No Peace for a Soldier

A Historical Epic of Faith and Courage in the Face of Persecution

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Introduction: France's Brutal "Missionary" Campaign

Late-seventeenth-century France had become Europe's first truly national state, and nearly absolute power rested in the hands of its monarch, Louis XIV. He had given his country a sense of self almost unimaginable even two generations earlier. French art, literature, and music dominated European culture, and French citizens gloried in the admiration with which the whole world gazed upon them, imitating their language, their fashions, and their manners. All things wonderful happened in Paris. London and Milan had become backwaters. With a population of well over twenty million inhabiting a single compact landmass, France boasted manpower superior to all the rest of Europe combined, if one didn't count the weaker Holy Roman Empire. And treaty after treaty had brought piece after piece of Europe into the French nation as its awe-inspiring military machine won the territory on the field.

The Edict of Nantes* hadn't given French Protestants—the Huguenots—religious freedom, but for a while it gave them extensive protection. However, Louis XIV envisioned a French nation that, under his supreme control, enjoyed uniformity of religion as well as economy and politics. So, beginning in 1681, to hasten the conversion of those French

* The Edict of Nantes was promulgated in 1598, nearly a hundred years before our story, by Henry IV, the grandfather of Louis XIV.

Protestants who were slow to be convinced by bribes or inconvenience, Louis XIV sent brutal soldiers throughout France in a "missionary" campaign called the *dragonnades.* His soldiers were billeted in private houses, where they were free to do as they pleased with the goods and persons of their hosts until those unfortunate people abjured their "heretical" beliefs.

As a result of the dragonnades, two hundred thousand Huguenots fled the country, and far more abjured their religion. The missionaries of the various Catholic orders who accompanied the "booted apostles" admitted that hardly one in a hundred of the "new converts" brought in by looting, assault, and occasional murder was sincere. But the impressive tallies of new members for his church pleased Louis XIV, and bringing His Most Christian Majesty pleasure was the highest service priests, soldiers, and functionaries could render him. What remained of the rights and protections Huguenots were supposed to enjoy were wiped out by the stroke of a pen in October 1685, and from that time on, the kingdom was officially entirely Catholic.

The Edict of Revocation ordered all Protestant pastors out of the realm within fifteen days but forbade the laity to leave the country under penalty of the galleys for life for men and assignment to a convent for women for those caught trying to flee. Fleeing Huguenot members and pastors lost all their property. True, there was the suggestion that if they didn't practice their heretical religion publicly, they weren't to be disturbed until "it pleased God to enlighten them like the others." However, what this meant depended on the interpretation of the edict by local officials and missionary priests who they could make life unendurable for those who clung to the Pretended Reformed Religion (PRR)—Protestantism.

As the storm passed and something like normalcy returned to communities, many new converts repented their weakness in anguish and frustration. Some, to protect property, lived a double life, attending the services of their new church so that outward faithfulness would be counted to them as "righteousness." More simply ignored Mass and secretly resumed worship according to the Reformed faith as well as they could without ministers or churches. Many were so ashamed of

their denial of the faith, even if momentary, that they became defiant and willing to risk great danger to attend secret assemblies of the faithful or to try to escape abroad, where they could be received again into the church and worship in peace.

The story of the Huguenots reads like a continuation of Hebrews chapter 11. These devout Protestants combined faith and works in heroic proportions. They were famed for both their religious zeal and their diligence in business. In the severe persecutions to which they were subjected, some abandoned their religion to save their lives and property, but thousands of others died or rotted in dungeons or galleys "that they might obtain a better resurrection." Many escaped to the Low Countries, England, and America, leaving their homeland the poorer for their exit.

The Huguenots loved the Scriptures and liberally sprinkled their daily conversations with biblical allusions. They studied the book of Revelation and knew themselves to be a people of prophecy. They referred, for example, to their beloved country in its apostate condition as "spiritual Egypt" (see Revelation 11:8). The state church they often called "the Scarlet Woman" (see Revelation 17:4). They denominated their rural environment in southern France the "wilderness" or "desert" to which the virtuous woman fled (see Revelation 12:14–17).

The issues the Huguenots faced are those that Christ's followers in other times and places have had to meet: Can Christians outwardly observe the commands of an absolute ruler while in mind and conscience they cling to their faith? When persecuted, should Christians defend themselves if they can, meeting violence with violence? When is it the part of wisdom to flee the persecutor and when is it cowardice?

Someday, we as individual Christians may have to answer the greatest question of all: Am I willing to surrender possessions or even life itself to obey God rather than men? May we be better enabled rightly to answer this great question after we more thoroughly acquaint ourselves with the inspiring epic of the Huguenots.

CHAPTER 1

Dark Clouds Gather

The tall man in a discolored riding cloak drew his big bay horse to a sudden stop and dismounted. "Ah! A new and splendid victory for the dragoons," he remarked acidly.

