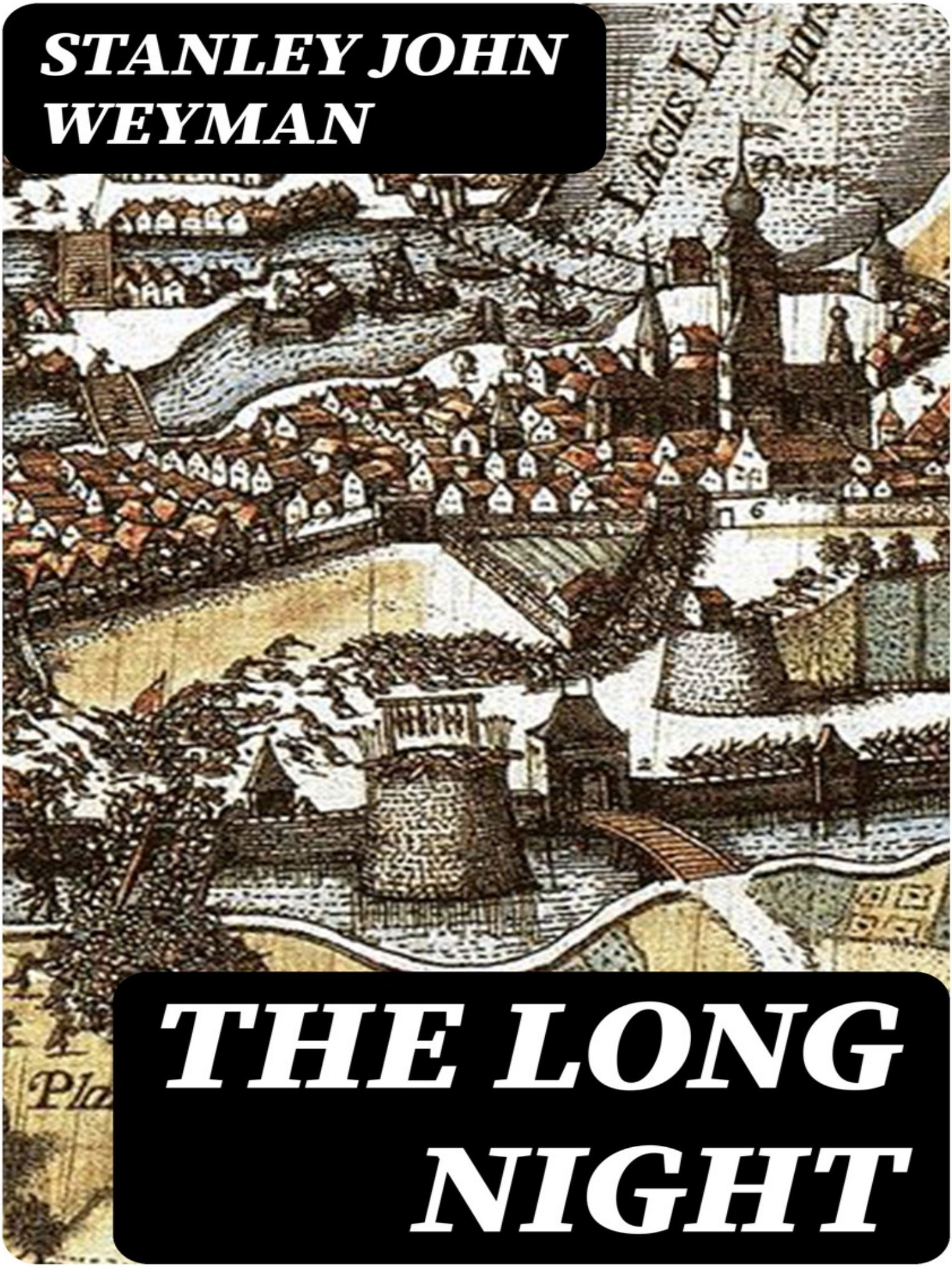
STANLEY JOHN WEYMAN



THE LONG NIGHT

Stanley John Weyman

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EAN 8596547329572

DigiCat, 2022
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CHAPTER I.

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A STUDENT OF THEOLOGY.

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THEY were about to shut the Porte St. Gervais, the north gate of Geneva. The sergeant of the gate had given his men the word to close; but at the last moment, shading his eyes from the low light of the sun, he happened to look along the dusty road which led to the Pays de Gex, and he bade the men wait. Afar off a traveller could be seen hurrying two donkeys towards the gate, with now a blow on this side, and now on that, and now a shrill cry. The sergeant knew him for Jehan Brosse, the bandy-legged tailor of the passage off the Corraterie, a sound burgher and a good man whom it were a shame to exclude. Jehan had gone out that morning to fetch his grapes from Möens; and the sergeant had pity on him.

