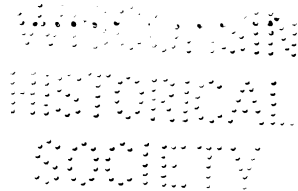


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THE HUGUENOTS OF THE "DÉSERT."*

BY HENRY M. BAIRD, D.D., LL.D., *Professor in the University of the City of New York.*

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: — I am to speak to you of the Huguenots of the "Désert," or of the Huguenots during that period, exceeding a century by two years, which intervened between the publication of the Revocatory Edict by Louis XIV. in 1685 and the publication of the Edict of Toleration by Louis XVI. in 1787. First of all, a few words must be said respecting the designation of the period as that of the "Désert" or "Wilderness." So far as it lay in the power of the government, Protestantism had been abolished in France. All its religious exercises were absolutely forbidden. In city, town or village there was not one place of worship remaining. For years before the formal recall of the Edict of Nantes, the policy had been inexorably pursued of closing, upon some pretext or other (and the flimsiest of pretexts served the purpose quite as well as the best grounded), every *temple*, or Protestant church, within the realm. Almost all these "temples" had been taken away from the Huguenots before the final edict, but that iniquitous law effectually disposed of the few that had been spared. France had now become all Roman Catholic in the eye of the despotic monarch and his applauding court. The Huguenots were no longer dignified even with the opprobrious title of members of the "pretended Reformed religion." They were now the "New Converts"—"*Nouveaux Convertis*"—very badly converted, it might be, undisguised opponents of the practices, the faith, the hierarchy of the church to which they were reputed to belong—but nevertheless styled "New Converts," rather than "Reformed," because, after the autocratic edict of Louis XIV., it

* Read before the Huguenot Society November 15th, 1888.

was contrary to every principle of the servile courtiership of the day to admit that there existed any Protestants in France. Such as had been dragooned into once going to mass and were so weak as to humor their persecutors by going there again at rare intervals, were regarded as reasonably good and faithful children of Mother Holy Church; at any rate, what they lacked in fervor and sincerity it was the sanguine hope of the clergy would be amply made up by the devotion of their children in the next generation. It was forgotten that these very children would be nourished and brought up in secret hatred of the established Church, of whose cruelty they would in future years show themselves scarcely more forgiving than their parents had been. But there were many others whose conformity to the State religion was of the very narrowest kind, and who disguised the fact from no one that they were still Protestants at heart. It was not long before they began to meet for mutual consolation, for the secret reading of God's word, for prayer. Such gatherings being under the ban of the law, the utmost secrecy was observed. A retired house might answer the purpose at first, in case the number of persons frequenting the place was very small. But as soon as there began to be preachers, and a regular service, and the singing of the grand old historic psalms, as soon as the gathered Protestants began to be numbered by hundreds and by thousands, some spot offering more likelihood of safety was sought out—some glen in the mountains, some wood difficult of access to all but those who were in the secret, some remote sheep pasture or some deserted stone quarry. Here great assemblies might come together of men, women and children, each of whom took his life in his hands, not knowing at what moment a band of merciless soldiers, guided only too well by a purchased traitor, might burst in upon them, and a volley of musket-shots might interrupt the harmony of their praise. To the worshippers who thus, laboriously and at the risk of death or life-long imprisonment in monastery or at the oar in the crowded galley, made their way from Nismes, or Alais, or Uzès, into the wilds far from the habitations of men, their toilsome and perilous experience assumed a Scriptural type. They recalled the strange advent

of John the Baptist, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!'" They likened their own experience to that of the ancient people of God, compelled to wander for forty years in the desert of Arabia. Most of all, as their minds turned instinctively to prophecy, they remembered that Apocalyptic vision of the woman clothed with the sun, who was to be persecuted by the great dragon, and who "fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God." Thus it was that the Huguenots of the end of the seventeenth century began to speak of their meetings, held in places which it was too hazardous to describe more definitely, and which, for fear of the enemy, only a very few persons were permitted to know until the very last moment, as convening "in the wilderness"—"*au Désert.*" The designation was adopted during the eighteenth century by friend and by foe; it was regularly employed by the ecclesiastical bodies, the colloquies and synods, in their minutes; and occasionally in the legal documents of the realm. I have even found the words, "Acts of the provincial synod of the Reformed Churches of Vivarais and Velay, assembled under the Divine protection in the *Désert*, in Upper Vivarais, on the 22d of May, 1788," at the head of the minutes of that body. As this was six months after the publication of the Edict of Toleration, the use of the formula may serve to show the affectionate regard that prevented the Huguenots from instantly dispensing with an appellation endeared to them by the constant use of an entire century.