A soldier wearing the red coat of the dragoons turned, a black scowl on his leathery, unshaven face. "Who asked you?" he said furiously. The dragoon was holding a boy firmly by the collar, and the boy was kicking industriously at his shins. But the boy was handicapped by the tall, heavy riding boots of the soldier and by the fact that the latter held him clear of the ground. Eventually, the dragoon dropped him to terra firma but kept a firm grip on his collar.

"I simply asked this whelp where the priest lived, and he insulted me . . . sir." He added the last reluctantly, as he suddenly recognized an infantry officer's gray uniform under the faded riding cloak.

The officer and the dragoon now faced each other. The tanned, handsome officer stood a head taller than the stocky soldier. The officer's firm jaw and general air of competence suggested to the observer that he was a career man and not one of those fops from the Versailles ballrooms.

"And where are your manners, boy?" asked the officer severely, for the youngster was well dressed.

A knot of spectators gathered in the littered, unpaved street of the southern French town of Saint Martin. A few feet away stood a saddled

horse belonging to the dragoon and a coach covered with yellow road dust, its leather curtains drawn in spite of the warm spring weather. A coachman nodded on the box.

The boy answered boldly. "When he asked for the priest, I asked him if he wore his red coat because he was in the service of the Scarlet Woman." The boy's eyes were a trifle too close together for him to be considered good-looking and his teeth were prominent, but he fairly radiated keenness and energy.

"You see!" cried the dragoon. "The rascal is one of these pestilential heretics. In the coach yonder is the subdelegate of this province, who comes to this town to deal with these brazen folk. I'd say it's high time!"

"Well, young man," said the officer to the boy, "you see you do the people of the Reform no service pouring out your sauce in this fashion. Give this gentleman his directions and crave his pardon."

The boy obeyed quickly and apologized insincerely. As the soldier released him, the officer spoke with some sarcasm. "It appears a little strange that French soldiers have no better employment than to harass peaceable folk whose only offense is their religion."

The dragoon averted his gaze a little from the piercing black eyes. "As you know, sir," he said, "there isn't much doing on the frontiers these days. Playing nursemaid to these civilians," and he gestured toward the coach, "is better than sleeping in wet straw or stealing chickens. Besides, something has to be done about these Huguenots—two religions in a kingdom is as unreasonable as two kings." He straightened his drooping tasseled cap. "The intendant is very zealous of late against the heretics, and we are here to stir up the local people to make things interesting for those who won't change their religion."

A shadow crossed the officer's face, and he shrugged.

"The king has turned devout, you know," persisted the dragoon, "so maybe this is a good time to see what makes these heretics think they are better than other folk." He hesitated. "Well, it won't be the first time soldiers have played at missionary."

"Your zeal does you credit, but then I fancy a dragoon has sins enough to atone for."

The dragoon had no time to reply for a bewigged head thrust itself through the coach curtain. "Monsieur wishes to know what is the reason for the delay," the man said crossly.

"I was obtaining directions," the dragoon explained. "We are almost there." He turned to mount his horse. "No offense, sir, I hope," he said, pausing. "I am Dupin of the Dauphin's Regiment, and sixteen years in His Majesty's service." He saluted.

"Gandon, major in the Regiment of Maine," replied the officer courteously as he returned the salute.

The coach and dragoon moved on, and the idlers began to disperse. The officer turned to the boy, who had been gazing up at him in open-mouthed admiration.

"Without letting that tongue of yours get away again, young man, can you tell me where I might find Monsieur Cortot, who was a tax farmer, I believe, when I was here ten years ago?"

"He's my father," exclaimed the boy.

"Good! You can show me the way. Your father and mine were friends long ago."

"Yes, monsieur, but monsieur will not need to mention this affair of the dragoon? Thank you, monsieur! Just come this way."

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Somewhat to his surprise, Armand de Gandon discovered that he was enjoying the long evening worship of the Cortot family. It had been years since he had been a part of such a gathering, and as Isaac Cortot launched into the third Scripture passage, Armand recalled some of the warmth and security he had felt as a boy by the glow of other evening fires, before his mother died and he and his father had gone away to the wars.

He marveled at the readiness with which Monsieur and Madame Cortot had welcomed him, as if he were a visiting angel passing through Saint Martin rather than a travel-stained infantry officer who had not seen them since he was a boy in his teens. He recalled with awe the dinner—the endless platters of boiled and roasted meats, the soups, the sweetmeats. It must have been the finest table in town. His father's old

comrade must be a most substantial citizen, for the establishment combined Huguenot simplicity with elegance.

Digesting the meal comfortably in the chimney corner, Armand watched the firelight play about the features of his friends. Monsieur Cortot, in blue serge and silver buckles, looked the part of a retired civil servant to perfection. With his spectacles down his nose, he leaned into the light of the candelabra on the table as he read a chapter in Isaiah. He was ruddy and of average height but more than average girth. At the moment, he was wearing his hat, but Armand had noticed that his hair was sparse and grizzled.

A glance at Madame Cortot—garbed in a dark gown, white cap, and apron and sitting primly in a high-backed settle beside her husband—confirmed that she fitted perfectly in these surroundings. A representation of the Ten Commandments hung on the parlor wall behind her head, and a scriptural motto was incised over the huge fireplace: "Who builds not the house in the Lord builds in vain." Madame Cortot's calm eye and assured manner as she sat with her embroidery needles temporarily idle in her lap spoke of the competent manager—the plump and utterly respectable queen of a provincial domain.

