

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria. "A Huguenot Family." *Godey's Lady's Book* (September and October 1842): pp. 144-48 and 189-93.

A HUGUENOT FAMILY.

By Miss C. M. Sedgwick.

[p. 144]

Louis XIV., in the beginning of his career, refrained from touching the privileges that had been conceded to the Protestants. He added nothing, but he took nothing away. By degrees, as the generous temper of youth wore off, and the bigotries infused by Anne of Austria and Mazarin came out, his course changed. Louis wanted indulgence in his licentious pleasures, and his confessor shut his eyes to his master's profligate and changing loves, on condition that heresy should be extirpated. He wanted money for his costly wars, and from the industrious and virtuously frugal Protestants Colbert filled the royal coffers which were to be drained by the prodigal Louvois. The Huguenots were robbed of the fruits of their industry in their modest provincial homes, that the monarch might encompass himself with the pomp and pageantry which was then the grand "Cherry and Fair Star" spectacle of the world. "Every room is divinely furnished," writes Madame de Sevigné from Versailles, "everything is magnificent. We rove from apartment to apartment without encountering heat or a press. The king, Madame Montespan, &c., &c., are engaged at a game; a thousand louis are thrown on the carpet; no other counters are used," &c., &c.

This was a picture of the court when that portion of Louis's subjects which had earned the golden counters were, by royal edicts, beset on every side with obstruction and disappointment. The avenues of industry were closed upon them; the dearest offices of domestic life were converted into sorrows. "Take care and make a fortune out of the sales of the Huguenot property," writes Madame de Maintenon to a brother in a Protestant province— this "property" being the ancestral homes from which the Protestants were driven forth.

Some of the best blood in our own country is derived from these exiled Protestants, and in many a family are preserved traditions and legends that need no embellishment from fiction to awaken a thrilling interest. The following has at least the merit of being a true record of some of the harassing persecutions which the Protestants endured. We are anxious to preserve it as a proof that, through all these fiery trials, christian love (which must run in concentric circles) was, in some instances, maintained between Catholics and Reformers.

At the period of the events we are about to transcribe the persecution had not reached its height. The *Dragonnades*, when the licentious soldiery, fresh from the Spanish campaigns, were, like dogs of war, set upon the homes of the Huguenots to worry and waste at will, were not yet proclaimed; one after another of the guarantees of the edict of Nantes had been removed, but Louis had not yet come to that most despotic and impotent resolve of tyranny, "to have but one religion in his kingdom."* [1]

But to our story. Arnauld d'Argile was the son of a gentleman of Languedoc, who by engaging in a profitable branch of manufactures, and living with simplicity and frugality, had amassed a large fortune. Arnauld, preferring the quiet enjoyment of a man of letters to the bustle with the profits of business, resigned a partnership in his father's concerns, and all claims to the paternal inheritance, to the younger branches of his family, for a sufficient provision to secure to him independence and leisure. Arnauld proposed, at a convenient season, to take that domestic commodity, a wife. He had the notion, sufficiently prevalent now, but then universal, that the wife's duty is limited to providing for the physical comfort of her husband, and that she is exempted by Providence from participation in his intellectual pursuits, and sympathy in his higher pleasures. Of course, at any time he might find some pretty rustic adequate to these moderate demands. But we are often as wide of the mark in casting the fashion of uncertain good as uncertain evil.

During an excursion into Switzerland, accident threw Arnauld into the society of the Baron de Villette and his daughter Emilie. Some romantic incidents brought them into intimate intercourse. The baron, though a Protestant himself, had, according to a contract with his wife, permitted her daughter to be educated in the Catholic faith, the religion of her mother. Madame de Villette died a year after her marriage, and her husband added to the fond affection of a father, for the child she left him, the devotion of a lover. When the Church, comprising all sects, was literally a church militant, and every inch of the religious world debateable ground, M. de Villette contented himself with maintaining his faith by the eloquence of his example. He committed his daughter's religious education to her mother's confessor, a worthy Franciscan, who, imitating her father's forbearance, was more intent on making her a good Christian than a good Catholic. She was attended by

[p. 145]

Léonie, a worthy creature, who had been her mother's nurse, and who loved M. de Villette so well as a master that she forgot he was a heretic. Thus left to the generous dictates of her own heart, Emilie grew up without suspicion of others' faith, or bigotry in respect to her own. Her intimate companionship with her father led to tastes and pursuits not common to women of that period, and after a few months' acquaintance with her, Arnauld d'Argile's horizon had wonderfully enlarged; the rustic little housekeeper had vanished from his perspective, and a woman whom he could honor as well as love filled her place. By what process Mademoiselle de Villette's mind was affected the family archives do not inform us, but in due time she joined the Reformers in the little Protestant church at Poitou, much to the grief of Father Clement, her confessor, and the scandal of the Church, and was soon after married to Arnauld d'Argile. As far as we can gather from her letters, and the few incidents recorded of the happy years that followed, the change of her faith seems rather to have been an emancipation from the shackles of rites and forms, and an enlargement of her charities, than any vehement abjuration of the old religion, or adoption of the new one. It was merely a passage to a simpler service, and a wider horizon of hope and love.

There are few entries in the log-book in fair weather. The family at the château de Villette remained in retirement and unbroken happiness. They lived unmolested themselves, extending their sympathy and aid to such of their church as suffered for their faith; and without question of creeds, to others who needed their charities. Father Clement continued to be, as he

had always been, the Lady Emilie's almoner; and in many a Catholic cottage penance was done for her, and prayers sent before many a saint's shrine.

