

# The Hermit of Livry

## Chapter I

### The Friends

SOFT May breezes were playing hide and seek among the whispering leaves of the apple and pear trees, and bending the long grass in the rich pastures of Picardy,<sup>1</sup> when three lads issued from the gates of a lordly mansion to ramble through the fields and lanes adjoining their ancestral home.

The peasantry for miles around knew the two De Mommors, and many a merry greeting did they give and receive before they reached the end of their walk. But their companion, though about the same age as themselves, was evidently looked upon with more reverence by the simple country people, and men touched their caps with a more serious air to the pale-faced, gentle-looking boy, Jean Calvin, although he was only a notary's son

<sup>1</sup> A region in northern France

being educated with the young nobles, the De Mommors.

Today young Calvin seemed more deeply absorbed in his own thoughts than usual; and though the other two ran races, chased butterflies, and tried all they knew to induce him to join in their sports, they gained but a languid response from him.

"If we were at our studies now, you would be eager enough, Jean," said one of the boys complainingly.

"True, my brother; but it is not the first time Jean has shown us he prefers the company of his own thoughts to our society," responded the other.

"Nay, nay, that is not fair," said Jean, rousing himself from his reverie. "You are my dearest friends, and, as you know, I prefer your company to that of all others, except perhaps my dear father and mother. But just now it is meet that I should meditate much, and join but little in sports and plays; for you know the time draws near when I shall be publicly set apart for the service of our holy Church."

The serious tone in which their companion spoke made the others more serious for a minute or two; but at length the elder, shrugging his shoulders, exclaimed, "I would not be you, Jean—no, not if the Bishop of Noyon would give me his bishopric."

His brother laughed.

LANGUID: *indifferent*

REVERIE: *thoughts*

MEET: *appropriate*

"You think to be head of the house of the De Mommors—a better position, I trow," he said.

"Nay, nay, I was not thinking of being the elder, or even of being a De Mommor at all," replied his brother. "I would not exchange with Jean if he were going to be made pope, instead of a chaplain."

"He will be a pope, or a cardinal at least, some day," observed the other brother; "he is only twelve now, and is already thought fit to enter the Church."

There was not a shadow of envy in the tone in which this was said, and though there was a shade of color in Jean's pale face for a moment, he answered quite calmly, "It is not for the sake of advancement that I am so soon to enter the service of our holy Church, but that I may pursue my studies and become a learned man, though I may remain the unknown and humble Jean Calvin to the day of my death."

"But I tell you, you will not remain so," said the elder De Mommor, a little testily; and as he spoke he looked round cautiously to see that no one was within earshot. "I believe what that old man told us in the woods a few months ago. He looked in your face so earnestly, as though he could read your fate there, as he said, 'Boy, you are born to be great; see to it that you fulfill your destiny.'"

"Hush, hush!" said Jean almost imploringly, and he shuddered as he spoke. "I thought that evil spirit had been exorcised ere this," he added, with a sigh.

BISHOPRIC: *position as bishop*

TROW: *suppose*

EXORCISED: *cast out*

“Call it an evil spirit, if you will, and call the old man a wizard who spoke the strange words to us; but I shall never forget either looks or words.”

“There, said I not you were bewitched when we came home!” exclaimed his brother. “I hope the old wizard has been burnt ere this,” he added, hastily crossing himself as he spoke, to prevent any of the wizard spells taking effect against himself.

“And yet you believe something of what the old man told us?” said his brother.

“I believe Jean Calvin will be a great man; I always did believe that. He will wear the pope’s triple crown, and I will walk barefoot to Rome to beg my old friend’s blessing;” and he made a pretense of going down on his knees at once. Before the mock ceremony was concluded, however, they were interrupted by the clatter of horse’s hoofs along the ill-kept bridle-path; but the next minute the animal stumbled, and the man was thrown to the ground. The three lads at once ran forward to his assistance, and on coming close to him found, to their surprise, that he was an old servant of Calvin’s.

