

STEPHANIE.

BY LOUIS VEUILLLOT.

[Translated from the French by Mrs. Josephine Black.]

CHAPTER VI.

You might have seen how well, and even gay, I seemed after that trip. The truth was, that I very wisely, but with a great effort of determination, left Germain's letter behind me—that letter is a talisman that always throws me into dreamland. After a great deal of reasoning with myself, and after a great deal of prayer, I conquered myself, and came back from Italy wiser and better. God gave me grace in those long hours of union with Him, my heart became quieter and I a more reasonable being. I certainly always held to the desire of seeing Germain again, and I know that I clung to him with some sort of vague hope; but, then, how often do we take our dearest hopes and wishes and lay them sadly away in some hidden chamber of our hearts, knowing that they lie there just as dear and sacred as ever, though we must give them up! Sometimes, I would take my letter in my hands and look at it for a while, but I never let myself open it. I often said to myself: if I find that reason advises and my aunt's happiness demands that I should marry, I will take Germain's letter and burn it without ever opening it again, but nothing else can ever weaken or destroy the feelings that have taken so strong a hold upon my heart.

I had just reached this heroic but rather gloomy height of determination, when I wrote that letter to you three weeks ago, on the subject of your marriage, which made me look back so sadly at my own life, and a few days after—I saw Germain!

CHAPTER VII.

MAY 22.

It was on Sunday, at Mass, in the parish chapel, that I saw him. I was beside my aunt, and we were turning towards the pulpit to listen to the sermon, when my eyes fell upon Germain, right opposite us, and not three steps away. I knew him at the very first glance. He is grand, Elise. I am sure you are dying to hear what he is like. He looks grave and manly. The thick clusters of hair on his forehead are beginning to thin just a little, but except for that, the calm, good face is not changed. His dress is very simple, and yet there is something elegant about it. Anyone might feel proud to belong to him.

His head was turned towards the preacher, and so I had plenty of time to look at him. It is he himself, I thought, the very Germain that I remembered, the very Germain that I pictured to myself. Then, I cast down my eyes again, I tried to draw down my veil, I shrank behind a very stout lady who happened to be between us, and began to think. I am afraid I did not hear much of the sermon that day; and, moreover, I am afraid I fell into a reverie, for I know I was troubled with very strong remembrances of a certain morning in a dark garret, and of a little child sitting on a bench behind her mother's kneeling figure, and St. Raphael with a kind, sweet face blazing out of a painted window overhead. Then, with a start, I came back to Stephanie, wondering what my dead mother would advise me to do now, what I ought to do, where my duty lay. When the sermon was over I fell on my knees, and burying my face in my hands implored God to grant that I might be the wife of my mother's benefactor or remain unmarried all my days. Oh, Germain, Germain, I could not give away the heart that was not mine to give, for it is as full of you as you desired it to be!

My aunt rose to leave the church, and I followed. We passed slowly by the bench where Germain knelt, and I ventured to take just one look at him. He was praying with head bowed down, and a few gray hairs scattered among the locks about his temples told me what a laborious life he had been leading since I saw him last. I recognized his prayer-book, for he taught me to read Latin in it, and I wondered if there was a little picture of St. Rose of Palermo there which I had given him shortly before our separation. My aunt remarked him, and observed that he seemed very pious. Why could I not say "I know him. He is my benefactor, my oldest, truest friend"? However, that remark of hers seemed a good omen as well as the fact that it was in so holy a place that Providence had allowed me to see my old friend again. Once outside the church my first feeling was dread that I should lose sight of him. I darted up to my own room to watch which way he would go. Presently from my post behind the curtains I saw him pass down a very quiet street just opposite the Hotel d'Aubecourt. He gave something to that poor old woman whom you may remember to have seen always there with her crucifix on her breast and her "Ave Maria" on her lips. Thanks to my long sight, I was able to watch him all down the street till he entered a plain but pretty-looking house at the end, which is shut in like a convent. By-and-by he came out again, without his prayer-book, so I concluded that it was his own house. What a lot of discoveries all in one day! To see him, to know that he was alive and well, and to find him living just within sight of my own window! He came up the street and passed our house with an attentive look at the carved escutcheon'd doorway and windows. Germain! Germain! look again, don't pass by so quickly. Your little Roeschen is watching you behind the rich curtains of one of those sculptured windows that have caught your eye, and loving you better than she did in those old, happy days, even with such a love as you wished her to have for you. But without another thought of the gorgeous Hotel d'Aubecourt, and still less of poor Roeschen, he went on and soon was out of sight. Then I rose with a great sigh, locked the door, took out my precious letter, unfolding it with a sort of tender respect and renewing in my heart the prayer I had made an hour before in the presence of God. At Vespers that evening he was in the very same place. "so, most probably," I thought, "he belongs to the parish, and I shall see him very often." A fortnight went by and I saw him every day. Nearly every morning we met at Mass and then he disappeared into his quiet-looking old house and did not come out again until evening, or if he did pass the

