

# THE REFUGEES

By A. CONAN DOYLE,

Author of "The Return of Sherlock Holmes"

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(Continued from Tuesday.)

During the half hour or so which had been occupied in this manner there had been a constant opening and closing of the chamber door, and a muttering of names from the captain of the guard to the attendant in charge, and from the attendant in charge to the first gentleman of the chamber, ending always in the admission of some new visitor. Here, close by the king, was the harsh but energetic Louvois, all powerful now since the death of his rival Colbert, discussing a question of military organization with two officers, the one a tall and stately soldier, the other a strange little figure, undersized and misshapen, but bearing the insignia of a marshal of France, and owning a name which was of evil omen over the Dutch frontier, for Luxembourg was looked upon already as the successor of Conde, even as his companion Vauban was of Turenne. Beside them a small white haired cleric with a kindly face, Pere la Chaise, confessor to the king, was whispering his views upon Jansenism to the portly Bossuet, the eloquent bishop of Meaux. Close to the door Racine, with his handsome face wreathed in smiles, was chatting with the poet Boileau and the architect Mansard, the three laughing and jesting with the freedom which was natural to the favorite servants of the king.

"He becomes harder and harder to amuse," said Racine. "I am to be at Mme. de Maintenon's room at 3 to see whether a page or two of the Phedre may not work a change. Madame is a wonderful woman. She has brains, she has heart, she has tact—she is admirable."

"And yet she has one gift too many—age."

"Pooh! What matter her years when she can carry them like thirty? What an eye, what an arm! And, besides, my friends, he is not himself a boy any longer."

"Very true, but a young man consults his eye and an older man his ear. Over forty, it is the clever tongue which wins; under it, the pretty face."

"Ah, you rascal! Then you have made up your mind that five and forty years with tact will hold the field against nine and thirty with beauty."

Well, when your lady has won she will doubtless remember who were the first to pay court to her."

"But I think you are wrong, Racine."

"Well, what then?"

"That it may be a little serious for you."

"And why?"

"The Marquise de Montespan has a memory."

"Her influence may soon be nothing more, Maintenon is the cleverest woman in France."

"Pshaw, Racine, you know our dear master well, or you should, for you seem to have been at his elbow since the days of the Fronde. Is he a man, think you, to be amused forever by sermons? No, no; it will be the Montespan or, if not she, some younger beauty."

"My dear Boileau, I say again that her sun is setting. Have you not heard the news? Her brother, M. de Vivonne, has been refused the entree."

"From whom had you it?"

"From De Catinat, the captain of the guard. He had his orders to bar the way to him."

"Ha, then the king does indeed mean mischief. That is why his brow is so cloudy this morning then. By my faith, if the marquise has the spirit with which folk credit her, he may find that it was easier to win her than to slight her."

"Aye, the Mortemarts are no easy race to handle."

"Well, heaven send him a safe way out of it! But who is this gentleman? His face is somewhat grimmer than those to which the court is accustomed. Ha, the king catches sight of him, and Louvois beckons to him to advance."

The stranger who had attracted Racine's attention was a tall, thin man, with a high aquiline nose, stern, fierce gray eyes, peeping out from under tufted brows, and a countenance so lined and marked by age, care and stress of weather that it stood out amid the prim courtier faces which surrounded it as an old hawk might in a cage of birds of gay plumage.

Louis possessed in a high degree the royal faculty of recognition. "It is years since I have seen him, but I remember his face well," said he, turning to his minister. "It is the Comte de Frontenac, is it not?"

"Yes, sire," answered Louvois. "It is indeed Louis de Buade, comte de Frontenac and formerly governor of Canada."

"We are glad to see you once more at our lever," said the monarch as the old nobleman stooped his head and kissed the white hand which was extended to him. "I hope that the cold of Canada has not chilled the warmth of your loyalty."

"Only death itself, sire, would be cold enough for that."

"Then I trust that it may remain to us for many long years. We would thank you for the care and pains which you have spent upon our province, and if we have recalled you it is chiefly that we would fain hear from your own lips how all things go there. And

of those of France, how about the missions?"

"They prosper, sire. There are Iroquois at the Sault and the mountain, Hurons at Lorette and Algonquins along the whole river cotes from Tadousac in the east to Sault la Marie, and even the great plains of the Dakotas, who have all taken the cross as their token. Marquette has passed down the river of the west to preach among the Illinois, and Jesuits have carried the gospel even to the warriors of the Long House in their wigwams at Onondaga."

