

A LITTLE SUNBEAM.

A little sunbeam in the sky Said to itself one day "I'm very small, but why should I Do nothing else but play? I'll go down to the earth and see If there is any use for me."

Selected Serial.

HOW THEY KEPT THE FAITH.

A Tale of the Huguenots of Languedoc.

BY GRACE KAYWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

"What you tell me about my mother's name, Nannette?" "It was a childish voice, clear and sweet as the tinkling of a brook on the hillside, that asked the question, and the face, upturned in the ruddy glare of the wide hearth, was winsome as a flower."

"I remember every word, and how old I was; but that is not like hearing you tell it. M. La Roche is in the sitting room with my aunt, and will not go away until my uncle gets back from the customary meeting at home, doing his lessons."

"You mind well there is nothing I like so much to tell," answered the woman, dropping her work for a moment to pat the child's cheek with a trembling hand. "But I might well hesitate to burden so young a heart with so sad a tale, if it were not for my lady's own words."

"I recall the visit to my grandfather very well, but I have forgotten the shops. Please go on, Nannette, and tell me about my mother, for I look like her."

"How often she had asked that question, and how often Nannette had looked into her face, and shaken her head, and sighed as she did now."

"For four days she lay upon her couch, neither speaking nor weeping, nor leaving her bed, but on the fifth, as I sat watching beside her, she opened her eyes and said quietly: 'I will live, Nannette, to save my little Mignonnette. Tell Antoine to have the horses ready, we will start for Beaucaire to-morrow.'"

"The nurse paused for a moment to lay a caressing hand on the small head nestling in her arm."

"Fair lodgings were not to be had in the town for love or money; we thought ourselves fortunate to secure one of the booths erected in the meadows along the river's banks, and your mother counted it a happy circumstance, also, that the people in the tents nearest us were from the Levant, and know no more of our language than was necessary for the purposes of trade."

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bedside, all dressed for a journey, and told me that she was going to leave her father, and married to Captain Bertrand, and that she never could be happy with any other, and then with tears and kisses, and soft arms about my neck, prayed me to go with her. I would have been false to the promise I gave her mother if I had let her go alone, so I dressed and went with them, though not without heavy misgivings, I will own, and saw them married at the priest's house—for your father was a Catholic—and was well on the road to Beaucaire when they the next morning before those behind us had found it out."

"It was your grandfather very angry?" "It nearly broke his heart, little one, for he had loved my lady as the apple of his eye, and he would not believe but that Captain Bertrand had cared more for the dowry than for the wife he had won. He sent back every letter my lady wrote him, unopened, until her husband would let her write no more. That was the only shadow on her happiness at first. Thou art like thy father, Miss Eglantine, with thy sunny temper, and thy hot way of loving. Whatever swayed my lady had afterwards to pay for her willfulness, she was at least not disappointed in him. He thought nothing too good for her, and it was not long before, to please him, she gave up going to her own church, and went to his. From that moment my heart misgave me."

"Your grandfather had never been to a church, and he would not let our pastor in Nismes talk much to my young lady about her soul, but he came of staunch Huguenot stock, and my dear mistress, your grandmother, had had the blood of martyrs in her veins, and would have been miserable if she had thought her darling would ever go to mass or the confessional. But my pretty mistress laughed at his scruples. To her, in her happiness, one religion was as good as another, and her husband's people were greatly pleased, and after that talked no more about the messianism, but made her one of them. And then your father was summoned to Flanders, and your little sister was born, and a new look came into my lady's eyes which said life had ceased to be all holiday."

"The little one was scarce a month old when one day, as we sat together in her chamber, she looked up at me suddenly, and said: 'Nannette, what if mother's religion was the only true one, after all; have I defrauded my baby—have I endangered her?'"

"I could only kiss her hand and weep, for I was not as brave to tell her the truth as I should have been, and she never broached the matter again, but after that I began sometimes to miss my little New Testament, and to guess where it had gone, and when the little one was old enough to lip a prayer, I marked that my lady taught her, not the Ave Marias of her husband's church, but the words she had learned at her mother's knee."

