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# THE REFUGEES

By **A. CONAN DOYLE**, Author of "The Return of Sherlock Holmes"  
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and buffed her face in her hands. Once more she prayed God to forgive her for her poor sinful life. So they whirled through the night behind the clattering horses, the husband and wife saying nothing, but with hatred and fear raging in their hearts, until a brazer fire shone down upon them from the angle of a keep and the shadow of the huge pile loomed vaguely up in front of them in the darkness. It was the castle of Portillac.

**CHAPTER XV.**  
AND thus it was that Amory de Catinat and Amos Green saw from their dungeon window the midnight carriage which discharged its prisoner before their eyes; hence, too, came that ominous plinking and that strange procession in the early morning. And thus it also happened that they found themselves looking down at Francoise de Montespan as she was led to her death, and that they heard that last piteous cry for aid at the instant when the heavy hand of the ruffian with the ax fell upon her shoulder and she was forced down upon her knees beside the block. She shrank screaming from the dreadful red stained, greasy billet of wood, but the butcher heaved up his weapon and the seigneur had taken a step forward with hand outstretched to seize the long auburn hair and to drag the dainty head down with it when suddenly he was struck motionless with astonishment and stood with his foot advanced and his hand still out, his mouth half open and his eyes fixed in front of him. And, indeed, what he had seen was enough to fill any man with amazement. Out of the small square window which faced him a man had suddenly shot headforemost, pitching on to his outstretched hands and then bounding to his feet. Within a foot of his heels came the head of a second one, who fell more heavily than the first, and yet recovered himself as quickly. The one wore the blue coat and silver facings of the king's guard; the second had the dark coat and clean shaven face of a man of peace, but each carried a short rusty iron bar in his hand. Not a word did either of them say, but the soldier took two quick steps forward and struck at the headman while he was still poisoning himself for a blow at the victim. There was a thud, with a crackle like a breaking egg, and the bar flew into pieces. The headman gave a dreadful cry, dropped his ax, clapped his two hands to his head and, running zigzag across the scaffold, fell over, a dead man, into the courtyard beneath. Quick as a flash De Catinat had caught up the ax and faced De Montespan.

"Now!" said he. The seigneur had for the instant been too astounded to speak. Now he understood at least that these strangers had come between him and his prey. "Seize these men!" he shrieked, turning to his followers. "One moment!" cried De Catinat, with a voice and manner which commanded attention. "You see by my coat what I am. I am the body servant of the king. Who touches me touches him."

"On, you cowards!" roared De Montespan. But the men at arms hesitated, for the fear of the king was as a great shadow which hung over all France. De Catinat saw their indecision. "This woman," he cried, "is the king's own favorite, and if any harm come to a lock of her hair I tell you that there is not a living soul within this portallie who will not die a death of torture." "Who are these men, Marceau?" cried the seigneur furiously. "They are prisoners, your excellency."

"Who ordered you to detain them?" "You did. The escort brought your signet ring." "I never saw the men. There is devilry in this. But they shall not beard me in my own castle, nor stand between me and my own wife. No, par Dieu! They shall not and live! You men, Marceau, Etienne, Gilbert, Jean, Pierre, all you who have eaten my bread, on to them, I say!" He glanced round with furious eyes, but they fell only upon hung heads and averted faces. With a hideous curse he flashed out his sword and rushed at his wife, who still knelt half-insensible beside the block. De Catinat sprang between them to protect her, but Marceau, the bearded senechal, had already seized his master round the waist. With the strength of a maniac, his teeth clinched and the foam churning from the corners of his lips, De Montespan whirled round in the man's grasp, and shortening his sword, he thrust it through the forehead and deep into the throat beneath. Marceau fell back with a choking cry, the blood bubbling from his mouth and his wound; but before his murderer could disengage his weapon De Catinat and the American, aided by a dozen of the retainers, had dragged him down on to the scaffold, and Amos Green had pinned him so securely that he could not move his eyes and his lips, with which he lay glaring and spitting at them. So savage were his own followers against him—for Marceau was well loved among them—that, with ax and block so ready, justice might very swiftly have had her way had not a long, clear bugle call, rising and falling in a thousand little twirls and flourishes, clanged out suddenly in the still morning air. De Catinat pricked up his ears at the sound of it like a hound at the huntsman's call.

"Did you hear, Amos?" "It was a trumpet." "It was the guards' bugle call. You, there, hasten to the gate! Throw up the portcullis and drop the drawbridge! Stir yourselves, or even now you may suffer for your master's sins! It has been a narrow escape, Amos." "You may say so, friend. I saw him put out his hand to her hair even as you sprang from the window. Another instant and he would have had her scalped. But she is a fair woman—the fairest that ever my eyes rested upon—and it is not fit that she should kneel here upon these boards." He dragged her husband's long black cloak from him and made a pillow for the senseless woman with a tenderness and delicacy which came strangely from a man of his build and bearing.

He was still stooping over her when there came the clang of the falling bridge, and an instant later the clatter of the hoofs of a troop of cavalry, who swept, with wave of plumes, toss of manes and jingle of steel, into the courtyard. At the head was a tall horseman in the full dress of the guards, with a curling feather in his hat, high buff gloves and his sword gleaming in the sunlight. De Catinat's face brightened at the sight of him, and he was down in an instant beside his stirrup. "De Brissac!" he cried. "De Catinat! Now where in the name of wonder did you come from?" "I have been a prisoner. Tell me, De Brissac, did you leave the message in Paris? And the archbishop came? And the marriage?" "Took place as arranged. That is why this poor woman whom I see yonder has had to leave the palace."

