

The Contrabandist; OR THE Life's Secret!

A TRUE STORY OF THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued.)

"He quiet, my child," he said. "He will come—Louis will come."
"No!—no! he will not—he will not come!" she cried, with a feeble groan, "I have not seen him this long time. I thought we were to be married. It was a dream, was it not?" And again that heart-breaking, sorrowful glance was fixed on him. "I don't know why I am lying here," she murmured, sadly, looking about her. "I ought to be ready to meet him when he comes. But I am so weak—so tired! I believe I have been journeying somewhere. But such a strange journey! I don't think it ever will end; and I am wandering all alone. And so weary, weary, weary! Ah, Louis, why don't you come and help me? You said you loved poor Rose!"

Mourful and plaintive grew those restless, feverish tones; and troubled the brilliant eyes; but still, though exhausted by her constant ravings, and though her cheeks burned more hotly, and her heart throbbed with terrible violence, and her breathing was short and painful, there was no rest for her. Still she raved of Louis, and begged him to see how her feet were torn and bleeding with the long and weary way she came, and then she would name that he never would come—"never, never, never!"

And that wild, mournful wail might have drawn tears from a stone; but Helen Montauban was more than a stone. The doctor went out, leaving Helen Montauban there to baffle the heated forehead of the sick girl, and offer water to those parched lips. And she said, looking down upon the stricken form before her, "She is in my power!"

"Alas! only too completely so! Made-moiselle Montauban had gathered that M. Merz had but a slight hope of Rose's recovery. It must be. No turning back, or flinching, or hesitating, for that desperate nature now! That hope must never become a stronger one! It was hers to see to it. Pouring out the water for which the sufferer pressed, eyes and anon, her hand involuntarily clutched the tiny vial concealed in her bosom. Yet—no! A little delay; the disease might terminate fatally in a few days, and spare her the work for which she was prepared. But once it were not so, then it was a poison, subtle and sure as death itself. Few were there who knew of such; few—almost no tests that could detect its presence. To Helen Montauban had been given a knowledge of this poison in bygone years, and she had guarded that knowledge like gold. The secret, so long preserved, was likely to become useful to her now.

It was midnight. All over the chateau, there was deep and heartfelt rejoicing; but in the sick chamber, where the doctor was, there was a sad and gloomy scene, for the life that had so lately been pronounced safe was only slowly and faintly fluttering up from the edge of the grave; and every voice spoke in whispers, every footstep was muffled. All day she had kept the faintest motion that could be perceived, or the slightest motion that could be perceived. Yet had the physician filled the breasts of those about him with a too delicious hope that hung for certainty upon her awakening.

Then had the evil desire of Helen Montauban grown to an intensity that was dreadful. Watching, with her haggard face and gleaming eyes, beside that couch, she had fixed her serpent gaze upon the almost lifeless being who lay there, looking with cruel and terrible eagerness for the sign of death to set itself upon that younger sufferer's brow. Yet it came not, and her eagerness grew almost into madness. The one way remained. She would make that sleep a lasting one!

But there was another watcher there. The aged physician had taken up his post also by the couch. He, too, was waiting; but it was for the angel of life—not that of death; and he stirred not from that place. Not a morsel of food had passed his lips that day. Since dawn he had been there. And Helen Montauban, in her fierce desperation at her own inability to accomplish the work so long meditated upon, was almost insane. Still he watched there; never for an instant was his vigilance relaxed. And the hours passed on and Rose awoke—safe!

CHAPTER XX.

It was nearly morning when the cure came to the chateau to request an interview with the marquise. He told him that Hugh Lamonte was at the village inn and dying. The marquise, astonished and affected at this sudden announcement, in the midst of his joy for the safety of Rose, prepared immediately to visit him; and the most favorable change had taken place in his patient's case, left her in the care of Made-moiselle Montauban and the countess and accompanied the marquise.