"Nannette had evidently forgotten her lessons, her needles were flashing fire in the fire, her usually busy needles motionless in her hands. There was always something awesome to Eglantine when Nannette's hand were still."

"Please go on," she whispered. "My mother was very ill at Beaucaire, was she?" "Nigh unto death, Mademoiselle. The figs had fallen, and the grapes were purple on the hillsides when we reached Beaucaire, and then it was only to meet sorrow upon sorrow. Mademoiselle Bertrand had placed her little niece in a convent as soon as she heard of M. le Capitaine's death, and in vain my lady appealed from her to the convent, and from the convent to the curé, and from the curé to the prefect. They either could not, or would not help her. There stood the king's edict, that permitted no children to be taken from their parents, the faith in which they would be reared, and this Mademoiselle Bertrand claimed her little niece had done, and though my lady knew a toy might have tempted the baby lip to utter the ave which was all that would have been considered necessary, she had no proof, no redress. It had been hard enough to be simply separated from the little one, but to think of her behind convent-bars, fretting her timid heart out among strangers, neglected, perhaps ill-used—it was more than any mother could bear her heart to bear."

"When at last the truth dawned on your mother she took to her chamber, and gave way to such comfortable grief, that M. Bertrand at last became uneasy, and sent for the curé. He was an old man, and seemed really touched by my lady's despair. He said her that it was because of her Huguenot leanings that the child had been taken from her, but that if she would reassure the Church as to her attachment, he would use his influence to have the little one restored. He thought your mother had anticipated this, for she said at once she would do anything, suffering anything that he would dictate. She had been only feeling after the truth, little one, she had not found it, and it was a sore test. In any case, conscience and mother-love had been on the side of the child, and she was a trifle between the two, and the human love was the stronger. God is pitiful! I think he will not judge harshly where he had given so little, but from that hour there was a broken-hearted look in my lady's eyes, which told me she felt she had turned her back on her right, and most henceforth walk in darkness."

"They were heavy days that followed, sweetheart: I like not to dwell upon them. Our young madame was worn to a shadow with prayers and pilgrimages; but when in the early spring she ventured to ask for the interview with Mademoiselle Mignonnette, Father Joseph confessed that the child had been removed to a distant convent, and that it would take time to have her brought back. I think my lady's heart misgave her from that, but she redoubled her penances and fasts, until the year was over, and then she was told that she was to see the child, and that she should no longer conceal the truth, and told her that the bishop had decided to train the little demoiselle for a nun, and her mother must resign all hopes of ever seeing her again. My young madame was borne to the convent, where the winter where the fatal word was spoken, and many a time in the sore illness that followed, I hoped God was going to take her out of this troublous world. But he is wiser than we, Miss Eglantine, though we would often mar His counsels when we had the power. When the winter was ended, and the gentians began to purple in the sheltered places, my lady came forth from her chamber; but though she took her old place in the house, there was a spirit-look in her face, and her eyes were in her step, which told that some link between her and this