Madame d'Argile had but one child, a son named Eugene, who was entered in one of the few colleges of all those instituted by the Protestant noblesse which were yet permitted to remain.

We said that fourteen prosperous years followed, but on recurring to the records we find that a few months previous to this the Baron de Villette died, and that soon after a suit was instituted by one Camille Savery, his cousin, for the succession to his estate. This iniquitous claim was founded on a then recent law forbidding the descent of property to the issue of a marriage between a Catholic and Protestant, which law the plaintiff pretended invalidated Madame d'Argile's right to her father's property. But, however inalienable and indisputable was the justice of her title, there was little hope of sustaining it; the appeal was to a Catholic tribunal, and its decisions were uniformly against the Protestants. It was with little hope and with sad forebodings that Monsieur d'Argile prepared to leave his wife to go to Paris to defend her rights. His forebodings were not causeless. Emilie's health and spirits had been much broken by her father's death; she was now near a second confinement, and the harassed and uncertain state of their affairs converted her hopes into anxieties.

The eve of Monsieur d'Argile's departure was the anniversary of a fête champêtre which the family de Villette had been accustomed to give to their dependants from time immemorial.

"A fête is not fitting these bothering times," said Léonie; "give it to the go-by, my dear Lady Emilie; you are full of trouble with my master's going away."

"But Léonie, I have heard you say that the very best way to forget our own griefs and dry our own tears is to light smiles on others' faces."

"Perhaps I did say so—though that sounds a deal more like you than me, my lady; but there are exceptions to all cases, and indeed, you have not strength for it, and they know why, and that you'll soon give the occasion for another guise fête than this."

"Ah! Léonie!" Madame d'Argile checked the expression of forebodings naturally arising from her dejected spirits and infirm health, and merely added, "no fête can be so good as that which our fathers and our fathers' fathers have enjoyed. No! this shall go forward; remember if the suit at Paris goes against us, this will be the last time that I preside over it. So, dear Léonie, see to the preparations. I will distribute the gifts when the dancing is over. Put the basket containing little Marie's gear under the almond-trees."

"Yes, my lady; but perhaps—I mean—that is—"

"What do you mean, Léonie?"

"I was just thinking, if the child Marie is not here, it will be no fête to my lady—that's all."

“You turning jealous, too, of my little favourite, Léonie?”

“No, truly, my lady, *I* am not; but there are those that, for every good turn you do her, would do her ten times an evil one. Dame Carmeau can’t forget that Marie’s mother was Master Eugene’s foster-mother.”

“Ah! Yes; I know Dame Carmeau thinks heretical blood is bad enough without being fed with heretical milk.”

“A fig cares she for that, my lady. All the babies born in France might feed and thrive on the milk of heretics, if she could get the silver spoons and silk gown that go to the foster-mother.”

“Well! You are right, Léonie; we must not provoke her envy; she is an ill-favoured creature, and, I fear, malicious. Marie shall have her apron and slippers with Dame Carmeau’s girls; after the fête is over will be enough to give her the basket and the gold chain Eugene has sent for her. Alas for these times, that make my favour of far more peril than advantage!”

The fête went on; there was dancing, and feasting, and general gayety. Madame d’Argile exerted herself to the utmost. She had a kind word for every one, and a special favour added to the customary gift. The painful conviction that this was

[p. 146]

the last time she should appear before her people as the representative of her house was not manifest in selfish sadness, but in unusual eagerness to promote their pleasures. So, in its very nature sun-like, bright and cheering is goodness.

“What is the meaning of tears in your eyes, Marie?” said Madame d’Argile to her little favourite.

“All this time you have not spoken to me, dear lady, and that is why I cannot help my tears.”

“Wipe them away; I never loved you better, Marie.”

This was enough. Marie joined the sports, and was the gayest of the gay. Madame d’Argile’s eye followed her. She had lived at the chateau as Eugene’s companion. She had shared his earliest studies; not that Madame d’Argile had any quixotic notions of educating the little peasant girl, but she served as whip, spur, and reward (if those discordant things may be conjoined) to Eugene. By this domestication at the castle she had acquired, in addition to the loveliest gifts of nature, a certain refinement of manners, which has well been styled one edge of the sword of aristocracy.

“Eugene has gone from us in good time for Marie,” said Monsieur d’Argile, apart to his wife; “we should have spoiled her for a peasant’s wife!”

“I wonder if that little minx Marie fancies she is made of porcelain,” said Dame Carneau, “that she won’t let my boy Hugh touch her with the tips of his fingers. We’ll bring down their pride, before the sun rises again.”

The fête was over. Marie had received a basket piled with a year’s garments, and, dearer far than all these, she had got Eugene’s gold chain. She had kissed it, and kissed over and over again the hand that hung it around her neck, and had followed her mother, who had preceded her by half an hour, to her cottage home, a short distance from the château.

Monsieur d’Argile set out early the next morning for Paris. His wife was overcome by her foreboding fears at parting, and was still weeping when Dame Méru, Marie’s mother, entered her apartment, wringing her hands, and crying that her child was stolen from her. Madame d’Argile put aside her own sorrows to inquire into the poor mother’s.

What Méru, in her bold despair, called theft, was authorized by law. One of the edicts, now daily issued against the Protestants, authorized the seizing the child or children of any Huguenot found from under its parents’ roof, and placing it under Catholic tutelage, to be brought up in the true faith at the parents’ cost.