Armand realized that his attention had wandered from the reading. His slightly guilty gaze swept quickly over the four children. They were dark, and except for the boy Alexandre, rather handsome. Louis and Louise, the shy and solemn twins, sat on stools one on each side of their mother. They might be seven or eight, he guessed. He sympathized with them in their bashfulness, and he recalled how he, too, as youngest at the table, had had to offer grace before company. He had probably not been any more audible than Louis had been this evening. The twins had begun to warm to him just a little during the dessert course. Like all Huguenot children, they had probably been warned against strangers ever since they could remember. The gleaming gold braid, gilt buttons, and bright red cuffs of his uniform must have been a new sight at this quiet table. He would have to make special efforts to win their confidence.

There was no problem getting acquainted with Alexandre, now sitting beside him in the chimney corner. The boy obviously had more energy than he knew what to do with anyway. He couldn't keep his eyes

off the officer's uniform, and Armand felt certain that if it weren't for the strong opinion held by Huguenots that children should be modest in the presence of their elders, the boy would have asked to try on his hat and heft his sword. With his toe, Alexandre dug absently at the furry underside of a gray kitten sprawled on the flagstones—until the movement caught the attention of his little brother. That, in turn, brought a stern glance from his mother.

The soldier found his roving eye resting longest on the pretty, thoughtful face of Madeleine, the tall and graceful eldest daughter of the house. Her eyes fastened on her father and her hands folded quietly in her lap, she seemed unaware of his scrutiny. The candlelight glinted on her shoulder-length dark hair, and her white cap and *fichu** seemed whiter for the contrast. In this poor light he couldn't see her eyes, but at the dinner table he had noticed they were a striking shade of blue—in fact, more violet than blue—and set off by long lashes. For all her demure manner, Armand noticed there could be a blue spark in those eyes, as when at the table she had used a sisterly elbow to cut off her talkative twelve-year-old brother.

With a pang Armand realized that his years of hard work and the genteel poverty of a career officer had not given him much opportunity to think seriously along such lines. He had certainly never met anyone like this in any garrison town he knew! He wondered what bucolic notable had bespoken this latter-day Esther. She certainly must have been promised, for she must be sixteen or seventeen at least. *And where,* he asked himself, *did she get her graceful slimness?* Both her parents looked like heavily built folk.

In the shadows behind Madeleine sat three or four servants. Armand recalled vaguely that there had been at least two other children in the family at the time of his earlier visit. One must have been lost young, and, his memory becoming stronger, he remembered that there had been a boy his own age who had died for the king in the Low Countries. The portrait done in charcoal by some itinerant artist that stood on the mantel between the Nevers figurines must be his.

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* An ornamental three-cornered cape.

The voice of his host seemed dim in the distance as the words of the prophet Isaiah rolled over Armand. He was in a trance, far from the dangerous world outside, where greed, ambition, and hatred played unchecked. Here was an island of peace and trust. Armand felt lifted out of time and reality. This was the very anteroom of heaven.

* * * * *

Father Chabert, priest in Saint Martin, settled himself at his polished ebony table, interlaced his fingers over his round stomach, and beamed in high good humor at his guest, a hawk-faced young man in a rust-colored suit, with Venetian lace at throat and cuffs and a long, glossy black wig. The priest's chubby face was shining with sweat and anticipation. Dust specks glittered and danced in the shaft of sunlight pouring in through the open windows of the pastoral parlor. From the garden rose the hum of insects and the desultory conversation of birds. "The local Huguenots cling tenaciously to the abominable blasphemies of Calvin," the priest was saying. "They pretend a meekness of spirit that is belied by the obstinacy with which they resist the conviction of the True Faith and the entreaties of His Gracious Majesty."

The visitor stifled a yawn. It promised to be a difficult afternoon. Charles Marie Joseph de Beausejour, subdelegate to the intendant of the province, had come at last in answer to repeated calls to take stock of the situation at Saint Martin. Though one must pretend a certain respect for the cloth, the official found it difficult to conceal his antipathy for this balding little priest who perched so eagerly in his big carved chair. The reflected glare from the table top hurt his eyes, and there was the racket of those insects and birds. He felt a dull resentment at being trapped here in this overheated rural desert.

The priest droned on. "While I would not in any way criticize the work of my predecessor in this parish—God rest his soul—yet the laxity here must have passed belief. 'Tis even said that Father Forbin thought it blasphemy to compel an unconvinced person to assist at mass!" He paused expectantly, but the bored official made no effort to answer.

"It has been well nigh a quarter of a century since His Gracious Majesty has heeded the appeals of the clergy and has begun to deal stringently with the menace of the Pretended Reformed Religion." The priest clenched his fist. "I have, of course, done what I could to see that the laws are obeyed, but my humble efforts have been without fruit—yes, virtually without fruit. There are only a few hundred of these PRR openly practicing here, but much of the town was once so; even the mayor and the city council are mostly New Catholics. They make endless difficulties for me—quibbles, arrant nonsense." Father Chabert then sketched in a few thousand well-chosen words a history of the religious troubles of the preceding 150 years.

