

Weyman Stanley John

For the Cause



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I

Paris had never seemed to the eye more peaceful than on a certain November evening in the year 1589: and this although many a one within its walls resented the fineness of that night as a mockery, a scoff at the pain of some and the fury of others.

The moonlight fell on roofs and towers, on the bare open space of the Place de Grève and the dark mass of the Louvre, and only here and there pierced, by chance, a narrow lane, to gleam on some foul secret of the kennel. The Seine lay a silvery loop about the Ile de la Cité—a loop cut on this side and that by the black shadows of the Pont au Change, and the Petit Pont, and broken again westward by the outline of the New Bridge, which was then in building.

The city itself lay in profound quiet in the depth of the shadow. From time to time at one of the gales, or in the lodge of the Châtelet, a sentinel challenged or an officer spoke. But the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, which had rung through hours of the

past day was silent. The tumult which had leaped like flame from street to street had subsided. Peaceful men breathed again in their houses, and women, if they still cowered by the hearth, no longer laid trembling fingers on their ears. For a time the red fury was over: and in the narrow channels, where at noon the mob had seethed, scarcely a stray wayfarer could now be found.

A few however were abroad: and of these some who chanced to be threading the network of streets between the Châtelet and the Louvre, heard behind them the footsteps of a man in great haste, and saw pass them a youth, white-faced and wearing a sword and a student's short cloak and cap-apparently a member of the University. He for his part looked neither to right nor left: saw not one of them, and seemed bent only on getting forward.

He slackened his space however near the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, where it shoots out of the Rue de Béthisy, and then turning it with a rush, caught his foot in some obstacle, and plunging forward, would have fallen violently, if he had not come against a man, who seemed to be standing still in the shadow of the corner house.

"Hold up!" exclaimed this person, withstanding the shock better than could have been expected. "You should have a pretty mistress, young man, if you go to her at this pace!"

The student did not answer-did not seem to hear. He had staggered against the wall, and still stood propping himself up by it. His face, pale before, was ghastly now, as he glared, apparently horror-struck, at something beyond the speaker. The latter, after

muttering angrily, "What the plague do you go dashing about the streets like a Shrove Tuesday ox for?" turned also and glanced behind him.

But not at that to which the student's eyes were directed. The stranger seemed constrained to look first and by preference at the long, low casement of a house nearly opposite them. This window was on the first floor, and projected somewhat over the roadway. There seemed to be no light in the room; but the moonlight reached it, and showed a woman's head bent on the sill—a girl's head, if one might judge from its wealth of hair. One white wrist gleamed amid this, but her face was hidden on her arms. In the whole scene—in the casement open at this inclement time, in the girl's attitude of abandonment, there was something which stirred the nerves. It was only after a long look that the stranger averted his eyes, and cast a casual glance at a queer, dark object, which a few paces away swung above the street, dimly outlined against the sky. It was that which had fascinated his companion.

"Umph!" he ejaculated in the tone of a man who should say "Is that all?" And he turned to the other again. "You seem taken aback, young man!" he said. "Surely that is no such strange sight in Paris nowadays. What with Leaguers hanging Politiques, and Politiques hanging Leaguers, and both burning Huguenots, I thought a dead man was no longer a bogey to frighten children with!"

"Hush, sir, in Heaven's name!" exclaimed the young man,

shuddering at his words. "He was my father!"

The stranger whistled. "He was your father, was he!" he replied more gently. "I dare swear too that he was an honest man, since the Sixteen have done this. There, steady, friend. These are no times for weeping. Be thankful that Le Clerc and his crew have spared your home, and your-your sister. That is rare clemency in these days, and Heaven only knows how long it may last. You wear a sword? Then shed no tears to rust it. Time enough to weep, man, when there is blood to be washed from the blade."

"You speak boldly," said the youth, checking his emotion somewhat, "but had they hung your father before his own door-"

"Good man," said the stranger with a coolness that bordered on the cynical, "he has been dead these twenty years."

"Then your mother?" suggested the student with the feeble persistence by which weak minds show their consciousness of contact with stronger ones, "you had then-"

"Hung them all as high as Haman!"

"Ay, but suppose there were among them," objected the youth, in a lower tone, while he eyed his companion narrowly, "some of the clergy, you understand?"

"They had swung-though they had all been Popes of Rome," was the blunt answer.

The listener shook his head, and drew off a pace. He scanned the stranger curiously, keeping his back turned to the corpse the while, but failed by that light to make out much one way or

the other. Scarcely a moment too was allowed him before the murmur of voices and the clash of weapons at the far end of the street interrupted him. "The watch are coming," he said roughly.

"You are right, and the sooner we are within doors the better," his companion assented.

It was noticeable that throughout their talk which had lasted many minutes no sign of life had appeared in any of the neighboring houses. Scarce a light shone from a window though it was as yet but nine o'clock. The fact was that fear of the Sixteen and of the mob they guided was overpowering Paris-a terror crushing out men's lives. While the provinces of France were divided at this time between two opinions, and half of each as a rule owned the Huguenot Henry the Fourth-now for six months the rightful sovereign-for king, Paris would have none of him. The fierce bigotry of the lower classes, the presence of some thousands of Spanish soldiers, and the ambition and talents of the Guise family combined at once to keep the gates of Paris closed to him, and to overawe such of the respectable citizens as from religious sympathy in rare cases, and more often out of a desire to see law and order re-established, would fain have adopted his cause. The Politiques, or moderate party, who were indifferent about religion as such, but believed that a strong government could only be formed by a Romanist king, were almost non-existent in Paris. And the events of the past day, the murder of three judges and several lower officials-among them poor M. Portail whose body now decorated the Rue de l'Arbre Sec-had

not reassured the municipal mind. No wonder that men put out their lights early, and were loth to go to their windows, when they might see a few feet from the casement the swollen features of a harmless, honest man, but yesterday going to and from his work like other men.

Young Portail strode to the door of the house and knocked hurriedly. As he did so, he looked up with something like a shiver of nervous apprehension at the window above. But the girl neither moved nor spoke, nor betrayed any consciousness of his presence. She might have been dead. It was a young man, about his own age or a little older, who, after reconnoitring him from above, cautiously drew back the door. "Whom have you with you?" he whispered, holding it ajar, and letting the end of a stout club be seen.