"I may add, your majesty," said Pere la Chaise, "that in leaving the truth there they have too often left their lives with it."

"Yes, sire, it is very true," cried De Frontenac cordially. "Your majesty



The old nobleman stooped his head and kissed the white hand.

has many brave men within his domains, but none braver than these. They have come back up the Richelieu river from the Iroquois villages with their nails gone, their fingers torn out, a cinder where their eye should be and the scars of the pine splinters as thick upon their bodies as the fleurs-de-lis on yonder curtain."

"And you have suffered this?" cried Louis hotly. "You allow these infamous assassins to live?"

"I have asked for troops, sire."

"And I have sent some."

"One regiment. More is needed, sire."

"There are the Canadians themselves. Have you not a militia? Could you not raise force enough to punish these rascally murderers of God's priests? I had always understood that you were a soldier."

"It is just because I am a soldier and have seen something of war that I know how hard it is to penetrate into a country much larger than the Lowlands, all thick with forest and bog, with a savage lurking behind every tree. You are a soldier yourself, sire. I ask you if such a war is an easy task for a handful of soldiers, with a few conscripts straight from the plow, and a troop of coureurs-de-bois whose hearts all the time are with their traps and their beaver skins."

"No, no; I am sorry if I spoke too hastily," said Louis. "We shall look into the matter at our council. And yet you must not look for too much, for Canada has been a heavy cost to us, and we have many calls in Europe."

"Ah, sire, I would that you could see that great land. It is so vast, sire, so rich, so beautiful! Where are there such hills, such forests, such rivers? And it is all for us if we will but take it. Who is there to stand in our way—a few nations of scattered Indians and a thin strip of English farmers and fishermen. Turn your thoughts there, sire, and in a few years you would be able to stand upon your citadel at Quebec and to say there is one great empire here from the snows of the north to the warm southern gulf and from the waves of the ocean to the great plains beyond Marquette's river, and the name of this empire is France, and her king is Louis, and her flag is the fleurs-de-lis."

"On my word, count," said the king, "you have caught something of this gift of Indian eloquence of which we have heard. But about these English folk. They are Huguenots, are they not?"

"For the most part, especially in the north."

"Then it might be a service to the holy church to send them packing. Tell me now, Frontenac, what force would you need to clear these people out—one regiment, two regiments and perhaps a frigate or two?"

But the ex-governor shook his grizzled head. "You do not know them, sire," said he. "They are a stern folk, these. We in Canada, with all your gracious help, have found it hard to hold our own. To put New England

into four majesty's hands I would ask 15,000 of your best troops and twenty ships of the line."

Louis sprang impatiently from his chair and caught up his cane. "The matter may stand until our council. Reverend father, it has struck the hour of chapel, and all else may wait until we have paid our duties to heaven."

## CHAPTER III.

WHILE Louis had been affording his court that which he had openly stated to be the highest of human pleasures, the sight of the royal face, the young officer of the guard outside had been very busy passing on the titles of the numerous applicants for admission and exchanging usually a smile or a few words of greeting with them, for his frank, handsome face was a well known one at the court. Three years ago he had been an unknown subaltern bush fighting with Algonquins and Iroquois in the wilds of Canada. An exchange had brought him back to France and into the regiment of Picardy, but the lucky chance of having seized the bridle of the king's horse one winter's day in Fontainebleau when the creature was plunging within a few yards of a deep gravel pit had done for him what ten campaigns might have failed to accomplish.

A gentleman very richly dressed in black and silver advanced, as the door opened, with the assured air of a man whose rights are beyond dispute. Captain de Catinat, however, took a quick step forward, and barred him off from the door.

"I am very sorry, M. de Vivonne," said he, "but you are forbidden the presence."

"Forbidden the presence! I? You are mad!" He stepped back with gray face and staring eyes, one shaking hand half raised in protest.

"I assure you that it is his order."

"If I could have one word with the king."

"Unfortunately, monsieur, it is impossible."

The angry nobleman stamped his foot and stared at the door as though he had some thoughts of forcing a passage. Then, turning on his heel, he hastened away down the corridor with the air of a man who has come to a decision.

