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SUN'S DAILY STORY

THE STORY OF HENRI.

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The child lived in an old chateau, built of some soft, gray stone that time had mellowed to exquisitely tender tints. Old poplars rustled drowsily, broad terraces, kissed by the sun, sloped down to a clear brook that loitered through the green fields and the woodlands until it sharply turned towards the village. The child often sat on the bank in moonlight nights and watched the stars, reflected in the stream. Then he would wonder whence it came and whither it would go and wish it would tell its secrets to him instead of to the round, white pebbles in its bed and to the waving blades of grass, that bent to listen. But in daytime he would wander noiselessly through the darkened rooms of the chateau. In the picture gallery a ray of sunshine sometimes stole through the barred shutters and danced on the opposite wall. The child thought that the boys and girls in the dark frames must be tired of their fixed positions. Their elders, doubtless, liked the dignified repose but surely little Marie-Eustachie, in the pink brocade, would sometimes long to lay down her rose and the small Charles Louis would gladly take his hand from the sword-hilt he had pressed so long. The child knew the names of all—Tante Amelie had told him—Tante Amelie, who, in her sunny room at the top of the tower, continually mused and prayed. But sometimes she would speak of the Saints,—their holy lives and blessed martrydoms.

"Are there saints now?" he once asked.

"Oui, mon enfant, holy men of God, driven forth from their flocks, hunted like wild beasts. And a martyred king, the son of Saint Louis."

These stories thrilled him with a mixture of exaltation and awe. He knew they dared not venture to the village lest evil men should harm them. And in the long days and nights he dreamed of martrydom, of the short, dreadful wrench from life and its quiet round, then of the celestial joy and the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

* * *

The whole commune was pressing afound the door of the blacksmith's forge. Women, holding their babies, were gossiping shrilly, peasants home from a long day's work in the wheat were gathered in small groups, vaguely curious as to the cause that had brought a municipal officer from Strasburg to their peaceful village. Jean Walther, the blacksmith, stood in his doorway; his tall figure in all its awkward strength loomed dark against the red glow of the fire behind him. The Maire was the strongest man for miles around, none but himself could lift the large hammer which he always called "mon fils," and now he towered over the small figure of his visitor.

"Friends," he shouted in his big voice, "the citizen here has something to say to us."

The "citizen here" paused for a moment, then began in a thin, high-pitched tone that sounded like the echo of the Maire's shout. He told of the good fortune the Revolution had brought, the glories of "Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite," then continued:

"And now that our liberty is won, now that we, a free people, rule a free country, it is our duty to cleanse ourselves of the old stain. Priests, spies, ci-devants, the emissaries of foreign tyrants, all must be exterminated. With sorrow we have heard that you, citizens, are harboring conspirators against the nation. That den of iniquity," he pointed towards the chateau, "that lurking-place of oppressors, cheated us with lies and the prontgates who fatten on the spoils of their fellowmen. Will you suffer this crime? Nay, rather shall we fire that accursed house of traitors and drag the evildoers to justice."

There was no answering murmur, much to the orator's surprise. He scorned these simple peasants and their lives of unchanging toil. They had no smouldering sense of injury that a breath could kindle into flame; the Revolution had abolished the gabelle and torn down the pigeon-cote at the chateau, it had no further meaning to them. To some the speaker's denunciation of the priests seemed blasphemy. But gradually their slow minds seized on the fact that they were threatened with some indefinite loss and they were roused to a state of fear, rage and violent patriotism. Arms were collected, scythes, pitchforks, old muskets from the days of "Malbrook," and Jean Walther, brandishing "mon fils," led the van. Several women marched with the men but all shrank from a sinister recruit, La Mere Margot, the witch, who rose like a mist from behind a bush and joined their ranks. Someone began "La Marseillaise" and the rest shouted a fierce chorus. Men, drunk with the song and the wild madness, waved torches that shot little, fiery stars on the dusty road, where they were trodden out by heavy feet. The mob straggled up a hill and crashed headlong through briers and underbrush to the sleeping brook. The water woke into sudden life, sullen, red ripples stained its surface, strange, distorted shadows seemed to mock their own reflection. Still the peasants pressed on up the terrace, cutting the velvet grass with their sabots. As they approached, the dark mass of the chateau sprang from the shadow and the windows of the front sent back the torches' light. Jean Walther thundered on the door with "Mon Fils."

"What would you?" quavered a voice from above.

"Come down, Suzon," shouted the Maire; "we must search the chateau."

"Eh, hurry," called Pierre Dreisler the carpenter; "this house is the na-

"Your name, mon petit."

tion's property. The sovereign people would inspect its own."

"Silence," commanded Walther.

The bolts screamed as the door grudingly opened.

"There are none here," began old Suzon tremulously.

"Stand aside in the name of the nation," cried the man from Strasbourg, pushing past her.

The huddled crowd flocked in, staring stupidly around them. Then, as their wonder lessened, they were ready for pillage. One man flung a mirror to the floor, his friends applauding as it shivered into a thousand fragments. That was the signal. Some prodded the chairs with their pikes, others laughing boisterously, pulled down the tapestry and wrapped themselves in trailing mantles. The women had their arms full of spoil. Old Margot silently passed from group to group; at her approach boasting and wrangling ceased.

"Tiens, mon ami," bawled Dreisler, bringing his fist down on an inlaid table, "this night's work will rejoice the hearts of our friends in Strasbourg."

"The conspirators will escape," cried the municipal officer shrilly. "On, citoyens, forward."

The citizens, enriched with the plunder of the chateau, had small time to waste on conspirators. But, obedient to their maire's orders, they tramped through the empty rooms, rousing unaccustomed echoes. They were sated and their excitement had in some degree cooled.

"Look at Margot," whispered the women; "she's talking to something unholy."

The witch's figure seemed taller, her dry lips were moving feverishly.

At last they came to the picture gallery. The portraits in calm state disdained the strange visitors, their insults and the wounds they inflicted.

"Suzon's right," the invaders growled; "there's no living soul here."

Then, at the upper end of the room, a little figure, vaguely outlined in the moonlight, advanced to meet them. The child had stolen away from the sobbing women, and had come to defend his home, perhaps—his heart beat fast—perhaps to die.

There was a moment's silence. Then, as their fright wore away, the Maire, a kindly man, spoke:

"Your name, mon petit?"

"Henri," answered the child steadily. "I will not sacrifice to Jupiter."

A laugh arose, a sign that the tide of feeling had turned.

"Who lives here?" continued the Maire.

"Tante Amelie and Suzon. I am ready to die, but they have done no harm."

Jean Walther turned to the man from Strasbourg.

"Here are your conspirators," he said.

Then Margot the witch, coming forward, took the child's hand.

"Thou shalt not die," she crooned. "I see thy fair life in the years to come and I see thy honored end."

"The child stood still. He was not to have the glory of martyrdom; he felt small and weak and very tired.

The blacksmith picked him up and carried him to Tante Amelie.

"Le petit and you can live here in peace," he said gruffly; "train him to be a good citizen."

But the child grieved at his own unworthiness.

The "Citizen."

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