

**CECILIA
BRIGHTWELL**

PALISSY THE
HUGUENOT
POTTER

Cecilia Brightwell
Palissy the Huguenot Potter

«Public Domain»

Brightwell C.

Palissy the Huguenot Potter / C. Brightwell — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| PREFACE | 5 |
| CHAPTER I | 6 |
| CHAPTER II | 10 |
| CHAPTER III | 13 |
| CHAPTER IV | 17 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 19 |

C. L. Brightwell

Palissy the Huguenot Potter / A True Tale

PREFACE

The readers of this little book may ask, with great propriety, “What is meant by a true tale?” and the answer to this question shall be very explicit, as it is of great importance that there should be no misunderstanding as to the matter of truth or fiction.

What is known of the history of Palissy is gathered from his writings, which are written in the form of dialogues, and into which he has incorporated short narratives of the events of his own life, and of the occurrences which took place under his own eyes. These, and a few incidental notices of him in contemporary writers, are the sources whence the materials for his life have been gathered.

In the present narrative, I have attempted to give an account of the facts which Palissy has himself recorded, weaving them into a tale. For instance, he tells us, in one of his treatises, of his troubles, and experiments, and sorrows, during the time he was engaged in discovering the white enamel; and he gives, now and then, a peep at his domestic life, showing how his poor children drooped and died; how he became burdened with debt; that his family and friends reproached him for his long and unprofitable toil; and that his neighbors joined in their invectives against his folly; also, that when reduced to the greatest straits, he obtained help from a friendly publican.

So with the religious events narrated: they are given from his work, “Recepte Vèritable, par laquelle tous les hommes de la France,” etc.¹ All that has been done is to arrange these details in order, and give them a narrative form. There is not one event in this narrative which did not actually occur, although it was not possible to give literally a Life of Palissy.

The principal aim has been to call attention to his religious character, which has been but slightly noticed in the accounts of those who have recorded the achievements of this great genius, as an artist in earth. He was, in fact, a French Huguenot: one of the glorious band of martyrs for the faith of Jesus; and he has told us, in a touching and simple manner, what he saw and heard in those days of persecution and trial.

The plan adopted seemed not only legitimate, but the one which could best render the work attractive and pleasing to those for whose instruction it is designed. They may be assured that the sentiments and doings of Palissy are here truly recorded, and if they take his example as an incentive to earnest, patient, and unwearying application – above all, if they adopt his high standard and the motive which sanctified all his work – they will not read this “True Tale” in vain.

I cannot conclude without expressing the great obligations I am under to Mr. Morley’s “Life of Palissy,” which has been my guide throughout. Of his admirable translations of the various passages he has given from the original treatises, I have gladly availed myself, finding it impossible to improve upon them.

Norwich, *November*, 1858.

¹ “A true Recipe, whereby all the inhabitants of France may learn to multiply and augment their possessions.”

CHAPTER I

*“And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one;
to every man according to his several ability.”*
– *Matthew xxv. 15*

In the south-west of France is the ancient town of Saintes, the capital of Saintonge, charmingly situated on the river Charente, and once the most flourishing city of all Guienne. It is a very ancient place, and was, in the time of the Romans, one of the principal cities of Aquitaine. There are still some slight remains of an amphitheatre, and a fine Roman bridge spans the waters of the Charente, bearing a Latin inscription (now illegible) upon its frieze. Placed at the foot of a mountain, the aspect of the town from a distance is impressive, but its streets are narrow and winding, and its houses low and ill-built. In olden times it boasted an ancient cathedral dedicated to St. Peter, and said to have been built by Charlemagne; but only the bell-tower now remains, and, indeed, most of the antiquities in which the town once abounded must be named among the things that were. A great deal of this destruction is attributed to the religious struggles which were carried on in Saintes with especial fierceness, and of which some record will be found interwoven in the story of Palissy the Potter.

It was in the year 1538, one morning in May, that the people of the old narrow-streeted town we have described, were surprised to find a strange family had arrived among them. The new-comers were a young couple who brought with them an infant in arms, and presently established themselves in a small house on the outskirts of the city, the frontage of which looked upon one of the steep crooked streets, and presented to view a workshop, in which were displayed various objects calculated to attract the eyes of passers-by. Above all, at the entrance of the door was placed the figure of a dog, modelled and painted in such life-like fashion, that many a time was this sturdy-looking guardian of the threshold challenged to single combat by the perplexed dogs of the good town.

It was not long before the inhabitants of Saintes learned that the head of this small family was named Bernard Palissy, and that he desired to obtain occupation among them as a surveyor, a painter, or a worker in glass. In the former of these occupations they soon discovered that he possessed considerable talent. He had good knowledge of geometry, and manual skill in the employment of the rule and compass, and these enabled him to measure and plan sites for houses and gardens, and to make maps of landed property; all which might turn to account in disputes as to questions of boundaries, a source of constant litigation formerly, in most countries. But, unfortunately, land measuring came only now and then, and on the arts of painting and glass-working, he must chiefly depend for support. The neighbours learned, too, after a while, to look with favourable eyes upon the young artist, whose spirit and vivacity attracted them, and seemed always to shed a sunshine around his home; for Palissy was a man full of hope at all times; and, even in the darkest hour of evil fortune he still looked cheerfully onward. At the time when he settled in Saintes he was about thirty years old. Of his early history but few particulars are known; he was born in the diocese of Agen, of parents so poor that they were unable to give him the advantages of a liberal education. However, he learned to read and write, and from his early youth showed a turn for drawing and designing, and speedily attained a degree of skill which secured him employment in painting on glass and drawing plans.