What a wearisome fellow, thought the subdelegate. *He never stops even to draw breath!*

"The hydra of heresy must be crushed, my lord. Its heads multiply when there is paltering with error. Its venom has infected the blood of our land, and we see the dreaded consequences on every side. We soldiers of the First Estate, defenders of the True Faith in the very forefront of the battle, as it were, never cease our prayers for the enlightenment of His Majesty. We count ourselves favored—imperfect vessels though we are—that he so vigorously prosecutes the cause of the Faith throughout the realm—"

De Beausejour interrupted in sudden desperation. "I pray you, my good father, have done with this sermon and let us get on with the business!"

Suddenly aware of the sour look on his auditor's face, the curé halted the speech in mid flight.

"The intendant has your letter," said the official, hastily exploiting his advantage, "and he has authorized me to take whatever steps may be necessary to raze the Huguenot temple. However, he is anxious that all the legal formalities be observed and has instructed me to examine all the evidence carefully. He would be *most* annoyed if ill-considered action gave the Pretended Reformed an opportunity to complain at court through their representative."

"Oh, most assuredly, most assuredly!"

De Beausejour shifted in his chair and raised a languid, white hand. "What are your proofs that the PRR have violated the law?" Too late he

realized he had restored the initiative to the priest, whose explanations, he feared, might well start back of Noah.

But this time the curé got to the point. "Surely I do not need to refresh monsieur's memory as to the edict of 1679, which provides that if the heretics allow a new convert to attend their services, their building is to be destroyed and the pastor is liable to public penance—the *amende honorable**—as well as a fine and banishment if His Majesty pleases."

He dropped his eyes modestly. "To carry it out, I found a former lackey, somewhat decayed in his estate and willing to accept the customary payment to abjure the Calvinistic delusion." His little eyes sparkled, and he grinned slyly, pausing so that the deadly simplicity of his scheme might be fully appreciated.

"You have witnesses to this happy 'coincidence'—the backsliding of this lackey?"

Father Chabert thumbed through a sheaf of papers. "We have here his abjuration under date of June 15, 1683," he presently announced, "and here are the sworn statements—all notarized, all dated the first of last month—of my witnesses who saw him at the Huguenot services."

The subdelegate accepted the papers and glanced at them listlessly.

"I'll authorize your mayor then," he said, "to proceed with the closing of the temple. Doubtless he can arrange for the labor if the heretics don't wish to demolish it themselves." His chair squealed as he pushed it back. "My secretary can draw up the papers. I'll call on the PRR minister this afternoon."

The curate's face fell. He had hoped for this pleasure himself. "Well," he resumed a little grumpily, "there are also other ways in which the pride of the heretics should be humbled. There is the cross in honor of our Savior and Redeemer Jesus Christ that should be raised on the site of their temple. And may I call to your attention the edict of 1681, which provides that the children of the PRR above the age of seven who are converted or who evince a desire for conversion may be placed for instruction in the Houses for New Catholics. His Majesty's efforts in

* A humiliating confession of guilt with public apology.

behalf of these unfortunate children are now four years old and nothing has been done yet in this city.

"I have here," he continued, rummaging in his papers, "a list of the Pretended Reform Religion families of the town. I could send it to the bishop, but it might save time in such an important matter if you would examine it in the room of the intendant, so to speak. Now that we will soon have a House for New Catholics on the outskirts of town, I would earnestly bespeak the cooperation of the civil authorities to fill it."

"You have the authority already, do you not?"

"Assuredly we could fill the house and the one for boys down country also, yes, several times over. But it's a matter of funds, monsieur." He eyed his adversary expectantly. "Voluntary contributions are but a trickle, sir, and the mayor and the council are stingy in the extreme—they elevate cheeseparing to an art. You know how these merchants behave when there is a new religious house coming to their town! The work of conversion must, I fear, rest largely on the royal bounty."

"You churchmen are always putting the cart before the horse," de Beausejour said with a yawn. "The law provides for the upkeep of such inmates by their parents according to their means. Confine your recruiting to those able to pay their own way. The intendant has a thousand parishes plaguing him with ten thousand silly requests and squabbles, all of them expensive. Public revenues can't be called on for everything, you know."

"But, monsieur," the priest cried, his chins shaking indignantly, "is there *any* work of greater importance than to wrest these children from the very jaws of hell? The old are almost beyond redemption, but the young may still be persuaded. The Houses for New Catholics make devoted subjects for His Majesty from the children of his enemies. From bad trees, good fruit! It would seem that for this divine work of pacification, this plucking of brands from the burning as it were, that funds might be spared—"

"The houses should support themselves," interrupted de Beausejour stubbornly. He noted the disappointment on the priest's face and hurried on—best not to antagonize these zealots too far. "The work of conversion is dear to all our hearts, but taxes come hard this year, and

we must go slowly. Now, if no further requests are made on the treasury, I'm sure the intendant will be happy to assist you to take as many children as the houses can accommodate." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "But stay within the law in this matter also. You are able to get all these children to ask for instruction?"