“Why, Pierre, you have not come to fetch Jean back to his college studies already!” exclaimed the young De Mommors, as they assisted the man to rise. He was more frightened than hurt by the fall; and when he saw that his master’s horse had been caught by a peasant at a short distance, he told the boys he had not received any orders to this effect.

“It may be, though, that my master has made known his wishes in these letters;” and as he spoke he put his hand inside his leather jerkin, and pulled out two, bound together by a scarlet silken cord. One was directed to Monsieur de Mommor, and the other to Jean himself, but both in his father’s handwriting.

“Oh, let us know the news at once,” said his companions; “open your letter, Jean.”

But young Calvin, anxious as he might be to know the important news it must contain (for letter-writing was by no means common in those days), remembered the deference due to his friend, their father, and decided to deliver the packet into his hands untouched.

After kind inquiries after his mother, brother, and sisters, Jean offered to walk back with the packet himself, so that the man might return to Noyon at once, for the horse seemed to have fallen lame.

After a little hesitation over the propriety of doing this, the man consented; for he knew his master would not be pleased if the horse were ruined, which it might be if he continued his journey, instead of returning to the town at once. So after receiving Jean’s messages for the various members of his family, he took his way along the bridle-path again, and the boys hastened with all possible speed to deliver the important missive with which they had been entrusted.

JERKIN: *short, sleeveless jacket*

PROPRIETY: *appropriateness*

MISSIVE: *letter*

Monsieur de Mommor was scarcely less surprised than the boys had been, when he received the packet. He cut the string at once, and telling Jean he might read his letter without delay, he opened his own. Both contained the same news. The chaplain of Gésine had resigned his benefice, and the Bishop of Noyon had chosen Jean Calvin as his successor. The eve of the festival of Corpus Christi had been appointed as the time for his investiture, and De Mommor at once decided that his own sons should be present at the solemn ceremony.

Had Jean been allowed to follow his own will just now, he would have retired to the college of Noyon, and spent the intervening time in prayer and meditation; but this his friends would not hear of, and so it was arranged that he should remain with them until the sixth of June, the day before that appointed for the ceremony.

It was not an uncommon thing for a child to be appointed to some office in the Romish Church<sup>1</sup> in those days, and so no great surprise was felt that a boy of twelve should be made a chaplain, but as many as could gain admission eagerly went to see the bishop cut off the dark brown hair of the young candidate for holy orders.

It was a grand and solemn spectacle: the white-robed priests and serge-clad monks, moving slowly through the dim arches of the church, chanting the Latin service, and then the pale, serious-looking

boy led in before the bishop, putting off his secular garments in token that he had already done with the world, and would henceforth devote his life to the service of the Church. There was no lightness or boyish playfulness in Jean Calvin's demeanor as he went through the ceremony; and when at last his hair had been cut off, and he stood forward with his bare, tonsured head to answer the last questions that should be put to him, not one among all that company of priests and monks looked more serious and devout than the boy chaplain.

To the young De Mommors the service was little more than a grand sight, and they more than half regretted that Jean had been called to this honor, for they were afraid they should lose their fellow-student and companion. But this fear was quite groundless; Jean would have the salary attached to the office, while others would perform its duties, and so, beyond the change of dress and the tonsured head, there was little alteration in the life of the young student. To his father it was a great relief, for he was not a wealthy man, and his son's education had already cost him more than he could well afford; but now the burden would be lifted from his shoulders, for Jean's salary would meet his expenses.

He did not return with the De Mommors to their splendid home. Rules were law here, and his father, inflexible in his sternness of character,

<sup>1</sup>The Roman Catholic Church

BENEFICE: *church office*

INVESTITURE: *commissioning*

SERGE-CLAD: *wearing garments made of a durable fabric*

TONSURED: *shaved*

was afraid his son would contract habits of luxury and indolence if he remained with them entirely; and so it had been arranged that he should pay a visit to his grandfather at the little village of Pont l'Évêque, a few miles from Noyon; though he promised to join the De Mommors immediately upon his return.

His friends at Pont l'Évêque received him most kindly, and his grandfather was specially pleased to see him.

