

YVES' PENANCE.

TEN LIVES FOR ONE.

EDITED BY

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CHAPTER I. (CONTINUED.)

Come one of the habitués of the Foaming Pitcher, a low tavern, kept by a good-for-nothing old fellow named Machecoul, who kept a running account with Yves, not forgetting to charge interest. "Drink what you like, my boy," he would say, "You are a fine fellow, and like to treat your friends. Never mind the score now; we'll settle accounts when you come of age." Things went on in this way from bad to worse. If Aubin had shown the slightest inclination to follow in his brother's steps, the parents would have been compelled to send the latter away; but it was not so, and therefore they waited, wept and prayed. The farmer scarcely ever spoke to his eldest son now, and except to give necessary orders, which were received in surly silence. Yves did his work, and did it well; but his father would rather have seen him fail with humility than succeed with insolent pride. It may seem strange that this very fault did not keep him from associating with the low set who frequented Machecoul's tavern; but the truth was that he was a sort of king among them, and the deference they showed him flattered his vanity. Now and then he had moments of tenderness towards his mother, and a look from her would make his heart swell; but his bitter envy of Aubin always stifled the good impulse, and he would turn away muttering: "She does not love me; he is all she cares for." Ah, no, misguided boy; it is the lost sheep we go after, the lost goats that we seek for. And so, like all mothers to whom Our Lady has bequeathed her heritage of sorrow, Marthe hid the sword in her heart and suffered silently.

This, then, was the state of things at Cadignon when we introduced this family to our readers; plenty and prosperity, with a secret sorrow blighting all.

The shadows were lengthening; only a few sheaves had to be bound; the farmer, standing in the great wagon, caught them one by one, as Yves threw them up to him with a strong and steady hand. "Cheerily my lads," cried Jean Patriarche, "the mistress has supper ready, and it is growing late."

There is only one sheaf left now; but what a grand one it is—the harvest-home sheaf! It is always made with extra care, and presented with some ceremony to the master, whose business it is to pour over it a bottle of good old wine as he receives it. There is, I confess, a touch of paganism about this old custom, but it is a pretty and graceful one never to be forgotten.

The farm-servants and day-laborers go singing merrily to fetch the harvest-home sheaf, with its gay ribbons and bouquets, from the end of the field. Jean Baptiste and Pierrot are preparing to lift it, but stop with a startled exclamation at the sight of ragged child sleeping quietly in the shadow of the sheaf. Poor little thing! her thin hand was holding some grains which she had rubbed from the husk before falling asleep. "Holy Mary!" cried one of the men; "it is the straw-cutter's daughter!"

CHAPTER II.

THE HARVEST HOME.

And why was the straw-cutter's daughter so much to be pitied? Alas for poor little Armelle! she was worse than an orphan. Her mother had died, worn out and heart-broken; a long course of illness had hastened her end. Her husband was a hopeless drunkard; he would come reeling home from the Foaming Pitcher and load her with reproaches and abuse; sometimes the neighbors heard Annette's voice broken by sobs, then a scream; and more than once she had been seen running out of the house with her child in her arms, to pass the night in an outhouse or a yard. If it was very wet or cold she would knock timidly at the door of a farmhouse; and it would have been a hard heart indeed that could have refused shelter to the pale trembling woman, with her child's rosy face pressed to the bosom so ill-protected from the winter wind. Then, at daybreak, she crept back to her wretched home, lit the fire, prepared the poor breakfast, and all with the most uncomplaining patience. But there came a day when Machecoul refused to let the straw-cutter add to his score unless he paid a part of his reckoning. This he could not do; high words followed, and Machecoul said: "Your wife has to beg her bread through your misconduct. Annette is my god-daughter, and if she comes to me I shall refuse her." The straw-cutter went home mad with fury, which only seemed increased by the silence with which his wife met his abuse. He dragged her out of the house; and as she fell, he pushed her with his foot against the door-step. In the morning he remembered nothing of what had happened, but noticed with surprise that there were no preparations for his break-