Little Marie, at Dame Carneau’s instigation, had been seized on the preceding night, as she was returning from the castle, and was bound as a servant to the daughter of that evil-eyed and evil-hearted woman, the wife of a jailer in Poitu. There was no redress.*^[2]

The first despatches from her husband brought Madame d’Argile information that the suit was decided against them, and that the influence of their relative, Marshal Schomberg, then second only in military renown to Turenne, and himself a Protestant, had secured to her, as the only attainable boon, the family plate and jewels. Madame d’Argile submitted to her loss of fortune with a fortitude which (we thank Heaven) is a virtue too common in women to be much wondered at or praised.

Another and heavier trial soon followed. The church within whose sacred cemetery Madame d’Argile’s father and his forefathers lay, was torn down, and its pastor ejected from his charge. It fell under the edict which ordained that all churches within whose walls a relapsed heretic worshipped or a Catholic had abjured his faith, should be razed to the ground. Madame d’Argile had there first publicly worshipped with the Reformers. It was enough. The churches of Montpellier, Poissan, Melguil, and Pignan, had fallen before it, on quite as frivolous pretexts.

These were but faint preludes to the shock that followed. Monsieur Martin assembled his frightened flock in the garden of the chateau on the following Sunday for worship. For this offence he was seized and sent to Paris, where he was (that being the penalty inflicted in such cases) to be led before the king’s palace with a rope round his neck, and then banished the kingdom. Madame d’Argile had forborne to acquaint her husband with this new calamity, and his first knowledge of it was at meeting the venerable old man thus led, and followed by a mob who treated him with every indignity. Monsieur d’Argile interposed by demanding of an officer of the guard the reason of this persecution. The officer answered him insolently; M. d’Argile retorted; the officer drew his sword; an encounter followed, and D’Argile received a fatal wound.

“Oh, what have you done?” cried Léonie, rushing into her mistress’s room, where she found her fainted and lying on the floor. “You have killed my lady.”

The messenger who had brought the fatal tidings stood aghast: he had been employed simply as a machine to carry the letter, and was ignorant of its contents. It was lying on the floor: neither he nor Léonie could read it. Happily, the heart needs no instructions to do its offices. Madame d’Argile was conveyed to her bed, and the common restoratives used, which so far produced their effect that she recovered from the fainting. On her return to partial consciousness she asked for the letter, and on seeing it exclaimed “It is not a dream, then—he is dead—Léonie, my husband is dead!” She struggled with her emotion, and for a moment was still,

[p. 147]

and then fell into sobbings, which were followed by convulsions. Léonie, strong-minded and strong-hearted, saw the danger that threatened her mistress, and took such measures as she could to avert it. She despatched a servant to Poitou for the physician, and another for the sage-femme, with such entreaties for speed as one makes when life or death is felt to hang on every minute. The servant, on arriving at the physician’s, found a parchment affixed to the door bearing the royal seal; the writing annexed to it he could not read. After repeated knockings he was admitted, and found the physician sitting amid his family and dependants, who were weeping around him, and he looked as if paralyzed by a sudden stroke. “Please, sir,” said the servant, “Madame d’Argile is ill.”

The physician did not move or raise his eyes, but said coldly, “I am sorry for it.”

“Sorry!” said the man, who had been accustomed to see the doctor breathless at the news of a finger-ache at the chateau; “and indeed ye must be something more than sorry. Léonie says my mistress must die if she has not your aid, and that right soon.”

“It matters not—I cannot go. I am forbidden to exercise my profession; the edict is nailed to my door. My patients must die, my family starve, because it pleased God I should be born and bred a Protestant. It was not of my own choosing.”

Nor was it like to be of his own keeping; but the history follows him no farther than to say that he wrote certain cabalistic prescriptions, which the servant carried to the apothecary. He found the ground before his door strewn with jars, unguents, pill-boxes, and gallipots; the door closed and barred, and a document affixed to it similar to that on the physician’s, which, with the comment of the ruin before him, he easily understood.

In the mean time Jean, the other servant, proceeded to the dwelling of Dame Alix, the midwife, which, luckily, was just without the gate. The evening was already considerably advanced. Dame Alix’s door and windows were barred and bolted; but the messenger, seeing a light through the crevices of an upper window, knocked sturdily, and was admitted by the old woman herself. When he told his errand, --

“Now God help us!” said the good creature, “that ever the day should come when I must say nay to my Lady Emilie—to her who never said nay to any human soul in need. The edict, as they call it, Jean, is nailed to my door, and it forbids me to help the women of my people by word or deed. They know that by tying up my hands they may kill two birds with one stone.

Jean represented the extraordinary urgency of the case; he told the dreadful news that had reached the chateau, and wept and wrung his hands as he spoke of the peril and helplessness of his mistress. It is a blessed truth, that whereas bad feeling is anti-social, good feeling is contagious. Alix wavered at the sight of Jean’s distress.

“It is a pity,” she said, “to sit here with folded hands and let her die. There may be two deaths; and if I lose my life, it is but one, and the fag end on’t, scarce worth the keeping, since I can no more earn bread for others as well as for myself. I’ll go, Jean; it’s my duty; and duty and God’s will are the same—there’s no mistake in that.”

Though a prison, the stocks, and a public whipping hung over her if she were discovered, Alix’s face brightened as soon as she had decided on the strong and right side, and she was soon mounted on the horse Jean had brought, and they proceeded towards the chateau through by-ways sheltered by close lines of mulberry-trees, and favoured by the darkness. As some ruggedness of the road obliged them to proceed more slowly—

“I have been thinking, Jean,” said the old woman. “It’s the year of our Lord 1662^[3]—just one hundred years since the massacre of St. Bartholomew’s eve—a black year in the calendar. It was on that cruel eve that my grandame was at the chateau on the same business I am going on now. It was the old baron’s grandmother that came into the world that night, and her father was massacred, and her mother, poor lady! died of a broken heart. Hark! is not that the tramping of horses?” They halted and listened, and, the sounds ceasing, they hastened onward, and soon emerged upon the highway, and approached the gate of the chateau by a long green archway, made by the interlacing of flexile branches of trees. As they wound around a turn in this arbour’d approach, they found themselves in the midst of mounted soldiers, drawn up close to the gate.