The priest brightened somewhat.

"That's no trouble. Well, not much, anyway. These children are often discreet beyond their years, but sometimes the younger ones will say 'Hail Mary' for a sweet or a gewgaw. Or, as the law is interpreted nowadays, if it is reported that an older child has admired the magnificence of an altar or a procession, we are able to construe such a favorable remark as a request for instruction. We must use care, for these people are to the last degree opinionated and may flee the country if they suspect we are after their children. But there will be no disturbance, my lord.

"Now this is my list as of last month. I have arranged the PRR families by streets, with the name and age of each child. It was much work, I can tell you," he added complacently. "Some we wouldn't want, it's true. Too young or sickly for good instruction, for example."

The official studied the sheets, crackling the papers as he looked through them. "Well," he said at length, "let's check the ones who can be supported by their parents. Perhaps some other likely ones may also be taken if the charges on the wealthy are placed high enough."

The priest beamed. "And might there not also be royal pensions for the poor at a later date, perhaps?" He moved closer so he could follow the list.

"I'm not paid to foretell the future," said de Beausejour sourly. "Let us do it my way for now."

"Certainly, monsieur, certainly," agreed Father Chabert quickly.

The subdelegate leaned back as the priest began to read the list. The secretary silently dipped a quill in the inkwell and made notations in the margin of his copy as dictated by his master.

"On the Rue de Montauban," began the priest, "we have the following: 'Isaac Cortot, bourgeois. Four children: Madeleine, sixteen; Alexandre, twelve; Louis and Louise, seven.' He is the richest heretic in

town and owns land besides. He was in the controller's office until the Huguenot tax officials were dismissed. The children are all sturdy, and he can certainly support them."

"Take them all," dictated the subdelegate with his eyes closed. The secretary's pen scratched briefly.

"On the same street: 'Emile Robert, ironmonger. Three children: Denise, ten; Emile, seven; Rebekah, three.' "

"Eh, that's too young. Take Denise and Emile."

"On the same street, 'Jean Delzers, former bookseller. Five children: Samuel, fifteen; Jean, fourteen; Georges, twelve; Hannah, ten; Gaspard, nine. He is poor, the law not permitting him to follow his trade of late, but the children are healthy."

"They would be public charges," commented the official. "Write, 'Do not take unless later vacancies.' "

Father Chabert looked pained but continued to read. " 'Gabriel Piel, weaver, on the Street of the Three Lions—' " He broke off and said, "This family is reported to have gone into foreign parts. It is hard to keep such a list up to date," he added apologetically. "They fly from here in such stealth."

The secretary noted in the margin: "Disappeared."

"Also in the same street, 'Jules Pinet, tanner. Two children: Olivier, nine; Henri, eight.' Olivier is sickly. The father is reputed to do a good business."

"Leave Olivier—"

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Monsieur Cortot had finished his chapter and had launched into the final prayer of the evening when there came a heavy rapping at the front door. The worshipers stirred uneasily on their knees, but the petitioner did not falter or shorten his prayer. When he had finished, one of the maids slipped away to unbar the door. While the group waited in some apprehension, the kitten rose, stretched, and lay down out of Alexandre's reach.

The maid ushered three solemn men into the room. Everyone rose, the men removing their hats and the women curtsying.

"Good evening, pastor," said Cortot heartily as he bowed over the hand of the first of the newcomers. "What brings you out at this time of day?"

"Nothing good, you may be sure," replied Pastor Merson with a thin smile. He bowed again to the rest of the company. "I would not lightly interrupt the devotions of my chief elder. I crave your pardon until I may make explanations."

Madame Cortot made polite deprecatory noises, and the host proceeded with introductions. "Brethren," he began, "I have the honor to present to you Henri Armand, the Sieur de Gandon, the son of my late friend and brother in the Religion Michel de Gandon. The elder Gandon and I served together—back in the fifties it was—under the illustrious Schomberg when our Protestant marshal was but a general."

Then, turning to Armand, Monsieur Cortot continued, "And these gentlemen are our good pastor, Jean Merson, and his nephew, Mathieu Bertrand, our schoolteacher and catechist here in Saint Martin. And this is our head deacon, Brother Etienne Lenotre."

The pastor offered Armand his hand with a kindly smile. "We are honored, brother, that you have come among us."

Armand bowed in his turn, taking in the whole group and then dropping his eyes as was mannerly when conversing with strangers. He was uncomfortably conscious of the contrast between his uniform and the sober hues worn by the visitors. The pastor was a slight man in his early forties in a black clerical mantle, wide-brimmed beaver hat, spotless white collar, and a short black wig. He had a thin, intelligent face with a spark of humor in his dark eyes. The soldier warmed to the atmosphere of genuine kindliness surrounding him. *Now here is a friend,* he told himself.