He waited, therefore; and presently he was sorry that he had waited. Behind Jehan, a long way behind him, appeared a second wayfarer; a young man covered with dust who approached rapidly on long legs, a bundle jumping and bumping at his shoulders as he ran. The favour of the gate was not for such as he—a stranger; and the sergeant anxious to bar, yet unwilling to shut out Jehan, watched his progress with disgust. As he feared, too, it turned out. Young legs caught up old ones: the stranger overtook Jehan, overtook the donkeys. A moment, and he passed under the arch abreast of them, a broad smile of acknowledgment on

his heated face. He appeared to think that the gate had been kept open out of kindness to him.

And to be grateful. The war with Savoy—Italian Savoy which, like an octopus, wreathed clutching arms about the free city of Geneva—had come to an end some months before. But a State so small that the frontier of its inveterate enemy lies but two short leagues from its gates, has need of watch and ward, and curfews and the like, so that he was fortunate who found the gates of Geneva open after sunset in that year, 1602; and the stranger seemed to know this.

As the great doors clanged together and two of the watch wound up the creaking drawbridge, he turned to the sergeant, the smile still on his face. "I feared that you would shut me out!" he panted, still holding his sides. "I would not have given much for my chance of a bed a minute ago."

The sergeant answered only by a grunt.

"If this good fellow had not been in front——"

This time the sergeant cut him short with an imperious gesture, and the young man seeing that the guard also had fallen stiffly into rank, turned to the tailor. He was overflowing with good nature: he must speak to some one. "If you had not been in front," he began, "I——"

But the tailor also cut him short—frowning and laying his finger to his lip and pointing mysteriously to the ground. The stranger stooped to look more closely, but saw nothing: and it was only when the others dropped on their knees that he understood the hint and hastened to follow the example. The soldiers bent their heads while the sergeant recited a prayer for the safety of the city. He did this reverently, while the evening light—which fell grey between walls and

sobered those who had that moment left the open sky and the open country—cast its solemn mantle about the party.

Such was the pious usage observed in that age at the opening and the closing of the gates of Geneva: nor had it yet sunk to a form. The nearness of the frontier and the shadow of those clutching arms, ever extended to smother the free State, gave a reality to the faith of those who opened and shut, and with arms in their hands looked back on ten years of constant warfare. Many a night during those ten years had Geneva gazed from her watch-towers on burning farms and smouldering homesteads; many a day seen the smoke of Chablais hamlets float a dark trail across her lake. What wonder if, when none knew what a night might bring forth, and the fury of Antwerp was still a new tale in men's ears, the Genevese held Providence higher and His workings more near than men are prone to hold them in happier times?

Whether the stranger's reverent bearing during the prayer gained the sergeant's favour, or the sword tied to his bundle and the bulging corners of squat books which stuffed out the cloak gave a new notion of his condition, it is certain that the officer eyed him more kindly when all rose from their knees. "You can pass in now, young sir," he said nodding. "But another time remember, if you please, the earlier here the warmer welcome!"

"I will bear it in mind," the young traveller answered, smiling. "Perhaps you can tell me where I can get a night's lodging?"

"You come to study, perhaps?" The sergeant puffed himself out as he spoke, for the fame of Geneva's college

and its great professor, Theodore Beza, was a source of glory to all within the city walls. Learning, too, was a thing in high repute in that day. The learned tongues still lived and were passports opening all countries to scholars. The names of Erasmus and Scaliger were still in the mouths of men.

"Yes," the youth answered, "and I have the name of a lodging in which I hope to place myself. But for to-night it is late, and an inn were more convenient."

"Go then to the 'Bible and Hand,'" the sergeant answered. "It is a decent house, as are all in Geneva. If you think to find here a roistering, drinking, swearing tavern, such as you'd find in Dijon——"

"I come to study, not to drink," the young man answered eagerly.

"Well, the 'Bible and Hand,' then! It will answer your purpose well. Cross the bridge and go straight on. It is in the Bourg du Four."

The youth thanked him with a pleased air, and turning his back on the gate proceeded briskly towards the heart of the city. Though it was not Sunday the inhabitants were pouring out from the evening preaching as plentifully as if it had been the first day of the week; and as he scanned their grave and thoughtful faces—faces not seldom touched with sternness or the scars of war—as he passed between the gabled steep-roofed houses and marked their order and cleanliness, as he saw above him and above them the two great towers of the cathedral, he felt a youthful fervour and an enthusiasm not to be comprehended in our age.