“Ha!” said their leader, seizing Jean’s bridle, “you ride fast, fellow. What is your business here?”

“We are servants belonging to the chateau; pray let us enter.”

“And who is master of the chateau?”

“Monsieur Arnauld d’Argile.”

“Ah ha! well and truly spoken! But when the bell of St. Agnes tolls twelve, the chateau passes to Monsieur de Savery, and so we are here to proclaim it.”

“Be it so: but for the love of mercy, let us pass. Leave the chateau in peace to-night, for—”

“Say not your mistress is ill!” whispered Alix, in time to break off the end of his sentence.

“No secrets from us, young woman,” cried the officer. “Let us see if your gallant fancies brown or fair for the companion of his night ride,” and, suiting the action to the word, he touched old Alix’s hood with the point of his rapier and pushed it off her face; as he did so, a straggling moonbeam fell on her white locks and wrinkled brow. An old woman is fair game; and, accordingly, the men gave a shout, which one of them ended by exclaiming, “By our Lady! It’s the old midwife Alix: how now, old beldame! did I not bar thy door yesterday, and affix an edict thereto that should put fetters on thy feet?” He added sundry scurvy jests relating to the multiplying heretics through her ministrations

[p. 148]

unfit to be copied from the mouldering paper on which they are recorded. Alix protested that she came not to practise her science, but, in default of a physician, to attend the lady of the château, who had been seized with convulsions; a sickness that might occur to man or child. The official replied with the deafness of heart incident to his calling, “We know not how true your excuse is: we neither make nor abrogate the law, we only execute it. Turn your horse’s head the other way, old mother. Gerard, lodge her in the prison, and report her to-morrow morning.”

Alix’s courage rose as her hope fell. “Jean,” she said. “Tell not the Lady Emilie what has befallen me: fifteen hundred seventy-two—sixteen hundred seventy-two! I told you so, Jean. On, caitiff! Conduct me to my lodging; such a night’s ride as this will make e’en a prison floor welcome to an old woman of threescore and ten.” No farther molestations being offered to Jean he entered the gate and proceeded immediately to inform Léonie of all that had befallen. Having no other help, Léonie fell back on her own resources. “You, Jean, go below,” she said, “and beseech these men, by the mothers that bore them, to do their office here quietly. Our dear lady has intervals when she asks for her husband and master Eugene, and a sudden sound sends her off into these fits again. God guide and teach me. I will myself let blood: that may save her.” Léonie had such assistance as the female servants of the chateau could give her, but she was too good a Christian and Catholic to trust alone to human aid. She had already despatched a servant to Father Clement, her mistress’s former confessor, to give him notice of her peril, well knowing the good man would pass his night in vigil and prayer for the wandering child he so well loved. She hung a crucifix at the head of the bed, and murmuring prayers to her favourite saints, she proceeded boldly in her duties, believing that each success was a prayer answered. Before morning dawned her fidelity was rewarded, a female child was born, and the mother, though with some alarming symptoms, sunk into deep repose.

(To be continued.)

A HUGUENOT FAMILY.

By Miss C. M. Sedgwick.

(Concluded from page 148.)

[p. 189]

The officer, after taking possession of the cattle^[4] in the name of Monsieur de Savery, returned to Poitou, and all remained quiet till towards evening, when Léonie was told that Monsieur Bertrand, Syndic of Poitou, demanded admittance to her mistress's apartment. Léonie, with indefinite forebodings, descended to the hall, where she found the man of authority attended by two soldiers, and a curate bearing the Host.

"I have come," said the syndic, "to enforce the salutary law which orders that a magistrate shall enter the apartment of every Protestant dangerously ill, and demand a renunciation of their heresies; and such righteous demand being continently complied with, a holy man is at hand to do the sacred offices."

Léonie protested that the visitation could do her mistress no good, and might kill her. The syndic was inexorable. Léonie threw herself on the compassion of the curate, and entreated him to interfere.

"It will be to no purpose," said the syndic; "law goeth before the Gospel in this case."

"And villany before both," cried Léonie, her indignation mastering her prudence; "but after that will come the gospel and its judgments; tell him so, Monsieur Curate. I know you, Master Syndic, and how you have pettifogged your way to the magistrate's chair; and it is because my master has wrested from you your ill-gotten gains, and saved many an honest man from your clutches, that you hasten hither to wreak your vengeance on his falling house."

"Give way, woman, said the syndic, pushing Léonie from the door, against which she had planted herself: "and you, Monsieur Curate, if this wolf in sheep's clothing be of your flock, look to her. Show us your lady's apartment," he added, turning to a servant, who led the unwelcome visitor through a long corridor and into a chamber adjoining that of his mistress. There, against her door, stood a lad in a travelling cap and cloak, and with a pale and anxious countenance.

"My God! Eugene!" exclaimed Léonie, in a suppressed voice.

The colour suffused the boy's cheek; he recognised Bertrand, and knew he was an intruder. Subduing his voice to a hoarse whisper, he advanced to the syndic and demanded why he was there?

"He is a villain! murderer! devil!" said Léonie. "He is forcing his way to your mother's room; he will surely kill her."

