can go no farther?" Urbaine said an hour later to Martin Ashurst, "no farther. Oh, my God, my God, that it should come to this! And for me, for my sake!"

"Nay, dear one, what matter? We are together to the last. And you love me. What more is there to ask?"

"Alas! Alas! I can not live without you, stay behind alone. My love, my love, you must not leave me. Shall not go before. If you die, then must I die too."

And as she spoke she loosened his vest and sought for the wound in his shoulder which had brought him to this pass.

They had found the fosse the Camisards knew of in the old farmhouse. Even as the attack began, Martin, seeking for a place of refuge for her, had thrust open a door at the back of the great old kitchen in which they were, and had led her out of the dangerous room that gave upon the spot where the conflict had begun. Had led her on through a passage sloping down into the earth from behind the house, until, by following it, they found themselves in a place which none could have supposed would have been there; a place like a crypt, stone-flagged, the stones themselves roughly hewn, the pillars dwarfed, yet strong enough to bear a vast fabric above them; a place so old, so long since built, that it may have been some Roman sepulchre, or hiding-place of Albigenses in long-forgotten days, or secret chapel of worship beneath the old feudal

castle that had once existed.

Yet there it was, calm and quiet. Even the sounds of the battle now waging in all its fury without came gently to their ears, was scarce heard more strongly than the murmur in a shell or the breaking of the ocean on a far-off shore. Calm and quiet, with, through a recess in the farther wall, perhaps once a niche or shrine, a moonbeam streaming brightly and making the dull flame of the lantern Martin had brought with him, snatching it off the nail where it hung, burn dull and rustily.

And Urbaine, entering with him this haven into which they had penetrated--surely none of those soldiers knew of it, would find it, surely God in his mercy would not permit that--flung herself on her lover's breast sobbing that they were saved again; again were saved by him whom she so loved with her whole heart and soul.

Then started back, a look of terror on her face--a look of awful fear and apprehension--seeing what she did see in her lover's eyes as she sought them.

"My God!" she half whispered, half shrieked, shuddering, "what--what is it? Martin, my love? Oh, what--what has happened?"

For his lips were cold, there was no answering warmth in them as they met hers; his face was white as death, his eyes dull and filmy.

"It--it--is not much. But--I--am struck. As we left the place above, a bullet--through the window--struck me. I--I--can go no farther. Alas, I can not stand," while as he spoke he swayed heavily against the middle pillar of the crypt, then slid, clutching at it, to the earth.

Even as he did so, even, too, as she a moment later undid his vest to seek for the wound, there came to her ears, though perhaps not to his as he lay there faint and almost insensible, the sound of many rushing feet, a heavy trampling; then, next, men passing swiftly by and farther on through the fosse--men whose smoke-grimed faces (sometimes, too, their wounded faces) she recognised as the moonbeams flickered on them. Camisards fleeing hastily, dispersing as Cavalier had said. The Camisards in whose power she had once been, in whose company she had but a few hours ago descended from the mountains.

"O God!" she moaned, "are they pursued by Montrevel's troops? If so, and he, my love, is found here by those troops!"

But he was not all unconscious; he could still hear, and, hearing, understood that moan.

"Nay, dearest," he whispered back, "even so it matters not. The Protestants, these men, are our friends. Baville's pass, the packet he bade me give you on our wedding morn--alas, our wedding morn!--will hold us safe from the soldiers. Fear not, *ma mie*."

Baville! The name stung her like an adder's fang. Baville! The man who had slain her father, and then endeavoured by a false, pretended love, to take that father's place! The man she would never see again, had vowed, as deeply as one so gentle as she could vow, never to see or know again.

Baville! And he had written to her, sent her a packet. Her lover had it about him at this moment. What could such a thing mean? What import? Yet, yet she upbraided herself for thinking of her own griefs and sorrows now at such a time as this. Baville! Faugh! Baville! Yet if he knew to what a pass they had come, knew that this man whose life might be ebbing slowly from him now, was ebbing slowly, was here? If he knew that he who had saved her was dying? Baville! The man whom once she had loved with a daughter's love.

