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THE
REFUGEES

By **A. CONAN DOYLE,**
Author of "The Return of Sherlock Holmes"

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again as he remembered how even his own personal entreaty had been unable to prevail with this young dandy of the court.

"France's religion should be that of France's king," said he, "and if my own guardsmen thwart me in such a matter I must find others who will be more faithful. That major's commission in the mousquetaires must go to Captain de Belmont, Louvois."

"Very good, sire."

"And De Catinat's commission may be transferred to Lieutenant Labodere."

"Very good, sire."

"And I am to serve you no longer?"

"You are too dainty for my service," De Catinat's arms fell listlessly to his side, and his head sank forward upon his breast. Then, as he realized the ruin of all the hopes of his life and the cruel injustice with which he had been treated, he broke into a cry of despair and rushed from the room with the hot-tears of impotent anger running down his face. So, sobbing, gesticulating, with coat unbuttoned and hat awry, he burst into the stable where placid Amos Green was smoking his pipe and watching with critical eyes the grooming of the horses.

"To Paris! To Paris!" shouted the guardsman frantically. If I am ruined I may yet be in time to save them. The horses, quick!

It was clear to the American that some sudden calamity had befallen, so he aided his comrade and the grooms to saddle and bridle. Five minutes later they were flying upon their way, and in little more than an hour their steeds, all reeking and foam flecked, were pulled up outside the high house in the Rue St. Martin. De Catinat sprang from his saddle and rushed upstairs, while Amos followed in his own leisurely fashion.

The old Huguenot and his beautiful daughter were seated at one side of the great fireplace, her hand in his, and they sprang up together, she to throw herself with a glad cry into the arms of her lover and he to grasp the hand which his nephew held out to him.

At the other side of the fireplace, with a very long pipe in his mouth and a cup of wine upon a settle beside him, sat a strange looking man, with grizzled hair and beard, a fleshy, red, projecting nose and two little gray eyes, which twinkled out from under huge brindled brows. His long, thin face was laced and seamed with wrinkles, crossing and recrossing everywhere, but fanning out in hundreds from the corners of his eyes. It was set in an unchanging expression, and as it was of the same color all over, as dark as the darkest walnut, it might have been some quaint figurehead cut out of a coarse grained wood. He was clad in a blue serge jacket, a pair of red breeches smeared at the knees with tar, clean gray worsted stockings, large steel buckles over his coarse, square toed shoes, and beside him, balanced upon the top of a thick oaken eudgel, was a weather stained silver laced hat. His gray shot hair was gathered up behind into a short, stiff tail, and a seaman's hanger, with a brass handle, was girded to his waist by a tarnished leather belt.

De Catinat had been too occupied to take notice of this singular individual, but Amos Green gave a shout of delight at the sight of him, and ran forward to greet him.

"Why, Captain Ephraim," cried Amos in English, "who ever would have thought of finding you here? De Catinat, this is my old friend Ephraim Savage, under whose charge I came here."

"Anchor's apeak, lad, and the hatches down," said the stranger in the peculiar drawing voice which the New Englanders had retained from the English Puritans.

"And when do you sail?"

"As soon as your foot is on her deck, if Providence serve us with wind and tide. And how has all gone with thee, Amos?"

"Right well. I have much to tell you of."

De Catinat and his relatives were far too engrossed with their own affairs to give a thought to the others. De Catinat told his tale in a few short, bitter sentences, the injustice that had been done him, his dismissal from the king's service and the ruin which had come upon the Huguenots of France. Adele, as is the angel instinct of woman, thought only of her lover and his misfortunes as she listened to his story, but the old merchant tottered to his feet when he heard of the revocation of the edict.

"What am I to do?" he cried. "What am I to do? I am too old to begin my life again."

"Never fear, uncle," said De Catinat heartily. "There are other lands beyond France."

"But not for me. No, no; I am too old. Lord, but thy hand is heavy upon thy servants. What shall I do and whither shall I turn? He wrung his hands in his perplexity."

