

Flower o' the Corn

A Romance of the Seventeenth Century Religious War

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CHAPTER XXIX.

Apples of Sodom.

WHEN the boat reached the other side of the Tarn, Cavalier could see dimly the forms of grenadiers in their tall peaked caps drawn up on either side. In the darkness he could hear the unanimous rustle of ordered movement as the arms rose to the salute and fell again to the men's side. Near by there was a grove of dark trees—pines by the sound of the wind among their branches. For five minutes Cavalier threaded aisle after somber aisle of these. They descended into a dell, as it had been an ancient quarry. Here, blazing with light, a tent was pitched. Others less bright and gay stood around.

The Marquis de Montrevel led the way, and what was the young man's wonderment to see that on his arm there hung, looking tenderly up into his weather-beaten face—who but Yvette Foy, daughter of the Camisard, innkeeper of La Cavalerie.

The table was spread for supper as they entered. Servants attired like the foresters of a great nobleman and mighty hunter stood in ordered rows. The grenadiers halted at the tent door. Officers in splendid uniforms rose to greet their commander-in-chief. That sturdy veteran conducted Yvette with grave courtesy to the head of the table. As he stood for a moment waiting till a little bustle subsided at the end of the tent nearest to the door, he glanced down at his companion with pride, and yet with an appreciation of the situation more than half humorous.

There was a proud smile of triumph on her beautiful, dark face. And it was poor Jean Cavalier's thought, the rat of a useless remorse gnawing at his vitals, that never woman looked so beautiful.

The marshal raised his hand, and commanded silence with a gesture at once great and gracious.

Then he took Yvette Foy by the hand, holding the fingers a little high in his, not without a certain pride.

"Gentlemen of the king's army and my good comrades," he said, "I present to you my wife, the Marquise de Montrevel."

Whereupon he sat down and ordered in the soup.

Yvette was seated on his right hand, and Cavalier, all overwhelmed and a little dazed by the lights and the flood of emotions, found himself on his left. He stood astonished, almost in act to flee, till the servant detailed to wait upon him, seeing his difficulty, seated him on his chair with a gentle compulsion.

A flood of indignant wonder rose slowly within him. Verily he had sold himself for naught—for the light word of a woman without honor.

The repast went on. Cavalier ate what was on his plate mechanically, or more often left it untouched.

The Marechal, an old campaigner and man of the world, perhaps divining some part of the young man's feeling, left him pretty much to himself, only pledging him once or twice for form's sake under the designation of "Mon Cousin."

Yvette never so much as glanced at him. The building was raised now. The scaffolding might come down when it liked.

The dinner drew to a close with the clearing of all the fragments down to the farther end of the table, where the soldier servants and officers of the Marshal's household proceeded forthwith to regale themselves, as was the jovial custom of the commander-in-chief of the Cevennes, while those at the upper end drew closer together and drank in great bumpers to the health of the king, to that of the general and to "All the Glories of France."

De Montrevel touched him on the shoulder immediately after and said, "Now, sir, if you are ready we will proceed to finish our affair."

Then he turned to the company with his usual courtesy.

"You will excuse us," he said. "I have some matters to arrange with this, my young kinsman, who has been good enough to escort my wife to our camp."

A signal to the guard followed. They fell in before and behind, silent and precise. The Marquis de Montrevel gave his arm to his wife. Jean Cavalier followed behind, his head bowed and his soul in sackcloth and ashes.

They mounted out of the quarry, but had not far to go through the pinewood before they came to the headquarters of the general. It was a white house in a vineyard with tall, winter-stripped trees like sentinels before the door. Guards lined the approaches, standing near enough for him to see, even in the dim light, the round spots of light made by their buttons and the whiter splashes of their buckles, gaiters and accouterments.

"And now, General Cavalier," said the marshal, after he had motioned the young man to a chair, "what have you to say to me?"

Jean Cavalier was a young and a brave man. He had no idea of falling back upon the plea ancient Adamic, "The woman thou gavest to be with me, she gave me to eat!"

"Sir," he answered, looking straight into the eyes of the sturdy old soldier of King Louis, "it is for you to speak to me. This lady at your right hand has informed me

that it was your wish to see me. I am here."

"I am given to understand," said the marshal, "that you wish to put an end to the war by surrendering to the clemency of the king!"

"Not to his clemency, but to his justice!" said Cavalier, boldly.

The old soldier shrugged his shoulders.

"I presume," he said, "that you did not come here to dispute with me about words. You desire to end this war. So, I may admit, do I. The question is, 'What then?'"

"This lady has informed me," Cavalier adhered to the formula, finding a certain satisfaction in it, "that in return for a

worship that we detest upon the pain of death or exile?"

"I promise you that you shall be able to worship your God in your own way, so long as no display is made. You shall have your pastors, who shall dwell among you and break bread with you. More I cannot promise, as an honest man and a servant of the king."

"And if we do not?" said Cavalier, rising to his feet.