It was by the small funds he procured in this way that he supported himself during his travels through the principal provinces of France, which he traversed, everywhere gazing, with youthful eagerness, on the works of God and the productions of human skill.

For nine or ten years he wandered on; sometimes pausing, and taking up his temporary residence in places where he found employment. Thus, at Tarbes, the capital of Bigorre, he dwelt some years, and in sundry other towns he sojourned awhile. It is evident that those were years of education to his young and indefatigably inquiring spirit. He was storing up knowledge which was

afterwards turned to excellent account. He investigated the arts of life and studied the monuments of antiquity, observing the local customs and habits of the places he visited, acquiring dexterity of hand, while, at the same time, he enlarged his mind. But the study in which he most delighted was that of natural history. The great interest he took in the various qualities of the earths, rocks, sands, and waters, on account of the relation they bore to his calling, had made him a naturalist. Everywhere he employed his leisure hours in wandering over the woods and meadows, and thus he studied that wondrous book men call the Book of Nature.

It is time we visit the humble dwelling of the man of genius, who, his wanderings now over, has quietly settled down, and is entering on the earnest business of life, full of that spiritual sense of power which begets hopefulness, and, at the same time, simple-hearted and loving as a child. Bernard's studio was no other than a small out-house, in which he wrought at his occupation, and beyond which was a little garden, filled with the choice plants and herbs he met with in his rambles through the woods and pasture lands around Saintes. The evening hour has just set in, bringing with it rest and relaxation, and the artist has laid aside his tools and is fondling the little Nicole, his eldest born; while his eyes glance lovingly towards his young wife, who, delicate and slightly formed, looks but ill-fitted to endure the troubles of life – we must add, the troubles peculiar to the wife of a genius.

For the present, however, the evil days have not come upon her, and she replies with looks of pleasure to his fond words. He is telling her of the glorious ramble he has had in the early morning, and of the treasures he has seen and gathered. A large earthen pot stands on his work-bench, filled with flowers and foliage, and his pencil has been diligently occupied in imitating the bright colors and elegant forms of these wild plants, with the minute accuracy of a naturalist. Lisette has opened his portfolio, and is turning over the loose sketches it contains; butterflies, lizards, beetles, and many other wild creatures are there – all drawn from nature, and true to the smallest tracery-work upon the insects' wings. To her exclamation of delight he answers, "Truly, it is a great recreation to those who will contemplate admiringly the wondrous works of nature, and methinks I could find nothing better than to employ one's-self in the art of agriculture, and to glorify God, and to admire him in his marvels. As I walked along the avenues, and under the foliage of the chestnuts, I heard the murmuring waters of a brook which passes at the foot of the hill; and on the other side the voices of the young birds warbling among the trees; then there came to my memory that 104th Psalm, where the prophet says, 'He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills;' also, he says, 'By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches.'"

The mother took the infant from her husband, and began undressing him for bed, while the father smiled and went on, half soliloquizing, "When I had walked through the avenue, I turned toward the side, where the woods and mountains are, and there I received a great contentment, and much joyous pleasure, for I saw the squirrels gathering the fruits and leaping from branch to branch, with many pretty looks and gestures; further on, I beheld the rooks busy at their repast; and again, under the apple trees I found certain hedgehogs, which had rolled themselves up, and having thrust their little hairs, or needles, through the said apples, went so burdened. I saw likewise many things narrated in that Psalm, as the conies, playing and bounding along the mountains, near certain holes and pits which the Sovereign Architect has made for them: and when suddenly the animals caught sight of an enemy, they knew well how to retire into the place which was ordained to be their dwelling. Then I exclaimed, 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all.' Such sights as these have made me so great a lover of the fields, that it seems to me there are no treasures on earth so precious, or which ought to be held in such great esteem, although they are the most despised."

At that moment Lisette, who had risen from the bench on which they had seated themselves, looking toward the palings of their garden, perceived a tall figure leaning there. She directed the attention of her husband to this person, and then retired into the chamber with her infant. A few moments after, Bernard was in eager conversation with the stranger. They spoke in low accents, as though anxious not to be overheard. "Let us go down to the field together," said Palissy; "I must

speak with thee, master Philibert, where our words may be freely uttered;” and presently the two had disappeared in the twilight.

This Master Philibert Hamelin, who was so eagerly accosted by our artist, was one of those “poor and unlearned men,” whose names were chronicled in the list of “heretics,” as infected with the taint of disloyalty to the Roman Catholic Church. At the time when Palissy came forth into life, the minds of men were greatly agitated by those religious struggles which convulsed Europe during the sixteenth century. From Germany the desire of spiritual emancipation had spread abroad, and before long the fire which burned with such fierceness during the terrible wars of the Huguenots, was kindled in France. Examples of religious persecution, cruel punishments of heretics, and expressions of much discontent on matters of faith, must, without fail, have often attracted the notice of Palissy during his years of travel.