life was broken. She showed no anger to those who had so sorely wronged her, but it was only the summer, summer, and sick in the hamlet that fully roused her. To them she was an angel of mercy—especially the mothers, who knew her story, loved her, and many an hour would she sit in their lowly cottages, with their little ones on her lap, or rosiel her knee, and it was only that summer, after she had had a young shepherd's wife to nurse a feeble baby back to life, that I found her weeping bitterly, and the cry on her lips was not for Mademoiselle Mignonnette, but 'My baby! my little, lost, unloved baby! A heart may count the words spoken, but it is not until afterward, little one, but it is not until afterward, that we wholly tell the price. I think it was not the first time your mother had cried out for the child she had put from her, though she had never at the word spoken, she still now. And I spoke out square and strong: 'The little one is rosy and well, madame, Antoine saw her this spring when he was in the Cevennes, where pastor Chevalier and his wife are living now. She is the darling of the whole countryside, and the pastor and the curé and his wife love her as their own flesh and blood and have planned to marry her to their only son, when she is grown; but you have only to speak the word, my lady; they will give gold to pay them for their trouble.' But she would let me say no more, Mademoiselle Eglantine. 'My shall break before I utter the word,' she said; 'who am I, Nannette, that I should take an innocent soul to train for God? And she dried her tears at once, and would never reopen the subject. But she was like a young bride, the chateau a young priest, with once like St. John. M. Fenelon was his name, and he has since come to be a great preacher, but then he was still at his studies. He was a distant kinsman of your father's, and had heard of my lady's trouble; it was not many days before he had won from her the whole story, for he had a gentle, kindly way about him, little one, which made even the most timid ready to put their trust in him. My lady told him everything, saying what had happened at Beaucaire, and he comforted her like a young bride, but he bade her think no more that God had forsaken her, but believe that he would send her Father, who had only suffered these trials to come upon her that He might draw her nearer to Himself. He told her that it was God himself, not her child, for whom she was to be hungry, and that He alone could satisfy her. But he reminded her, too, that the little one was still in the Good Shepherd's keeping, though removed from her, and that if she would only trust Him, He would give His angels charge concerning the little one, so they should never go astray. And he spoke of the love and sympathy of the Lord Jesus, and the joy of following in the prints of those blessed feet, until his own face glowed like an angel's, and my lady caught the reflection. Sometimes she would weep, and the perpetuity of the Church, and the sacredness of her ordinances, but to these she only listened absently, though she liked well enough to hear of the holy sisters of Port Royal, and a little book by M. Pascal, which he lent her, she said, read like the words of another man, and God face to face. But after all, it was the saintly beauty of M. Fenelon's own life, and the plain tokens of his near walk with God—more than ought he said—that set my lady's heart at rest. It would take a wiser head than mine, madame Eglantine, to explain to you so good and pure can remain in the Church of Rome, but no one could live in the house with M. Fenelon, and hear him talk, without seeing that he at least worshipped God in spirit and in truth, and walks with unspotted garments even where Satan's angels are. There were none of these harsh edicts against the Protestants if he had his way, and I have heard the pastor tell that when he was appointed chief of the mission to St. Etienne, last year, he was bold enough to tell his mastery that he would go only on condition that he force none to believe in 'Little wonder that a bruised heart like my lady's surrendered itself to his guidance. 'If I am doing wrong, God will be pitiful to my weakness and ignorance,' she said one night, when I was taking her to when she said, 'I have not much longer to live, Nannette, and those few months I can but wait quietly where I am. God knows my heart; He sees that it is only to Him I look, only in His cross I trust. Once I thought that I could only find God through my mother's Church; but now I know the way is not this creed, nor that, but Hisself. 'Will madame then send for her youngest daughter, and leave the little one to be reared in the faith in which she herself is content to die?' I asked. She gave me a strange look, sweetheart. 'Never, Nannette,' she answered. 'I am not strong nor brave like others, but I would be broken upon the wheel before I would bid my little one leave the blessed home in which she has found shelter, for the snarers and perils of this world, and then she put her arms about my neck, and laid her head upon my breast. 'This is one of several reasons why I refuse to say she would not speak aloud. 'There are not many like M. Fenelon,' she whispered; 'none should know that better than you and I, Nannette. If I have found the light at last, it has been through a weary and winding road, and more than once I have come near missing it altogether. Would you have me take the light from the plain path, and the happy daylight of the open Bible, to grope their way through the night that I have known? I can hope for my little Mignonnette, because I gave her the best I had when she was taken from me, but I could not pray for the other, if I put the stumbling-block in her way.' And though she was afterward induced to write to M. Chevalier, and had occasionally secret letters from him, and wrote in return, she had no other purpose not to look upon this face, nor let the father's people suspect their existence. Bear this in mind, my little one, if thou art ever tempted to part with the pearl purchased for thee with such bitter pain. And who can tell through what trials thou mayest have to keep it by the time thou art a woman grown—the edicts grow much harsher. Even now the pastor walks beneath the edge of an avalanche, and the least incautious step or word may bring it down upon his head."

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