

houses. The notes of their praise acted with strange effect on "those of the religion," as the phrase went in the desert. It thrilled and excited them. A wild yearning came over all. Men, women, and children, on foot or on horseback, swelled the crowd on its way ever singing and rejoicing.

In a grassy valley, half-way up the mountain-side, they came upon the band of Generalissimo Cavalier, the leader of the Host, surprised on the ground, munching dry bread and chestnuts, which they washed down with small wine and the pure mountain stream that flowed beside them. Their muskets were stacked, and they had placed no sentries. At first the King's Hebeles started up in disorder and seized their arms, believing themselves betrayed into the hands of the "idolatrous" dragoons from Montpellier. But when the sounds of the Lord's hymns fell clear upon their ears they flew forward with joy to greet the great procession that wound up the mountain. Singing ever as they went, they grew fiercer and holier at each step of their ascent toward the impregnable fastness.

Outside the rude stone fort the bride dismounted. Was ever stranger bridal, even in those stirring times? On the arid white rocks of the Desert of the Cevennes men and women knelt down, under the eye of heaven, beneath the hot blazing sun of Languedoc. Salomon Couderc, the Prophet of the Lord—a fierce, wild soul, who could tell by a single intuitive glance the saved from the reprobate—stood up in their midst and stretched prophetic hands over the great assembly. He prayed and prophesied. In the centre of the group Castanet knelt on the bare ground, with Mariette by his side, and took her hand in his own, looking a soldier indeed in his cloak of yellow satin. Salomon Couderc improved the occasion with a fiery discourse over these servants of God who had faith even in the moment of trial and persecution to become man and wife, and raise up for the Lord in future more faithful servants. Then he asked in a loud voice, "Do you take this handmaid of the Eternal to be your wedded wife, in the name of the Spirit?"

And Castanet answered: "In that name, O Prophet of the Lord, I take her."

The prophet turned to Mariette. "And do you take this believer to be your lawful husband, to honour, and obey after God's holy commandment?"

The girl's voice trembled a little; but she answered, none the less, in a very clear tone, "With Heaven's help, I do so take him."

"I pronounce you man and wife," Couderc said, spreading his hands.

All rose from their knees. With one accord they burst into sacred song. They poured forth on the air from a thousand throats the words of the Hundred and Fiftieth Psalm in the rugged rhyme of the old Hignenet version. It was an aptly-chosen anthem. They sang it with vigour, "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands," they sang, "Oh, Israel, trust thou in the Lord," they sang again: "He is their help and their shield"—and by Israel they meant their own folk, the Camisards. "The Lord shall increase you more and more," they sang, "you and your children"—and they looked to the bride and groom. What more appropriate wedding hymn for those persecuted folk in those mountain fastnesses? And with what vigour they sang the final words, till the rocks re-echoed, "We will bless the Eternal from this time forth. Praise ye the Eternal!"

The gallant bridegroom stood forth. He raised his hat and shook his cloak of satin. Twenty captives from the fort were paraded in front. "Go back to your homes and your King," he said, addressing them. "On the bridal day of the Princess of the Cevennes, I, Castanet, release you."

And Mariette was known as the Princess of the Cevennes, in derision or in earnest, from that day forward.

III.

Seven months later the King's Rebels went forth on a marauding expedition against their savage persecutors in the northern valley. They marched through the chestnut woods to St. Germain de Calberte, the one town in the neighbourhood which, Protestant itself, was still held for the King by a few important Catholic inhabitants. Mouldering old walls surrounded the place. For three days Castanet and his little band of insurgents besieged them. For three nights they sang hymns round the beleaguered town, and were answered

with similar hymns from the houses and streets by the Protestant defenders. But in the end a reinforcement of dragoons from Avignon swept down upon the valley; and, after four hours' hard fighting with pikes and muskets, Castanet was forced to retreat at last, leaving not a few of the Lord's people dead before St. Germain.

He wound his way up the hills again to the fastness of Mont Algoal. Arrived before the little ill-built fort, which he left half unguarded, with his young wife within it, he saw to his horror signs of recent fighting. A few bodies strewed the ground; there was a smell of powder. But the place seemed deserted. He entered the fortress. Not a soul was in it. As he rode out again, distracted, not knowing whither to turn, one of his followers, a timid-looking creature for a Camisard, crept down cautiously from a spur of the mountains, and, making sure it was Castanet, came up with tidings.

"Who did it?" the leader asked sternly.