It was the more startling, therefore, when, as he took the hand of Merson's tall, blond nephew, he was subjected to an intense, hostile stare. Armand's breeding rescued him, and he didn't return rudeness for rudeness. Perhaps, he speculated, he resembled someone this Mathieu disliked.

Still murmuring pleasantries, the gentlemen replaced their hats, and everyone was seated. Now and again the black-clad nephew stole glances

at Armand. His mouth was tight and censorious as he catalogued each gilt button and red ribbon on the soldier's uniform. Armand noted that the schoolmaster was of a size with himself, with a boldly handsome profile and a much lighter complexion. *Probably a Norman father or mother,* thought Armand. *That long blond hair is his own, I'll wager, and he's not a little proud of it.*

It was not until Armand saw that Mathieu was also covertly observing Madeleine Cortot that he began to understand. As Madeleine did not notice—or affected not to—that the newcomer was fishing for her eyes, Mathieu's expression became increasingly glum.

Aha! thought Armand, now a little amused. *So that's why he scowls. He suspects me as a serpent in his little Eden!*

"Yes," Cortot was continuing, "Monsieur Gandon's father remained with the army after I left the service to go into the controller's office, back in the days when Colbert protected us of the Religion. But as I was saying, the last time the Gandons came through here was on their way to the Catalonian campaign. Now let's see, that would have been in 1674. They were attached to Marshal Schomberg's staff. You are named for the Marshal, are you not?" He looked expectantly at Armand.

"Yes, I am," replied the soldier. "My father was wounded before Belleville and died the next year. The Marshal was kind enough to arrange a lieutenancy for me for the love he bore my father. I have been with the Regiment of Maine ever since."

"Ah, but Armand is no mere lieutenant these days!" Cortot seemed as pleased as if he were boasting of his own son. "In an action in the Palatinate, he saved his regiment—single-handed, mark you—with guns and standards when they were ambushed, and he was mentioned in dispatches. He is now a major and stops with us tonight on his way from his estate in Languedoc to the Court at Versailles!"

The pastor maintained his equanimity, but the deacon and Mathieu looked shocked. Versailles was the nation's focal point of sin and extravagance as well as the fount of Romish persecutions. To a provincial Huguenot of good morals and conventional viewpoint, Monsieur Cortot's statement of Armand's destination was like his announcing the soldier's intention of wallowing in a pigpen.

The young officer came as near blushing as was possible for one of his weathered complexion. He fairly stammered his disclaimers. "Monsieur Cortot is too kind, I protest! I've been so fortunate as to enjoy the interest of the Duc de Lauzières, who is colonel of my regiment. It's at his request that I am to visit him on my way north."

Mathieu Bertrand's expression was wonderful to behold. First distress flitted across his face, to be replaced by something approaching relief, for no proper girl would be interested in such an obvious backslider. But Papa Cortot was beaming and insensitive, and Madeleine's own expression was of pleased politeness. Mathieu's face darkened again. Was not the heart of woman notoriously frail where fripperies were concerned? And here were a gold-rimmed hat, a red tassel, and much more.

More aware than Cortot of some of these reactions, Armand wished the subject might be changed. *If I had just requisitioned the fellow's horse, that fellow's sour looks would be more understandable,* he thought to himself. *I must ignore him.* Mademoiselle Cortot was more pleasant to look at anyway, so he addressed himself to that agreeable duty.

So agreeable, in fact, that he lost track of the conversation. A cry of consternation jerked him back.

"What are you saying, pastor?" cried Cortot, half rising from his chair. His hat fell off, and his bald dome glowed pinkly in the firelight. He retrieved his hat with a shaking hand.

"You anticipate me, Brother Cortot," said the minister sadly. "Yes, the subdelegate has waited upon me within this hour and told me our temple is to be torn down within three days, and at our expense."

Madame Cortot screamed faintly and dropped her embroidery. The twins shrank closer to her, and Louise buried her face in her mother's skirt. Madeleine stared with slightly parted lips, and for once, Alexandre looked solemn. A long moment of silence followed. The fire sputtered fitfully. The room seemed suddenly darker and colder.

The pastor spoke again, quietly and slowly. "We cannot say this visitation is unexpected. The Lord has been most gracious to His people in this place and has stayed the hand of the persecutor, unworthy though we be to claim such mercies. Now He would try us also."

"But what's their pretext?" asked Cortot.

"They say we allowed a relapsed new convert to attend the last Communion service. You recall the lackey Petitjean? The one who lost his situation when the law was passed forbidding Huguenot servants in Catholic houses?"

Cortot nodded. "Yes. I was sent by the consistory to reason with him when he became discouraged and made scandal of the Religion by his disorderly living. I'd like to know how he came by the *mereau.** He had to have one of the tokens to gain admission to the service."

"I heard a year ago that he'd abjured and gotten his money from the conversion fund," said the deacon.

"His name was on the list of new converts sent us by the bishop," admitted the pastor.

"Well, what if it was?" snorted Madame Cortot. Her needles flashed furiously. "There must have been four or five thousand people at the last Communion."