"No one," Portail replied in the same cautious tone. And he would have entered without more ado, and closed the door behind him had not his late companion, who had followed him across the street like his shadow, set his foot against it. "Nay, but you are forgetting me," he said good-humoredly.

"Go your way! we have enough to do to protect ourselves," cried Portail brusquely.

"The more need of me," was the careless answer.

The watch were now but a few houses away, and the stranger seemed determined. He could scarcely be kept out without a disturbance. With an angry oath Felix Portail held the door for him to enter; and closed it softly behind him. Then for a minute

or so the three stood silent in the darkness, while with a murmur of voices and clash of weapons, and a ruddy glimmer piercing crack and keyhole, the guard swept by.

"Have you a light?" Felix murmured.

"In the back room," replied the young man who had admitted them. He seemed to be a clerk or confidential servant. "But your sister," he continued, "is distraught. She has sat at the window all day as you see her now-sometimes looking at *it*. Oh Felix, this has been a dreadful day for this house!"

The young Portail assented by a groan. "And Susanne?" he asked.

"Is with Mistress Marie, terrified almost to death, poor child. She has been crouching all day by her, hiding her face in her gown. But where were you?"

"At the Sorbonne," replied Felix in a whisper.

"Ah!" the other exclaimed, something of hidden meaning in his tone. "I would not tell her that, if I were you. I feared it was so. But let us go upstairs."

They went: with more than one stumble by the way. At the head of the staircase the clerk opened a door and preceded them into a low-roofed panelled room, plainly but solidly furnished, and lighted by a small hanging lamp of silver. A round oak table on six curiously turned legs stood in the middle, and on it some food was laid. A high-backed chair, before which a sheep-skin rug was spread, and two or three stools made up with a great oak chest the main furniture of the room.

The stranger turned from scrutinizing his surroundings, and started. Another door had silently opened; and he saw framed in the doorway and relieved by the lamplight against the darkness of the outer room the face and figure of a tall girl. A moment she stood pointing at them with her hand, her face white-and whiter in seeming by reason of the black hair which fell around it-her eyes dilated, the neck-band of her dark red gown torn open. "A Provençal!" the intruder murmured to himself. "Beautiful and a tigress."

At any rate, for the moment, beside herself. "So you have come at last!" she panted, glaring at Felix with passionate scorn in word and gesture. "Where were you while these slaves of yours did your bidding? At the Sorbonne with the black crows! Thinking out fresh work for them? Or dallying with your Normandy sweetheart?"

"Hush!" he said quailing visibly. "There is a stranger here."

"There have been many strangers here today!" she retorted bitterly. "Hush, you say? Nay, I will not be silent. They may tear me limb from limb, but I will accuse them of this murder before God's throne. Coward! Do you think I will ask mercy from them? Come, look on your work! See what the League have done-your holy League! – while you sat plotting with the black crows!"

She pointed into the dark room behind her, and the movement disclosed a younger girl clinging to her skirts, and weeping silently. "Come here, Susanne," said Felix, who had turned pale and red under the lash of the other's scorn. "Your sister is not

herself. You do no good, Marie, staying in there. See, you are both trembling with cold."

"With cold? Then do you warm yourselves! Sit down and eat and drink and be comfortable and forget him! But I will not eat or drink while he hangs there! Shame, Felix Portail! Have you arms and hands, and will you let your father hang before his own door?"

Her voice rang shrilly to the last word; and then an awkward silence fell on the room. The stranger nodded, almost as if he had said, "Bravo!" The two men of the house cast doubtful glances at one another. At length the clerk spoke. "It is impossible, mistress," he said gently. "Were he touched, the mob would wreck the house to-morrow."

"A little bird whispered to me as I came through the streets," — it was the stranger who spoke—"that Mayenne and his riders would be in town to-morrow. Then it seems to me that our friends of the Sorbonne will not have matters altogether their own way."

The Sorbonne was the Theological College of Paris; at this time the headquarters of the extreme Leaguers and the Sixteen. Mayenne and D'Aumale, the Guise princes, more than once found it necessary to check the excesses of this party.

Marie Portail looked at the last speaker. He sat on the edge of the chest, carelessly swinging one knee over the other; a man of middle height, rather tall than short, with well bronzed cheeks, a forehead broad and white, and an aquiline nose. He wore a beard and moustaches, and his chin jutted out. His eyes were keen,

but good-humored. Though spare he had broad shoulders, and an iron-hilted sword propped against his thigh seemed made for use rather than show. The upper part of his dress was of brown cloth, the lower of leather. A weather-stained cloak which he had taken off lay on the chest beside him.

"You are a man!" cried Marie fiercely. "But as for these--"

"Stay, mistress!" the clerk broke in "Your brother does but collect himself. If the Duke of Mayenne comes back to-morrow, as our friend here says is likely-and I have heard the same myself-he will keep his men in better order. That is true. And we might risk it if the watch would give us a wide berth."

Felix nodded sullenly. "Shut the door," he said to his sister, the deep gloom on his countenance contrasting with the excitement she betrayed. "There is no need to let the neighbors see us."

This time she obeyed him. Susanne too crept from her skirts, and threw herself on her knees, hiding her face on the chair. "Ay!" said Marie looking down at her with the first expression of tenderness the stranger had noted in her. "Let her weep. Let children weep. But let men work."

"We want a ladder," said the clerk in a low voice. "And the longest we have is full three feet short."

"That is just half a man," remarked he who sat on the chest.

"What do you mean?" asked Felix wonderingly.

"What I said."

"But there is nothing on which we can rest the ladder," urged the clerk.

"Then that is a whole man," quoth the stranger curtly. "Perhaps two. I told you you would have need of me." He looked from one to the other with a smile; a careless, self-contented smile.

"You are a soldier," said Marie suddenly.

"At times," he replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"For which side?"

He shook his head. "For my own," he answered naïvely.

"A soldier of fortune?"