I have chosen the Huguenots of the *Désert* as the subject of this paper, both because of the fact that this portion of the history of French Protestantism is less familiar to most readers of the records of the past, and because we may learn from it that the age of heroism is not so distant from us as we are apt to imagine. For over a hundred years, the Protestant religion was under the ban. Every measure had been taken to destroy it. It would tax the ingenuity of the most fertile imagination to invent more effectual means than those that were employed to accomplish this end. And yet when the day of toleration tardily dawned, when it was once more possible for the Prot-

estants to show their faces and claim their civil rights, men discovered to their amazement that the number of adherents to this communion was little, if at all, inferior to the number of the Huguenots before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, subtraction being made of the multitudes — three or four or five hundred thousand perhaps — that succeeded in reaching the hospitable shelter of Holland, of Switzerland, of Germany, of England, and of this country among others. The maintenance of Protestantism in France through so many years, under such difficulties, in the face of such formidable dangers, was a magnificent achievement, the more worthy of admiration that it called not so much for any single daring act in a sudden emergency, as for the quiet, persistent, relentless exercise of a resolution which nothing could daunt, nothing could turn aside from its purpose. This wonderful achievement was the work for the conscientious and successful execution of which the Huguenots of the period of the Désert are entitled to undying praise at our mouths, whether we can claim descent from them or we derive our birth from their more fortunate brethren, who defied the legislation of the “Grand Monarque” and made their way to happier lands.

The closing fifteen years of the seventeenth century—the years from 1685 to 1700—and the first fifteen years of the eighteenth century, were the most dismal part of the existence of the Huguenots. Although not annihilated, as their enemies expected them to be, they were dazed by the crushing blow they had received. Well used as they were to the endurance of injustice, they could not bring themselves to believe that the law revoking an edict guaranteed to them by the direct promises and assurances, so often repeated, of successive rulers, was a final resolution of the King. That amiable prince had been misinformed, misled, abused by his counsellors. He would, he must, repeal his unrighteous act, when his eyes were opened, when the friendly remonstrances of neighboring princes and States reached his throne, when the cries of the persecuted were at length permitted to enter his ears. It was natural for the Huguenots, even yet firm believers, for the most part, in the dangerous tenet that the king can do no

wrong, to look for better things in their own times,—in no distant future.

Meantime the ministers of the Gospel had been driven out of France. Their former flocks were left without a shepherd. The conditions were precisely those which would engender irregular religious manifestations, and accordingly they did engender them—not among the well-educated and intelligent men and women who had been wont to attend worship at Charenton or Caen, and had listened to the preaching of a Jean Claude or a Pierre du Bosc, nor in Poitou or Saintonge, seats of culture and ease, but among the rude peasantry of Vivarais and Dauphiny and the shepherds of the Cévennes Mountains, unused to letters. Here it was that the world was startled by hearing of strange sights and sounds. Here it was that circles of men, and especially women, meeting to read and meditate upon the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures, witnessed the sudden manifestations, as they thought, of the Divine Spirit revealing things to come. Young girls, and even small children, fell into a trance, and uttered predictions of the near approach of the day of deliverance, of the destruction of God's enemies, of the triumph of His elect. The shepherdess of Crest, a young peasant maiden, obtained a wide reputation through the southeast of France for her wonderful revelations. Royal intendants and priests, including Bishop Esprit Fléchier, of Nismes, whose interesting correspondence on the subject has come down to us, interfered, and by inquisitions and punishments attempted to stop the spread of the New Fanaticism, as they called it. But no means of forcible repression were of much avail, and the movement had to run its natural course. It was many years before the voice of the "prophets of the Cévennes," or the "little prophets," as they were popularly called, was silenced. Meanwhile the utterances of the fanatics, amid much that was self-deception and more that was probably pure imposture, had had at least the good effect of preventing the Protestants of this corner of France from lapsing into utter irreligion and unconcern; while the failure of the pretended prophets to make good their predictions had given the people a thirst for a more orderly and regular religious

organization, after the model of the times before the Revocation.

However, before that consummation could be attained, it was decreed that an attempt should be made in another form to re-establish Protestantism in France. Popular enthusiasm in connection with pretended revelations from Heaven having failed, it was next attempted to see what the force of arms could do.