"A sudden swoop of dragoons from the quarter of Montpellier. Some five of us were killed, perhaps three taken prisoners, the rest fled to the desert."

"And Mariette, my wife?"

"The dragoons carried off the Princess of the Cevennes on their horses as a prisoner."

"Which way did they retire?" the brigadier asked with a terrible face.

"By the route of Nimes. They are gone six hours. They will doubtless sleep this night at Alais."

Castanet was a man of resource and courage. He made his mind up instantly. In that war of extermination—a war of cruel reprisals on both sexes—no prisoner escaped punishment, few escaped torture. Castanet saw what he must do, for he loved his wife. Weary as men and horses were with their long up-hill ride, he turned his charger's head, and gave the word of command.

"Down again!" he cried aloud. "Forward once more—to Valleraugue!"

"Pardon, brigadier," the runaway Camisard exclaimed, "the enemy went with your wife in the opposite direction, to Alais."

Castanet eyed him from head to

foot. "The Eternal has given me the command of this His brigade," he said, "and He will guide me. Soldiers, do as I order you! Forward—to Valleraugue! We will fall upon them and slay them."

And he rode away in the opposite direction from his captured wife, with indomitable faith, indomitable courage.

It was almost midnight before they reached Valleraugue. Rumour, which flies fast in such stirring times, had already brought word to the upland town and castle how the King's troops had fallen upon the stronghold of the Camisards, destroyed half the band, and taken prisoner the Princess of the Cevennes, to Montpellier. The Chevalier de Valleraugue therefore little expected an attack. His castle was an old mediaeval chateau, unaltered by the fashionable art of Vauban. But the men of Mont Algoal and of Mialet would be far too much occupied with their own defence, he imagined, to think of swooping west upon a weak point in the King's country. So the loyalists at Valleraugue slept well that night. All at once, with a wild onslaught, Castanet and his men were upon them. The Catholics, surprised in their beds, had no time to seize their arms. Before they knew what had happened, Castanet was knocking at the gate of the castle. The Lord had indeed delivered his enemies into his hands. The Camisards attacked and sabred the sentries. The drawbridge was down. They rushed across it. One man opposed: the brigadier clubbed his musket and brained him. The great gate stood in their way. A few blows with hatchets made a breach in its mass. They entered the castle.

"Servants of the Eternal," Castanet cried, "go on and slay! Burn down the chateau with the priests of Baal!"

Defence was impossible. The loyalists were unarmed, surprised, in their night-clothes. With unerring instinct, Castanet made for the dwelling-rooms. There, bursting through a closed door, he and his men seized Mademoiselle de Valleraugue, the Chevalier's daughter, and hurried her away suddenly. It was all they want-

ed. Who she was Castanet knew not. But she was a lady of rank; so much he guessed at once from her room and the surroundings it contained in it. That amply sufficed. He seized the girl by force, and three of his men dragged her out behind him. The poor child, just seventeen, not knowing to what death she was being led, or why, went with them half-fainting.

"Fear not, mademoiselle," the gallant brigadier cried, as they reached the drawbridge. "You shall not be hurt unless they hurt my wife. You shall be courteously treated. I take you with me merely as a hostage."

Outside the gate he turned. The defenders were now beginning to appear upon the wall. He raised his big hat to them. They could see him in the moonlight.

"This is my prisoner," he cried. "I take her to my mountains. I am Castanet, brigadier of the Army of the Lord. Go to Alais and Montpellier, and tell the King's dragoons that I hold this lady as a hostage for the safety of Mariette, my wife, the Princess of the Cevennes. If one hair of my wife's head be hurt, this lady's life shall answer for it." And he lifted her to his saddle and rode away hastily.

IV.

Next day but one, for the first time in that terrible war, a flag of truce was seen approaching Alais.

Hitherto the King's troops had treated the Camisards, not as belligerents, but as common malefactors. It was a hunt after wolves. A prisoner, once taken, was hanged or burned; a Camisard, once seen, was tracked down like a wild beast, and shot or stabbed without forms of capture.

Now, however, the Commandant of the King's troops at Alais, looking forth and seeing a white flag approach, was very differently minded. For all night through the Chevalier de Valleraugue had ridden post-haste towards the friendly town, with news that the Mademoiselle Louise had been carried off by the brigands of Castanet's band, and that if one hair of the head of the rebel Princess were hurt Castanet would avenge it on the nobleman's daughter.

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