"At your service, mistress; now and ever."

The clerk struck in impatiently. "If we are to do this," he said, "we had better see about it. I will fetch the ladder."

He went out and the other men followed more slowly, leaving Marie still standing gazing into the darkness of the outer room—she had opened the door again—like one in a trance. Some odd trait in the soldier led him, as he passed out, to lay his hand on the hair of the kneeling child with a movement infinitely tender; infinitely at variance with the harsh clatter with which his sword next moment rang against the stairs as he descended.

The three men were going to do that which two certainly, and perhaps all, knew to be perilous. One went to it in gloom, anger as well as sorrow at his heart. One bustled about nervously, and looked often behind him as if to see Marie's pale face at the window. And one strode out as to a ball, glancing up and down the dark lane with an air of enjoyment, which not even the grim nature of his task could suppress. The body was hanging from a

bar which crossed the street at a considerable height, serving as a stay between the gables of two opposite houses, of which one was two doors only from the unhappy Portails'. The mob, with a barbarity very common in those days, had hung him on his own threshold.

The street as the three moved up it, seemed empty and still. But it was impossible to say how long it would remain so. Yet the soldier loitered, staring about him, as one remembering things. "Did not the Admiral live in this neighborhood?" he inquired.

"De Coligny? Yes. Round the corner in the Rue de Béthisy," replied the clerk brusquely. "But see! The ladder will not reach the bar-no, not by four feet."

"Set it against the wall then-thus," said the soldier, and having done it himself he mounted a few steps. But then he seemed to bethink himself. He jumped down again. "No," he exclaimed, peering sharply into the faces of one and the other, "I do not know you. If any one comes, my friends, and you leave the foot of the ladder I shall be taken like a bird on a limed twig. Do you ascend, Monsieur Felix."

The young man drew back. He was not without courage, or experience of rough scenes. But the Louvre was close at hand, almost within earshot on one side, the Châtelet was scarcely farther off on the other; and both swarmed with soldiers and brutal camp-followers. At any moment a troop of them might pass; and should they detect any one interfering with King Mob's handiwork, he would certainly dangle in a very few minutes from

some handy lamp-iron. Felix knew this, and stood at gaze. "I do not know you either," he muttered irresolutely, his hand still on the ladder.

A smile of surprising humor played on the soldier's face. "Nay, but you knew *him*!" he retorted, pointing upwards with his hand. "Trust me, young sir," he added significantly, "I am less inclined to mount now than I was before."

The clerk intervened before Felix could resent the insult. "Steady," he said; "I will go up and do it."

"Not so!" Felix rejoined, pushing him aside in turn. And he ran up the ladder. But near the top he paused, and began to descend again. "I have no knife," he said shamefacedly.

"Pshaw! Let me come!" cried the stranger. "I see you are both good comrades. I trust you. Besides, I am more used to this ladder work than you are, and time is everything."

He ran up as he spoke, and standing on the highest round but one he grasped the bar above his head, and swung himself lightly up, so as to gain a seat on it. With more caution he wormed himself along it until he reached the rope. Fortunately there was a long coil of it about the bar; and warning his companions in a whisper, he carefully, and with such reverence as the time and place allowed, let down the body to them. They received it in their arms; and were loosening the noose from the neck when an outburst of voices and the noise of footsteps at the nearer end of the street surprised them. For an instant the two stood in the gloom, breathless, stricken, still, confounded. Then with a single

impulse they lifted the body between them, and huddled blindly to the door. It opened at their touch, they stumbled in, and it fell to behind them. The foremost of the party outside had been within ten paces of them. A narrow escape!

Yet they had escaped. But what next? What of their companion? The moment the door shut behind them they would have rushed out again, ay, to certain death, so strongly had the soldier's trust appealed to their confidence. But they had the body in their arms; and by the time it was laid on the stairs, a score of men had passed. The opportunity was over. They could do nothing but listen. "Heaven help him!" fell from the clerk's quivering lips. Pulling the door ajar, they stood, looking each moment to hear a challenge, a shot, the clash of swords. But no. They did hear the party halt under the gallows, and pass some brutal jest, and go on. And that was all.

They could scarcely believe their ears; no, nor even their eyes, when a few minutes later the street being now quiet, they passed out, and stood in it shuddering. For there still swung the corpse dimly outlined above them! There! Certainly there! The clerk seized his companion's arm and drew him back. "It was the fiend!" he stammered. "See, your father is still there! It was the fiend who helped us!"

But suddenly the figure they were watching became agitated; another instant and it slid gently to the ground. It was the soldier. "O ye gods!" he cried, bent double with silent laughter. "Saw you ever such a trick? How I longed to kick if it were but my toe at

them, and I forbore! Fools that they were! Did man ever see a body hung in its sword? But it was a good trick, eh?" appealing to them with a simple pride in his invention. "I had the rope loose in my hand when they came, and I drew it twice round my neck-and one arm trust me-and swung off gently. It is not every one who would have thought of that, my children."

It was odd. They still shook with fear, and he with laughter. He did not seem to give a thought to the danger he had escaped. Pride in his readiness and a keen sense of the humorous side of the incident entirely possessed him. At the very door of the house he still chuckled from time to time; muttering between the ebullitions, "Ah, I must tell Diane! Diane will be pleased!"

Once inside, however, he acted with more delicacy than might have been expected. He stood aside while the other two carried the body upstairs; and himself waited patiently in the bare room below, which showed signs of occasional use as a stable. Here the clerk Adrian presently found him, and murmured some apology. Mistress Marie, he said, had fainted.

"A matter which afflicts you, my friend," the soldier replied with a grimace, "about as much as your master's death. Pooh, man, do not look fierce! Good luck to you. Only if-but this is no house for gallantry to-night-I had spruced myself, you had had to look to your ewe lamb!"

The clerk turned pale and red by turns. This man seemed to read his thoughts as if he had indeed been the fiend. "What do you wish?" he stammered.

"Only shelter until the early morning when the streets are most quiet; and a direction to the Rue des Lombards."

"The Rue des Lombards?"