Again the hurrying feet passed, again the gaunt fugitives went by, yet she heeded them not. Her whole soul was in what she was endeavouring to do--to staunch that gaping wound. Then suddenly one, an old, white-faced, terror-stricken man with long gray hair, stopped, seeing those forms; stopped, peering through the moonbeam that slanted down upon their faces; stopped, then advanced toward them.

"'Tis he," he whispered, bending toward the wounded man. "Martin! Martin! O Martin, my friend!"

"You know him? Your friend? You know him?" she whispered back. "Who are you?"

"His friend, Buscarlet, the inhibited *pasteur* of Montvert. Driven to the mountains at last, forced to abide with these unhappy outcasts, but, thank God, not yet to draw the sword. No, no, not that! Never, never! Only to pray upon my knees to them by morn and night to shed no blood, to bear, to suffer all. To do that, I followed them here. Only they will not listen. Oh, Baville, Baville, has not your tiger's fury been glutted yet?" And he gazed down upon the almost senseless form of Martin lying there, muttering, "If I could save you!"

Then, a moment later, he spoke again.

"Who," he said very gently now, "are you? Not his wife or sister, I know. But what?"

For a moment she did not answer, looking up at him, instead, with wide, clear eyes so full of sorrow that her glance struck him to the heart.

"I was to have been his, am his, affianced wife. And--and--God help me!--I am Baville's, that tiger's, adopted child!"

"You! *His* adopted child, and Martin's affianced wife!"

"Even so." And she bent her head and wept.

For a moment there was silence in that deserted place, deserted now since all the fugitive mountaineers had passed through the fosse; silent because no longer was heard the distant sound or hum of shot or cry of combatants. Then he bent over Martin, looked to his wound, touching it very gently and afterward replacing the hasty bandages she had made from some of her own linen, and said:

"He is exhausted from his loss of blood. But, though he dies, it will not be yet. The cold is to be feared, however. If that reaches the wound--I know somewhat of surgery--he can not live. Now I go to seek succour, help!"

"Succour! Help! Where can it be obtained? In Heaven's mercy, where? Nîmes is three leagues off."

"I will do my best. Pray God I am not too late."

And so he left her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TOUT SAVOIR, C'EST TOUT PARDOXNER.

Coming to himself, Martin, lying there, wondered where he was. He felt no pain in the wounded shoulder, only, instead, an awful weakness. Also he felt no cold. Knew too that around him was wrapped some soft warm garment, yet knew not that it was the great fur cloak in which the woman whom he had loved had been muffled up as she descended from the mountains, and in which she had long since enveloped him. Long since to her, watching, waiting there for succour to come, through two, three, four hours, and then another, but to him no length of time whatsoever. And he did not know--he was indeed even still in a half-unconscious state--how those hours had been spent by her, heedless of the cold which pierced through and through her, spent in sitting on the ground by his side, soothing him when he moaned painfully, holding his hand, kissing his hot brow. Attending also to his wound, and going even some distance farther along the fosse in the hope of discovering water, yet without success.

He knew nothing; had forgotten how he came there, that she had been with him, that there was such a woman, and that they loved each other madly.

Then suddenly a voice broke in upon his unconsciousness--a voice that seemed to recall him back to the world--the voice of Urbaine, yet, as she spoke, stifled now and again by sobs.

"Better," it seemed to him that he heard her say, "better have slain me with him, upon his desolate hearth, than have spared me to learn this at last. Of you, you whom I worshipped, whom I so reverenced."

If he had doubted whether he lived or was already in the shades leading to another world, or in that world itself, he doubted no longer, when through that old crypt a second voice sounded, one known to him as well as Urbaine's was known--a voice deep, solemn, beautiful. Broken, too, as hers had been, yet sweet as music still.

"If," that voice said, "you had escaped with your lover to some far-distant land as I hoped, ay, as even such as I dared to pray that you might do, you would have learned all. In those papers I sent by him you love, you would have known all on the morning you became his wife. Now I must tell you with my own lips. Urbaine, in memory of the happy years gone by, the years when you grew from childhood to womanhood by my side, at my knee, hear my justification, let me speak."

It was Baville.

Baville! Her father's murderer there! Face to face with Urbaine once more!