"He dare not enter there! he shall not. Back! on peril of your life!" cried Eugene, drawing his sword.

"Seize him, fellows!" said the syndic to his attendants.

“No, do not!” exclaimed Léonie, frightened at the consequence of her own imprudence. “He is a boy—a child. Eugene, my darling, put up thy sword; there is no use. Nay, nay, my good fellows, do not seize him.” She wrenched the weapon from Eugene’s hand, and holding it up to shield him, she besought him, for his mother’s sake, to save himself. She whispered a word to him, and added aloud, “begone! begone!”

The sword was wrested from her; she clutched the men by the hair like a wildcat, and while they were struggling for extrication Eugene disappeared.

This encounter had no tendency to soften the syndic. Léonie in vain entreated for a few preparatory moments with her mistress: finding her entreaties unavailing, she asked for penance, death, anything to save her mistress. The syndic, impatient of the delay, pushed her aside and opened the door; but he involuntarily stopped on the threshold. There is no heart quite obdurate to all those sorrows or joys that are common to all humanity. A mother with a new-born child is a sight to subdue a savage, to touch with reverence the rudest boor. Madame d’Argile, wakened by the noise, had raised her head from the pillow, put aside her curtain, and instinctively stretched one arm over her infant, which Léonie had left, enveloped in its baby covering, on the bed beside her. The light of the lamp fell on her bloodless face, and her eye and brow expressed bewilderment and inquiry. At the head of the bed, close to her, but concealed from his mother by the folds of the curtain, stood poor Eugene. The light glanced athwart his round cheek and rich, curling hair. The fire had gone out of his eyes; they were brimming with tears. The poor boy had intended to conceal himself, but, in passing by a private entrance to his mother’s apartment, the impulse to enter it was too strong to be resisted, and he looked now as if he were stationed by his mother’s bed to do an angel’s office; alas! without an angel’s power.

The syndic was the first to speak. “Madame Emilie d’Argile,” he said, “I come in the name of his majesty, Louis our King, and of our holy Church, of which he is the most gracious defender, to summon you, now on the brink of the grave,

[p. 190]

and in peril of eternal damnation, to renounce your errors, abjure your heresies, and return to the condescending love and grace which our venerable and holy church offers to the penitent.”

“What does he say, Léonie?” asked Madame d’Argile, sinking back on her pillow.

“I say,” replied the syndic, and he reiterated in a louder and harsher tone what he had already said.

Madame d’Argile seemed to have received but one idea. “If I am dying, Léonie,” she said, feebly, “why is not my husband here?”

Léonie made no reply, and the truth flashed on her mistress’s recollection. She pressed both hands to her head as if a thunderbolt had fallen there, and groaned, but did not speak. After a moment she looked up imploringly, saying, “Eugene! cannot I see him once more, Léonie?”

Eugene bit his lips, but neither spoke nor moved. "He will be here to-morrow, my dear lady."

"Believe it not, Madame," said the curate, stepping forward, and motioning to the syndic to withdraw. "Death has already laid his icy hand upon you. But fear him not; fear him only who can kill both soul and body. I open to you a way of escape. Will ye have me do my holy office, that ye may die in peace and hope?"

"I would die in peace and hope," she faintly replied.

The curate drew a crucifix from his bosom; Eugene raised his hand in earnest deprecation; Léonie, crossing herself, gently repressed him, and said, "Dear Master Curate, she cannot rightly comprehend you; wait till the morning."

"Wait, woman! where will her soul be then?"

Léonie's lip quivered with the reply that rose to it, but her religious awe overpowered the strong impulses of affection, and she was silent. The priest held the crucifix before Madame d'Argile while he pronounced a solemn abjuration to repentance in a monotonous ecclesiastical tone.

Madame d'Argile's mind seemed to have been in part stunned by her husband's death, and in part paralyzed by her illness. It was powerless. All her recent impressions had vanished, and in their place her old associations returning, she drew the crucifix to her lips, and kissed it with a faint smile. This, to Léonie, the Catholic, seemed the consummation she had devoutly wished; she fell on her knees, and gave her mind half to earth and half to heaven, her eyes turning incessantly from Madame d'Argile to Eugene, and her lips moving in prayer. The priest proceeded, according to the prescribed ritual of the church, to repeat a formal renunciation of heresy, and at the close of each sentence he said, "And to this you assent, Emilie d'Argile?" She replied by a scarcely audible affirmative. When this part of the service was ended, Léonie became alarmed by signs of exhaustion which no experienced eye could mistake, and she entreated the priest to suspend the service, but he bade her be silent, and proceeded to repeat the articles of faith, ending each with "say 'I believe;'" and each time Madame d'Argile faintly responded "I believe." Poor Eugene! he looked like a martyr at the stake, as by turns love, despair, or indignation possessed him. The priest proceeded, and finally summed all up in the consoling doctrine that every son and daughter of the true Church inherited eternal life, and every heretic, by whatsoever name named, eternal damnation. As he concluded, Madame d'Argile, instead of responding "I believe," started from the half death of unconsciousness to life and intelligence. She fixed her eyes on the priest and on the symbols of his office. "What does this mean?" she asked. He affected not to notice her altered voice and expression, but proceeding, offered the consecrated wafer to her lips. She gently put it aside, saying, "Nay, good curate."

"Daughter, beware of sacrilege! thou art damning thy soul with double damnation if thou now relapsest."