"What is amiss with him, then, Amos?" asked the seaman.

"He and his must leave the country, Ephraim."

"And why?"

"Because they are Protestants and the king will not abide their creed."

Ephraim Savage was across the room in an instant and had inclosed the old merchant's thin hand in his own great knotted fist. There was a brotherly sympathy in his strong grip and rugged, weather stained face.

"Tell this man that we shall see him through, Amos. Tell him that we've got a country where he'll just fit in like a bung in a barrel. Tell him that religion is free to all there. Tell him that if he wants to come the Golden Rod is waiting with her anchor apeak and her cargo aboard."

"Then we must come at once," said De Catinat as he listened to the cordial message which was conveyed to his uncle. "Tonight the orders will be out, and tomorrow it may be too late."

"But my business!" cried the merchant.

"Take what valuables you can and leave the rest. Better than than lose all, and liberty into the bargain."

And so at last it was arranged. That very night, within five minutes of the closing of the gates, there passed out of Paris a small party of five, three upon horseback and two in a closed carriage which bore several weighty boxes upon the top. They were the first leaves flying before the hurricane, the earliest of that great multitude who were within the next few months to stream along every road which led from France.

Thanks to the early tidings which the guardsman had brought with him, his little party were now ahead of the news. At Rouen all was quiet, and Captain Ephraim Savage before evening had brought both them and such property as they had saved aboard his brigantine, the Golden Rod. It was but a little craft, some seventy tons burden, but at a time when so many were putting out to sea in open boats, preferring the wrath of nature to that of the king, it was a refuge indeed. The same night the seaman drew up his anchor and began to slowly make his way down the winding river.

With the early dawn the river broadened out and each bank trended away, leaving a long, funnel shaped estuary between. Ephraim Savage snuffed the air and paced the deck briskly, with a twinkle in his keen gray eyes. The wind had fallen away, but there was still enough to drive them slowly upon their course.

"Where's the gal?" he asked.

"She's in my cabin," said Amos Green. "I thought that maybe she could manage there until we got across."

"Where will you sleep yourself, then?"

"Tut! A litter of spruce boughs and a sheet of birch bark over me have been enough all these years. What would I ask better than this deck of soft white pine and my blanket?"

"Very good. The old man and his nephew—him with the blue coat—can have the two empty bunks. But you must speak to that man, Amos. I'll have no philandering aboard my ship, lad; no whispering or eudling or any such foolishness."

"It's a pity that we left so quick, or they might have been married before we started. She's a good girl, Ephraim, and he a fine man, for all that their ways are not the same as ours."

"But what is the matter with the old man? He doesn't seem easy in his mind," said Captain Savage.

The old merchant had been leaning over the bulwarks, looking back with a drawn face and weary eyes at the red curving track behind them which marked the path to Paris. Adele had come up now with not a thought to spare upon the dangers and troubles which lay in front of her as she chafed the old man's thin cold hands and whispered words of love and comfort into his ears.

"We are always in the hollow of God's hand," he whispered, "but, oh, Adele, it is a dreadful thing to feel his fingers moving under us!"

"Come with us, uncle," said De Catinat, passing his arm under that of the old man. "It is long since you have rested. And you, Adele, I pray that you will go and sleep, my poor darling, for it has been a weary journey. Go now to please me, and when you wake both France and your troubles will lie behind you."

When father and daughter had left the deck De Catinat made his way aft again to where Amos Green and the captain were standing.

"I am glad to get them below, Amos," said he, "for I fear that we may have trouble yet."

"And how?"

"You see the white road which runs by the southern bank of the river. Twice within the last half hour I have seen horsemen spurring for dear life along it. Where the spires and smoke are yonder is Honfeur, and thither it was that these men went. I know not who would ride so madly at such an hour unless they were the messengers of the king. Ah, see, there is a third one!"

On the white band which wound among the green meadows a black dot could be seen, which moved along with great rapidity, vanished behind a clump of trees and then reappeared again, making for the distant city. Captain Savage drew out his glass and gazed at the rider.