threshold he was back directly with two or three awful-looking old books tucked affectionately under his arm; from all of which I concluded he had no particular occupation except study, and that he was not changed since he wrote that wonderful letter. Once or twice I saw him at a particular window in which a light burns until the most unearthly hours; and this I supposed was his own room, and probably his study also. You will smile at all this, I know, dear; but my life is very sweet just now. I piece out my little puzzle every day. When I awaken, I feel that he is not far away. I guess at all his occupations as the day goes on. I kneel near him in the church. I pray for him, little as he suspects it; and I wait in hopes of some day having an opportunity of showing him what a grateful, loving heart I have. Sometimes he looks sad and careworn; and I think he has some great trials to bear, and I long so much to comfort him who comforted us in our troubles. He looks lonely, too; I wonder where his mother and sister can be?

He does not recognise me in the least. Sometimes he happens to glance at me in passing; but it does not seem to awaken the slightest remembrance in his mind. You know one sometimes sees on people's faces a look as if they were trying to remember where they had seen you. Of course, I was only ten years old when he went away and now I am twenty, just double the age I was then. Besides, at that time I was a miserable and rather plain child, and now I am a girl, and if the opinions of M. de Sauveterre and his mother are to be relied upon, rather a nice girl. Well, there is no use in my hiding anything from you, Elise, and I do not think you will be vexed with me for what I am going to say. I wish that Monsieur Germain could hold the same opinion on this subject as my aristocratic admirer. But I laugh to see the two men side by side in my mind, and to fancy two such different beings having any feeling in common, and I fear the contrast is hardly complimentary to the Viscount de Sauveterre.

CHAPTER VIII.

May 27.

No, Elise, I could not speak to my aunt about him. The reasons which I have already urged to you, and of which you have taken no notice, seem to me insurmountable. Besides, there is the fear that, if my aunt attempted to admit him as a *protégé* into her house, she would scare him altogether. I also feel that if I ventured even to pronounce his name, any one could read my secret in my face. Now, it does not follow that because I wish to tell all to you, because I feel a want to tell all to you, I must necessarily tell everyone else. You know the very depths of my heart and of my character, and to you the singularity of my situation accounts for all my thoughts, and feelings, and desires. I loved Germain, I may say, before I saw him, because of his magnificent character, I love him ten times as much now that I see him every day, and every day see something new to admire in him. I say it to you without a blush, for while it is a secret between us, there is nothing to blush about; others would not judge so. And I have no particular desire to be set down as a young lady who is given to throwing herself at the heads of men who are not troubling themselves about her. What would Germain think if he heard it? Then what would my aunt say if I came and asked her to let me marry Germain—she who raves about title and distinction of birth and rank, who thinks very little of other merits, or rather cannot be induced to believe that real merits exist at all apart from these advantages, who thinks that nothing is to be compared with them? Germain—who? she would ask. Why, the Germain who saved us, my mother and me, when you left us to die. What a nice way to curry favour that would be! She would think that I was disposing very cleverly of her fortune, and perhaps it would end by my throwing her favours back to her. How little it would cost me if in doing so I could still retain her affection and cause her no pain! Is there another in Paris or in France who cares as little for the world? Better a thousand times live good and happy in some retired little home than beat out your heart and your life against the cold, tyrannical breast of society. But my aunt's love I must not lose if I can help it, and, besides, I would feel some scruple in bringing Germain my heart only. If he knew and loved me, he might think it enough; but, then, I would not have the intense happiness of enriching him. M. de Tourmagne says that it is a hundred times easier for a rich man to become learned than a poor one. The rich man has more leisure, more repose of mind; he has more opportunities of seeing varieties of books, and countries, and people. Fancy what a delight it would be to me to give my philosopher all these advantages, what a glory to raise the noble heart and mind of him I love to a pedestal where all the world might see and admire him, whence he might speak to be gladly heard. No devoted heart could be insensible to such hopes as these. Science is my rival, my favoured rival, and yet so much do I love Germain, that I wish with my own hands to deck my rival and adorn her and bring her to him. Since the haughty dame must have money, and reserves her tenderest caresses for those of her adorers who come to her with gold and dwell in palaces, then the gold and the palace she must have.

My first idea is to bring Germain to my aunt's house without either him or her knowing how it has been brought about; I do not yet see how it will be brought about; I see many obstacles and yet I will try. I want Madame d'Aubecourt to know and like him. Once she has seen him (of course, without any suspicion of my wishes), she will be sure to admire and like him; I am proud of them both. I wish next that, by my endeavours, Germain should make a name for himself. M. de Tourmagne will help me willingly and powerfully here. And then I want Germain to see me sometimes and speak to me, so that if he thinks of it at all, he may think, "she is not plain, or stupid, or silly." And when all this is done we shall see further. Meanwhile I shall speak and listen to him, and we shall once more be friends. Ah! I know Elise will soon be sending me a little bitter medicine in the shape of sensible advice. I am afraid that sensible advice troubles me without curing me.

(To be continued.)