“Has he tampered with me, Léonie?” I go with my account to God. He will not mark against me what I have unknowingly said or done; but do thou, Léonie, bear witness for me to my son that I die in our reformed faith. Tell him—tell my dear boy to keep his conscience void of offense towards God, and to live in love and charity with all men; and oh! dear Léonie, tell him that if, by the grace of God, he does so, his mother, bred a Catholic, dying a Protestant, believes it matters not by what name he is named; and for my baby—this little lamb—God guide and guard her. Lay her close to my bosom, Léonie.”

Léonie rose to do so. The priest pushed her rudely aside. “Madame d’Argile,” he said, “dost thou think of the manifold perils to which thou exposest thy children by refusing to make thy peace with the Church?”

“I commit them to God’s care.”

“Thou art obdurate. Dost thou know that by sacrilegiously rejecting and contemning this holy sacrament, thou dost, by a late edict, render thy dead body liable to be dragged through the street, and dishonoured like that of the guiltiest wretch that dies on the gibbet?”

“The body is but a cast-off garment.”

“But so it shall not seem to thy boy, when he sees thee dragged along the ground like a dead dog.”

“Wretch! begone! out of my mother’s presence!” cried Eugene, involuntarily starting forward, and, as he did so, oversetting a little table on which the crucifix stood, with a lamp, the sacred ointment, the chalice, and the host.

“Oh! Eugene, hush!” said Léonie, looking aghast at these consecrated things lying dishonoured on the ground. “Oh! on thy knees to the good curate.”

But Eugene did not even hear her: his mother’s arm was around him, his cheek was on hers, and both mother and son were unconscious of poor Léonie’s entreaties.

“Good curate,” she said, “you have had a

[p. 191]

mother, and she is dead. Pity the poor boy! Do not report what he has done! he so loves her—and she is dying. She is—alas! I know it—a sinner against the holy Church; but indeed, indeed, she is a saint in her own home.”

The curate vouchsafed not one word, but darting malicious glances at the bed, and angry ones at Léonie, he departed, Léonie muttering, as she closed the door after him, “He has far more dishonoured the cross than this poor fatherless boy; his is a black heart under a fair outside; all he cares for the converts is the price he gets for them.”* [5]

“My dear child, raise my head a little, and let me lay it on your breast,” said Madame d’Argile; “there—I breathe easier; I can speak to you now. It is God’s will, my dear boy—we must part.”

“Oh no! dear mother, it must not be! do not say so!”

“Yes, Eugene; and it is in mercy that God takes us.”

“*Mercy!* Oh mother!”

“Hear me, dear child; and if you love me, be more calm: your heart throbs so that I cannot rest my head on your breast, dear, if you do not quiet it.”

“I will, mother; I will try.”

“There is a cruel persecution opened upon us, Eugene, and God in infinite mercy removes your parents from it to the peace and love of Heaven. If I could I would stay with you, and with this poor little unconscious thing; but this is the weakness of a mother’s love; I could do nothing for you. Seek the truth, and hold fast to it, my dear boy.”

“Dear mother, I will; but how shall I be sure when I find it? our good pastor called one thing truth, and dear Father Clement another, and when I have no longer you nor my father to tell me which it is, what am I to do?”

“Hold fast ever, my dear child, to the great truth that is above all—love, supreme love to God, and self-sacrificing love to your fellow-creatures. This is the great unchanging truth. While you hold to this, God abideth with you, and you have no need of man’s direction. My strength is going fast; do you understand me, Eugene?”

“Yes, dear mother.”

“All evil will finally be overcome, but in the mean time there will be much sin and sorrow. If it be possible, Eugene, escape from this old world, and go to that fresh western land where you may serve God as your conscience directs.”

“Anything will be possible that you wish me to do, mother.”

“Thank God! I believe so, Eugene; but my poor baby—you can do nothing for her.”

“Oh! do not think so, dear mother. She will be all that I have left. God will help us, mother.”

“He will, my child, he will—take her little hand in yours—I commit you both to him.”

The hope that rose in the mother’s heart, above every fear, brightened her countenance, and lit her eye as she raised it in prayer that no words can express.

Léonie had admitted Father Clement by the private entrance, and he had heard the words of faith and love; the little sectarian mist that hung about the clear atmosphere of the good man's soul was dissipated, and he involuntarily uttered the words that rose to his lips—they might have been the inspiration of his long fast, vigil, and prayers—"Daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee!"

"Dear Father Clement!" said Madame d'Argile, faintly, and taking his hand, "thank you for your parting blessing; there is but one faith, one hope on the deathbed; dividing lines end here." She pressed his hand to her lips, and then her faithful servant's, "my good Léonie."

A deep silence followed. It was too late for the holy offices of the church, even if there had been any hope the patient would receive them; and the saintly, sorrow-stricken priest stood bent forward, his hands folded over his breast, and his eyes raised to heaven. Léonie knelt at the foot of the bed, her hands clasped and her tears pouring down like rain. The mother's head still rested on the breast of her boy. His close set teeth and purple cheek betrayed his effort to suppress the tumult in his heart, and contrasted with the celestial peace on his mother's countenance. No cloud of fear or anxiety hung over her clear brow; her hair was parted from it, and lay in rich dark tresses on her pillow. The dawn of immortality was on her, converting the paleness of death into light. The baby's tiny hand was clasped in Eugene's, and both rested on their mother's breast; she raised them to her lips, and breathed her last breath upon them.

The first knell of death, the thrilling silence of the death-chamber, struck on Eugene. He turned to Father Clement, and from him to Léonie; neither spoke; their eyes were closed for a moment; then Léonie gently raised his mother's head from his breast, and laid it back on the pillow, and Father Clement laid his hand on the poor boy's throbbing temple, and said, "She is gone, my child." Eugene buried his face in the clothes beside his mother, while his two faithful friends, kneeling before a crucifix, prayed for the departed with a fervour so sincere and so soothing that a Protestant might have envied them the faith that extended the exercise and power of affection beyond the grave.