"I thought as much." "I trust that no harm has come to her?" "My friend and I were just in time to save her. Her husband lies there. He is a fiend, De Brissac." "Very likely. But an angel might have grown bitter had he had the same treatment." "We have him pinioned here. He has slain a man, and I have slain another." "On my word, you have been busy." "How did you know that we were here?" "Nay, that is an unexpected pleasure."

"You did not come for us, then?" "No; we came for the lady. Her brother was to have taken her in his carriage. Her husband learned it, and by a lying message he coaxed her into his own, which was at another door. When De Vivonne found that she did not come and that her rooms were empty he made inquiries and soon learned how she had gone. De Montespan's arms had been seen on the panel, and so the king sent me here with my troop as fast as we could gallop."

"Ah, and you would have come too late had a strange chance not brought us here. I know not who it was who warned us for this man seemed to know nothing of the matter. However, all that will be clearer afterward. What is to be done now?" "I have my own orders. Madame is to be sent to Petit Bourg, and any who are concerned in offering her violence are to be kept until the king's pleasure is known. The castle, too, must be held for the king. But you, De Catinat, you have nothing to do now."

"Nothing save that I would like well to ride into Paris to see that all is right with my uncle and his daughter." "Ah, that sweet little cousin of thine!

by my soul. I do not wonder that the folk know you well in the Rue St. Martin. Well, I have carried a message for you once, and you shall do as much for me now." "With all my heart. And whither?" "To Versailles. The king will be on fire to know how we have fared. You have the best right to tell him, since without you and your friend yonder it would have been but a sorry tale." "I will be there in two hours." "Have you horses?" "Ours were slain." "You will find some in the stables here. Pick the best, since you have lost your own in the king's service." The advice was too good to be overlooked. De Catnat, beckoning to Amos Green, hurried away with him to the stables, while De Brissac, with a few short, sharp orders, dismissed the retainers, stationed his guardsmen all over the castle and arranged for the removal of the lady and for the custody of her husband. An hour later the two friends were riding swiftly down the country road, inhaling the sweet air, which seemed the fresher for their late experience of the dank, foul vapors of their dungeon.

**CHAPTER XVI.**  
TWO days after Mme. de Maintenon's marriage to the king there was held within the humble walls of her little room a meeting which was destined to cause untold misery to many hundreds of thousands of people.

The time had come when the church was to claim her promise from madame, and her pale cheeks and sad eyes showed how vain it had been for her to try to drown the pangs of her tender heart by the arguments of the bigots around her. She knew the Huguenots of France, who could know them better, seeing that she was herself brought up in their faith? She knew their patience, their nobility, their independence. Their tenacity! What chance was there that they would conform to the king's wish? A few great nobles might, but the others would laugh at the galleys, the jail, or even the gallows, when the faith of their fathers was at stake. If their creed were no longer tolerated, then, and if they remained true to it, they must either fly from the country or spend a living death tugging at an oar or working in a chain gang upon the rocks.

The eloquent Bishop Bossuet was there, with Louvois, the minister of war, and the thin, pale Jesuit, Father de Chaise, each piling argument upon argument to overcome the reluctance of the king. Madame bent over her tapestry and weaved her colored silks in silence, while the king leaned upon his hand and listened with the face of a man who knows that he is driven and yet can hardly turn against the odds. On the low table lay a paper, with pen and ink beside it. It was the order for the revocation, and it only needed the king's signature to make it the law.

"And so, father, you are of opinion that if I stamp out heresy in this fashion I shall assure my own salvation in the next world?" he asked. "You will have merited a reward." "And you think so, too, M. de Shop?" "Assuredly, sire." "Besides, sire," said Pere la Chaise softly, "there would be little need for stronger measures. As I have already remarked to you, you are so beloved in your kingdom that the mere assurance that you had expressed your will upon the subject would be enough to turn them all to the true faith."

"I wish that I could think so, father; I wish that I could think so. But what is this?" It was his valet who had half opened the door. "Captain de Catinat is here, sire." "Ask the captain to enter." Ah! A happy thought seemed to have struck him. "We shall see what love for me will do in such a matter, for if it is anywhere to be found it must be among my own body servants."

The guardsman had arrived that instant from his long ride, and leaving Amos Green with the horses, he had come on at once, all dusty and travel stained, to carry his message to the king. He entered now and stood with the quiet ease of a man who is used to such scenes. "What news, captain?" "Major de Brissac bade me tell you, sire, that he held the castle of Portillac, that the lady is safe and that her husband is a prisoner." Louis and his wife exchanged a quick glance of relief. "That is well," said he. "By the way, captain, you have served me in many ways of late and always with success. I hear, Louvois, that De la Salle is dead of the smallpox."

"He died yesterday, sire." "Then I desire that you make out the vacant commission of major to M. de Catinat. Let me be the first to congratulate you, major, upon your promotion." De Catinat kissed the hand which the monarch held out to him. "May I be worthy of your kindness, sire!" "You would do what you could to serve me, would you not? Then I shall put your fidelity to the proof." "I am ready for any proof."

"It is not a very severe one. You see this paper upon the table. It is an order that all the Huguenots in my dominions shall give up their errors, under pain of banishment or captivity. Now I have hopes that there are many of my faithful subjects who are at fault in this matter, but who will abjure it when they learn that it is my clearly expressed wish that they should do so. Do you follow me?" "Yes, sire." The young man had turned deadly pale, and he shifted his feet and opened and clasped his hands. "You are yourself a Huguenot, I understand. I would gladly have you, To be continued.

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Shortening the sword, he thrust it deep into the throat.



"Do not sign it, sire," he cried.