As we have already intimated, Saintes became a stronghold of the new opinions. Many “heretics,” and among them Calvin himself, the great Reformer, had taken refuge in Saintonge – the very district in which the home of Palissy was afterwards fixed. He dwelt there in the house of a young man, whose friends were wealthy; and this youth persuaded Calvin, while in his retirement there, to write Christian sermons and remonstrances, which he then caused to be preached by curés in the neighbourhood. These curés were “certain Reformed monks,” who, having adopted the new tenets, visited among the people, teaching them secretly, and gradually instructing them, so that by degrees the eyes of many were opened to see the errors of the Romish Church.

Among those who had eagerly embraced the instructions of Calvin was Hamelin, who, consequently, having incurred suspicion of heresy, escaped from Saintes, and journeyed to Geneva, at that time the head quarters of the French Reformers, where he acquired clearer knowledge of divine truth, and increased earnestness. Zealous to communicate to others the faith he had adopted, he wandered from place to place through the provinces of his native land, exerting himself wherever he went to incite men to have ministers, and to gather themselves into church communion. So eager was he to spread the gospel, that he took up with the trade of a printer, and printed Bibles, which he hawked about in the towns and villages. In the course of his journeyings, he passed through one of the towns in which Palissy had taken up his temporary abode. The spirit of the young artist was stirred within him as he listened to the animated exhortations of Hamelin, who, having gathered together a little flock of some seven or eight auditors, laboured to win them to God: and exhorted them to meet together for prayer and mutual instruction.

His teaching fell like the dew upon the heart of the young man, and he eagerly sought out the preacher and took counsel with him. From that time the persecuted Huguenot commanded the love and reverence of Palissy, who never spoke of him but in terms of respect and affection.

At the period of which we are about to speak, although the persecutions had not yet reached Saintonge, the struggle had begun in many towns by the tumultuous rising of the people, and severe punishments were inflicted upon all who joined in these outbreaks. Emissaries of the ecclesiastics were keenly on the watch for suspected characters, and it was at the risk of fine, imprisonment, and death, that the proceedings of men like Hamelin were carried on. Nor was it without serious danger of compromising his own safety that Palissy cultivated the friendship of a man so attainted, and of this he was well aware. It was, however, no part of his character to flinch from trouble or peril in such a cause.

It will be unnecessary to relate what passed between the two friends on the evening in which we have introduced Palissy to our readers. The visit of Hamelin was secret and hurried. He had come for the purpose of bringing to the poor people he had formerly taught around Saintes, three teachers, who, having been convinced of the errors of the Romish Church, had been constrained to take flight and exile themselves. Having recommended them to the friendly notice of Bernard, and taken counsel with him as to certain precautionary measures, Hamelin hastened to quit the neighbourhood of a

place in which he was too well known to venture himself openly. Some years passed away before these two met again.

Shall we follow our artist homeward, as slowly and thoughtfully he retraced his steps thither? He was pondering, in the earnestness of his heart, an idea which was indeed the mainspring of all his intellectual and moral activity. Again and again in his writings does he solemnly recur to this idea, and in all the long years of his toil and suffering to acquire the skill which was to render him immortal in the history of art; this was his incentive and spur. The parable of the talents – the duty of every man to turn to account the powers and gifts he has received from God – was the touchstone by which Bernard tried his work.

His own words, written long after, will best close this opening chapter. “Though there be some who will at no time hear mention of the holy Scripture, yet so it is that I have found nothing better than to pursue the counsel of God; his edicts, statutes, and ordinances; and in regarding what might be his will, I have found that he has commanded his heirs that they should eat bread by the labour of their bodies, and that they should multiply the talents which he has committed to them. Considering which, I have not been willing to hide in the ground those talents it has pleased him to allot me; but to cause them to yield profit and increase to him from whom I have received them.”

CHAPTER II

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.”
Eccles. ix. 10.

For a considerable time after he had settled at Saintes, Palissy went on surveying, painting, and designing, working industriously, and earning a competent, though slender, income for the support of his household – an increasing one – for he had now another baby to kiss, as well as a child upon his arms. Conscious of his own strength, and dissatisfied with labour which produced only food, he naturally felt eager to accomplish something better than he had yet done.

There is often a long period, during which a man of genius is occupied in gathering together materials, unconscious what use they shall eventually serve; but the turning-point of his history comes, and suddenly, perhaps through a passing and merely accidental circumstance, he receives an impetus which directs him on to the fulfilment of his career. It was thus in the case of Palissy. Some two years after the events related in the preceding chapter, Bernard had received a little commission from one of the great seigneurs who lived in the neighbourhood of Saintes. He was a man of much taste in the fine arts, and had in his possession some choice specimens of ancient Moorish pottery. After showing these to Palissy (who had come to the château for directions), the nobleman, going to the cabinet from which they had been taken, drew out an earthen cup, turned and enamelled with so much beauty, that, at the sight of it, our artist was struck dumb with admiration. He knew nothing of pottery, he had no knowledge of clays, and he was aware of the fact that there was no man in all France who could make enamels.

This last thought acted, perchance, as a stimulus to his ambition. However that might be, the idea instantly took possession of his mind that he would make enamels. They could be made, for here was a specimen. To be the only man in the land who could produce these beautiful vases would be not only to secure an abundant supply for the wants of his family, but it would be a triumph of art – a riddle of deep interest to solve, and an occupation after his heart.