"Aye, aye," said he as he snapped it up again. "It is a soldier, sure enough. I can see the glint of the scabbard which he carries on his larboard side. I think that we shall have more wind soon. With a breeze we can show our heels to anything in French waters, but a galley or an armed boat would overhail us now."

De Catinat, who, though he could speak little English, had learned in America to understand it pretty well, looked anxiously at Amos Green. "I fear that we shall bring trouble on this good captain," said he, "and the loss of his cargo and ship may be his reward for having befriended us."

Ask him whether he would not prefer to land us on the north bank. With our money we might make our way into the lowlands."

Ephraim Savage looked at his passenger with eyes which had lost something of their sternness. "Young man," said he, "I see that you can understand something of my talk."

De Catinat nodded.

"I tell you, then, that I am a bad man to beat. Any man that was ever shipmate with me would tell you as much. I just jam my helm and keep my course as long as God will let me. D'ye see?"

De Catinat again nodded, though, in truth, the seaman's metaphors left him with but a very general sense of his meaning.

While the Puritan seaman had been talking his eyes had kept wandering from the clouds to the flopping sails and back. Such wind as there was came in little short puffs, and the canvas either drew full or was absolutely slack. The fleecy shreds of cloud above, however, traveled swiftly across the blue sky. It was on these that the captain fixed his gaze, and he watched them like a man who is working out a problem in his mind. They were abreast of Honfeur now and about half a mile out from it. All was quiet on the curving quay and on the half moon fort, over which floated the white flag with the golden fleur-de-lis. The port lay on their quarter now, and they were drawing away more quickly as the breeze freshened. De Catinat, glancing back, had almost made up his mind that their fears were quite groundless when they were brought back in an instant.

Round the corner of the mole a great dark boat dashed into view ringed around with foam from her flying prow and from the ten pairs of oars which swung from either side of her. A dainty white ensign drooped over her stern, and in her bows the sun's light was caught by a heavy brass carrouade. The captain brought his glass to bear upon them and whistled; then he glanced up at the clouds once more.

"Thirty men," said he, "and they got three paces to our two. You, sir, take your blue coat off this deck or you'll bring trouble upon us. The Lord will look after his own if they'll only keep from foolishness. Get these latches off, Tomlinson. So! Where's Jim Sturt and Hiram Jefferson? Let them stand by to clap them on again when I whistle. Starboard; starboard! Keep her as full as she'll draw. Now, Amos, and you, Tomlinson, come here until I have a word with you."

The three stood in consultation upon the poop, glancing back at their pursuer. There could be no doubt that the wind was freshening. It blew briskly in their faces as they looked back, but it was not steady yet, and the boat was rapidly overhauling them. Already they could see the faces of the marines who sat in the stern and the gleam of the lighted linstock which the gunner held in his hand.

"Holla!" cried an officer in excellent English. "Lay her to or we fire!"

"Who are you, and what do you want?" shouted Ephraim Savage in a voice that might have been heard from the bank.

"We come in the king's name, and we want a party of Huguenots from Paris who came on board of your vessel at Rouen."

"Brace back the foreyard and lay her to!" shouted the captain. "Drop a ladder over the side there and look smart. So! Now we are ready for them."

The yard was swung round, and the vessel lay quietly rising and falling on the waves. The boat dashed alongside, her brass cannon trained upon the brigantine, and her squad of marines with their fingers upon their triggers ready to open fire. They grinned and shrugged their shoulders when they saw that their sole opponents were three unarmed men upon the poop. The officer was on deck in an instant, with his drawn sword in his hand.

"Come up, two of you," he cried. "You stand here at the head of the ladder, sergeant. Throw up a rope, and you can fix it to this stanchion. Keep awake down there and be all ready to fire. You come with me, Corporal Lemoine. Who is captain of this ship?"

"I am, sir," said Ephraim Savage submissively.

"You have three Huguenots aboard."

"Tut, tut, Huguenots, are they? I thought they were very anxious to get away, but as long as they paid their passage it was no business of mine. An old man, his young daughter and a young fellow about your age in some sort of livery."