"Certainly it is not surprising the elders did not spy the fellow," said the pastor with a sigh, "if he was even there. Of course, there are 'witnesses,' but you know what that amounts to. We have no way to dispute them, so we can only hope if he was there that he was in agony of soul for his apostasy, and truly contrite."

"But at what cost!" burst out his nephew. "For six *livres*†—the price of a pig—he sells himself, and now we lose the last church for leagues around!"

Cortot growled. "Seeking comfort for his soul? The promise of a couple of bottles did it!"

Madame Cortot was not interested in quibbles. "What do we do now?"

"Private worship in our homes is all that is left to us, my dear sister. The law is explicit. No public worship in any building save a temple." The pastor paused sadly. "It would be well if we scattered the church records and the funds among the elders and deacons, I think. They are

* Receipt given to prove attendance at church.

† Old French monetary unit equal to twenty *sols*.

at my home but may be confiscated at any moment. The funds let us distribute to our own poor at once. The sack of *mereaux* must be hidden, too. We may never use the tokens again, but it would not do to let them fall into the wrong hands."

"One more blow," said Cortot heavily. He smote his fist in his palm. "If anyone had told me twenty years ago how we'd have to live in 1685—"

"It is amazing what one can become accustomed to," agreed the pastor. " 'Patient as a Huguenot' did not become a proverb for nothing."

The fire burned low, but no one seemed to notice. Eventually, Pastor Merson spoke. "I doubt the Edict of Nantes will last long now—what's left of it."

"Why, they wouldn't *dare*!" stormed Madame Cortot. "The king's own grandfather made it for us."

The pastor shook his head. "You give your enemies too little credit, madame. The edict is a poor tatter, violated in spirit and in letter."

"Well, what would you expect—" Mathieu's tone was bitter—"with cardinals for chief ministers?"

"We had too many ambitious nobles in the old days, I'd say," Cortot asserted. "If it hadn't been for their fools' games against the king, I doubt he'd have paid much heed to the clamor of the clergy. Cardinal Richelieu was no fanatic. He said there should be 'no discrimination among Frenchmen except in matters of loyalty.' And who, I'd like to know, have been more loyal to the crown these past fifty years than have the Huguenots? True, the cardinal took away our political rights, but when I was young that didn't seem a great matter. We stayed out of politics, and we prospered."

"I agree with you, brother," replied the pastor. "Neither Richelieu nor Mazarin was a very devoted churchman; they were first of all statesmen anxious to strengthen the crown. So they ignored the fury of the clergy and protected us. Mazarin himself said, you recall, 'I have no complaint to make of the little flock, for if it feeds in bad pasture, at least it does not go astray.' "

"This loyalty—nay, servility is a better word—what has it gotten us?" Mathieu Bertrand snorted. "Two years ago they closed forty of our

churches, and last year a hundred. We encourage this persecution. But there are some who do right well by licking the boots that kick them." He looked carefully at a spot in the darkness about three feet above Armand's head. The latter tightened his jaw and said nothing.

"Well, at least they have not yet dared to revoke the edict entirely," said Pastor Merson. "But with every scrape we are forced into, the Romanists always gain something. Most professions and the Crown offices are closed to us now, and our seminaries are all shut down. Mathieu here must teach school, for there is no way for him to be ordained in France, and he is forbidden to study abroad. Then we are allowed but one primary school for each congregation no matter how many thousands of children there may be to educate. We haven't been permitted a provincial synod for two years or a general meeting of the church for twenty-six.

"Our churches are destroyed under any pettifogging pretext. Faulty titles are found for a building that has stood for a century undisturbed, or it may be within a hundred feet of a Roman church and the singing of hymns disturbs the priest at mass. We can hold funerals only at sunrise and sunset, and there must be no more than ten mourners in any funeral procession. We must not sing our psalms on the highway or at work. If we don't uncover when the Host passes, we may be fined, beaten, or jailed. No royal insignia may be displayed in our churches, and we must allow the Roman clergy to have special benches in our temples from which they may interrupt the sermons and cause commotion in the house of the Lord.

"Unless I wish to go to prison, I must not mention in my sermons 'Egyptian bondage' or 'tyranny' or even 'troublous times.' In all documents we must call ourselves the 'Pretended Reformed Religion,' the PRR. We can't proselytize—not even among Jews or Muslims. Such a great matter as letting Catholic visitors kneel during our prayers got our church in Orleans closed up. And the latest rule is that our pastors may not stay longer than three years in a place, so it appears I shall be leaving you this summer."

Isaac Cortot spoke again, addressing his remarks to Armand. "Perhaps as a soldier you haven't been aware of all that goes on, but if a

Huguenot businessman apostatizes, he's excused debts and taxes for two years. So when you try to buy stock, you can't get credit. They're afraid you'll become 'converted' and repudiate your debts. And lawsuits are hopeless. All your opponent has to do is cry, 'I plead against a heretic. I have to do with a man and religion odious to the king!' " Cortot drew his finger across his throat expressively. "But I suppose we could take this and the doubling and trebling of our taxes. The worst is the billeting. It's never a pleasure to have soldiers quartered in a decent house, but since four years ago, the Reformed have had to bear most of it, knowing that if they would but abjure, it would stop."

