

THE REFUGEES

By A. CONAN DOYLE,
Author of "The Return of Sherlock Holmes".

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(Continued from Friday.)

"Until Ephraim Savage, the master of the Golden Rod, my father's ship, comes for me. She has been to Bristol, is now at Rouen and then must go to Bristol again. When she comes back once more Ephraim comes to Paris for me, and it will be time for me to go."

"And how like you Paris? Have you seen the city yet?"

"Only as I journeyed through it yesterday evening on my way to this house. It is a wondrous place, but I marvel how you can find your way among these thousands of houses."

"Perchance it would be as well that you should have a guide at first," said De Catinat, "so if you have two horses ready in your stables, uncle, our friend and I might shortly ride back to Versailles together, for I have a spell of guard again before many hours are over. Then for some days he might bide with me there, if he will share a soldier's quarters, and so see more than the Rue St. Martin can offer."

"I should be right glad to come out with you, if we may leave all here in safety," said Amos.

"Oh, fear not for that," said the Huguenot. "The order of the Prince of Condé will be as a shield and a buckler to us for many a day. I will order Pierre to saddle the horses."

After riding some time De Catinat said, "Now, if you will look there in the gap of the trees, you will see the king's new palace of Versailles."

The two young men pulled up their horses and looked down at the wide spreading building in all the beauty of its dazzling whiteness and at the lovely grounds, dotted with fountain and with statue and barred with hedge and with walls stretching away to the dense woods which clustered round them.

They passed through the gateway of the palace, and the broad sweeping drive lay in front of them, dotted with carriages and horsemen. On the gravel walks were many gayly dressed ladies, who strolled among the flower beds or watched the fountains with the sunlight glinting upon their high water sprays. One of these, who had kept her eyes turned upon the gate, came hastening forward the instant that De Catinat appeared. It was Mlle. Nanon, the confidante of Mme. de Maintenon.

"I am so pleased to see you, captain," she cried, "and I have waited so patiently. Madame would speak with you. The king comes to her at 3, and we have but twenty minutes. I heard



"I am so pleased to see you, captain,"

that you had gone to Paris, and so I stationed myself here. Madame has something which she would ask you."

"Then I will come at once. Ah, De Brissac, it is well met!"

A tall, burly officer was passing in the same uniform which De Catinat wore. He turned at once and came smiling toward his comrade.

"Ah, Amory, you have covered a league or two from the dust on your coat!"

"We are fresh from Paris. But I am called on business. This is my friend, M. Amos Green. I leave him in your hands, for he is a stranger from America and would fain see all that you can show. He stays with me at my quarters. And my horse, too, De Brissac. You can give it to the Laval."

Throwing the bridle to his brother officer and pressing the hand of Amos Green, De Catinat sprang from his horse and followed at the top of his speed in the direction which the young lady had already taken.

CHAPTER VI.

THE rooms which were inhabited by the lady who had already taken so marked a position at the court of France were as humble as were her fortunes at the time when they were allotted to her, but with that rare tact and self-restraint which were the leading features in her remarkable character she had made no change in her living with the increase of her prosperity and forbore from provoking envy and jealousy.

great Henry. But Henry's eyes were opened ere his end came, and I pray—oh, from my heart I pray—that yours may be also."

She rose and, throwing herself down upon the prie-dieu, sunk her face in her hands for some few minutes. A tap at the door brought the lady back to this world again, and her devoted attendant answered her summons to enter.

"The king is in the Hall of Victories, madame," said she. "He will be here in five minutes."

"Very well. Stand outside and let me know when he comes. Now, sire," she continued when they were alone once more, "you gave a note of mine to the king this morning?"

"I did, madame."

"And, as I understand, Mme. de Montespan was refused admittance to the grand lever?"

"She was, madame."

"But she waited for the king in the passage and wrung from him a promise that he would see her today?"

"Yes, madame."

"I would not have you tell me that which it may seem to you a breach of your duty to tell. But I am fighting now against a terrible foe and for a great stake. Tell me, then, at what hour was the king to meet the marquise de Maintenon, with the pension and estate which the king's favor had awarded her."

The young guardman had scarcely exchanged a word with this powerful lady, for it was her taste to isolate herself and to appear with the court only at the hours of devotion. It was therefore with some feelings both of nervousness and of curiosity that he followed his guide down the gorgeous corridors, where art and wealth had been strewn with so lavish a hand.

"At 4, madame."

"I thank you. You have done me a service, and I shall not forget it. Now you must go, captain. Pass through the other room and so into the outer passage. And take this. It is Bossuet's statement of the Catholic faith. It has softened the hearts of others and may yours. Now, adieu!"

De Catinat passed out through another door, and as he did so he glanced back. The lady had her back to him, and her hand was raised to the mantelpiece. At the instant that he looked she moved her neck, and he could see what she was doing. She was pushing back the long hand of the clock.

Captain de Catinat had hardly vanished through the one door before the other was thrown open by Mlle. Nanon, and the king entered the room. Mme. de Maintenon rose with a pleasant smile and courtesied deeply, but there was no answering light upon her visitor's face, and he threw himself down upon the vacant armchair with a pouting lip and a frown upon his forehead.