To many of us the name and memory of Geneva stand for anything but freedom. But to the Huguenot of that

generation and day, the name of Geneva stood for freedom; for a fighting aggressive freedom, a full freedom in the State, a sober measured freedom in the Church. The city was the outpost, southwards, of the Reformed religion and the Reformed learning; it sowed its ministers over half Europe, and where they went, they spread abroad not only its doctrines but its praise and its honour. If, even to the men of that day there appeared at times a something too stiff in its attitude, a something too near the Papal in its decrees, they knew with what foes and against what odds it fought, and how little consistent with the ferocity of that struggle were the compromises of life or the courtesies of the lists.

At any rate, in some such colours as these, framed in such a halo, Claude Mercier saw the Free City as he walked its narrow streets that evening, seeking the "Bible and Hand". In some such colours had his father, bred under Calvin to the ministry, depicted it: and the young man, half French, half Vaudois, sought nothing better, set nothing higher, than to form a part of its life, and eventually to contribute to its fame. Good intentions and honest hopes tumbled over one another in his brain as he walked. The ardour of a new life, to be begun this day, possessed him. He saw all things through the pure atmosphere of his own happy nature: and if it remained to him to discover how Geneva would stand the test of a closer intimacy, at this moment, the youth took the city to his heart with no jot of misgiving. To follow in the steps of Theodore Beza, a Frenchman like himself and gently bred, to devote himself, in these surroundings to the Bible and the Sword, and find in

them salvation for himself and help for others—this seemed an end simple and sufficing: the end too, which all men in Geneva appeared to him to be pursuing that summer evening.

By-and-by a grave citizen, a psalm-book in his hand, directed him to the inn in the Bourg du Four; a tall house turning the carved ends of two steep gables to the street. On either side of the porch a long low casement suggested the comfort that was to be found within; nor was the pledge unfulfilled. In a trice the student found himself seated at a shining table before a simple meal and a flagon of cool white wine with a sprig of green floating on the surface. His companions were two merchants of Lyons, a vintner of Dijon, and a taciturn, soberly clad professor. The four elders talked gravely of the late war, of the prevalence of drunkenness in Zurich, of a sad case of witchcraft at Basle, and of the state of trade in Lausanne and the Pays de Vaud; while the student, listening with respect, contrasted the quietude of this house, looking on the grey evening street, with the bustle and chatter and buffoonery of the inns at which he had lain on his way from Chatillon. He was in a mood to appraise at the highest all about him, from the demure maid who served them to the cloaked burghers who from time to time passed the window wrapped in meditation. From a house hard by the sound of the evening psalms came to his ears. There are moods and places in which to be good seems of the easiest; to err, a thing well-nigh impossible.

The professor was the first to rise and retire; on which the two merchants drew up their seats to the table with an

air of relief. The vintner looked after the retreating figure. "Of Lausanne, I should judge?" he said, with a jerk of the elbow.

"Probably," one of the others answered.

"Is he not of Geneva, then?" our student asked. He had listened with interest to the professor's talk and between whiles had wondered if it would be his lot to sit under him.

"No, or he would not be here!" one of the merchants replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why not, sir?"

"Why not?" The merchant fixed the questioner with eyes of surprise. "Don't you know, young man, that those who live in Geneva may not frequent Geneva taverns?"

"Indeed?" Mercier answered, somewhat startled. "Is that so?"

"It is very much so," the other returned with something of a sneer.

"And they do not!" quoth the vintner with a faint smile.

"Well, professors do not!" the merchant answered with a grimace. "I say nothing of others. Let the Venerable Company of Pastors see to it. It is their business."

At this point the host brought in lights. After closing the shutters he was in the act of retiring when a door near at hand—on the farther side of the passage if the sound could be trusted—flew open with a clatter. Its opening let out a burst of laughter, nor was that the worst: alas, above the laughter rang an oath—the ribald word of some one who had caught his foot in the step.

The landlord uttered an exclamation and went out hurriedly, closing the door behind him. A moment and his

voice could be heard, scolding and persuading in the passage.

"Umph!" the vintner muttered, looking from one to the other with a humorous eye. "It seems to me that the Venerable Company of Pastors have not yet expelled the old Adam."

Open flew the door and cut short the word. But it had been heard, "Pastors?" a raucous voice cried. "Passers and Flinchers is what I call them!" And a stout heavy man, whose small pointed grey beard did but emphasise the coarse virility of the face above it, appeared on the threshold, glaring at the four. "Pastors?" he repeated defiantly. "Passers and Flinchers, I say!"