"You have entered the Church now, Jean, and of course know much more than we do in matters of faith. Now, there has been a hermit here for the last few days; he comes from the forest of Livry, near Paris, and he tells us of strange things, new doctrines that are being taught there now."

On the mention of Paris, Jean's thoughts recurred to the old man he had seen in the woods some weeks before when out with the De Mommors.

"Was he grey-headed, worn, and bent, but without of a peaceful, happy countenance?" said Jean quickly.

"Why, you must have seen him as you came into the village, Jean," replied his grandfather.

But the boy shook his head.

"I saw an old man such as I have described some weeks ago; but we thought his hermit's dress was but to conceal the witchcraft he practiced."

"And wherefore thought you he practiced witchcraft?" asked his aunt.

CONTRACT: *acquire*

INDOLENCE: *slothfulness*

"Because he pretended to foretell my future. He could see I should be a great man, he said," answered Jean simply.

His grandfather laughed. "It needed not witchcraft to see that, I trow," he said. "You will rise to be a bishop, or a cardinal, I doubt not; and if that were all the hermit had said, I could well forgive him."

"What worse thing could he have said?" exclaimed Jean in a tone of surprise.

"Well, I know not; but I greatly fear it is heresy the hermit teaches. But you shall hear him for yourself tomorrow; he will be sure to take his place by the stone cross when the people go by to market."

The old man never doubted but that his grandson, having received the tonsure, would by the magical charm of this be able to detect any flaws in the doctrine taught by the hermit; and it would greatly redound to the credit of the whole family if Jean should succeed in doing this. It had been suggested by two or three of the neighbors that the old man taught strange things. If the young chaplain decided that they were "strange," or any way contrary to the doctrines of the Church of Rome, he should at once give information against the offender, and thus prove at the very outset that he was no lukewarm disciple of the Church.

But both Jean and his grandfather were doomed to be disappointed, as well as many others, when

HERESY: *views that go against accepted beliefs*

REDOUND: *contribute*

they went to the stone cross the next day. There stood the cross as usual, but no hermit was there; and though the crowd turned to look up and down the road in hope of seeing the bowed form appear, they waited for upwards of an hour, and still he did not come. At length a neighbor returning from a distant village brought the news that the hermit was on his way back to his native forest of Livry; he had met him that morning soon after sunrise. When the crowd heard this, they broke into loud murmurs of dissatisfaction. All were united in wishing to hear him preach again, but from very different motives. Some had already learned to love the new truths he taught, while others were only anxious that he should say something that would justify them in bringing the charge of heresy against him. Jean and his grandfather were both disappointed on this account, for from the various accounts he had heard of the hermit, he felt sure it was the same he and the young De Mommors had mistaken for a wizard, and he longed to hear what this new thing could be which his grandfather called heresy. Whatever it was, he would have nothing to do with it, he was quite determined. He had too much reverence for the Church to question anything in its teaching, and he began to think that the supposed hermit was given to the practice of witchcraft after all, and that this was another form of it—preaching against the Church.

On his return to the De Mommors, he told them what he had heard at Pont l'Évêque; but they only laughed at him for thinking so seriously of the matter.

"Hermit or wizard, it does not matter much," said the youngest gaily; "I do not think he would either talk you or bewitch you out of your allegiance to the pope."

The young chaplain bowed his head and crossed himself reverently.

"I trust I shall ever be faithful to our holy Church," he said.

"Yes; I have heard it has been said that your carrying the cross-hilted sword in the Church processions betokens what you will one day become."

"Ah, and my father says the Church will need all that men can do for her by and by, for many enemies are rising up against her. Some letters just received from Paris bring sad news of the spread of heresy in the Sorbonne,<sup>1</sup> many of the students and learned professors openly proclaiming it."

It was not often the young De Mommors spoke so seriously; but they had heard this was a very grave subject, and if grave to them, how much more so to the devout mind of the young chaplain! His pale cheek flushed, and his hand was clenched as though he would at once grasp the sword and rush to the battle, and a feeling of hatred against this new heresy crept into his heart.

<sup>1</sup> A college founded in 1253 A.D., located in Paris