That evening he called his wife to him, and told her what he had seen, and how his heart was set upon learning to make enamels. The poor woman saw by his beaming countenance that he was pleased; she knew that he loved her and their children, and she said not a word to discourage him, although he plainly told her, with that truthfulness which was as the very breath of his nostrils, that his first experiments must be made at great cost. “There will be the loss of my time from my wonted occupation; besides that, I must purchase drugs and make me furnaces, and all, at first, a clear outlay, without fruit. I shall have many drawbacks, and it may be a weary while before I master this art. I shall be as a man that gropes his way in the dark, for I have no knowledge of clays, nor have I ever seen earth baked, nor do I know of what materials enamels are composed.” His wife urged that he had better rest content with diligence in his own calling, and on her pale face came a blush of pleasure and pride as she looked up at him, who was already, in her esteem, a perfect artist. But he heeded not her words, save that he tenderly bade her be of good cheer. Poverty and pain would have mattered little to him personally; and had he been free from household cares, he would, in all likelihood, have wandered forth among the potters, and learned all that could be gathered of their work from them. But he was bound to home and its cares and duties, and so, alone, unaided, and without sympathy, must he work. Nothing daunted, however, by these drawbacks, his resolve was taken – to complete his invention, or perish in the attempt.

Before retiring to rest that night, Palissy, as his custom was, devoutly opened the sacred volume; and turning to the thirty-fifth chapter of Exodus, he read how God called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri, and filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, and to devise curious works, in gold, in silver, in brass, and in cutting of

stones, and in carving of wood, in all manner of cunning work. “Then I reflected,” said he, “that God had gifted me with some knowledge of drawing, and I took courage in my heart, and besought him to give me wisdom and skill.”

Palissy lost no time in setting to work. He began by making a furnace which he thought most likely to suit his purpose, and having bought a quantity of earthen pots, and broken them into fragments, he covered these with various chemical compounds which he had pounded and ground, and which he proposed to melt at furnace heat. His hope was, that of all these mixtures, some one or other might run over the pottery in such a way as to afford him at least a hint towards the composition of white enamel, which he had been told was the basis of all others. Alas! his first experiment was but the beginning of an endless series of disappointments and losses, while, for many long months and years he wrought with fruitless labor. But we must not anticipate. Happily the ardent spirit of our artist suffered him not easily to succumb under difficulties; nay, it even seemed to gather new energy from the struggle, as, with all the fire of love and all the strength of will, he, every day, renewed his experiments, and blundered on with cheerful hope. It has well been said, “Ideas become passions in the breasts of poets and artists.”

Many months have now passed in this way; and the little family gathering around Palissy’s humble hearth begin to show symptoms that all is not so flourishing as when we first saw them. Lisette looks thin and worn, and there is a shadow upon her brow. As she goes down the garden walk to call her husband to his mid-day meal, you see her garments are poor and scanty, and she has no longer the trim look of conscious comeliness about her. By her side, and clinging to her gown, is a delicate creature, whose pale face tells a sorrowful tale of childish suffering, and the infant she is carrying looks sallow and feeble. The furnace and shed where Palissy is at work are built at the end of the garden, as far as possible from the house. Close by, is the road, and beyond it the fields and waste lands; there was no sheltering wall or enclosure near, and when the storm and winds of winter blew, nothing could be more bleak and comfortless. Palissy has drawn a doleful picture of this scene of his labors. “I was every night,” he says, “at the mercy of the rains and winds, without help or companionship, except from the owls that screeched on one side, and the dogs that howled upon the other; and oftentimes I had nothing dry upon me, because of the rains that fell.” At the present time, however, it is looking cozy and picturesque, for the season is spring, and a bright sun is shining overhead. There is a glad sound, too, proceeding from the shed, over which its owner has trained a cluster-rose, whose tendrils have interwoven themselves among the reeds, and are putting forth their blossoms. It is the voice of Palissy, chanting in clear sonorous tones, the Psalm which Luther loved so well, and which we sing in the tuneful strains of our unequalled psalmodist —

“God is the refuge of his saints,
When storms of sharp distress invade.”

And the little Nicole, who is busily occupied in mimic pottery-work at the door of the shed, chimes in with his small voice, and beats the time with his wooden spade. Lisette’s face brightened as she listened, and with cheerful tones, she summoned Bernard indoors, and bade the little boy lead his sister back.

Notwithstanding Palissy’s psalmody and the cheerful face he wore, matters were far from satisfactory at this peculiar juncture. In fact, he had just undergone a heavy disappointment, and was secretly making up his mind to a step which it cost him a grievous heartache to have recourse to. Seeing that all his experiments with his own furnace had proved failures, he determined to adopt a new scheme, and send the compositions to be tested in the kiln of some potter. For this purpose he bought a large stock of crockery, which according to custom, he broke into small fragments; three or four hundreds of which he covered with various mixtures, and sent to a pottery some league and a half off, requesting the workmen to bake this strange batch with their own vessels. They consented

readily to let the amateur potter try his experiments; but alas! when the operation was complete, and the trial pieces were drawn out, they proved absolutely worthless. Not the smallest appearance of the longed-for enamel was to be seen on any of them. The cause of the failure was a secret, at the time, to the grievously disappointed Bernard, and he returned home heavily discouraged, for he knew that his wife and children were deprived of many comforts they might have enjoyed, had he continued steadily at his occupation of glass-working and surveying. What was to be done? “Begin afresh.” And so, again he fell to work, compounding and grinding, and sending more batches to the same potters to be baked as before. This he had continued to do time after time, “with great cost, loss of time, confusion, and sorrow.”