In a few moments the party arrived at the suberge. Maurice met them with a dubious countenance.
"How is he—is there any change?" asked the cure, anxiously.
"None, monsieur," answered the man. "He raves still; but he talks of some guilty deed to be atoned for—some secret to be confessed. I can make nothing satisfactory, though, out of what he says, he wanders so."
The three ascended to the chamber above, where lay the dying man. The marquise started as he beheld him, stretched out upon the couch, with his wild, unshorn and emaciated countenance, and coarse, rough garments, which he had not suffered to be removed, presenting a spectacle so wretched. The kind-hearted old man could scarcely refrain from shedding tears as he gazed upon the wreck of that proud form.

"Is this indeed Hugh Lamonte?" he exclaimed, advancing towards the couch. "Who calls Hugh Lamonte?" shouted the sick man, sternly; "who calls him the outcast—the robber? Who calls him, I say? And who are you?" fixing his wild, gleaming eyes upon the countenance of the marquise. "Ah, Armande Montauban, I know you—I know you!" he uttered, fiercely, trying to spring upright, yet falling, from very weakness. "Don't come near me, or I shall murder you! Where is Made-moiselle?—where is she? You have hidden her from me! You have wedded her; and she was mine—mine! You stole her from me! I will have my blood!"

He sank back, exhausted, with white lips.
"Look—look," murmured the cure, springing to the side of the marquis—"look, M. Merz, the marquise is fainting!"

And even as he spoke, the heavy fall of his friend attracted the physician's attention. Consternation and alarm were visible in his features.
(To be continued.)

THE PASSING YEAR.

Across the shadows of the night
There came to my expectant ear
The twelve deep notes that tell the flight
Of yet another passing year.
Its limits reached, its work is done,
Its record sealed and set on high,
Unknown to future eyes.
Except God's own all-seeing eye.

Ah, me! these years, these vanished years,
In memory, but beyond recall,
How filled with foolish joys and tears,
How filled with sin and blasted all!
What can we ask of these but grace
To meet the failures of the past
The beacon lights by which to trace
Our way to thee, O Christ, at last!

