Through Stress and Strain

Chapter I

The Village Home

IT was a lovely afternoon in the spring of 1666 that a weary-looking horseman alighted at a small roadside inn, and after calling for a stoup of wine for himself and some water for his horse, inquired the nearest road to St. Etienne, a small village on the lower plateau of the Cevennes.

All through the sweet, soft country of Languedoc the traveler had been brisk enough, noting the condition of the vines and of the promise they gave of a future

STOUP: *cup*
PLATEAU: *a high, flat area of land*
CEVENNES: *a mountain range in southern France*

harvest; but now he was looking weary. Although the landlord of the inn pointed out the best road for him to take, he seemed in no hurry to mount his horse again when he had finished his wine; and so, for lack of other customers to serve, the landlord thought he might glean a little news from this one.

"From Nîmes, messire? What news from Paris?" asked the host of the inn.

The traveler shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. "Louis the Great is Louis the Great still," he said in a mocking tone; but he looked curiously at the landlord as he spoke, to see whether his words conveyed more than their outward seeming, and then he said, "What news has reached this out-of-the-way corner of France?"

"Not much, messire. We have but few travelers during the winter; 'tis scarce worth opening the door, in fact; for, as you doubtless know, Huguenots are but poor

MESSIRE: "*my lord" in French; a title of respect*
HUGUENOTS: *French Christians*

customers to a wine-seller."

"And the village is Huguenot?" said the traveler, as if asking for information.

"Ah! peste is it. A poor-spirited lot, these people of the religion, with no feasts but Sunday, and that spent in hearing sermons and singing hymns, instead of a merry dance on the green, with plenty of wine to keep their feet going. If it was not for a few who are of the king's religion, and for some jolly father of the Church who comes this way to help them keep the saints' days, I might as well turn Huguenot myself. Ah! our king is not so devoted to the Church as he should be, or he would drive this monster of heresy from our land, now that he has all power in his own hands."

"Why, what more would you have?" exclaimed the traveler, in surprise. "The king has done more to harass these people than the late cardinal, and surely he was a faithful servant of the Church!"

PESTE: *like a plague*
HERESY: *views that go against accepted beliefs*
CARDINAL: *an important official in the Roman Church*

"Mazarin!"[1] said the innkeeper, with a contemptuous shrug and discontented grunt. "If Richelieu had but lived a little longer, he would have driven them out of France entirely. He broke their power when he took that stronghold of heresy, La Rochelle, and—"

"Nay, nay; Richelieu was too wise a statesman to try and impoverish France by driving away her most industrious workmen. I am a merchant, with an eye to the best goods. I can buy and sell, no matter whether they are produced by those of the religion or their Catholic neighbors; but I tell you, gossip, I have to look sharp when I am buying of a Catholic, or I may make a bad bargain, and be left with the worst article in the market on my hands."

The innkeeper laughed. "I am of the same opinion, and I've learned by experience too; and whenever I buy a bit of cloth in the village here, I always take care it comes from

[1] Cardinal Mazarin became chief minister of France in 1642, following the death of his mentor, Cardinal Richelieu.

a Huguenot loom, much as I hate the religion."

"It's the same with their wines and their silks, their glass and leather. I am always open to a bargain that I can sell again at a good profit, and I say it will be a bad day for France when we merchants can't get the top prices in every market, and we should be driven out of all if it wasn't for the Huguenots. Whether it is because they have about fifty more working days than their neighbors, I can't say; but I do know they put more heart into their work than most people," said the stranger, taking up his broad-brimmed beaver hat and replacing it on his head.

"And you have an eye for a good thing in cloth, and have come to see the winter's work of our villagers. You are only just in time, for our people will soon be moving with their flocks to the higher slopes of the hills; but perhaps it is silk you have in your eye.

GOSSIP: *friend*

Never was a better year for silkworms than this last has been, and, as usual, the Huguenots seem to have had all the luck, for they have reared twice as many as their neighbors," said the talkative innkeeper.

But whether it was cloth, silk, or silkworms that the merchant was in search of, or whatever his business might be, he did not seem disposed to talk about it; and finding that he could learn very little from the host of the inn as to what had actually been going on here lately, he soon mounted his horse again, and resumed his journey.