At length a more than usually trying failure had occurred, and many things combined to warn our artist that he must desist for a season and procure some remunerative work. His home resources were completely exhausted; while the home wants had greatly multiplied, and he could not be blind to the sorrowful looks of the woman he loved, nor indifferent to the necessities of his babes.

Three years had been spent about this work, and, for the present, he was no wiser than when he began, and he resolved now to try his hand at the old trades. His poor wife urged that food and medicine must be thought of, and she lowered her voice as she added that the doctor had yet to be paid for her confinement, and for physicking their lost darling, whom he said he would soon cure, notwithstanding, she pined and languished like a frost-nipped flower, that fades away and dies. Poor mother! the tears trickled down her cheeks at the thought; and for all there were still three hungry little mouths to feed, she could not be reconciled to the loss of one of her treasures. But Palissy would not let her dwell upon this sorrow; he wiped away the tears, and smilingly said, he had good news for her. Yesterday, there had arrived in the town the commissioners deputed by the king to establish the salt-tax in the district of Saintonge; and it seems they had judged no man in the diocese more competent than Bernard Palissy for the task of mapping the islands and the countries surrounding all the salt marshes in that part of the world. It was a profitable job, and would occupy him many months.

This was, indeed, glad tidings for Lisette; and that night she slept sweetly, and dreamed of her girlhood; for when the heart is happy it suns itself in the memories of early days. Her husband’s rest was broken and perturbed, for it pained him deeply to give up the struggle which had cost him so much, before he had justified his pertinacious efforts by success.

Perhaps it was in reality advantageous to him, and tended to his eventual success, that he was thus perforce constrained to taste an interval of repose. When a man has been repeatedly foiled it is well to cease from effort awhile, and to dismiss, if possible, the subject which has occupied his thoughts too long and too unremittingly.

Revolving in his mind such considerations, Palissy determined wholly to cease from his labours in pursuit of the discovery on which his heart was set, and “to comport himself as if he were not desirous to dive any more into the secrets of enamels.”

CHAPTER III

“Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”
– *Rev. xiv. 12.*

Of the profitable task assigned him by the commissioners of the gabelle (or tax), Palissy has left some memorial in his spirited account of the salt marshes of Saintonge. The work with which he was intrusted was to make a plan of the district adjoining the western coast line, where was the celebrated salt-marsh, which yielded the largest supply of salt. At that time Saintonge was the chief source of salt in France, until it was obtained more abundantly from Brittany, and a large sum was gathered into the royal revenue from the tax produced by this article. But with all the skill and energy of taxation, difficulties and fraud still perplexed and threatened the tax receivers; and in the year 1543, Francis I, after trying various means for enforcing the payment of the gabelle, determined on a new and more stringent system, in consequence of which it became necessary that an accurate survey should be taken and new maps prepared.

What chiefly interests us in this matter of the surveying is the fact that the islands Oléron, Allevvert, and Marepènes – called the Saintonic Isles – which adjoin and form part of this marshy district, were a favourite resort for the persecuted refugees, who brought the Reformed tenets into Saintonge. These districts being remote from the public roads, in fact being an intricate labyrinth of marshes, afforded a safe hiding-place, and there several “Reformed monks” had established themselves; some taking to a little trade, others keeping village-schools, and finding sundry means of gaining a livelihood, without being known. As it was impossible for large ships to approach the low flat coast, one of the chief difficulties in ordering the marshes was to form channels of communication by which the salt made on them might be conveyed to the open sea. An immense amount of money and labour had been expended in the construction of dykes, canals, or passages – of which there was a perfect net-work, extending many miles – to afford the means of bringing up small barques or vessels, which thus penetrated the flat country, and conveyed the salt from thence. So intricate was this labyrinthine communication, that a stranger inclosed therein without a guide, would have been wholly unable to thread his way, or extricate himself from their meshes. During the winter season, all these marshes were flooded, in order that the clay which formed the foundation of the dykes or canals, might be protected by the water from the destructive bite of the frost; and thus, for a considerable part of the year, all communication was blocked up, or wholly cut off. What an admirable place of refuge must this district have afforded to men hunted like partridges upon the mountains! Accordingly here the three refugees brought by Hamelin, together with many others similarly circumstanced, had found shelter: men these, whose guileless lives and active charity commended them to the esteem of the poor peasants among whom they had sought a home. They visited in their cottages, ministered, as best they could, to their wants, and ventured by degrees to promulgate those spiritual truths, for the sake of which they had suffered the loss of all worldly goods, and were prepared to yield life itself. At first their instructions were cautiously given. They spoke in parables, and with hidden meaning, until they were assured they should not be betrayed. Slowly, but steadily, the leaven had begun to work, and it was shortly after Palissy had completed his task (which involved no slight labour, and occupied him more than a year), that a report came to the ears of the bishop of Saintes, that the place was full of Lutherans, whom it was highly desirable to extirpate without delay.