"Yes, why not?" But though the soldier still smiled, the lines of his mouth hardened suddenly. "Why not to the Rue des Lombards?"

"I know no reason why you should not be going there," replied the clerk boldly. "It was only that the street is near; and a friend of my late master's lives in it."

"His name?"

The clerk started; the question was put so abruptly, and in a tone so imperious. "Nicholas Toussaint," he answered involuntarily.

"Ay?" replied the other, raising his hand to his chin meditatively and glancing at Adrian with a look that for all the world reminded him of an old print of the eleventh Louis, which hung in a room at the Hôtel de Ville. "Your master, young man, was of the moderate party—a Politique?"

"He was."

"A good man and a Catholic? one who loved France? A Leaguer only in name?" he continued with vividness.

"Yes, that is so."

"But his son? He is a Leaguer out and out—one who would rise to fortune on the flood tide of the mob? A Sorbonnist? The priests have got hold of him? He would do to others as they have done to his father? A friend of Le Clerc and Boucher?"

Adrian nodded reluctantly. This strange man confounded and yet fascinated him: this man so reckless and gay one moment, so wary the next: exchanging in an instant the hail of a boon companion for the tone of a noble.

"And is your young master also a friend of this Nicholas Toussaint?" was the next question.

"No," said Adrian, "he has been forbidden the house. M. Toussaint does not approve of his opinions."

"Ha! That is so, is it," rejoined the stranger with his former gayety. "And now enough: where will you lodge me until morning?"

"If my closet will serve you," Felix answered with a hesitation he would not have felt a few minutes before, "it is at your will. I will bring some food there at once, and will let you out if you please at five." And Adrian added some simple directions, by following which his guest might reach the Rue des Lombards without difficulty.

An hour later if the thoughts of those who lay sleepless under that roof could have been traced, some strange contrasts would have appeared. Was Felix Portail thinking of his dead father, or of his sweetheart in the Rue des Lombards, or of his schemes of ambition? Was he blaming the crew of whom until to-day he had been one, or sullenly cursing those factious Huguenots as the root of the mischief? Was Adrian thinking of his kind master, or of his master's daughter? Was the guest dreaming of his narrow escape? or revolving plans beside which Felix's were but the

schemes of a rat in a drain? Perhaps Marie alone-for Susanne slept a child's sleep of exhaustion-had her thoughts fixed on him, who so few hours before had been the centre of the household.

But such is life in troubled times. Pleasure and pain come mingled together, and men snatch the former even from the midst of the latter with a trembling joy; knowing that if they wait to go a pleasuring until the sky be clear, they may wait until nightfall.

When Adrian called his guest at cock-crow the latter rose briskly and followed him down to the door. "Well, young sir," he said on the threshold, as he wrapped his cloak round him and took his sheathed sword in his hand, "I am obliged to you. When I can do you a service, I will."

"You can do me one now," replied the clerk bluntly, "It is ill work having to do with strangers in these days. You can tell me who you are, and to which side you belong."

"Which side? I have told you-my own. And for the rest," continued the soldier, "I will give you a hint." He brought his lips near the other's ear, and whispered, "Kiss Marie-for me!"

The clerk looked up aflame with anger, but the other was already gone striding down the street. Yet Adrian received an answer to his question. For as the stranger disappeared in the gloom, he broke out with an audacity that took the listener's breath away into a well-known air,

"Hau! Hau! Papegots!

Faites place aux Huguenots!"

and trilled it as if he had been in the streets of Rochelle.

"Death!" exclaimed the clerk, getting back into the house, and barring the door, "I thought so. He is a Huguenot. But if he takes his neck out of Paris unstretched, he will have the fiend's own luck, and the Béarnais' to boot!"

II

When the clerk went upstairs, again, he heard voices in the back room. Felix and Marie were in consultation. The girl was a different being this morning. The fire and fury of the night had sunk to a still misery: and even to her it seemed over dangerous to stay in the house and confront the rage of the mob. Mayenne might not after all return yet: and in that case the Sixteen would assuredly wreak their spite on all, however young or helpless, who might have had to do with the removal of the body. "You must seek shelter with some friend," Felix proposed, "before the city is astir. I can go to the University. I shall be safe there."

"Could you not take us with you?" Marie suggested meekly.

He shook his head, his face flushing. It was hard to confess that he had power to destroy, but none to protect. "You had better go to Nicholas Toussaint's," he said. "He will take you in, though he will have nothing to do with me."

Marie assented with a sigh, and rose to make ready. Some few valuables were hidden or secured, some clothes taken; and then the little party of four passed out into the street, leaving but one solemn tenant in their home. The cold light of a November morning gave to the lane an air even in accustomed eyes of squalor and misery. The kennel running down the middle was choked with nastiness, while here and there the upper stories leaned forward so far as to obscure the light.

The fugitives regarded these things little after the first shivering glance, but hurried on their road; Felix with his sword, and Adrian with his club marching on either side of the girls. A skulking dog got out of their way. The song of a belated reveller made them shrink under an arch. But they fell in with nothing more formidable until they came to the high wooden gates of the courtyard in front of Nicholas Toussaint's house.

To arouse him or his servants, however, without disturbing the neighborhood was another matter. There was no bell; only a heavy iron clapper. Adrian tried this cautiously, with little hope of being heard. But to his joy the hollow sound had scarcely ceased when footsteps were heard crossing the court, and a small trap in one of the gates was opened. An elderly man with high cheek bones and curly gray hair looked out. His eyes lighting on the girls lost their harshness. "Marie Portail!" he exclaimed. "Ah! poor thing, I pity you. I have heard all. I only returned to the city last night or I should have been with you. And Adrian?"

"We have come," said the young man respectfully, "to beg shelter for Mistress Marie and her sister. It is no longer safe for them to remain in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"I can well believe it," cried Toussaint vigorously. "I do not know where we are safe nowadays. But there," he added in a different tone, "no doubt the Sixteen are acting for the best."

"You will take them in then?" said Adrian, with gratitude.

But to his astonishment the citizen shook his head, while an awkward embarrassment twisted his features. "It is impossible!"

he said reluctantly.