"In Heaven's name, Messer Grio!" the landlord protested, hovering at his shoulder, "these are strangers——"

"Strangers? Ay, and flinchers, they too!" the intruder retorted, heedless of the remonstrance. And he lurched into the room, a bulky, reeling figure in stained green and tarnished lace. "Four flinchers! But I'll make them drink a cup with me or I'll prick their hides! Do you think we shed blood for you and are to be stinted of our liquor!"

"Messer Grio! Messer Grio!" the landlord cried, wringing his hands. "You will be my ruin!"

"No fear!"

"But I do fear!" the host retorted sharply, going so far as to lay a hand on his shoulder. "I do fear." Behind the man in green his boon-fellows, flushed with drink, had gathered, and were staring half curious, half in alarm into the room. The landlord turned and appealed to them. "For Heaven's sake get him away quietly!" he muttered. "I shall lose my

living if this be known. And you will suffer too! Gentlemen," he turned to the party at the table, "this is a quiet house, a quiet house in general, but——"

"Tut-tut!" said the vintner good-naturedly. "We'll drink a cup with the gentleman if he wishes it!"

"You'll drink or be pricked!" quoth Messer Grio; he was one of those who grow offensive in their cups. And while his friends laughed, he swished out a sword of huge length, and flourished it. "Ça! Ça! Now let me see any man refuse his liquor!"

The landlord groaned, but thinking apparently that soonest broken was soonest mended, he vanished, to return in a marvellously short space of time with four tall glasses and a flask of Neuchatel. "'Tis good wine," he muttered anxiously. "Good wine, gentlemen, I warrant you. And Messer Grio here has served the State, so that some little indulgence——"

"What art muttering?" cried the bully, who spoke French with an accent new and strange in the student's ears. "Let be! Let be, I say! Let them drink, or be pricked!"

The merchants and the vintner took their glasses without demur: and, perhaps, though they shrugged their shoulders, were as willing as they looked. The young man hesitated, took with a curling lip the glass which was presented to him, and then, a blush rising to his eyes, pushed it from him.

"'Tis good wine," the landlord repeated. "And no charge. Drink, young sir, and——"

"I drink not on compulsion!" the student answered.

Messer Grio stared. "What?" he roared. "You——"

"I drink not on compulsion," the young man repeated, and this time he spoke clearly and firmly. "Had the gentleman asked me courteously to drink with him, that were another matter. But——"

"Sho!" the vintner muttered, nudging him in pure kindness. "Drink, man, and a fico for his courtesy so the wine be old! When the drink is in, the sense is out, and," lowering his voice, "he'll let you blood to a certainty, if you will not humour him."

But the grinning faces in the doorway hardened the student in his resolution. "I drink not on compulsion," he repeated stubbornly. And he rose from his seat.

"You drink not?" Grio exclaimed. "You drink not? Then by the living——"

"For Heaven's sake!" the landlord cried, and threw himself between them. "Messer Grio! Gentlemen!"

But the bully, drunk and wilful, twitched him aside. "Under compulsion, eh!" he sneered. "You drink not under compulsion, don't you, my lad? Let me tell you," he continued with ferocity, "you will drink when I please, and where I please, and as often as I please, and as much as I please, you meal-worm! You half-weaned puppy! Take that glass, d'you hear, and say after me, Devil take——"

"Messer Grio!" cried the horrified landlord.

"Devil take"—for a moment a hiccough gave him pause—"all flinchers! Take the glass, young man. That is well! I see you will come to it! Now say after me, Devil take——"

"That!" the student retorted, and flung the wine in the bully's face.

The landlord shrieked; the other guests rose hurriedly from their seats, and got aside. Fortunately the wine blinded the man for a moment, and he recoiled, spitting curses and darting his sword hither and thither in impotent rage. By the time he had cleared his eyes the youth had got to his bundle, and, freeing his blade, placed himself in a posture of defence. His face was pale, but with the pallor of excitement rather than of fear; and the firm set of his mouth and the smouldering fire in his eyes as he confronted the drunken bravo, no less than the manner in which he handled his weapon, showed him as ready to pursue as he had been hardy to undertake the quarrel.

He gave proof of forethought, too. "Witness all, he drew first!" he cried; and his glance quitting Grio for the briefest instant sought to meet the merchants' eyes. "I am on my defence. I call all here to witness that he has thrust this quarrel upon me!"

The landlord wrung his hands. "Oh dear! oh dear!" he cried. "In Heaven's name, gentlemen, put up! put up! Stop them! Will no one stop them!" And in despair, seeing no one move to arrest them, he made as if he would stand between them.