The devil never wants for agents to execute his malicious purposes; and at this juncture, a man of “perverse and evil life,” named Collardeau (a fiscal attorney), set busily to work to discover the lurking places of the heretics. In that day, Saintes was an extensive and lucrative bishopric, including more than 700 parishes, and its bishop was an august personage, in whose veins flowed “the blood

of St. Louis,” Charles, cardinal of Bourbon, brother of the king of Navarre, then twenty-three years of age. His fitting place was the court, and, accordingly, there he abode, taking small note of the heretical doings among the poor villagers of the Saintonic isles.

With zeal worthy a good cause, Collardeau not only repeatedly wrote to this high dignitary, preferring his charges, but eventually crowned his energetic efforts by a journey to the capital, and by these means he succeeded in obtaining a commission from the bishop and the parliament of Bordeaux, with ample funds for carrying out his designs. Thus furnished, he proceeded to work upon the cupidity of certain judges, with whom he tampered so successfully that he procured the arrest of the preacher of St. Denis, a small town at the extremity of the isle of Oléron, named brother Robin, a man of such metal, that the principal anxiety had been to lay hand upon him by way of example. Shortly after, another preacher named Nicole was taken; and a few days later a similar fate overtook the schoolmaster at Gimosac, a man much beloved of the inhabitants, to whom he preached on Sundays. This last arrest keenly touched the heart of Palissy. He knew and esteemed the good brother, and had intrusted to his care his little Nicole, who had been placed at the school of Gimosac from the time Bernard had made his survey of the marshes. The poor child wept bitterly as he described to his parents the grievous parting his young eyes had witnessed; for, undaunted by the threats of their cruel enemies, the poor villagers accompanied, with prayers, tears, and lamentations, their beloved instructor to the shores of their little island. Alas! there, perforce, they parted never to meet on earth again.

It was the eve of St. John, the twenty-third of June, 1546, when the citizens of Saintes beheld a strange and ominous scene, the commencement of the horrors subsequently perpetrated within the walls of their ancient town. The day, being a gala one, was ushered in with music of every kind, while the whole population, down to the lowest of the multitude, were decorated with flowers. Old pitch-barrels and faggots, piled up along the banks of the river, lay in readiness for the illuminations of the evening, while games, dances, and banquets were the diversions of the day. In the afternoon, there were to be many hogsheads of claret delivered out, and a universal merry-making prevailed. From an early hour crowds hastened to perform their devotions at the shrine of the patron saint of the city, carrying with them their votive offerings with which to propitiate his favour.

Among the multitude who thronged the high street at noon, were two men, one tall, and of a vigorous form, who looked with an air of thoughtful concern around him. He was still in the prime of manhood, and about his whole bearing there was a certain air of energetic intelligence, while, ever and anon, his eyes kindled with the fire of enthusiasm; one saw at once he was a worker, and that what his hands found to do would be done with all his might. His companion was small and deformed, and would not have awakened any interest save from the intense feeling visible on his pale, sunken countenance. The two were approaching the church of St. Eutropius, where the saint was displayed to the admiring gaze of the people. On entering the sacred edifice, all kneeled down reverently before a kind of cupboard with an iron grating before it, and at an awful distance made sundry genuflections, and uttered various prayers. At last, the attendant priests opened the door of the closet where the head of the saint was deposited, and displayed the treasure to view. It would be difficult to conceive an object less calculated to awaken feelings of true devotion than that presented for adoration. It was very large, and formed entirely of solid silver; the hair and an immense pair of whiskers were gilt, and the shoulders were covered with lawn, and decorated with glittering gems. All around were placed the gifts brought by the deluded people, who ascribed the most marvellous power of healing to this graven image. The divinity was absolutely encircled with their votive offerings. Group after group, alternately advancing and retiring, filled up the church, and then emerged into the busy streets to gaze upon the crowds of gaily bedecked revellers, and gossip over the news of the day.

Close to the gate of the church Palissy and his companion had taken their stand, and were conversing together in low tones. “Alas! I know the truth of the facts, and can assert them for such,” said the former; “nay, I was myself present when the three brethren admirably disputed and

maintained their religion in the presence of that false theologian, Navières, who had himself, some months ago, begun to detect errors, although now, conquered by his love of gain, he stoutly upholds the contrary. Well did brother Robin know how to reproach him with this to his face, and he flinched under his words, but for all the right is with the poor heretics, as they are called, the power is with their enemies, and they have ever since languished in prison. After a while Robin fell sick of pleurisy, and as it was feared he might die in his bed, after all, they sent both for physician and apothecary, the latter of whom is well known to me, having been but too frequent a visitor in my afflicted household. The worthy man has conveyed many a message from me to the brethren, and in more ways than one has done them good service.” “And now they are to be made a show of openly, like the servants of the Lord in former times,” said Bernard’s comrade; “it is a hateful thing when the wicked triumph, and when the righteous are as the offscouring of all things.” “Patience, my good Victor,” replied the sturdy potter. “Let us see the end of these things. At present we are but in the beginning of sorrows; I am of opinion we must lay our account for trouble, and assure ourselves that we shall have enemies and be persecuted, if, by direct paths, we will follow and sustain the cause of God; for such are the promises written originally in the Old and New Testaments. Let us, then, take refuge under the shelter of our protecting Chief and Captain the Lord Christ, who, in time and place, will know how properly to avenge the wrongs his people have suffered, and our sorrows.”