For a moment the silence was intense, or broken only by the woman's sobs. Then from her lips

he heard the one word "Speak" uttered.

"Urbaine, your father died through me, though not by my will, not by my hands."

"Ah!"

"I loved Urbain Ducaire," the rich, full voice went on. "Loved him, pitied him too, knowing something, though not all, of his past life. Knew that he, a Huguenot, was doomed if he stayed here in Languedoc, stranger though he was, for his nature was too noble to conceal aught; he was a Catholic who had renounced his ancient faith, a *nouveau converti*, yet of the wrong side for his future tranquility. And he boasted of it loudly, openly. He was doomed."

Again there was a pause broken only by the weeping of Urbaine. Then once more Baville continued:

"I beseeched him to go, to leave the neighbourhood, to depart in peace. Provided him with safe conducts, implored him to seek an asylum in England or Holland where those of his newly adopted creed were safe. He refused. Your mother, a woman of the province, had died in giving birth to you. He swore he would not leave the place where her body lay. He defied me, bade me do my worst."

"And--and----" Urbaine sobbed.

"And the orders came from Paris. From Louvois, then alive, and Madame de Maintenon. '*Saccagez tous!*' they wrote. 'Those who will not recant must be exterminated.'

"Then I sent to him by a trusty hand a copy of those orders. I bade him fly at once, since even I could not save him. Told him that on a fixed night--great God! it was the night ere Christmas, the night when the priests bid us have our hearts full of love and mercy for each other--I *must* be at his cottage with my Cravates. He was a marked man; also I was known to favour him. If I did so now, spared him and imprisoned others, all the south would be in a tumult."

Again Baville paused. Again went on:

"I never deemed I should find him; would have sworn he must be gone ere I reached his house. Yet went there, knowing that I dared not omit him. Went there, praying, as not often I have prayed, that it would be empty, forsaken. Alas! Alas! Alas! he had ignored my warning, my beseechings. He *was* there, reading his Bible. He defied me. By his hand he had a pistol. Seeing the Cravates behind me, their musketoons ready, it seemed as though he was about to use it. Raised it, pointed it at me, covered my breast."

The pause was longer now. Martin, hearing, understanding all, his mind and memory returned to him, thought Baville dreaded to continue. Yet it was not so. The full clear tones reached his ear again:

"I could not deem him base enough to do that, to shoot me down like a dog, since I had drawn no weapon of my own. It was, I have divined since, the soldiers whom he defied. Yet in my contempt for what I thought his idle threat, I cried scornfully '*Tirez donc*.' Alas, ah, God! the fatal error that has forever darkened your life and mine! Those words were misunderstood. The Cravates misunderstood them, believed the exclamation an order given to them by me; a moment later they had fired. O Urbaine! my love, my child--I--I--what more is there to tell?"

And as he ceased, hers were not the only sobs Martin heard now.

Then, as they too ceased somewhat, another voice was heard by the listener--the voice of Buscarlet.

"You hear? The wrong, that was in truth no wrong, is atoned. Has never been. Your way is clear before you. The evil he has wrought has not come nigh you or yours. Woman, as his heart has ever cherished you, I, a pastor of your rightful faith, bid you give back your love to him."

The dawn was coming as the old man spake these words. In the thin light of that new morning which crept in from where the moon's ray had shone through the night, Martin, his fur covering tossed from off him long since, saw Urbaine fall on Baville's breast, heard her whisper, "My father, oh, my father!" Knew, too, that they were reconciled, the past forgotten. And thanked God that it was so.

Yet once again Buscarlet spoke, his white hair gleaming in the light of the coming day, his old form erect and stately before the other.

"You are absolved by her," he said; "earn absolution, too, for your past cruelty by greater mercy to others of her faith. I charge you, I, a priest of that persecuted faith, that henceforth you persecute no more. God has given you back your child's love. Be content."

* * * * * * *

A little later and those three were gathered round the spot where Martin lay, with, in the background, a fourth figure, that of Baville's own surgeon. He had been brought by the Intendant after Buscarlet had told the latter all that he had ridden hastily to Nîmes to inform him of, and when the pastor had declared that if surgical aid was not at once forthcoming the wounded man must surely die. And, seeing him, the surgeon had said that his life still hung in the balance; that if what Baville desired was to be done, it had best be done at once.