Adrian doubted if he had heard aright. Nicholas Toussaint was known for a bold man; one whom the Sixteen disliked, and even suspected of Huguenot leanings, but had not yet dared to attack. He was a dealer in Norman horses, and this both led him to employ many men, reckless daring fellows, and made him in some degree necessary to the army. Adrian had never doubted that he would shelter the daughter of his old friend; and his surprise on receiving this rebuff was extreme.

"But, Monsieur Toussaint-" he urged-and his face reddened with generous warmth as he stood forward. "My master is dead! Foully murdered! He lies who says otherwise, though he be of the Sixteen! My mistress has few friends now to protect her, and those of small power. Will you send her and the child from your door?"

"Hush, Adrian," cried the girl, lifting her head proudly, yet laying her hand on the clerk's sleeve with a tender touch of acknowledgment that brought the blood in redoubled force to his cheeks. "Do not press our friend overmuch. If he will not take us in from the streets, be sure he has some good reason to offer."

But Toussaint was dumb. Shame-a shame augmented tenfold by the clerk's fearlessness-was so clearly written on his face, that Adrian uttered none of the reproaches which hung on his lips. It was Felix who came forward, and said contemptuously, "So you have grown strangely cautious of a sudden, M. Toussaint?"

"Ha! I thought you were there, or thereabouts!" replied the

horse-dealer, regaining his composure at once, and eyeing him with strong disfavor.

"But Felix and I," interposed Adrian eagerly, "will fend for ourselves."

Toussaint shook his head. "It is impossible," he said surlily.

"Then hear me!" cried Felix with excitement. "You do not deceive me. It is not because of your daughter that you have forbidden me the house, and will not now protect my sister! It is because we shall learn too much. You have those under your roof, whom the crows shall pick yet! You, I will spare for Madeline's sake; but your spies I will string up, every one of them by-" and he swore a frightful oath such as the Romanists used.

Toussaint's face betrayed both fear and anger. For an instant he seemed to hesitate. Then exclaiming "Begone, parricide! You would have killed your own father!" he slammed the trap-door, and was heard retreating up the yard with a clatter, which sufficiently indicated his uneasiness.

The four looked at one another. Daylight had fully come. The noise of the altercation had drawn more than one sleepy face to neighboring casements. In a short time the streets would be alive with people, and even a delay of a few minutes might bring immediate danger. They thought of this; and moved away slowly and reluctantly, Susanne clinging to Adrian's arm, while Felix strode ahead scowling. When they had placed, however, a hundred yards or so between themselves and Toussaint's gates, they stopped, a chill sense of desolation upon most of them.

Whither were they to go? Felix urged curtly that they should seek other friends. But Marie declined. If Nicholas Toussaint dared not take them in, no other of their friends would. She had given up hope, poor girl, and longed only to get back to their home, and the still form, which it now seemed to her she should never have deserted.

They were standing discussing this when a cry caused them to turn. A girl was running hatless along the street towards them; a girl tall and plump of figure in a dark blue robe, with a creamy slightly freckled face, a glory of wavy golden hair about it, and great gray eyes that could laugh and cry at once, even as they were doing now. "Oh, Marie," she exclaimed taking her in her arms; "my poor little one! Come back! You are to come back at once!" Then disengaging herself, with a blushing cheek and more reserve she allowed Felix to embrace her. But though that young gentleman made full use of his permission, his face did not clear. "Your father has just turned my sister from his door, as he turned me a month ago," he said bitterly.

Poor girl, she quailed; looking at him with a tender upward glance meant for him only. "Hush!" she begged him. "Do not speak so of him. And he has sent to fetch them back again. He says he cannot keep them himself, but if they will come in and rest he will see them safely disposed of later. Will not that do?"

"Excellently, Miss Madeline," cried Adrian gratefully. "And we thank your father a thousand times."

"Nay but-" she said slyly-"that permission does not extend to

you,"

"What matter?" he said stoutly.

"What matter if Marie be safe you mean," she replied demurely. "Well, I would I had so gallant a clerk," with a glance at her own handsome lover. "But come, my father is waiting at the gate for us." Yet notwithstanding that she urged haste, she and Felix were the last to turn. When she at length ran after the others her cheeks betrayed her.

"I can see what you have been doing, girl," her father cried angrily, meeting her just within the door. "For shame, hussy! Go to your room, and take your friends with you." And he aimed a light blow at her, which she easily evaded.

"They will need breakfast," she persisted bravely. She had seen her lover, and though the interview might have had its drawbacks—best known to herself—she cared little for a blow in comparison with that.

"They will take it in your room," he retorted. "Come, pack, girl! I will talk to you presently," he added, with meaning.

The Portails drew her away. To them her room was a haven of rest, where they felt safe, and could pour out their grief, and let her pity and indignation soothe them. The horror of the last twenty-four hours fell from them. They seemed to themselves to be outcasts no longer.

In the afternoon Toussaint reappeared. "On with your hoods," he cried briskly, his good humor re-established. "I and half a dozen stout lads will see you to a place where you can lie snug

for a week."

Marie asked timidly about her father's funeral. "I will see to it, little one," he answered. "I will let the curate of St. Germain know. He will do what is seemly-if the mob let him," he added to himself.

"But father," cried Madeline, "where are you going to take them?"

"To Philip Boyer's."

"What!" cried the girl in much surprise. "His house is small and Philip and his wife are old and feeble."

"True," answered Portail. "But his hutch is under the Duchess's roof. There is a touch of *our great man* about Madame. Mayenne the crowd neither overmuch love, nor much fear. He will die in his bed. But with his sister it is a word and a blow. And the Sixteen will not touch aught that is under her roof."

The Duchess de Montpensier was the sister of Henry Duke of Guise, Henry the Scarred, *Our great man*, as the Parisians loved to call him. He had been assassinated in the antechamber of Henry of Valois just a twelvemonth before this time; and she had become the soul of the League, having more of the headstrong nature which had made him popular, than had either of his brothers, Mayenne or D'Aumale.

"I see," said Madeline, kissing the girls, "you are right, father."