A pleasant, peaceful scene the village presented when the traveler drew near in the dusk of the evening. Each cottage stood in a garden or in a little orchard of mulberry trees. From some of the open doorways came the sound of the flying shuttle and the click-clack of the loom, as the busy workman finished his day's task by the waning light. Others were digging their gardens or

WANING: *dimming*

loosening the soil round the mulberry trees; while among the women and children were signs of packing up for the summer flitting to the higher pastures.

A lad about ten years of age, on his way from the little village shop, caught sight of the traveler as he passed, and instantly recognized him.

"Oh, Uncle, you have come at last! Mother was afraid you would be too late, for we go to the hills the day after tomorrow. But—but where is Jacques?" he asked, looking round as he spoke, as if in search of someone else.

"Jacques has not come," said the traveler shortly.

The boy did not wait to hear more; he felt too much disappointed to ask the reason, but ran on to tell the disquieting news at home.

"Jacques not come!" said his mother, who met him in the garden, and she went on to

FLITTING: *move*

the gate to meet the horseman, who was slowly coming up the road. He was looking cross as well as weary, and the woman grew alarmed as she caught sight of his face.

"Oh, brother! what is it? What has happened to our boy?" she said, anxiously laying her hand on the bridle as she spoke.

The man dismounted at once, and grasped her hand. "I began to fear I should be too late," he said.

"Yes, we expected you a week ago. But what of Jacques—where is he? Why is he not with you? It was a promise, you know, that he should come back for this summer on the hills."

"Yes, yes; but we cannot always keep our promises," said the man evasively, in a tone of vexation.

The mother's keen eyes saw there was something amiss, something to be kept from her as long as possible; and clasping her hands, and facing round upon the

EVASIVELY: *avoiding answering directly*
VEXATION: *frustration*

traveler, she said with whitening lips, "Is my boy dead? Has our father—"

"No, no; Jacques is as well as you are," said the man impatiently. "Let us go indoors, and I will soon explain why he has not come."

But he seemed in no hurry to explain the mystery. The horse was put up, greetings were exchanged, and the table set out for supper, but no word was said about Jacques, until one of the younger children, sidling up to her mother, whispered aloud:

"When is Uncle going to tell us about Jacques?"

"All in good time, Ninon. We will have supper first. Jacques is well; and that must content you for the present, little ones," said the visitor, feeling a little more at ease now; and he launched out into details of business and the political action taken by the Huguenots of Nîmes.

Intrigue and double-dealing was the occupation or amusement of everybody in France

SIDLING: *moving sideways*
INTRIGUE AND DOUBLE-DEALING: *treachery*

just now. It was in the air like an infection, and the astute Nîmes merchant had caught the contagion like the rest of his countrymen, and was ready to hope for all sorts of things from this nobleman being disgraced, and that one exalted in the favor of the king, although he knew that the power of the nobles was as much a thing of the past as that of the Huguenots themselves. But the stories he had to tell of this and that piece of wire-pulling seemed to fall flat in this simple household, and it was a relief to his brother when, the frugal meal being over, he could say, "Now let us go outside, and you can tell me how it is Jacques has not come with you," for he could see it was no good news his brother had to tell about the boy.

Once outside, the merchant's face changed, and he looked grave and anxious, as, laying his hand on the weaver's shoulder, he said, "I hope you will not blame me in this miserable business, Claude."

WIRE-PULLING: *puppetry; in this case efforts to control the government*

"You promised to take care of the lad, and I trusted you as one Huguenot with another," said the other shortly.

"Yes, yes, and I did take care of him all I could. He was a good lad, too—steady and industrious. It is the law, not the lad, who is to blame, Claude, and you must not be hard upon him."

"Why should I be hard upon him?" said the father, but he spoke in an unsteady voice, for he knew he had not heard all yet.

"No, it is not fair to be hard upon our children when so many temptations are offered them to take up the king's religion instead of our own," went on the merchant.

"What! what is that you say? my Jacques turned Catholic? I don't believe it! I'll never believe it!" exclaimed the father in an agonized voice, and staggering against a tree as he spoke.