The war of the Camisards is one of the most singular and romantic episodes of Huguenot history. Although the conflict lasted only two years—from 1702 to 1704—this short struggle is invested with an interest as deep as belongs to that of any other popular movement directed against ecclesiastical and secular despotism. Like many another, this war arose not in accordance with a carefully laid plan, but in the circumstances of the hour, from the desperation of men whose righteous indignation has been long and severely tried and at length breaks through the bands of ordinary prudence and purpose. The Abbé du Chayla, stationed at Pont de Montvert (a village that now boasts some sixteen hundred inhabitants, and probably had about the same number at the beginning of the last century), was no ordinary spiritual shepherd—least of all the model country parson, with heart aglow with tenderness and love for his flock. Appointed inspector-general of missions in the diocese of Mende, he had for seventeen years been discharging the office of an inquisitor in the whole region of the Cévennes Mountains with a zeal and with a ferocity that would have done no discredit to a Torquemada. The first blow of the Camisard war was struck when a band of forty or fifty men, who had themselves been the victims of his savage cruelty, or who had witnessed the wretchedness which he had inflicted upon their nearest relatives, attacked his house with the view of liberating the captives known to be there. At that very time, according to the admission of his apologist, Louvroleuil, there were imprisoned in the cellar of his manse—held fast in the clutches of a curiously devised instrument of torture which permitted the victim neither to sit nor to stand, and inflicted upon him the most exquisite pain—three young

men and three girls reserved for still greater punishment for the frightful crime of attempting to leave France without the king's permission, in the hope of reaching some place where they might freely worship God!* The assailants, we are assured, had only intended to free the prisoners; but no sooner had they gotten their arch-enemy into their power than an uncontrollable desire of revenge gained possession of them. It took but a few moments to dispatch the blood-thirsty abbé, covered with a multitude of wounds. "Here," said one as he struck him with his knife, "here is for your violent treatment of my father." "Here," said another, "for what you did to my mother, my brother, or my sister." "Here," said others, "for condemning such a man to the galleys." "Here," said others, "for ruining such a family," or "for securing the condemnation of So-and-so to death."

I shall not stop to describe the incidents of the war of which the attack upon the Abbé du Chayla was the opening chapter. It must suffice to say that when the Protestant mountaineers of the Cévennes took the field, these untrained troops, under the leadership of men taken from the lowest ranks of society, made themselves feared and respected by the best forces which the King could send against them. Even the most experienced and distinguished of royal generals were not ashamed to treat on equal terms with the Huguenot Roland, and Catinat and Cavalier, and it only depended upon these humble men to obtain for themselves the most enviable advantages, if they would but abandon the cause for which they had drawn the sword.

The Camisard war ended, as was inevitable, with the complete subjection of the insurgents; but its conclusion did not much precede an event far less conspicuous, yet of far more world-wide importance—the resurrection of the French Protestant Church from the grave in which it had been lying apparently lifeless for the space of thirty years.

The one year 1715 witnessed *three* events of far more than ordinary importance in the history of the Huguenots. The

* Louvreur, *Le fanatisme renouvelé*, I. 33, and Court, *Hist. des Camisards*, I. 26.

first was the publication of the most savage law in all the cruel legislation against them. The second was the death of their arch-persecutor, Louis XIV. The third was the initial but decisive step taken to rear anew their prostrate churches. Let us for a moment look at each of these events.

First the law. On the 8th of March, 1715, Louis XIV. issued his last enactment regarding the Protestants. The object was to make every Protestant, who in his last illness should refuse the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, liable to the penalties pronounced upon "relapsed" persons, that is, persons who having been once converted to Roman Catholicism had returned to their former so-called heretical opinions. The penalties to be inflicted upon such persons had been prescribed in another and previous declaration of April 26th, 1686. They were in brief that the bodies of relapsed persons should, after death, be thrown, like the carcasses of unclean beasts, upon hurdles, dragged through the filth of the streets, and having been denied any form of Christian burial,—indeed, of human burial,—at last be consigned—refuse of the earth that they were—to the common sewer. That the surviving family might not only suffer ignominy, but positive loss, the property of the relapsed was forfeited to the State. Now, why should the Huguenots, many of them persistent Protestants, who in point of fact had never abjured their faith, and could not therefore, it would seem, in any sense have relapsed, be treated by the new law as relapsed persons? Were they not the very class of men and women to whom the assurance had been given, in the Edict of Revocation itself, that they might continue to reside safely and without molestation in their former homes? The reasons assigned were dishonest enough, and quite in keeping with the tricky and disingenuous legislation of which the Huguenots were the constant victims. First, it was stated to be hard, and in many cases impossible, to obtain sufficient proof of abjurations that had taken place many years before, often in distant parts of the kingdom, and at a time when, in the hurry of the moment, the records were irregularly and imperfectly kept. The other reason, to translate the King's own words, was "that the sojourn which those

who were of the so-called Reformed religion, or were born of Protestant parents (*parens religionnaires*), have made in our kingdom since we abolished all exercise of the said religion therein, is proof more than sufficient that they have embraced the Roman Catholic and Apostolic religion, *without which thing they would not have been suffered or tolerated therein!*" It was a palpable untruth, another and the last reiteration by Louis XIV. of his success in overthrowing Protestantism—the lying sentiment expressed upon one of the medals struck in honor of the Revocation, "*Hæresis extincta*," and the assertion of another medal that two millions of Calvinists had been brought back into the bosom of the papal Church.