fast. He opened the house door; there Annette lay, her hair loose on her shoulders, her white face upturned; on the left temple was a deep red mark; he gave only one look, and fled from the place. Soon afterwards, a laborer, who wanted some straw for the finishing of his beehives, came to the door; he lifted up the poor young woman, bathed her face, and gradually she recovered consciousness. Recognizing the man, she said: "I had a fall, Catherine, but it is nothing. Many thanks; I am so sorry to have troubled you; my husband will be wanting his breakfast." She just managed to drag herself to the bed, and to say: "Catherine, go and send the priest to me; God will repay you for your trouble." The man went, with tears in his eyes, to do her bidding. Poor Annette! Her long martyrdom was all but ended. She confessed and received absolution, and received the "Bread of Life" to support her on her last journey. She died very quietly, forgiving her husband, but troubled about her little one. "Who will take care of her?" she said to the priest. "Providence, my child," he answered, "is a good mother to the orphan."

Two neighbors stayed beside Annette's corpse; and when her husband came in one of them said: "Take off your hat, Daniel; you must pay her some respect in death though you made her life wretched."

He obeyed mechanically. "Say a prayer, Daniel; she is gone to God, and she forgave you."

The straw-cutter knelt; but he did not know how to pray. He could feel remorse, though, and the thought of his heart was: "She never gave me an angry word, and I have killed her!"

The next day he followed her to the grave, and afterwards took his little girl in his arms, and leading by a string the goat whose milk had fed her, went to one of the women who had watched by his wife, and agreed to pay her so much a month for taking care of the child.

Little Armelle grew and thrived. Chantefleur doted on her; the only trouble was that every now and then her father talked of having her home; but the good woman put him off and said he had better wait till she was old enough to cook his dinner and mind the house. He saw that the child was terribly afraid of him, and this made him furious.

When Armelle was seven years old, he took her home. It was a sad change for the poor child; but the thing that she most missed was hearing Chantefleur talk of her mother. One day she had put a rosary round the child's neck, telling her that her mother said it every day; and never since then had Armelle failed to say it too. She pulled up daisy-tufts, and planted them on her grave, and gathered the first violets, and the pretty little milk worts to lay there. One day a little boy gave her a bird's nest, in which were some downy nestlings; she put it in a wild rose bush which grew by the grave, and told the little birds to sing to her mother when they were old enough. Chantefleur had always kept her neat and tidy, but now the frocks were in rags and the little feet bare. She was very ignorant. Daniel refused to send her to school, and very often she had to beg.

One evening, when she was about ten years old, her father came in with a coarse untidy-looking woman, whom he ordered Armelle to call "mother."

"My mother is dead," said the child, gravely.

"This is your second mother." "Chantefleur is my second mother." "Indeed! and what is wife?"

The child seemed stupefied; then, after awhile, she said gently: "Father, now that you have some one else to look after you, you do not want me."

"I do not turn you out, mind."

"But I am going," she answered.

"A good riddance," cried La Gervaise for that was the woman's name.

Armelle went up to her father and asked him to give her her mother's wedding ring. The man turned pale; he had placed it on the finger of La Gervaise. The child had noticed what seemed to her a sacrilege.

"Give it her," muttered Daniel, "I can get you another."

The woman drew it off and threw it rudely on the ground. Armelle picked it up, kissed it, fastened it to her mother's rosary, and then said slowly and sorrowfully: "Good-bye, father."

The man's heart smote him: "Stop here," he said, "and I promise never to beat you again."

But La Gervaise rose, and facing him said resolutely: "She or I—choose between us."

Then Armelle repeated: "Good-bye father!" opened the door, knelt down, kissed the door-step, and went away.

It was a lovely night; the stars looked down from a cloudless sky. Armelle did not feel lonely; it seemed as if some one was beside her, taking care of her; her mother or her angel-guardian—perhaps both. She walked straight to the churchyard. What a pretty carpet the turf made, starred over with daisies; and

now sweetly the nightingale was singing. She lay down on the grave, and slept quietly till morning; then she awoke with the sun, the swallows in the tower, and the church bell. She slipped into a confessional, for she was ashamed of her rags; and when Mass was over she slipped out again.

