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THE REFUGEES By A. CONAN DOYLE. Author of "The Return of Sherlock Holmes" COPYRIGHT, 1903, BY HARPER & BROTHERS

"Silence, madame! This is intolerable!" "It is indeed intolerable!" cried the angry lady, throwing all discretion to the winds.

The king sprang from his chair as if he had been stung. Accustomed as he was to his gentle little wife and the even gentler La Valliere, such language as this had never before intruded itself upon the royal ears.

"Sire!" Mme. de Maintenon, who had watched keenly the swift play of his emotions over his expressive face, took two quick steps forward and laid her hand upon his arm.

"But, sire, could you not write?" "No, no; I shall see her." He pulled open the door.

"Oh, sire, be firm, then!" It was with an anxious face that she watched him start off, walking rapidly, with angry gestures, down the corridor.

De Catinat, the guardsman, had employed himself in showing his young friend from over the water all the wonders of the great palace.

De Catinat had arranged that the American should remain with his friend-Major de Brissac, as the time had come round for his own second turn of guard.

Wherever he is, you must find him within the hour." "Yes, sire."

The king passed on down the corridor and opened a door which led him into a magnificent anteroom, all one blaze of mirrors and gold, furnished to a marvel with the most delicate ebony and silver suit, on a deep red carpet of Aleppo, as soft and yielding as the moss of a forest.

At the sound of the closing door she had glanced up, and then, at sight of the king, she sprang to her feet and ran toward him, her hands out, her blue eyes bedimmed with tears.

"All is over forever between us," he cried harshly. "Your brother will await you at the east gate at 6 o'clock, and it is my command that you wait there until you receive my further



"All is over forever between us," he cried harshly.

She staggered back as if he had struck her. "Leave you!" she cried.

"The court! Aye, willingly; this instant! But you! Ah, sire, you ask what is impossible."

"I do not ask, madame; I order. Since you have learned to abuse your position, your presence has become intolerable. The united kings of Europe have never dared to speak to me as you have spoken today."

"Oh, I have been wicked!" she cried. "I know it; I know it! How could I speak to you so! How could I! Oh, what some blight may come upon this unhappy tongue! I, who have had nothing but good from you! I to insult you, who are the author of all my happiness! Oh, sire, forgive me, forgive me; for pity's sake forgive me!"

"It is useless, madame," said he. "I have thought this matter over for a long time, and your madness today has only hurried what must in any case have taken place. You must leave the palace."

"I will leave the palace. Say only that you forgive me. Oh, sire, I cannot bear your anger. It crushes me down. I am not strong enough. It is not banishment, it is death to which you sentence me. Think of our long years of love, sire, and say that you forgive me. Oh, will you not give your anger up for mine? My God, he weeps! Oh, I am saved; I am saved!"

"No, no, madame," cried the king, dashing his hand across his eyes. "You see the weakness of the man, but you will also see the firmness of the king. As to your insults today, I forgive them freely, if that will make you more happy in your retirement. But a time has come when it is necessary to review our past life and to prepare for that which is to come."

"Ah, sire, you pain me. You are not yet in the prime of your years, and you speak as if old age were upon you. In a score of years from now it may be time for folks to say that age has made a change in your life."

"You have but to name the place, sire-Petit Bourg, Chargny or my own convent of St. Joseph in the Faubourg St. Germain. What matter were the flower withers when once the sun has forever turned from it? At least the past is my own, and I shall live in the remembrance of the days when none had come between us and when your sweet love was all my own. Be happy, sire, be happy, and think no more of what I said about the foolish gossip of the court. Your life lies in the fu-

ture. Mine is in the past. Adieu, dear sire, adieu!" She threw forward her arms, her eyes dimmed over, and she would have fallen had Louis not sprung forward and caught her in his arms.

"Then I am not to go! You would not have the heart to send me away, would you?" "No, no; but you must not annoy me, Françoise."

"I had rather die than cause you an instant of grief. Oh, sire, I have seen so little of you lately! And I love you so! It has maddened me. And then that dreadful woman!"

"Who, then?" "Oh, I must not speak against her. I will be civil for your sake even to her, the widow of old Scarron."

"Yes, yes, you must be civil. I cannot have any unpleasantness." "But you will stay with me, sire?" Her supple arms coiled themselves round his neck. Then she field him for an instant at arm's length to feast her eyes upon his face, and then drew him once more toward her.

"I will stay," said he. "And that carriage, dear sire, at the east door?" "I have been very harsh with you, Françoise. You will forgive me. Have your paper and pencil, that I may countermand the order?"

"They are here, sire, upon the side table. I have also a note which, if I may leave you for an instant, I will write in the anteroom."

She swept out with triumph in her eyes. It had been a terrible fight, but all the greater the credit of her victory. She took a little pink slip of paper from an inlaid desk and dashed off a few words upon it. They were, "Should Mme. de Maintenon have any message for his majesty he will be for the next few hours in the room of Mme. de Montespan." This she addressed to her rival, and it was sent on the spot, together with the king's order, by the hands of a page.

CHAPTER VIII. FOR nearly a week the king was constant to his new humor. The routine of his life remained unchanged, save that it was the room of the frail beauty rather than of Mme. de Maintenon which attracted him in the afternoon.

And as the king brightened, so all the great court brightened too. The robes began to resume their former splendor, and gay coats and glittering embroidery which had lain in drawers years were seen once more in the halls of the palace.

The church party was never severely alarmed at this relapse. The eyes of priest or of prelate followed Louis in his escapade as wary huntsmen might watch a young deer which gambols about in the meadow.

To this end it was that his confessor, Pere la Chaise, and Bossuet, the great bishop of Meaux, waited one morning upon Mme. de Maintenon in her chamber. With a globe beside her, she was endeavoring to teach geography to the lame Duc du Maine and the mischievous little Comte de Toulouse, who had enough of their father's disposition to make them averse to learning and to hate any discipline or restraint.

"I see, my dear daughter, that you have sorrowed," said Bossuet, glancing at her with a kindly and yet searching eye. "I have indeed, your grace. All last night I spent in prayer that this trial may pass away from us."

"And yet you have no need for fear, madame-none, I assure you. Others may think that your influence has ceased, but we, who know the king's heart, think otherwise. A few days

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may pass, a few weeks at the most, and once more it will be upon your rising fortunes that every eye in France will turn."

"For all that, my daughter, you are ambitious. Would you not love to turn the king toward good?" "I would give my life for it."

"And there is your ambition. Ah, can I not read your noble soul? Would you not love to see the church reign pure and serene over all this realm, to see the poor housed, the needy helped, the wicked turned from their ways and the king ever the leader in all that is noble and good?"

"My daughter," said Bossuet solemnly, "it is time for plain speaking. It is in the interests of the church that we do it. None hear and none shall ever hear what passes between us now. Regard us, if you will, as two confessors, with whom your secret is inviolable. I call it a secret, and yet it is none to us, for it is our mission to read the human heart. You love the king."

"Your grace-father!" She turned in confusion from one to the other. "There is no shame in loving, my daughter. The shame lies only in yielding to love. I say again that you love the king."

"At least I have never told him so," she faltered. "And will you never?" "But consider, my daughter. Such love in a soul like yours is heaven's gift and sent for some wise purpose. We speak for the interests of the holy church, and those interests demand that you should marry the king."

"Marry the king!" The little room swam round her. "Marry the king!" "There lies the best hope for the future. We see in you a second Jeanne d'Arc who will save both France and France's king."

Madame sat silent for a few moments. Her face had regained its composure, and her eyes were bent vacantly upon her tapestry frame as she turned over in her mind all that was involved in the suggestion.

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