But the bully flourished his blade about his ears, and with a cry the goodman saved himself "Out, skinker!" Grio cried grimly. "And you, say your prayers, puppy. Before you are five minutes older I will spit you like a partridge though I cross the frontier for it. You have basted me with wine! I will baste you after another fashion! On guard! On guard, and ——"

"*What is this?*"

The voice stayed Grio's tongue and checked his foot in the very instant of assault. The student, watching his blade and awaiting the attack, was surprised to see his point waver and drop. Was it a trick, he wondered? A stratagem? No, for a silence fell on the room, while those who held the floor hastened to efface themselves against the wall, as if they at any rate had nothing to do with the fracas. And next moment Grio shrugged his shoulders, and with a half-stifled curse stood back.

"What is this?"

The same question in the same tone. This time the student saw whose voice it was had stayed Grio's arm. Within the door a pace in front of two or three attendants, who had displaced the roisterers on the threshold, appeared a spare dry-looking man of middle height, wearing his hat, and displaying a gold chain of office across the breast of his black velvet cloak. In age about sixty, he had nothing that at a first glance seemed to call for a second: his small pinched features, and the downward curl of the lip, which his moustache and clipped beard failed to hide, indicated a nature peevish and severe rather than powerful. On nearer observation the restless eyes, keen and piercing, asserted themselves and redeemed the face from insignificance. When, as on this occasion, their glances were supported by the terrors of the State, it was not difficult to understand why Messer Blondel, the Syndic, though no great man to look upon, had both weight with the masses, and a hold not to be denied over his colleagues in the Council.

No one took on himself to answer the question he had put, and in a voice thin and querulous, but with a lurking

venom in its tone, "What is this?" the great man repeated, looking from one to another. "Are we in Geneva, or in Venice? Under the skirts of the scarlet woman, or where the magistrates bear not the sword in vain? Good Mr. Landlord, are these your professions? Your bailmen should sleep ill to-night, for they are likely to answer roundly for this! And whom have we sparking it here? Brawling and swearing and turning into a profligate's tavern a place that should be for the sober entertainment of travellers? Whom have we here —eh! Let me see them! Ah!"

He paused rather suddenly, as his eyes met Grio's: and a little of his dignity fell from him with the pause. His manner underwent a subtle change from the judicial to the paternal. When he resumed, he wagged his head tolerantly, and a modicum of sorrow mingled with his anger. "Ah, Messer Grio! Messer Grio!" he said, "it is you, is it? For shame! For shame! This is sad, this is lamentable! Some indulgence, it is true"—he coughed—"may be due after late events, and to certain who have borne part in them. But this goes too far! Too far by a long way!"

"It was not I began it!" the bully muttered sullenly, a mixture of bravado and apology in his bearing. He sheathed his blade, and thrust the long scabbard behind him. "He threw a glass of wine in my face, Syndic—that is the truth. Is an old soldier who has shed blood for Geneva to swallow that, and give God thanks?"

The Syndic turned to the student, and licked his lips, his features more pinched than usual. "Are these your manners?" he said. "If so, they are not the manners of Geneva! Your name, young man, and your dwelling place?"

"My name is Claude Mercier, last from Chatillon in Burgundy," the young man answered firmly. "For the rest, I did no otherwise than you, sir, must have done in my case!"

The magistrate snorted. "I!"

"Being treated as I was!" the young man protested. "He would have me drink whether I would or no! And in terms no man of honour could bear."

"Honour?" the Syndic retorted, and on the word exploded in great wrath. "Honour, say you? Then I know who is in fault. When men of your race talk of honour 'tis easy to saddle the horse. I will teach you that we know naught of honour in Geneva, but only of service! And naught of punctilios but much of modest behaviour! It is such hot blood as yours that is at the root of brawlings and disorders and such-like, to the scandal of the community: and to cool it I will commit you to the town jail until to-morrow! Convey him thither," he continued, turning sharply to his followers, "and see him safely bestowed in the stocks. To-morrow I will hear if he be penitent, and perhaps, if he be in a cooler temper——"

But the young man, aghast at this sudden disgrace, could be silent no longer. "But, sir," he broke in passionately, "I had no choice. It was no quarrel of my beginning. I did but refuse to drink, and when he——"

"Silence, sirrah!" the Syndic cried, and cut him short. "You will do well to be quiet!" And he was turning to bid his people bear their prisoner out without more ado when one of the merchants ventured to put in a word.

"May I say," he interposed timidly, "that until this happened, Messer Blondel, the young man's conduct was all

that could be desired?"

"Are you of his company?"

"No, sir."