What was she to do? Chantefleur had left the neighborhood for a day or two. But, to be sure, it was harvest time; she should soon glean a little bundle; the miller was a kind man, and would give her in exchange for it a loaf of bread. Providence guided her to the field of Jean Patriarche; she gleaned all day, ate the corn, which she rubbed out in her hands, drank from the stream which ran at the bottom of the field, made a dessert of blackberries, and then quite tired out, she laid her bunch of ears beside her, and fell asleep in the shadow of the harvest-home sheaf, with the names of God and her mother on her lips.

She awoke with a start as Pierrot's cry brought the reapers to the spot. She looked around her with a scared expression, pushed her tangle of fair hair back from her little pale face, and said: "I may keep my bundle, mayn't I?"

"Poor little mite!" said Pierrot, "how hard she must have worked to get all that! I'll tell you what, fellows, I've got an idea; suppose the straw-cutter's daughter gives the sheaf to the master?"

"Well said! a capital notion!"

A wreath of wheat-ears and corn-flowers had been made, and this was placed on Armelle's head. The men undid the wisp of straw which bound the sheaf and placed the child in the middle of it; only her head was visible.

"Poor little maid!" said Pierrot, "I wish she had poppies on her cheeks as well as corn-flowers in her eyes."

"Up with the sheaf, the bonny harvest-home sheaf!"

Pere Patriarche was sitting quietly on the wagon pole, waiting for the sheaf; his sons were beside him. Yves was looking unusually pleasant, and the father felt almost happy.

"The sheaf seems tolerably heavy," he said, smiling.

The men laid it with a laugh at their master's feet.

"It is good grain," said old Pierrot, which the good God has ripened. See what he has hidden in the sheaf—a bird without a nest, a daisy plucked up by the roots. See master, we have made her a bed of fresh straw, just as Our Lady did for her little Jesus."

Patriarche could not understand a word of all this, till a pretty little pale face met his wondering eyes as Pierrot's sickle cut the bands, and the golden ears fell in a shower at Armelle's feet. The good farmer's eyes were wet. "Poor little lark!" he said, "did you make a nest in the corn?"

"I was gleaning," answered the little one; "and I fell asleep; and it was Pierrot—"

"Pierrot is a clever fellow," returned Jean, with a kind smile. "You shall have the harvest-home sheaf, my child. When God gives abundantly, our hands must be open like His. But your father?"

"He is married again, to La Gervaise." "Good Heavens! And you are turned out of doors?"

"I am sure father would have kept me; but—"

"But he is afraid of La Gervaise. I see—a woman like that! What a shame! what a sin—"

Patriarche broke off abruptly, then, at a sign from him, Armelle was lifted into the high wagon; the two lads led the horses, and he himself followed slowly and thoughtfully.

It was a pretty, yet a sad sight; the little thing, with her bare feet crossed, sitting smiling on her golden throne, crowned with flowers and innocence.

As soon as they reached the farm, Jean Patriarche took his wife's hand, and saying, "I want to speak to you," led her into the family sanctuary, the inner room.

"Wife," he said, "I do not want to give you a command; I do not even ask you to do what I wish for my sake; I only want to say this: we have a wound deep down in our hearts; let us move the good God to cure it by doing a good action. The straw-cutter is going from bad to worse. The house where La Gervaise is mistress is no fit home for Armelle. Last night she slept on her mother's grave and the angels watched over her. Where can she sleep to-night? where can she go to-morrow? Our men, who found her sleeping by the sheaf, brought her to me like a dove in its nest; and I have been thinking—"

(To be continued.)

French Protestants Distressed.

The "Matin," one of the Liberal journals of Paris, has published an article deploring the way in which the youth of France are deserting the State University and the lycées for the Catholic universities and colleges.

The Dominican Fathers are establishing a school of Oriental language and Scriptural studies at Jerusalem.

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