"Impertinent baggage!" he cried. "To your prayers and your needle. And see that while we are away you keep close, and do not venture into the courtyard."

She was not a nervous girl, but the bare, roomy house seemed lonely after the party had set out. She wandered to the kitchen where the two old women-servants were preparing, with the aid of a turnspit, the early supper; and learned here that only old Simon, the lame ostler, was left in the stables, which stood on either side of the courtyard. This was not reassuring news: the more as Madeline knew her father might not return for another hour. She took refuge at last in the long eating-room on the first floor; which ran the full depth of the house, and had one window looking to the back as well as several facing the courtyard. Here she opened the door of the stove, and let the cheery glow play about her.

But presently she grew tired of this, and moved to the rearward window. It looked upon a narrow lane, and a dead wall. Still, there was a chance of seeing some one pass, some stranger; whereas the windows which looked on the empty courtyard were no windows at all-to Madeline.

The girl had not long looked out before her pale complexion, which the fire had scarcely warmed, grew hot. She started, and looked into the room behind her nervously: then looked out again. She had seen standing in a nook of the wall opposite her, a figure she knew well. It was that of her lover, and he seemed to be watching the house. Timidly she waved her hand to him, and he, after looking up and down the lane, advanced to the window. He could do this safely, for it was the only window in the Toussaints' house which looked that way.

"Are you alone?" he asked softly, looking up at her.

She nodded.

"And my sisters?" he continued.

"Have gone to Philip Boyer's. He lives in one of the cottages on the left of the Duchess's yard."

"Ah! And you? Where is your father, Madeline?" he murmured.

"He has gone to take them. I am quite alone; and two minutes ago I was melancholy," she added, with a smile that should have made him happy.

"I want to talk to you," he replied gravely. "May I get up if I can, Madeline?"

She shook her head, which of course meant no. And she said, "It is impossible." But she still smiled.

There was a pipe which ran up the wall a couple of feet or so on one side of the casement. Before she well understood his purpose, or that he was in earnest he had gripped this and was halfway up to the window.

"Oh, do take care," she cried. "Do not come, Felix. My father will be so angry!" Woman-like she repented now, when it was too late. But still he came on, and when his hand was stretched out to grasp the sill, all her fear was only lest he should fall. She seized his wrist, and helped him in. Then she drew back. "You should not have done it, Felix," she said severely.

"But I wanted to see you so much, Madeline," he urged, "and the glimpse I had of you this morning was nothing."

"Well then, you may come to the stove and warm yourself, sir. Oh! how cold your poor hands are, my boy! But you must not stay."

But stolen moments are sweet and apt to be long drawn out. She had a great deal to say, and he had a great deal, it seemed, to ask-so much to ask indeed, that gradually a dim sense that he was thinking of other things than herself-of her father and the ways of the house, and what guests they had, came over her.

It chilled her to the heart. She drew away from him, and said, suddenly, "Oh, Felix!" and looked at him.

Nothing more. But he understood her and colored; and tried to ask, but asked awkwardly, "What is the matter, dearest?"

"I know what you are thinking of," she said with grave sorrow, "Oh! it is too bad! It is base of you, cruel! You would use even me whom you love to ruin my friends!"

"Hush!" he answered, letting his gloomy passion have vent for the moment, "they are not your friends, Madeline. See what they have done for me. It is they, or the troubles they have set on foot, that have killed my father!" And he swore solemnly-carried away by his mistaken resentment-never again to spare a Huguenot save her father and one other.

She trembled and tried to close her ears. Her father had told her a hundred times that she could not be happy with a husband divided from her by a gulf so impassable. She had said to him that it was too late. She knew it. She had given Felix her heart and she was a woman. She could not take it back, though she

knew that nothing but unhappiness could come of it.

"God forgive you!" she moaned in that moment of strained insight; and sank in her chair as though she would weep.

He fell on his knees by her with a hundred words of endearment, for he had conquered himself again. And she let him soothe her. She had never loved him more than now, when she knew the price she must pay for him. She closed her eyes—for the moment—to that terrible future, and he was holding her in his arms, when without warning a heavy footstep rang on the stairs by the door.

They sprang apart. If even then he had had presence of mind, he might have reached the window. But he hesitated, looking in her startled eyes. "Is it your father?" he whispered.

She shook her head. "He cannot have returned. We should have heard the gates opened. There is no one in the house," she murmured faintly.

But still the footsteps came on: and stopped at the door. Felix looked round in despair. Close beside him, and just behind the stove was the door of a closet. He took two strides, and before he or she had thought of the consequences, was within it. Softly he drew the door to again; and she sank terrified on a chair, as the door of the room opened.

He who came in was a man of thirty-five, a stranger to her. A man with a projecting chin. His keen gray eyes wore at the moment of his entrance an impatient expression, but when he caught sight of her, this passed away. He came across the floor

smiling. "Pardon me," he said-but said it as if no pardon were needed, "I found the stables insupportably dull. I set out on a voyage of discovery. I have found my America!" And he bowed in a style which puzzled the frightened girl.

"You want to see my father?" she said tremulously. "He-"

"Has gone to the Duchess's. I know it. And very ill-natured it was of him to leave me in the stable, instead of intrusting me to your care, mistress. La Nouë," he continued, "is in the stable still, asleep on a bundle of hay, and a pretty commotion there will be when he finds I have stolen away!"

Laughing with an easy carelessness that struck the citizen's daughter with fresh astonishment, the stranger drew up the big armchair, which was commonly held sacred to M. Toussaint's use, and threw himself into it; lazily disposing his booted feet in the glow which poured from the stove, and looking across at his companion with open and somewhat bold admiration in his eyes. At another time she might have been offended: or she might not. Women are variable. Now her fears lest Felix should be discovered dulled her apprehension.

Yet the name of La Nouë had caught her ear. She knew it well, as all France and the Low Countries knew it in those days, for the name of the boldest and staunchest warrior on the Huguenot side.

"La Nouë?" she murmured, misty suspicions beginning to take form in her mind.