"Ah," said the marshal, his face falling. "I trust it will not come to that. My reign here is nearly over. If the matter is not finished now, the wind that is already sown shall be reaped as the whirlwind among these mountains. I have fought you fairly

"Life is very hard for a woman, Jean. I do not ask you to forgive me—but be kind to me—for my heart is broken—broken!"

She breathed the final word upon the air with a wonderful tenderness.

But the heart of the young man was not so easily moved this time.

She was compelled, therefore, to try another tack.

Like a flash of lightning the anger passed sudden—white across her face.

"Sir," she said, "you may thank your gods that I brought you here. You have come to the house of a man who knows how to deal honestly. You are offered such terms as will never be given to you again.



"GOOD MORNING, ANGLAIS," SAID A VOICE. "WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU."

cessation of the war in the countries of the Cevennes, the king would grant freedom of faith and worship, and permit us to serve his majesty in his foreign wars, where we could prove our devotion to his person."

The marshal pinched Yvette's ear as she sat beside him.

"I fear," he said, "that this pretty one hath somewhat exceeded her instructions. I will promise you no terms that I do not believe that I can persuade the king to agree to."

"But I can promise you," he said, after a pause, "that the king will accept your service—that he will make you commander of all the troops you are able to raise for service abroad. He will also remove the officers who have been signally unsuccessful in restoring order in the Cevennes, and he will grant you freedom of opinion in matters religious!"

"What does that mean?" said Cavalier brusquely, "can we worship according to our consciences the God of our fathers?"

The Marquis de Montrevel made a slight motion of impatience.

"As to that," he said, "it depends what you mean. His majesty is, as you know, of the religion Catholic. So am I. So is my wife. (He bowed.) So are all officers and true servants of the king."

"So," continued the marquis more gravely, "it amounts to this, that I can promise you liberty of conscience but not liberty of proclaiming that conscience. You will then have as much freedom as I—I am not always able to declare my own. It is a good maxim—take it from a man well nigh thrice your age—Tell half the truth to a woman—the hundredth part thereof to a king."

"If the Cevennes are pacified," said Cavalier, his downrightness cutting the sophistry as a knife cuts butter, "will we of the faith be dragooned into attending a

no man of you can say other than that! But the man who comes after will burn your homes with fire, sow your hearthstones with salt and leave the High Cevennes bare as the palm of my hand, and without inhabitants, as a land where never man came!"

During this speech Yvette for the first time raised her eyes, not to the face of Cavalier, but to that of her husband. She moved her head aside very slightly, as if making a signal agreed upon. The marquis nodded, touched a bell at his side, and an officer instantly appeared.

"I have a letter to write, very urgent," he said. "I pray you bear my wife company till my return. Pardon the discourtesy. I shall not keep you long waiting."

CHAPTER XXX.

Jean Cavalier's Last Temptation.

With a bow and a smile he went out and Jean Cavalier was left once more alone with Yvette Foy. The girl regarded him long and steadily from under her lashes. Had the scepter indeed departed from her? Was her power utterly gone? It seemed like it, for the young man never so much as glanced at her.

"I do not ask you to forgive me," she murmured. "That I cannot hope for. I only ask you to believe that if there was any deceit it was not of my own will. I was sworn to silence. To speak the whole truth would have ruined—him!" (She pointed without to where in an anteroom the steady murmur of a voice told that the marshal was dictating his dispatch.) "He made me promise never to reveal our marriage—to keep it even from my own father. For his sake I have done so, and only tonight has he removed the oath from me by proclaiming the truth himself."

Yvette had risen and now stood beside the young Camisard leader.

If you have anything against me go with your complaint to my husband. He will answer for me."

"I have nothing against you," said Jean Cavalier, more gentle than can be believed; "nothing against any save only myself!"

"Forgive me. Do not waste time about that," she said. "Agree quickly with the marshal. He is not a hard man. You shall go back to the folk of the mountains with a message of peace. You and I will end the war. I pledge myself that you shall see the king himself, and that he will ratify the word which my husband speaks."

"I cannot betray those who have trusted me," said Cavalier. "I will go back as I came. I will die as a soldier of the Lord, in the trenches, if indeed I am no more worthy to lead the people in the day of battle."

"Ah, do so!" answered the girl with a slight curve of the lip.

Cavalier strode to the door without deigning any answer. He passed the open alcove in which the marshal was still dictating to his secretary. De Montrevel did not pause or look up. But, as Cavalier opened the door—a common countryman's kitchen door opening outward in two leaves, his eye caught a descending flash of steel. He found two bayonets at his breast and two more crossed before him to bar his way.

Finding his way thus barred by the soldiers of the king, the young man turned and going straight back into the chamber where the conference had begun, he waited. Triumphant as she was, Yvette could not escape a certain shiver of anxiety as she turned to face Jean Cavalier. For once she felt herself the weaker. Yet there was nothing militant or even reproachful about the aspect of the young peasant soldier.

He had rather the air of a man who knew his own responsibility and accepted its consequences. He stood by the fireplace, on