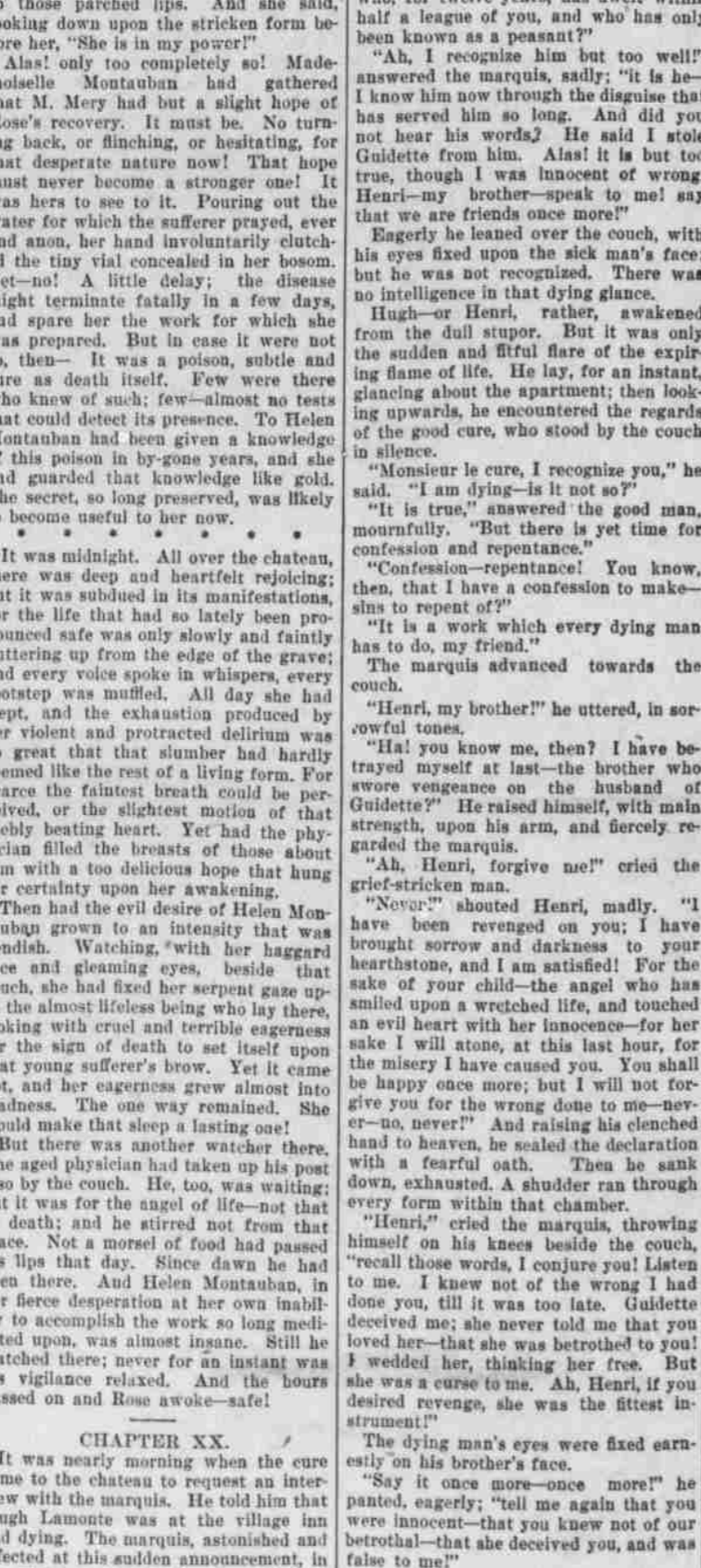
AN OLD MAN'S FIRST CHRISTMAS.

BY HOPE DARING.

Y ES, I will do it. It's the only way I can be sure of making a fair profit next year. My workmen must understand that I run the mill to put money in my own pocket!"

There was an ugly frown on Gilbert Bentley's brow as he sat in his shabby little study, communing with himself. He was a small, stooping man of 65, with searching blue eyes, and a cold, forbidding expression.

WAITING FOR SANTA CLAUS.



Then they must remember the little children. Christmas Eve came. Mr. Bentley had shamefacedly ordered Simpson to provide a "regular Christmas dinner." He had never made a Christmas gift in his life, but now—well, Florence would persist in talking as if Christmas meant as much to him as it did to her.

"You precious grandpa!" Again her arms were round his neck. "I found your gift, and I thank you a thousand times. But grandpa, I want to ask you for something more. It is a part in your work I want you to give me. And I want to give you my help—myself. It is a wonderful position you hold—so much wealth and so many people whom you can help. On this best of all nights—the birth night of our dear Savior, let us give ourselves anew to the work you have been doing alone!"

"Let us carry him out into another room," he said, excitedly. "Let us carry him out into another room," he said, excitedly.

Weak and trembling as he was, he made them assist him to re-enter the other apartment. They advanced towards the couch; there was a different sight there now. From the height of delirium Hugh Lamonte was suddenly sinking into a stupor. His eyes were almost closed. Only faint, unintelligible murmurs broke from his lips at times. He did not see them approach. The cure and M. Merz cast glances at each other. The marquise comprehended them.

"Be calm, my dear friend," entreated the physician again, "and listen to the truth. No power on earth can save him now; he is sinking fast. But maintain your energies; he may revive before death, with the possession of his full reason."
"Ah, Henri!" murmured the marquise, with indescribable emotion—"my brother that I should recognize you thus, after all these years! See—see, Gustave, and he lifted the matted hair from the temples of the unconscious man—"see where I struck him once! I knew the mark. My father told me he would bear it to the grave—that scar!"

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