"Yes, pretty one," replied he laughing. "La Nouë and no other. Does Bras-de-fer pass for an ogre here in Paris that you tremble

so at his name? Let me--"

But whatever the proposition he was going to offer, it came to nothing. The dull clash of the gates outside warned both of them that Nicholas Toussaint and his party had returned. A moment later a hasty tread sounded on the stairs; and an elderly man wearing a cloak burst in upon them.

His eyes swept the room while his hand still held the door, and it was clear that what he saw did not please him. He came forward stiffly, his brows knitted. But he said nothing; seeming uncertain and embarrassed.

"See!" the first comer said, looking quietly up at him, but not offering to move. "Now what do you think of your ogre? And by the rood, he looks fierce enough to eat babes! There, old friend," he continued speaking to the elder man in a different tone, "spare your lecture. This is Toussaint's daughter, and as staunch I will warrant as her father."

The old noble--he had but one arm she saw--still looked at her with disfavor. "Girls have sweethearts, sire," he said shrewdly.

For a moment the room seemed to go round with her. Though something more of reproach and playful defence passed between the two men, she did not hear it. The consciousness that her lover was listening to every word and that from this moment La Nouë's life was in his hands, numbed her brain. She sat helpless, hardly aware that half a dozen men were entering, her father one of them. When a lamp was called for--it was growing dark--she did not stir: and Toussaint, not seeing her, fetched it himself.

But by the time he came back she had partly recovered herself. She noted that he locked the door carefully behind him. When the lamp was set on the table, and its light fell on the harsh features of the men, a ray passed between them, and struck her pale face. Her father saw her.

"By heaven!" he cried furiously. "What does the wench here?" No one answered; but all turned and looked at her where she cowered back against the stove. "Go, girl!" Toussaint cried, beside himself with passion. "Begone! and presently I will—"

"Nay, stop!" interposed La Nouë. "Your daughter knows too much. We cannot let her go thus."

"Knows too much? How?" and the citizen tossed his head like a bull balked in his charge.

"His majesty—"

"Nay, let his majesty speak for himself—for once," said the man with the gray eyes—and even in her terror and confusion Madeline saw that all turned to him with a single movement. "Mistress Toussaint did but chat with La Nouë and myself, during her father's absence. But she knows us; or one of us. If any be to blame it is I. Let her stay. I will answer for her fidelity."

"Nay, but she is a woman, sire," some one objected.

"Ay, she is, good Poulain," and he turned to the speaker with a singularly bright smile. "So we are safe, for there is no woman in France would betray Henry of Bourbon!"

A laugh went round. Some one mentioned the Duchess.

"True!" said Henry, for Henry it was, he whom the Leaguers

called the Béarnais and the Politiques the King of Navarre, but whom later generations have crowned as the first of French kings—Henry the Great. "True! I had forgotten her. I must beware of her gold scissors. We have two crowns already, and want not another of her making. But come, let us to business without ceremony. Be seated, gentlemen; and while we consider whether our plans hold good, Mistress Toussaint—" he paused to look kindly at the terrified girl—"will play the sentry for us."

Madeline's presence within a few feet of their council-board was soon forgotten by the eager men sitting about it. And in a sense she forgot them. She heard, it is true, their hopes and plans, the chief a scheme to surprise Paris by introducing men hidden in carts piled with hay. She heard how Henry and La Nouë had entered, and who had brought them in, and how it was proposed to smuggle them out again; and many details of men and means and horses; who were loyal and who disaffected, and who might be bought over, and at what price. She even took note of the manner of each speaker as he leaned forward, and brought his face within the circle of light, marking who were known to her before, substantial citizens these, constant at mass and market, and who were strangers; men fiercer-looking, thinner, haughtier, more restless, with the stamp of constant peril at the corners of their eyes, and swords some inches longer than their neighbors'.

She saw and heard this and reasoned dully on it. But all the time her mind was paralyzed by a dreadful sense of some great evil awaiting her, something with which she must presently come

face to face, though her faculties had not grasped it yet. Men's lives! Ah, yes, men's lives! The girl had been bred in secret as a Huguenot. She had been taught to revere the great men of the religion, and not the weakness of the cause, not even her lover's influence had sapped her loyalty to it.

Presently there was a stir about the table. The men rose. "Then that arrangement meets your views, sire," said La Nouë.

"Perfectly. I sleep to-night at my good friend Mazeau's," the king answered, "and leave to-morrow about noon by St. Martin's gate. Yes, let that stand."

He did not see—none of them saw—how the girl in the shadow by the stove started; nor did they mark how the last trace of color fled from her cheeks. Madeline was face to face with her fate, and knew that her own hand must work it out. The men were separating. Henry bade farewell to one and another, until only three or four beside Toussaint and La Nouë remained with him. Then he prepared himself to go, and girt on his sword, talking earnestly the while. Still engaged in low converse with one of the strangers, he walked slowly lighted by his host to the door, forgetting to take leave of the girl. In another minute he and they would have disappeared in the passage, when a hoarse cry escaped from Madeline's lips.

It was little more than a gasp, but it was enough for men whose nerves were strained. All-at the moment they had their backs to her, their faces to the king—turned swiftly. "Ha!" cried Henry at once, "I had forgotten my manners. I was leaving my most

faithful sentry without a word of thanks, or a keepsake by which to remember Henry of France."

She had risen, and was supporting herself-but she swayed as she stood-by the arm of the chair. Never had her lover been so dear to her. As the king approached, the light fell on her face, on her agonized eyes, and he stopped short. "Toussaint!" he cried sharply. "Your daughter is ill. Look at her!" But it was noticeable that he laid his hand on his sword.

"Stay!" she cried, the word ringing shrilly through the room. "You are betrayed! There is some one-there-who has heard-all! Oh, sire, mercy! mercy!"

As the last words passed the girl's writhing lips she clutched at her throat: seemed to fight a moment for breath: then with a stifled shriek fell senseless to the ground.

A second's silence. Then a whistling sound as half a dozen swords were snatched from the scabbards. The veteran La Nouë sprang to the door: others ran to the windows and stood before them. Only Henry-after a swift glance at Toussaint, who pale and astonished, leaned over his daughter-stood still, his fingers on his hilt. Another second of suspense, and before any one spoke, the cupboard door swung open, and Felix Portail, pale to the lips, stood before them.