Madame Cortot disagreed. "No, the worst is the lowering of the age of accountability of our children from twelve to seven, so the authorities may steal them from us and raise them Catholics!"

"It is a melancholy list," sighed the pastor, "and no human help in sight."

Mathieu Bertrand had continued to eye the almost invisible figure in the chimney corner. "Our fathers fought for *their* liberties with sword in hand," he blurted. "Now if we fight at all, we fight *for* our oppressors it seems. Are we too timid to stand for what we believe?"

It was now quite dark, for the candles had gone out unnoticed, and the fire was low. Armand promised himself that he would not let this fellow provoke him to an altercation. Instead, he stared fixedly at a large black chest near him that was carved with scenes from the tribulations of the children of Israel.

The pastor broke the ringing silence. "There may be more heroism in not resisting evil, Mathieu," he said quietly. "But even if we wished to resist, would it be possible?" He, too, looked toward the officer. "What think you, Monsieur Gandon?"

Armand noticed the use of *monsieur* in place of *brother,* but he couldn't be certain that it was intentional. He picked his words carefully and spoke directly to the minister. "I've been in the king's army for ten years now. Louvois is the minister of war, and Vauban is the greatest master of siegecraft in the world. The army has scores of regiments of infantry and cavalry ready at a moment's notice. Then there are all the

new guns—and everything controlled from Versailles. Gallantry counts for little today."

Cortot rose to stir the fire. As the flames leaped up, the tense faces of the group were brought into sharp relief.

"I agree with you, Armand," said Cortot. "I was a soldier once, and even in my day we could see it coming. The power of the Crown is established now. I think when the nobility saw that the king was supreme and it was hopeless to resist, they lost their interest in religion. I don't say all of them were this way, you understand, but far too many. The gentry were always lax—careless of their deportment and in Sabbath observance. And even the great Turenne left us. Now all we have left is this threadbare edict."

"Perhaps this is God's way to make us more aware of our dependence on Him," the minister said gently. "Certainly, we have no other refuge. As for those who have left us, be it Marshal Turenne or this poor Petitjean, we cannot know the heart. We should pray for their repentance and soon return."

Resuming his seat, Monsieur Cortot said, "Maybe we should have listened to Claude Brousson two years ago when the brethren in Toulouse wanted us to fast and pray publicly on an appointed day, law or no law, temple or no temple—in all meekness, of course. He wanted the king to see how many we are and pause before he went too far."

"Nay, brother," replied the pastor solemnly. "You know I opposed that scheme. Resistance simply plays into the hands of our persecutors. The clergy wish for nothing better than to convince His Majesty that we are disloyal and will make party with his enemies.

"God enjoins obedience to earthly sovereigns," he continued, "for they were ordained by Him. On this the Scriptures are very clear. All we have is at the disposal of Caesar, save for our consciences."

Madame Cortot shook a long needle at the pastor. "But surely we can't allow the king's men to carry off all that we have worked for, the inheritance of our children, yes, even the children themselves! Are we to flee to alien lands and bring up our children among strangers—to beg their bread perhaps?"

"We are told in Matthew chapter ten, verse twenty-three, 'But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another,' " the pastor said reprovingly. "But while we should count it no loss to leave all for the Lord's sake, it is also true that there are times when it is better to abide in one's place and faithfully live the truth.

"*We* have changed, not the Lord," he added. "We are waxen fat and increased with goods. All hate the Huguenot. He is wealthy, for he works harder and longer than his Catholic neighbor—fifty extra days a year because he does not keep saints' days. His sober living is a rebuke. He presumes to think differently in the realm of a king who wishes his subjects to conform in all things."

"Our enemies have been crying woe for ninety years," interjected his nephew. "So why do we have so much trouble now?"

"It may be a change in the king himself," said the pastor slowly. "He has in the past laid a heavy hand on the pope and may need now to prove his orthodoxy. He has also eschewed his immoral way of life and may need to show his piety by harshness toward heretics. I am sure his confessor whispers in his ear, and there's our ancient enemy, Chancellor Le Tellier, the father of Louvois, and there is much talk of this woman at court who, it is said, has secretly become his wife. She used to be the nurse of his children, and 'tis said she has great influence over him. And to think she was born a Protestant!" He paused. "In any case, the English philosopher Bacon spoke truth when he said 'no man doth a wrong, for the wrong's sake; but thereby to purchase himself profit, or pleasure, or honor.' "

The fire had almost died. It flickered unevenly and sent irregular shadows chasing each other vainly about the walls. Louise had gone to sleep on her mother's knee, and Louis sat with heavy-lidded eyes, swaying occasionally. Madeleine was gazing abstractedly into the fire, and Armand was thinking he had never seen anything quite as pretty as Madeleine's face with the firelight on it.

"The Lord's people may be approaching the climax of their tribulations," concluded the pastor. "We must be firm in our minds, ready to accept flight or the dungeon—whatever He sends—with meekness and joy that we are accounted worthy to suffer for Him."