"Then best keep out of it!" the magistrate retorted sharply.

"And you," to his followers, "did you hear me? Away with him!"

But as the men advanced to execute the order, the young man stepped forward. "One moment!" he said. "A moment only, sir. I caught the name of Blondel. Am I speaking to Messer Philibert Blondel?"

The Syndic nodded ungraciously. "Yes," he said, "I am he. What of it?"

"Only this, that I have a letter for him," the student answered, groping with trembling fingers in his pouch. "From my uncle, the Sieur de Beauvais of Nocle, by Dijon."

"The Sieur de Beauvais?"

"Yes."

"He is your uncle?"

"Yes."

"So! Well, I remember now," Blondel continued, nodding. "His name was Mercier. Certainly, it was. Well, give me the letter." His tone was still harsh, but it was not the same; and when he had broken the seal and read the letter—with a look half contemptuous, half uneasy—his brow cleared a little. "It were well young people knew better what became them," he cried, peevishly shrugging his shoulders. "It would save us all a great deal. However, for this time as you are a stranger and well credited, I find, you may go. But let it be a lesson to you, do you hear? Let it be a lesson to you, young

man. Geneva," pompously, "is no place for brawling, and if you come hither for that, you will quickly find yourself behind bars. See that you go to a fit lodging to-morrow, and do you, Mr. Landlord, have a care that he leaves you."

The young man's heart was full, but he had the wisdom to keep his temper and to say no more. The Syndic on his part was glad, on second thoughts, to be free of the matter. He was turning to go when it seemed to strike him that he owed something more to the bearer of the letter. He turned back. "Yes," he said, "I had forgotten. This week I am busy. But next week, on some convenient day, come to me, young sir, and I may be able to give you a word of advice. In the forenoon will be best. Until then—see to your behaviour!"

The young man bowed and waited, standing where he was, until the bustle attending the Syndic's departure had quite died away. Then he turned. "Now, Messer Grio," he said briskly, "for my part I am ready."

But Messer Grio had slipped away some minutes before.

CHAPTER II.

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THE HOUSE ON THE RAMPARTS.

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THE affair at the inn which had threatened to turn out so unpleasantly for our hero, should have gone some way towards destroying the illusions with which he had entered Geneva. But faith is strong in the young, and hope stronger. The traditions of his boyhood and his fireside, and the stories, animate with affection for the cradle of the faith, to which he had listened at his father's knee, were not to be over-ridden by the shadow of an injustice, which in the end had not fallen. When the young man went abroad next morning and viewed the tall towers of St. Peter, of which his father had spoken—when, from those walls which had defied through so many months the daily and nightly threats of an ever-present enemy, he looked on the sites of conflicts still famous and on farmsteads but half risen from their ruins—when, above all, he remembered for what those walls stood, and that here, on the borders of the blue lake, and within sight of the glittering peaks which charmed his eyes—if in any one place in Europe—the battle of knowledge and freedom had been fought, and the rule of the monk and the Inquisitor cast down, his old enthusiasm revived. He thirsted for fresh conflicts, for new occasions: and it is to be feared dreamt more of the Sword than of the sacred Book, which he had come to study, and which, in Geneva, went hand in hand with it.

In the fervour of such thoughts and in the multitude of new interests which opened before him, he had well-nigh forgotten the Syndic's tyranny before he had walked a mile: nor might he have given a second thought to it but for the need which lay upon him of finding a new lodging before night. In pursuit of this he presently took his way to the Corraterie, a row of gabled houses, at the western end of the High Town, built within the ramparts, and enjoying over them a view of the open country, and the Jura. The houses ran for some distance parallel with the rampart, then retired inwards, and again came down to it; in this way enclosing a triangular open space or terrace. They formed of themselves an inner line of defence, pierced at the point farthest from the rampart by the Porte Tertasse: a gate it is true, which was often open even at night, for the wall in front of the Corraterie, though low on the town side, looked down from a great height on the ditch and the low meadows that fringed the Rhone. Trees planted along the rampart shaded the triangular space, and made it a favourite lounge from which the inhabitants of that quarter of the town could view the mountains and the sunset while tasting the freshness of the evening air.

A score of times had Claude Mercier listened to a description of this row of lofty houses dominating the ramparts. Now he saw it, and, charmed by the position and the aspect, he trembled lest he should fail to secure a lodging in the house which had sheltered his father's youth. Heedless of the suspicious glances shot at him by the watch at the Porte Tertasse, he consulted the rough plan which his father had made for him—consulted it rather to assure

himself against error than because he felt doubt. The precaution taken, he made for a house a little to the right of the Tertasse gate as one looks to the country. He mounted by four steep steps to the door and knocked on it.