On the day after Madame d'Argile's death as little Marie, who, from living a life happy and free as the birds and flowers, had become the hard driven drudge of the Poitou prison, was doing one of her daily tasks, filling the water-jugs for the prisoners' cells, she received a cuff on the side of her head (happily somewhat protected by masses of curls), followed by a surly "what are you spilling that water for? can't you pour it in the jug as well?"

"No, I can't, Master Arnaud," she replied,

[p. 192]

dropping her pitcher, whose cool contents, flowing over her master's feet and ankles, had no tendency to cool his temper. "I can't," she replied, striking one dimpled hand into the palm of the other; "I can't, and I won't—"

"Won't! you impertinent little minx!" he cried, breaking off her sentence by striking her half a dozen blows, first on one side of her head, and then on the other.

“No, I *won't*,” she resumed, unmoved by this brutality; “you may beat me, you may lay me dead at your feet, but I will never do another stroke for you or yours if you persist in refusing to let me go to the chateau to look once more upon my mistress Emilie before they bury her. Oh! that one so good and kind should ever be buried up in the ground!”

“You may think her well off if she can keep buried in the ground, for there she is already.”

“Buried already, and only dead yester-night! Nay, it cannot be; you only say this, Master Arnaud, just to keep me here.”

“Hussy! What need have I to lie to such as thee? have not I the strong hand, and the whip in it? No, no, I tell you, they shovelled your lady there into the grave at the dawn of day, for since the new edicts the heretic people may only bury their dead at dawn and twilight.”

“And is she buried? my dear, dear mistress! shall I never see her again? never? never?”

Poor little Marie gave way to tears and cries.

“What ails the girl? has she heard of it?” asked a man who just turned in at the street door, addressing Arnaud.

“Heard of what? anything new going on at the château? I thought all was done there.”

The new comer, in his eagerness to tell news, was heedless of Marie's presence, to whom each word he uttered was a serpent's tooth; and he proceeded to state that the magistrates had been informed by the curate of certain outrages against him, and the holy offices of the church, at the chateau. How Madame d'Argile had, in her last moments, refused and derided his services, and made a mock of the charities offered to her perishing soul. And how the boy, her son, instigated by her evil example, had committed the boldest sacrilege, strewing on the ground and trampling under foot the holiest symbols of the church, and had proceeded to offer the grossest indignities to its representative the curate. These enormities being duly considered, the occasion was deemed a fitting one for the most appalling manifestation of the power of the true church. Accordingly, an order was issued for disinterring the body of Madame Emilie d'Argile, and dragging it around the public square of Poitou. And that this vindictive vengeance might lack none of the accessories to give it the picturesque effect for which the French have been always rather remarkable, measures had been taken that the guard sent to the château to convey Eugene to prison should meet the procession in face of that edifice, that the loving boy might see the mother on whose bosom he had hung, whose every hair was to him a sacred relic, dragged at the tail of a cart round the public square of Poitou! And this was done that heretics might be brought back to the true faith in Jesus! Like acts have been done with a like purpose, by many sects called Christian!

“Here will be the best place to see the meeting,” said the jailer's friend, in conclusion. “This young gallant will come into the square by that street, and his mother's body by this,” pointing to the streets that, running parallel, entered the square on each side the prison; “and they will naturally halt in front of us, as the boy is to be given into your keeping. How the good

people love a pretty show like this, now! they are gathering from all points; see them settling round St. John's steps like flies round honey—a *sweet* sight it will be. See those old women hobbling up to the shrine of the Virgin— it may be to pray for her soul; her carriage never passed that alms wer'n't thrown to them. Lord help us! see old Valet smiting his breast; he's thinking of all she did for him when his boys were killed in the Spanish war. They'd better have left the poor lady in her grave, to my mind.”

Poor little Marie had been effectually silenced by the first words of this communication. Not a word, tear, or sob came from her. Shivering as if an ague had seized her, she stole across the apartment, and, climbing on to a stone window-seat, she opened a casement-window, and stretched her little body half out of it, looking wildly on one side and on the other. It was a touching sight to see that little dimpled, rosy, laughing, shouting, creature, impressed with horror, and colourless as marble. She had not long stood there when she heard a rush, and then a maddening shout, and a troop of mounted soldiers wheeled into the square, and halted before the jailer's house. As there was some little manœuvring to clear the space before them, Marie saw Eugene stationed at the very front, every object removed that could intercept his view of the ghastly spectacle preparing for him; there he was, helpless, his hands bound behind him, and his bridle-rein held by soldiers. Then, on the other side, through the narrow street, came the sound of tramping horses, and every head turned that way, and every eye in that direction; all was silence and expectation; life seemed suspended this moment for the sensation of the next.

“Master Eugene!” screamed Marie, “shut your eyes! look not that way! Oh! hear what I say!”

Eugene looked wildly round, but he saw nothing; half a dozen horsemen had drawn up between him and Marie, and there was no familiar sound in her strained and terror-struck voice. A soldier struck her, blow after blow, on her head and shoulders, with the hilt of his sword, till, overcome by the general feeling, she too turned her eyes to the troop now pouring into the square. They came—all—but where were the spoils of the grave? not there! A general buzz of inquiry and exclamation

[p. 193]

rose from the crowd. Little Marie, overcome by the sudden revulsion of feeling, rolled back from the window on to the stone floor and fainted away.