"In uniform, sir—the uniform of the king's guard. Those are the folk I have come for."

"And you wish to take them back?"

"Most certainly."

"The old man is in his bunk asleep, the maid is in a cabin below, and the other is sleeping down the hold."

"Sleeping, you say? We had best surprise him."

"But think you that you dare do it alone? He has no arms, it is true, but he is a well grown young fellow. Will you not have twenty men up from the boat?"

Some such thought had passed through the officer's head, but the captain's remark put him upon his mettle.

"Come with me, corporal," said he. "Down this ladder, you say?"

"Yes, down the ladder and straight on. He lies between those two cloth bales." Ephraim Savage looked up with a smile playing about the corners of his grim mouth. The wind was whistling now in the rigging, and the stays of the masts were humming like two harp strings. Amos Green ounded beside the French sergeant who guarded the end of the rope ladder, while Tomlinson, the mate, stood with a bucket of water in his hand exchanging remarks in very bad French with the crew of the boat beneath him.

The officer made his way slowly down the ladder which led into the hold. The corporal followed him, and had his chest level with the deck when the other had reached the bottom. It may have been something in Ephraim Savage's face or it may have been the gloom around him which startled the young Frenchman.

"Up again, corporal!" he shouted. "I think that you are best at the top."

"And I think that you are best down below, my friend," said the Puritan, who gathered the officer's meaning from his gesture. Putting the sole of his boot against the man's chest, he gave a shove which sent both him and the ladder crashing down on to the officer beneath him. As he did so he blew his whistle, and in a moment the hatch was back in its place and clamped down on each side with iron bars.

The sergeant had swung round at the sound of the crash, but Amos Green, who had waited for the movement, threw his arms round him and hurled him overboard into the sea. At the same instant the connecting rope was severed, the foreyard creaked back into position once more and

"I think that you are best down below," the bucketful of salt water soused down over the gunner and his gun, putting out his linstock and wetting his priming. A shower of balls from the marines piped through the air or rapped up against the planks, but the boat was tossing and jerking in the short, choppy waves, and to aim was impossible. In vain the men tugged and strained at their oars, while the gunner worked like a maniac to re-light his linstock and to replace his priming. The boat had lost its weight, while the brigantine was flying along now with every sail bulging and swelling to bursting point. Crack! went the carrouade at last, and five little slits in the mainsail showed that her charge of grape had flown high. Half an hour afterward a little dark dot upon the horizon with a golden speck at one end of it was all that could be seen of the Honfeur guard boat. The smoke of Havre lay like a little cloud upon the northern horizon, and Captain Ephraim Savage paced his deck with his face as grim as ever, but with a dancing light in his gray eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR two days the Golden Rod lay becalmed close to Cape la Hague, with the Breton coast extending along the whole of the southern horizon. On the third morning, however, came a sharp breeze, and they drew rapidly away from land until it was but a vague, dim line which blended with the cloud banks.

"I am frightened about my father, Amory," said Adele as they stood together by the shrouds and looked back at the dim cloud upon the horizon which marked the position of that France which they were never to see again.

"What do you mean, Adele? My uncle is hale and hearty, and he will accustom himself to this new life."

"If it only could be so! But I fear, I fear that he is over old for such a change. He says not a word of complaint, but I read upon his face that he is stricken to the heart."

De Catinat was about to suggest that the voyage might restore the merchant's health, when Adele gave a cry of surprise and pointed out over the port quarter.

"Look!" she cried. "There is something floating upon the sea. I saw it upon the crest of a wave."

He looked in the direction in which she pointed, but it was so far from him that he could make nothing of it, but sharper eyes than his had caught a glance of it. Amos Green had seen the girl point.

"Captain Ephraim," said he, "there's a boat on the starboard quarter."

The New England seaman whipped up his glass.

"Aye, it's a boat," said he, "but an empty one. Maybe it's been washed down this ladder, you say?"

To be continued.



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