It was opened so quickly as to disconcert him. A lanky youth about his own age bounced out and confronted him. The lad wore a cap and carried two or three books under his arm as if he had been starting forth when the summons came. The two gazed at one another a moment: then, "Does Madame Royaume live here?" Claude asked.

The other, who had light hair and light eyes, said curtly that she did.

"Do you know if she has a vacant room?" Mercier asked timidly.

"She will have one to-night!" the youth answered with temper in his tone: and he dashed down the steps and went off along the street without ceremony or explanation. Viewed from behind he had a thin neck which agreed well with a small retreating chin.

The door remained open, and after hesitating a moment Claude tapped once and again with his foot. Receiving no answer he ventured over the threshold, and found himself in the living-room of the house. It was cool, spacious and well-ordered. On the left of the entrance a wooden settle flanked a wide fireplace, in front of which stood a small heavy table. Another table a little bigger occupied the middle of the room; in one corner the boarded-up stairs leading to the higher floors bulked largely. Two or three dark prints—one a portrait of Calvin—with a framed copy of the Geneva catechism, and a small shelf of books, took something from

the plainness and added something to the comfort of the apartment, which boasted besides a couple of old oaken dressers, highly polished and gleaming, with long rows of pewter ware. Two doors stood opposite the entrance and appeared to lead—for one of them stood open—to a couple of closets: bedrooms they could hardly be called, yet in one of them Claude knew that his father had slept. And his heart warmed to it.

The house was still; the room was somewhat dark, for the windows were low and long, strongly barred, and shaded by the trees, through the cool greenery of which the light filtered in. The young man stood a moment, and hearing no footstep or movement wondered what he should do. At length he ventured to the door of the staircase and, opening it, coughed. Still no one answered or came, and unwilling to intrude farther he turned about and waited on the hearth. In a corner behind the settle he noticed two half pikes and a long-handled sword; on the seat of the settle itself lay a thin folio bound in stained sheepskin. A log smouldered on the hearth, and below the great black pot which hung over it two or three pans and pipkins sat deep among the white ashes. Save for these there was no sign in the room of a woman's hand or use. And he wondered. Certainly the young man who had departed so hurriedly had said it was Madame Royaume's. There could be no mistake.

Well, he would go and come again. But even as he formed the resolution, and turned towards the outer door—which he had left open—he heard a faint sound above, a step light but slow. It seemed to start from the uppermost floor of all, so long was it in descending; so long was it

before, waiting on the hearth cap in hand, he saw a shadow darken the line below the staircase door. A second later the door opened and a young girl entered and closed it behind her. She did not see him; unconscious of his presence she crossed the floor and shut the outer door.

There was a something in her bearing which went to the heart of the young man who stood and saw her for the first time; a depression, a dejection, an I know not what, so much at odds with her youth and her slender grace, that it scarcely needed the sigh with which she turned to draw him a pace nearer. As he moved their eyes met. She, who had not known of his presence, recoiled with a low cry and stared wide-eyed: he began hurriedly to speak.

"I am the son of M. Gaston Mercier, of Chatillon," he said, "who lodged here formerly. At least," he stammered, beginning to doubt, "if this be the house of Madame Royaume, he lodged here. A young man who met me at the door said that Madame lived here, and had a room."

"He admitted you? The young man who went out?"

"Yes."

She gazed hard at him a moment, as if she doubted or suspected him. Then, "We have no room," she said.

"But you will have one to-night," he answered

"I do not know."

"But—but from what he said," Claude persisted doggedly, "he meant that his own room would be vacant, I think."

"It may be," she answered dully, the heaviness which surprise had lifted for a moment settling on her afresh. "But we shall take no new lodgers. Presently you would go," with a cold smile, "as he goes to-day."

"My father lodged here three years," Claude answered, raising his head with pride. "He did not go until he returned to France. I ask nothing better than to lodge where my father lodged. Madame Royaume will know my name. When she hears that I am the son of M. Gaston Mercier, who often speaks of her——"

"He fell sick here, I think?" the girl said. She scanned him anew with the first show of interest that had escaped her. Yet reluctantly, it seemed; with a kind of ungraciousness hard to explain.

"He had the plague in the year M. Chausse, the pastor of St. Gervais, died of it," Claude answered eagerly. "When it was so bad. And Madame nursed him and saved his life. He often speaks of it and of Madame with gratitude. If Madame Royaume would see me?"