"Madame wishes to speak to you of what occurred this morning," said she. "I should advise you to say nothing to madame about your creed, for it is the only thing upon which her heart can be hard." She raised her finger to emphasize the warning, and, tapping at the door, she pushed it open. "I have brought Captain de Catinat, madame," said she.

"Then let the captain step in." The voice was firm and yet sweetly musical.

Obeying the command, De Catinat found himself in a room which was no longer and but little better furnished than that which was allotted to his own use. Yet, though simple, everything in the chamber was scrupulously neat and clean, betraying the dainty taste of a refined woman. The stamped leather furniture, the La Savonniere carpet, the pictures of sacred subjects, exquisitely arranged from an artist's point of view, the plain but tasteful curtains, all left an impression half religious and half feminine, but wholly soothing. Indeed, the soft light, the high white statue of the Virgin in a canopied niche, with a perfumed red lamp burning before it, and the wooden prie-dieu with the red edged prayer book upon the top of it made the apartment look more like a private chapel than a fair lady's boudoir.

"Nay, now this is a very bad compliment," she cried, with the gayety which she could assume whenever it was necessary to draw the king from his blacker humors. "My poor little dark room has already cast a shadow over you."

"Nay; it is Father la Chaise and the bishop of Meaux, who have been after me all day like two hounds on a stag, with talk of my duty and my position and my sins, with judgment and hell fire ever at the end of their exhortations."

"And what would they have your majesty do?"

"Break the promise which I made when I came upon the throne, and which my grandfather made before me. They wish me to recall the edict of Nantes, and drive the Huguenots from the kingdom. You would not have me do it, madame?"

"Not if it is to be a bribe to your majesty. Bethink you, sire, that the Almighty can himself incline their hearts to better things if he is so minded, even as mine was inclined. May you not leave it in his hands?"

"On my word," said Louis, brightening, "it is well put. I shall see if Father la Chaise can find an answer to that. It is hard to be threatened with eternal flames because one will not run one's kingdom."

"Why should you think of such things, sire?" said the lady in her rich, soothng voice. "What have you to fear, you who have been the first son of the church?"

"You think that I am safe, then? But I have erred and erred deeply. You have yourself said as much."

"But that is all over, sire. Who is there who is without stain? You have turned away from temptation. Surely, then, you have earned your forgiveness."

"I would that the queen were living once more. She would find me a better man."

"I would that she were, sire."

"And she should know that it was to you that she owed the change. Oh, Françoise, you are surely my guardian angel, who has taken bodily form! How can I thank you for what you have done for me?" He leaned forward and took her hand, but at the touch a sudden fire sprang into his eyes, and he would have passed his other arm round her had she not risen hurriedly to avoid the embrace.

"Sire!" said she, with a rigid face and one finger uplifted.

"You are right; you are right, Françoise. Sit down, and I will control myself. But how is it, Françoise, that you have such a heart of ice?"

"I would it were so, sire."

"No. But surely no man's love has ever stirred you! And yet you have been a wife. You did not love this Scarron?" he persisted. "He was old, I have heard, and as lame as some of his horses."

"Do not speak lightly of him, sire. I was grateful to him; I honored him; I liked him."

"You did not love him, Françoise?"

"At least I did my duty toward him."

"Has that nun's heart never yet been touched by love, then?"

"Spare me, sire, I beg of you!"

"But I must ask, for my own peace hangs upon your answer."

"Your words pain me to the soul."

"Have you never, Françoise, felt in your heart some little flicker of the love which glows in mine?" He rose with his hands outstretched, a pleading monarch, but she, with half turned head, still shrank away from him.

"Be assured of one thing, sire," said she.

"that even if I loved you as no woman ever loved a man, yet I should rather spring from that window on to the stone terraces beneath than ever by word or sign confess as much to you."

"And why, Françoise?"

"You have wasted too much of your life and of your thoughts upon woman's love. And now, sire, the years steal on, and the day is coming when even you will be called upon to give an account of your actions and of the innermost thoughts of your heart. I would see you spend the time that is left to you, sire, in building up the church, in showing a noble example to your subjects."

The king sank back into his chair with a groan. "Forever the same," said he. "Why, you are worse than Father la Chaise and Bossuet."

"Nay, nay," said she gaily, with the quick tact in which she never failed. "I have wearied you when you have stooped to honor my little room with your presence. That is indeed ingratiate, and it were a just punishment if you were to leave me in solitude tomorrow and so cut off all the light of my day. And why have you not ridden today, sire?"

"Pah! It brings me no pleasure. There was a time when my blood was stirred by the glare of the horn and the rush of the hoofs, but now it is an wearisome to me."

"And hawkling too?"

"Yes; I shall hawk no more."

"But, sire, you must have amusement."

"What is so dull as an amusement which has ceased to amuse? I know not how it is. When I was but a lad, and my mother and I were driven from place to place, with the Fronde at war with us and Paris in revolt, our throne and even our lives in danger, all life seemed to be so bright, so new and so full of interest. Now that there is no shadow and that my voice is the first in France, as France's is in Europe, all is dull and lacking in flavor."

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