As he spoke, the sound of music was heard at a distance, and presently a noisy rabble crowded the street, running, shouting, pushing, and gesticulating. Then followed the procession, whose approach had been heralded by the sound of drums, fifes, and tabrets; horsemen gaily attired, rode, two and two, at a foot pace; then flags and banners were borne aloft, and a troop of priests, barefooted, and carrying torches, advanced at a slow pace. A strange and melancholy sight was next presented to the eyes of the by-standers; three men, caparisoned in green, and bedizened with fluttering ribbons, walked, bridled like horses, and each of them having an *apple* of iron fastened to the bridle, which filled all the inside of his mouth. Thus tortured and degraded, the three brethren, Robin, Nicole, and he of Gimosac, were driven, like beasts, by their cruel enemy, Collardeau, who triumphantly conducted them, in this wise, to a scaffold, which was erected in the market-place, that they might there be exposed to the public execration, as fools and madmen. This done, they were returned to prison, thence to be conveyed to Bordeaux to receive sentence of death.

“A hideous sight to behold,” said Palissy, drawing a deep breath, as he looked after the three sufferers, whose sole crime was that they had manfully upheld the cause of truth, “and one that makes us marvel at the wondrous patience of God. How long, O Lord, wilt thou leave thy chosen ones at the mercy of those who cease not to torment them?” This sorrowful exclamation had scarcely been uttered, when two fellows who stood near fell to quarrelling and beating each other. A ring was soon formed around them, and the bystanders looking on cried, “Give it him well; strike as though he were an heretic.” “Alas!” said Palissy, “what frightful crimes will be committed when such a spirit grows rife; already terrible things are done elsewhere. I heard but yesterday, through one who shall be nameless, that many are burned and destroyed in various ways, in Paris and elsewhere. A peasant in the forest of Lyons, met four men who were on their way to execution. He asked the reason of their punishment, and having learned they were Huguenots, claimed a place upon the cart, and went to the gallows with them.”

That evening there occurred what Bernard called “an admirable accident.” The three heretics had been conveyed to their prison-house carefully guarded; and, above all, Robin, who was the principal object of hatred, and whom it was designed to put to death with the most cruelty. He was kept, with his companions, heavily ironed, in a prison attached to the bishop’s palace, and a sentry was placed to watch outside, while a number of large village dogs were turned into the court-yard. But, for all these precautions, Robin did not despair. He had obtained a file (probably Palissy could have told how he managed this,) and having filed off the irons which were upon his legs, he gave the file to his fellow-captives, and proceeded to scrape a hole through the prison wall. But a strange accident

here occurred. It chanced that a number of hogsheads which had been emptied during the fête, had been piled, one above another, against the wall, and these being pushed down by the prisoner, in his efforts to escape, fell with rumbling noise, and awakened the sleeping sentry, who listened for a while, but hearing nothing further, and overcome by the fumes of the liquor in which he had indulged somewhat freely, relapsed into slumber. Bernard tells, in his quaint manner, what next befell, thus: "Then the said Robin went out into the court at the mercy of the dogs; however, God had inspired him to take some bread, which he threw to the said dogs, who were quiet as the lions of Daniel. It was so ordered that he should find an open door, which led into the garden, where, finding himself again shut up between certain somewhat high walls, he perceived by the light of the moon, a tall pear tree, close enough to the outer wall, and having mounted this, he perceived, on the outer side of the wall, a chimney, to which he could leap easily enough." He was soon safe in the street, but, having never been in the town before, he was at a loss how to proceed. In this dilemma, the clever fugitive recalled to mind the names of the physician and apothecary who had attended him, and went knocking from door to door inquiring for their residence. He had contrived to fasten his fetters to his leg, and carrying his dress about his shoulders, had the adroitness to arrange it somewhat after the costume of a footman, so that the people whom he roused were deceived, and supposing it to be an urgent case of sickness, gave him the necessary directions. In this manner he succeeded in gaining the shelter of a friendly roof, and from thence was conducted safely out of the town; nor was he again taken, though, in the course of his perilous adventure, he had knocked at the door of one of his principal enemies, who, in the morning, offered a reward of fifty dollars for his recapture.

Alas, for Nicole and the kind-hearted schoolmaster of Gimosac! Brother Robin would fain have had them accompany him and share his risk, but they chose rather to remain in their fetters. Seeing they had neither strength nor energy to follow his example, he took a sorrowful leave of them, praying with and consoling them, exhorting them to do valiantly, and to meet death with courage. Both perished in the flames a few days after; one in the city of Saintes, and the other at Libourne. The heart of Palissy was too full to suffer him to detail the particulars of this event. It was the first time the fires of persecution had blazed before his eyes; and as he gazed upon the terrific sight, his soul was kindled with a zeal unquenchable, and from that time the whole force of his energy was upon the side of the Reformers.

CHAPTER IV

“Then I went down to the potter’s house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter.”

– *Jer. xviii. 3, 4.*

Shortly before the events recorded in the preceding chapter, there had been no small excitement among Palissy’s poor neighbours and acquaintance, with reference to his proceedings. Day after day little knots of gossips might be seen, lounging about the neighbourhood of his garden and workshed, expressing in various ways, their surprise and indignation at his conduct, and exclaiming, in no measured terms, against his obstinate and mad folly. This indignation reached its height when, one day, the report spread, far and wide, that the poor man was actually insane, and had torn up the palings of his garden, and the planks of his dwelling-house, and that his unhappy wife, half-crazed with his conduct, had herself rushed out of the house accompanied by her children, and taken refuge with a neighbour.