It was a few evenings after, that this same child, in the dead of night, stole into the jailer's apartment. She dreaded the man as a child dreads an ogre, and it was gratitude and feudal devotion, fortifying a love stronger than the love of life, which inspired a girl of ten years with courage to do what she was now bent on doing. The jailer was asleep in his bed. A lamp was suspended from the ceiling, which, sending a broad light in every direction, left no friendly shadow for a moment's shelter. The keys, of which Marie was to possess herself, were under the jailer's pillow. They were attached to a single ring made of a series of small, clear-toned bells, that rung at the slightest touch. Marie stood for a moment hesitating.

“If he should wake!” thought she. “Heaven grant good father Clement has well drugged

his wine!” She slid her arm under his pillow. He started, muttered in his sleep, and turned. She did not move, nor even tremble, but firmly grasped the ring and pulled it towards her. The bells tinkled. The jailer threw off the bedclothes and cried “help!” but it was the cry of a troubled dream; and, assured of this, after a moment’s breathless listening to his heavy breathing, Marie drew out the keys, and muffling the bells in her apron, she glided out of the room. Away she went through, long dark corridors, and up and down winding stairs, till she came to an apartment doubly locked, barred, and bolted. She did her task with a hand so skillful and a step so light that she entered the cell without breaking the slumbers of the prisoner. Eugene’s cheek rested on his hand, in which he held a miniature of his mother, and the expression of his face was as peaceful and contented as if the illusions of his dream were a reality, and he were actually enfolded in his mother’s arms. “He could not sleep so,” thought Marie, “if he knew that poor Alix died on this straw he lies on, and died for the will to serve dear mistress Emilie!” She knelt down and wakened him with a kiss. A few sentences passed between them, and he rose and followed her out of the cell. She replaced the fastening, and after many turns and windings, they came to a secret door that opened into a subterranean passage, connecting the prison with a neighbouring monastery, a passage known only to a Father Clement and a few of his brotherhood. There Father Clement received him, and there, with many tears and embraces, Eugene parted from Marie, who returned and replaced the keys, and who, as she afterwards told, secretly laughed many a time at the general conclusion that the devil had spirited away the prisoner.

It was on the following night that Eugene stood with Father Clement under the cloister of St. Francois, beside his mother’s grave. “Here, my dear child,” said the good man, “she will rest in peace. Léonie and I foresaw what must happen. The coffin which you believed contained your mother’s body was buried in the Protestant burial-place beside her father. A sufficient weight was in it to delude those who bore it there. There, by a cruel order, it was unearthed, but, as you know, your mother’s precious body was not found within it. Here she lies beside her mother and her mother’s kindred.”

“But, dear Father Clement, do not you—does not your church, I mean, forbid consecrated ground to those she calls heretics?”

“She does, my son; but it seemeth to me that if the prayers and alms of the heathen man, Cornelius, went up as a memorial before God, that your mother’s life of good deeds has expiated her error of faith; perhaps, my child,” added the good father, with a faint smile, “unshed tears, tears stayed by love and charity, may wash out these light stains on the soul.”

It was not for his mother’s soul, but the precious sanctuary which once contained it, that Eugene was anxious. “And will she rest here, dear Father Clement?” he asked; “will no one dare—”

“Softly, my son: no one knows but Léonie and I, and Léonie, if she were drawn by wild horses, would not betray the secret. There will be no disturbance here till the great day when the dead shall rise from their graves. While I live, this shall be holy ground to me, and I will tend it with vigil and prayer.”

“Oh, Father Clement, you are not a Catholic—you are nothing but a Christian.”

Father Clement smiled through his tears. “Truly, my son,” he said, “I would be nothing else. Every other name by which Christ’s followers is called is subordinate to that, and I would that all others were abolished, and that his disciples were known and bound together, by that on earth, as they will be in heaven. But, my son, we must not linger; danger is here, safety hence.”

Eugene knelt beside the grave, he kissed the stone that covered it, and love and faith mingled in silent prayer. He was there but a moment, but it was one of those moments that gives its stamp to the whole of after life.

Our extracts, with the necessary amplifications, have extended beyond the limits prescribed to us, and we can only add that, strictly obeying Father Clement’s instructions, and sheltered by disguises, Eugene passed from one Protestant house to another till he embarked for England. The wreck of his maternal property, with his father’s small patrimony, were afterward transmitted to him; and keeping steadily in mind his mother’s dying wish, after getting his education in England, and, in consequence of the interposition of powerful friends being joined by Léonie, his young sister, and Marie, he associated with other Huguenot families who emigrated to America. After being a few years here, and forgetting or disregarding the conventional ranks of the old world, he married Marie, and, if we may judge by their descendants, secured the transmission of such beauty, wit, and worth as seldom goes by royal patent, though stamped with ducal coronet.

¹ [Author’s note] “Le roi commence à penser sérieusement à son salut, et à celui de ses sujets; si Dieu nous le conserve *il n’y aura plus qu’ une religion dans son royaume*. C’est le sentiment de Monsieur Louvois,” &c.—
² [Author’s note] Madame de Maintenon, under authority of this law, took possession of the children of a Protestant uncle, and, adding hypocrisy to the cruelest treachery, pretended that she did it to express her gratitude to her aunt and benefactress!

³ [Editor’s note: Changed to “1672” in *Tales and Sketches*, 1844.]

⁴ [Editor’s note: Changed to “chateau” in *Tales and Sketches*, 1844.]

⁵ [Author’s note] The priest made lists of his converts, and in the margin marked the price affixed to each head, which was paid by the office appointed to receive these returns.