"It will make you happy?" Urbaine whispered, her lips close to her lover's, her arms about him.

"Passing happy," he murmured, "beyond all hope. Now, now, at once."

"You can do it?" the Intendant asked, turning to the pastor.

"I can do it now."

"So! Let it be done."

"Stay there by his side," Buscarlet said then to Urbaine, "upon your knees.--Take you her hand," to Martin.

And in whispered tones he commenced the marriage ceremony of the Huguenots as prescribed by their Church.

"Repeat after me that you take Urbaine Ducaire to be your wedded wife"

"Nay, nay," said Baville, interposing. "Nay, I had forgotten. Not that. Not that. The packet would have told what both must have learned ere they had been married elsewhere. Now I must tell it myself. Her name is not Urbaine Ducaire."

"Not Urbaine Ducaire?" all exclaimed, looking up at him. "Not Urbaine Ducaire?"

"Nay. Nor her father's Urbain Ducaire. Instead, this," and he produced hastily his tablets from his pocket and wrote on them for some few moments, muttering as he did so, "I knew it not till lately, until I communicated with those in Paris, though I suspected. Also," he repeated, "the packet would have told all."

Then, thrusting the tablets into the pastor's hands, while all around still gazed incredulously at him, he said aloud: "Marry her in those names and titles. Hers by right which none can dispute, and by the law of Richelieu passed through the Parliament of Paris in the last year of his life. The right of sole daughters where no male issue exists."

"These titles are lawfully hers?" Buscarlet asked, reading in astonishment that which Baville had written, while Urbaine clung closer still to her lover, wondering what further mystery surrounded her birth, and Martin, no light breaking in on him as yet, deeming Baville demented. "Lawfully hers?"

"Lawfully, absolutely hers. Proceed."

And again Buscarlet commenced:

"Repeat after me that you take Cyprienne, Urbaine Beauvilliers----"

"My God!" whispered Martin faintly ere he did so. "My God! that my quest ends here!" Then he repeated the words that Buscarlet read from Baville's tablets as he had been bidden.

"Baronne de Beauvilliers," the pastor continued, "Comtesse de Montrachet, Marquise du Gast d'Ançilly, Princesse de Rochebazon, daughter of Cyprien, Urbain Beauvilliers, former bearer of those titles, to be your wedded wife--to----"

* * * * * * *

It was finished. They were married. The union blessed by a pastor of their own Church and attested by him who had so persecuted the members of that Church by order of the man, if indeed it was by his orders, whom they called "The Scourge of God."

And Martin, gazing up into the eyes of his wife, murmured:

"I have not failed, my love, in what I sought. But, ah, that my search should bring me to such perfect peace, should end with you! Now, if I die, I die happy."

But even as she held him close to her, his head upon her shoulder, he knew, felt sure, that he

would not die; that God would restore him to a new life, to be passed as long as it lasted by her side.

POSTSCRIPT.--The historical incidents in the foregoing story have necessarily, for obvious purposes in one or two instances, been altered from their exact sequence. With this exception they are described precisely as they occurred, each description being taken from the best authorities, and especially the best local ones. Exclusive of the names of Ashurst, Ducaire, and all pertaining to that of De Rochebazon and of De Rochebazon itself, the others are, in almost every case, authentic.

FOOTNOTES

Footnote 1: Baville judged accurately. Of all who are descended from those great Protestant houses, there is not one now who is not of the Roman Catholic faith.

Footnote 2: Doubtless the Prophet's visions foresaw the Battle of Almanza, whereon many hundreds of Camisards fell fighting for England and the allies against France. A strange battle this! in which the French were led by an Englishman, the Duke of Berwick, and the English by a Frenchman, Ruvigny, afterward the Earl of Galloway.

Footnote 3: Among the inspired prophets of the Cévennes, none were supposed to be more penetrated with this gift than the youngest children. In their histories there are recorded instances, or perhaps I should say beliefs, of babes at their mothers' breasts who had received it, and were by signs and motions supposed to direct the actions of their seniors.

THE END.

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