"I don't believe he has really chosen the Catholic faith in preference to that in which

he was brought up, but he has been incautious enough to say something, enough for our enemies to make a handle of—it does not need much to do that, you know—at all events, he has been taken away from me, and placed in a Catholic seminary, and the payment for his board and education there has been demanded of me."

"But—but Jacques is only thirteen; he cannot abjure his faith until fourteen, even by law," said the agitated father.

But the merchant shook his head. "The age has been lowered to seven, and Ninon there would be counted a Catholic tomorrow if she said, in the hearing of anybody that could report it to a priest, that she wished to know what the king's religion was. Some such incautious speech Jacques must have uttered, and—"

"But what does he say himself?" interrupted the father.

"Ah! that we shall never know, for I have not been allowed to see him. I missed him

ABJURE: *renounce*

from the counting-house one morning, and an hour or two afterwards was informed by a plausible old monk that my nephew had turned Catholic, and was sent to the school belonging to the Franciscan monastery, and that five hundred francs must be paid at once for his first year's stay there."

"But he must not stay there," said the father distractedly; "I would rather he should tend sheep, or work at the loom, and never go beyond our mountains all his life. He must come home again and content himself here."

"Claude, be reasonable. You know that if once it happens that one of our children falls into the hands of our enemies as Jacques has done, they never can return. It is cruel, unjust, say what you will, and I have been trying for years to get this law altered, but—" And here the merchant shrugged his shoulders, sighed, and applied himself to his snuff-box for consolation; while his brother, in his long white camise, just as he had left

PLAUSIBLE: *someone who seems believable*
CAMISE: *loose-fitting shirt*

the loom, stood leaning against the tree in an attitude of utter despair.

"If he had only died!" he gasped at length, "but to forsake his God and Savior and turn to this monkish mummery will break his mother's heart."

"Oh, you mustn't look at it in that way," said the merchant briskly; "such things are too common now to be thought much of. Besides—" But the words he was about to utter died on his lips as he looked at his brother's white face. Worldly counsel would be utterly lost upon Claude, he knew, and it would afford him no comfort to be told that his son might yet be a prosperous merchant, though he had forsaken his father's faith.

There were two distinct types of Huguenots now: the old-fashioned sort, like Claude, who clung to the simple truth as taught by Calvin, and those whom the exigencies of the times had made more accommodating in many things as regarded their faith; but they still gloried in the name of Huguenot,

THIS MONKISH MUMMERY: *these empty ceremonies*
EXIGENCIES: *urgent needs*

as affording them some shadow of political liberty.

In the time of Henry of Navarre, when that grand law of toleration, the Edict of Nantes, was granted to the Huguenots, they formed themselves into something like a political federation, and this had been still further developed since, so that now in the towns the Huguenots had constituted themselves into a distinct civil community.

There doubtless was good reason for this at the time, but it had a most disastrous effect upon the spiritual life of the Church, and in many places it degenerated into a mere political council, and its members were content to be Huguenots by profession and politics, caring little for the spiritual freedom so dear to their fathers.

Our merchant of Nîmes, Jules Marot, was a Huguenot of the latter pattern. His brother had noticed the change gradually creeping over him since he had left the old home in the Cevennes; and when he proposed to

take his nephew and help him on in the world, the father had shrunk from the proposal at first. The boy himself was eager to go; the family was a large one, and the little village could offer no opening for him but weaving, silkworm rearing, sheep and cattle tending, or chestnut growing, each of which or two or three combined would only afford a frugal living with a simple, primitive mode of life, and in none of them did Jacques care to engage.

He longed for a more stirring life, where books could be met with, and the education which had been suddenly arrested a year or two before, by the banishment of the schoolmaster, carried on a little further; and so at last, after many prayers, it was arranged that Jacques should go to Nîmes for the winter, but return to his home in the spring to spend a few months on the hills with the sheep. By this arrangement the influence of his home would not be broken off all at once, thought

MODE: *way*
ARRESTED: *stopped*

the careful father, and his brother had willingly consented to the plan; but Jacques had gone to Nîmes only to be entrapped into a Catholic seminary, as so many Huguenot children had been before him.