In order to account for all this, it is necessary to retrace our steps, and relate in what manner our artist has been spending the two years that have intervened since his marsh-surveying.

Undaunted by the failure of his early efforts, and relieved, for a time, from anxiety on the score of domestic wants, Palissy, giving the money he had received for the execution of his task into the hands of his wife, resumed his “affection for pursuing in the track of the enamels.”

Two years of unremitting and zealous labour followed, productive of no practical results, although there had once been a partial melting of some of his compounds, which gave him sufficient encouragement to persist. During those two long years, he tells us, he did nothing but come and go between his dwelling and the adjacent glass-houses, where the furnaces being much hotter than those of the potteries, were more likely to be successful in melting his materials.

Was it any marvel if poverty and sorrow invaded his household; if his wife grew moody and sad, and if the neighbours, pitying the hapless woman and innocent children, pronounced hard judgment upon a man who consumed his time in buying pots and breaking them, in grinding drugs and burning them, and in going to and fro upon his bootless errand? Death, too, had once and again entered his doors, bearing away the two sickly infants we saw clinging to their mother, while in their place, two others had been born, inheriting, alas! their malady. Of late, Lisette, full of gloomy thoughts, had taken to complaining, and remonstrating with her husband. Her temper had been soured by disappointment and trouble; and hope, so long deferred, ceased to buoy up her spirit. She could not understand the course Bernard was pursuing. She did not partake in his glowing visions of future fame and prosperity, and the instinct of power and the energy of will that nerved and inspired him were all unknown to and unshared by her. Poor suffering woman! She felt as any other common-sense wife and mother would have felt in her circumstances; and bewailing his obstinate persistence in such profitless labour, she embittered his home by her lamentations and reproaches.

In this strait Palissy began to give way: he faltered, and at length made a compromise with his anxious helpmate. One more last trial he pleaded for; and then – if it failed, he would abandon the search for ever! He must have felt that the happiness as well as the fortune of his life, depended on the cast. Rather, we learn from his own touching account of what ensued, that he looked for counsel and help from above. In all his ways did this good man acknowledge his heavenly Father’s hand, and seek his blessing. What befell, in this crisis, he thus tells us: “God willed that, when I had begun to lose my courage, and was gone for the last time to a glass furnace, having a man with me carrying more than 300 kinds of trial pieces, there was one among them which was melted within four hours

after it had been placed in the furnace, which turned out white and polished, in a way that caused me to feel such joy as made me think I was become a new creature.”

With winged feet he flew home, bearing his treasure, which he pronounced “exceedingly beautiful,” and, almost beside himself with delight, he rushed into the chamber, where his poor wife lay in her sick bed, and holding up the shining white fragment exclaimed, “I have found it!” Lisette caught the infection of his gladness, and hailed the first ray of returning prosperity. Poor woman, she little knew how long she must wait before she could warm herself in its sunshine.

But Palissy was convinced that he had now discovered the full perfection of the white enamel; and his delight was in proportion to all the toil and struggle the discovery had cost him. No more any idea, now, of giving over, and returning to his old calling. Illustrious results must soon follow, he was sure, and from henceforth it was necessary he should work privately, and construct for his own use a furnace like that of the glass-workers. Already in imagination stretching out his hand to grasp the prize, he eagerly betook himself to moulding vessels of clay, shaped after his own designs, which, covered with the exquisite white enamel he had discovered, he purposed to adorn with lovely paintings. He saw them doubtless, in his mind’s eye, beautiful, as those he actually produced in after years – those perfect master-pieces of porcelain in relief, and dishes ornamented with figures, beasts, reptiles, insects, beetles, and flowers: treasures of art, full of grace, beauty, and simplicity, which were eagerly purchased by the rich seigneurs of that day, to adorn their cabinets and beautify their châteaux, and which now sell for their weight in gold.

But though his fancy saw them, as his taste, so exquisite and refined, had already designed them, still it was with the rough clay his hands were actually at work, and he had, unfortunately for his present need, “never understood earths.”

Some seven or eight months more were expended in making these vessels, and then he began to erect the furnace. With incredible difficulty and labour – for he had none to assist him in the work, not even so much as to draw water, and fetch bricks from the kiln – the indefatigable man wrought till he had completed the furnace, and the preliminary baking of his vessels. And then, instead of reposing after all this toil, by the space of more than a month, he worked, night and day, grinding and compounding the materials of which he had made the white enamel. At length his task was completed, and the vessels, coated with the mixture, were arranged within the furnace.

Look at him now! – he has kindled his furnace fire, and is feeding it through its two mouths. He does not spare the fuel; he diligently throws it in, all day; he suffers it not to slacken all night. Yet the enamel does not melt. The sun rises, bright and glowing, and Nicole, now a sturdy boy of eleven or twelve years old, brings his father a basin of pottage for breakfast; a poor and scanty meal, ill-fitted to recruit his over-taxed powers, but eagerly devoured by the hungry artisan, who pauses for a few moments in order to swallow it. How pale and thin and haggard he looks! What a strained expression does his countenance wear; but all indomitable and calmly hopeful ’mid his toil!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.