"It is useless," she answered with an impatient shrug. "Quite useless, sir. I tell you we have no room. And—I wish you good-morning." On the word she turned from him with a curt gesture of dismissal, and kneeling beside the embers began to occupy herself with the cooking pots; stirring one and tasting another, and raising a third a little aslant at the level of her eyes that she might peer into it the better. He lingered, watching her, expecting her to turn. But when she had skimmed the last jar and set it back, and screwed it down among the embers, she remained on her knees, staring absently at a thin flame which had sprung up under the black pot. She had forgotten his presence, forgotten him utterly; forgotten him, he judged, in thoughts as deep and gloomy as the wide dark cavern of chimney which yawned

above her head and dwarfed the slight figure kneeling Cinderella-like among the ashes.

Claude Mercier looked and looked, and wondered, and at last longed: longed to comfort, to cherish, to draw to himself and shelter the budding womanhood before him, so fragile now, so full of promise for the future. And quick as the flame had sprung up under her breath, a magic flame awoke in his heart, and burned high and hot. If he did not lodge here,

The sky might fall, fish fly, and sheep pursue
The tawny monarch of the Libyan strand!

But he would lodge here. He coughed.

She started and turned, and seeing him, seeing that he had not gone, she rose with a frown. "What is it?" she said. "For what are you waiting, sir?"

"I have something in charge for Madame Royaume," he answered.

"I will give it her," she returned sharply. "Why did you not say so at once?" And she held out her hand.

"No," he said hardily. "I have it in charge for her hand only."

"I am her daughter."

He shook his head stubbornly.

What she would have done on that—her face was hard and promised nothing—is uncertain. Fortunately for the young man's hopes, a dull report as of a stick striking the floor in some room above reached their ears; he saw her eyes flicker, alter, grow soft. "Wait!" she said imperiously; and stooping to take one of the pipkins from the fire, she poured its contents into a wooden bowl which stood beside her on the table. She added a horn-spoon and a pinch of salt, fetched a slice of coarse bread from a cupboard in one of the dressers, and taking all in skilled steady hands, hands childishly small, though brown as nuts, she disappeared through the door of the staircase.

He waited, looking about the room, and at this, and at that, with a new interest. He took up the book which lay on the settle: it was a learned volume, part of the works of

Paracelsus, with strange figures and diagrams interwoven with the crabbed Latin text. A passage which he deciphered, abashed him by its profundity, and he laid the book down, and went from one to another of the black-framed engravings; from these to an oval piece in coarse Limoges enamel, which hung over the little shelf of books. At length he heard a step descending from the upper floors, and presently she appeared in the doorway.

"My mother will see you," she said, her tone as ungracious as her look. "But you will say nothing of lodging here, if it please you. Do you hear?" she added, her voice rising to a more imperious note.

He nodded.

She turned on the lowest step. "She is bed-ridden," she muttered, as if she felt the need of explanation. "She is not to be disturbed with house matters, or who comes or goes. You understand that, do you?"

He nodded, with a mental reservation, and followed her up the confined staircase. Turning sharply at the head of the first flight he saw before him a long narrow passage, lighted by a window that looked to the back. On the left of the passage which led to a second set of stairs, were two doors, one near the head of the lower flight, the other at the foot of the second. She led him past both—they were closed—and up the second stairs and into a room under the tiles, a room of good size but with a roof which sloped in unexpected places.

A woman lay there, not uncomely; rather comely with the beauty of advancing years, though weak and frail if not ill. It was the woman of whom he had so often heard his father

speak with gratitude and respect. It was neither of his father, however, nor of her, that Claude Mercier thought as he stood holding Madame Royaume's hand and looking down at her. For the girl who had gone before him into the room had passed to the other side of the bed, and the glance which she and her mother exchanged as the daughter leant over the couch, the message of love and protection on one side, of love and confidence on the other —that message and the tone, wondrous gentle, in which the girl, so curt and abrupt below, named him—these revealed a bond and an affection for which the life of his own family furnished him with no precedent.

For his mother had many children, and his father still lived. But these two, his heart told him as he held Madame Royaume's shrivelled hand in his, were alone. They had each but the other, and lived each in the other, in this room under the tiles with the deep-set dormer windows that looked across the Pays de Gex to the Jura. For how much that prospect of vale and mountain stood in their lives, how often they rose to it from the same bed, how often looked at it in sunshine and shadow with the house still and quiet below them, he seemed to know—to guess. He had a swift mental vision of their lives, and then Madame Royaume's voice recalled him to himself.

"You are newly come to Geneva?" she said, gazing at him.

"I arrived yesterday."

"Yes, yes, of course," she answered. She spoke quickly and nervously. "Yes, you told me so." And she turned to her daughter and laid her hand on hers as if she talked more