"What do you here?" cried Henry, restraining by a gesture those who would have flung themselves upon the spy.

"I came to see her," Felix said. He was quite calm, but a perspiration cold as death stood on his brow, and his

distended eyes wandered from one to another. "You surprised me. Toussaint knows that I was her sweetheart," he murmured.

"Ay, wretched man, to see her! And for what else?" replied Henry, his eyes, as a rule, so kindly, bent on the other in a gaze fixed and relentless.

A sudden visible quiver-as it were the agony of death-shot through Portail's frame. He opened his mouth, but for a while no sound came. His eyes sought the nearest sword with horrid intentness. He gasped, "Kill me at once, before she-before-"

He never finished the sentence. With an oath the nearest Huguenot lunged at his breast, and fell back, foiled by a blow from the King's hand. "Back!" cried Henry, his eyes flashing as another sprang forward, and would have done the work. "Will you trench on the King's justice in his presence? Sheath your swords, all save the Sieur de la Nouë, and the gentlemen who guard the windows!"

"He must die!" cried several voices, as the men still pressed forward viciously.

"Think, sire! Think what you do," cried La Nouë himself, warning in his voice. "He has the life of every man here in his hand? And they are your men, risking all for the cause."

"True," replied Henry, smiling; "but I ask no man to run a risk I will not take myself."

A murmur of dissatisfaction burst forth. Several drew their swords again. "I have a wife and child!" cried one recklessly, bringing his point to the thrust. "He dies!"

"He does not die!" exclaimed the King, his voice so ringing through the room that all fell back once more; fell back not so much because it was the King who spoke as in obedience to the voice which two months before had rallied the flying squadrons at Arques, and years before had rung out hour after hour and day after day above the long street fight of Cahors. "He does not die!" repeated Henry, looking from one to another, with his chin thrust out, "I say it. I! And there are no traitors here!"

"Your majesty," said La Nouë after a moment's pause, "commands our lives."

"Thanks, Francis," Henry replied instantly changing his tone. "And now hear me, gentlemen. Think you that it was a light thing in this girl to give up her lover? She might have let us go to our doom, and we none the wiser! Would you take her gift and make her no requital? That were not royal. And now for you, sir" – he turned to Felix who was leaning half-fainting against the wall – "hearken to me. You shall go free. I, who this morning played the son to your dead father, give you your life for your sweetheart's sake. For her sake be true. You shall go out alive and safe into the streets of Paris, which five minutes ago you little thought to see again. Go! And if you please, betray us, and be damned! Only remember that if you give up your king and these gentlemen who have trusted you, your name shall go down the centuries-and stand for treachery!"

He spoke the last words with such scorn that a murmur of applause broke out even among those stern men. He took instant

advantage of it. "Now go!" he said hurriedly. "You can take the girl there with you. She has but fainted. A kiss will bring her to life. Go, and be silent."

The man took up his burden and went, trembling; still unable to speak. But no hand was now raised to stop him.

When he had disappeared La Nouë turned to the king. "You will not now sleep at Mazeau's, sire?"

Henry rubbed his chin. "Yes; let the plan stand," he answered. "If he betray one, he shall betray all."

"But this is madness," urged La Nouë.

The king shook his head, and smiling clapped the veteran on the shoulder. "Not so," he said. "The man is no traitor: I say it. And you have never met with a longer head than Henry's."

"Never," assented La Nouë bluntly, "save when there is a woman in it!"

The curtain falls. The men have lived and are dead. La Nouë, the Huguenot Bayard, now exist only in a dusty memoir and a page of Motley. Madame de Montpensier is forgotten; all of her, save her golden scissors. Mayenne, D'Aumale, a verse preserves their names. Only Henry-the "good king" as generations of French peasants called him-remains a living figure: his strength and weakness, his sins and virtues, as well known, as thoroughly appreciated by thousands now as in the days of his life.

Therefore we cannot hope to learn much of the fortunes of people so insignificant-save for that moment when the fate of a nation hung on their breath-as the Portails and Toussaints.

We do know that Felix proved worthy. For though the attack on Paris on the ninth of November, 1589, failed, it did not fail through treachery. And we know that he married Madeline, and that Adrian won Marie: but no more. Unless certain Portals now living in the north of Ireland, whose ancestors came over at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, are their descendants. And certainly it is curious that in this family the eldest son invariably bears the name of Henry, and the second of Felix.

KING PEPIN AND SWEET CLIVE

Upon arriving at the middle of the Close the Dean stopped. He had been walking briskly, his chin from very custom a little tilted, but his eyes beaming with condescension and general good-will, while an indulgent smile playing about the lower part of his face relieved for the time its massive character. His walking-stick was swinging to and fro in a loose grasp, his feet trod the pavement of the precincts with the step of an owner, he felt the warmth of the sun, the balminess of the spring air dimly, and somewhere at the back of his mind he was conscious of a vacant bishopric, and of his being the husband of one wife. In fine, he presented the appearance of a contented, placid, unruffled dignitary, until he reached the middle of the Close.

But there, alas! the ferule of his stick came to the ground with a mighty thud; the sweetness and light faded from his eyes as they rested upon Mr. Swainson's plot; the condescension and good-will became conspicuous only by their absence. The Dean was undisguisedly angry; he disliked opposition as much as lesser men, and met with it more rarely. For Bicester is old-fashioned, and loves the Church and State, but especially the former, and looks up to principalities and powers, and even now execrates the memory of a recreant Bicestrian, otherwise reputable, on account of a terrible mistake he made. It was at a public dinner. "I remember," said this misguided man, "going in my young days

to the old and beautiful cathedral of this city. (Great applause.) I was only a child then, and my head hardly reached above the top of the seat, but I remember I thought the Dean the greatest of living men. (Whirlwinds of applause.) Well (smiling) perhaps I don't think quite that now." (Dead silence.) And so dull at bottom may even a man be whose name is not unknown in half the capitals of Europe, that this degenerate fellow never could guess why the friends of his youth from that moment turned their backs upon him.

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