"There, now," grumbled De Catinat to himself, as he pulled his thick dark mustache, "he is off to make some fresh mischief. I'll have his sister here presently, as like as not, and a pleasant little choice between breaking my orders and making an enemy of her for life. By my faith, here is a lady, as I feared. Ah, heaven be praised, it is a friend and not a foe. Good morning, Mlle. Nanon."

"Good morning, Captain de Catinat." The newcomer was a tall, graceful brunette, her fresh face and sparkling black eyes the brighter in contrast with her plain dress.

"A note from Mme. de Maintenon to the king. You will hand it to him, will you not?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle. And how is madame, your mistress?"

"Oh, her director has been with her all the morning, and his talk is very, very good, but it is also very, very sad. We are not very cheerful when M. Godelet has been to see us. But I forget monsieur is a Huguenot and knows nothing of directors."

"Oh, but I do not trouble about such differences."

"Ah, if monsieur could talk to Mme. de Maintenon a little! She would convert him."

"I would rather talk to Mlle. Nanon, but if—"

"Oh! There was an exclamation, a whisk of dark skirts, and the soubrette disappeared down a side passage.

Along the broad lighted corridor was gliding a very stately and beautiful lady, tall, graceful and exceedingly haughty. The lady was past her first youth, it is true, but the magnificent curves of her queenly figure, the purity of her complexion, the brightness of her deep lashed blue eyes and the clear regularity of her features enabled her still to claim to be the most handsome as well as the most sharp tongued woman in the court of France.

"Ah, it is Captain de Catinat!" said Mme. de Montespan, with a smile.

"Your humble servant, marquise."

"I am fortunate in finding a friend here, for there has been some ridiculous mistake this morning."

"I am concerned to hear it."

"It was about my brother, M. de Vivonne. It is almost too laughable to mention, but he was actually refused admission to the lever."

"It was my misfortune to have to refuse him, madame."

"You, Captain de Catinat? And by what right?" She had drawn up her superb figure, and her large blue eyes were blazing with indignant astonishment.

"The king's order, madame."

"The king! Is it likely that the king would cast a public slight upon my family? From whom had you this preposterous order?"

"Direct from the king through Bon-tem's."

"Absurd! Do you think that the king would venture to exclude a Mortemart through the mouth of a valet? Go, tell the king that I am here and would have a word with him."

"Impossible, madame. I have been forbidden to carry a message."

"To carry any message?"

"Any from you, madame."

"Come, captain, you improve. It only needed this insult to make the thing complete. You may carry a message to the king from any adventures, from any decayed governess"—she laughed

shrilly at her description of her rival—"but none from Francoise de Mortemart, Marquise de Montespan."

"Such are my orders, madame. It pains me deeply to be compelled to

carry them out."



He slipped in front of her.

captain. You may yet find that you have every reason to be deeply pained. For the last time, do you refuse to carry my message?"

"I must, madame."

"Then I carry it myself."

She sprang forward at the door, but he slipped in front of her with outstretched arms.

"For God's sake, consider yourself, madame!" he entreated. "Other eyes are upon you."

"Fah! Canaille!" She glanced at the knot of Switzers, whose sergeant had drawn them off a few paces and who stood open eyed, staring at the scene.

"I tell you that I will see the king."

"You will ruin me if you pass."

"And none the less I shall do so."

The matter looked serious. De Catinat was a man of resource, but for once he was at his wits' end. Mme. de Montespan's resolution, as it was called in her presence, or effrontery, as it was termed behind her back, was proverbial. If she attempted to force her way, would he venture to use violence upon one who only yesterday held the fortunes of the whole court in the hollow of her hand and who, with her beauty, her wit and her energy, might very well be in the same position tomorrow? If she passed him, then his future was ruined with the king, who never brooked the smallest deviation from his orders.

"If madame would deign to wait," said he soothingly, "the king will be on his way to the chapel in an instant."

"It is not yet time."

"I think the hour has just gone."

"And why should I wait like a lackey?"

"It is but a moment, madame."

"No, I shall not wait." She took a step forward toward the door.

But the guardsman's quick ear had caught the sound of moving feet from within, and he knew that he was master of the situation. "I will take madame's message," said he.

"Ah, you have recovered your senses! Go, tell the king that I wish to speak with him."

He must gain a little time yet. "Shall I say it through the lord in waiting?"

"No; yourself."

"Publicly?"

"No, no; for his private ear."

(To Be Continued.)

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