

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

THE SCOURGE OF GOD

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John Bloundelle-Burton

The Scourge of God / A Romance of Religious Persecution

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-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 Sevigné 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 necessities 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, Bavière. 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

'TWIXT THEN AND NOW

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 titular 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 revered 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 Beauvilliers."

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 Rochembazon 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 *déjeuner 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 *déjeuner*."

"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 *déjeuner* 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—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. Baviille-ho, Baviille! -*le Roi de Languedoc*, as he is termed-the prior of St. Maurice-the priest of Frugères-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 Frugères. 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. Baviile would not spare you."

"Baviile 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 Baviile, 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 Baviile'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 Baviile, 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.

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