The "Grand Monarque" may be said to have died with this falsehood upon his lips. The law against obstinate Huguenots was signed, as has been said, on the 8th of March, 1715; Louis XIV. died on the 1st of September of the same year. He died, apparently believing that he had completely succeeded in doing the work of exemplary piety urged upon him by Père la Chaise, and that Protestantism was forever a thing of the past. Yet we are told that the darkest hour is that which immediately precedes the dawn. In the brief interval that elapsed between the publication of the infamous law of which I have just spoken and Louis XIV.'s death, the very period when the deepest gloom hung over the fortunes of French Protestantism, the first crepuscular rays, harbingers of an approaching sunrise, struck the eyes of those almost disheartened watchers who still hoped almost against hope that the orb of day might yet again shine upon France. It was upon the 21st of August, 1715, eleven days before Louis XIV. breathed his last in the palace of Versailles, surrounded by every form of magnificence, that Antoine Court, son of a peasant, himself a homeless and proscribed preacher, gathered in a deserted quarry, near the village of Monoblet, in Lower Languedoc, the few Protestant workers, men over whose heads a sword not less fatal than that of Damocles was suspended, and organized the first Synod of the churches of the Désert. To Antoine Court justly belongs the proud title of the Restorer of French Protestantism.

He was of humble and obscure parentage, and saw the light of day about the year 1696. His Protestant father and mother had destined him, even before his birth, to the Christian ministry. But as the former died when Antoine was but four or five years old, and the latter was left a poor widow, burdened with several small children, there was little likelihood of the fulfilment of parental hopes. Happily Antoine was bright, studious, and from the start a devoted Protestant. His aversion to Roman Catholicism took concrete form in his boyhood, we may judge from his extant autobiography, chiefly in a hatred of the mass, which he tells us he "detested with all his heart." Of this he once gave a somewhat amusing illustration. Four of his schoolmates, noticing that he never set foot in the village church, resolved to take him thither by main force. For this purpose they ran after him, and overtaking him upon the stairs of his house, undertook to carry their plan into execution. They found it no easy task. The boy clung with desperation to each successive step. He could not have fought more resolutely, had his life depended on the issue of the struggle. In the end his assailants drew off discomfited, but Antoine Court had made himself thoroughly disliked. Not only children, but full-grown men derisively shouted at him on the street, "There goes Calvin's eldest son!" "*Au fils aîné de Calvin!*"

It is needless here to detail the steps by which Court, at the age of only seventeen, and in the great dearth which then prevailed of persons able in any capacity to encourage and exhort their persecuted brethren, was led to assume the duties of a preacher, committing to memory the sermons of approved ministers, and reciting them in the small meetings which convened, with fear and trembling, in retired places and often at dead of night. He had, however, a more important work to do than this. With a discernment wonderful in one so young, he saw in the fanaticism of those who pretended to have visions from heaven and to be endowed with prophetic gifts still greater impediments to the progress of Protestantism, than in the persecution to which its professors were exposed. And it was with the view of suppressing the irregular and

injurious activity of the "inspired," not less than of giving form and consistency to the government and administration of the churches, that he labored for months with pertinacious zeal, until he at length succeeded in bringing together the assembly to which reference has already been made. It was a most unpretending gathering, of which the lad who acted both as presiding officer and as secretary had not reached his twentieth year. Yet, as the first of a long series of synods stretching over the entire remainder of the eighteenth century and to the very verge of the century in which we live—as the meeting at which was roughly drawn the sketch of a great movement that was, before the fall of the Bourbon dynasty, to spread over the entire kingdom, and reclaim a great part of the ground once held by the Reformation, the "synod" in the deserted quarry of Monoblet, where the seats of the nine members and the secretary's table were rude blocks of stone, assumes an importance not second to that of the most pompous assembly of the clergy of the State church in the cathedral of Sens, or the palace of the Archbishop of Paris.

It is not my purpose on the present occasion to speak at length respecting the very interesting Synods of the Désert, whose minutes it is now possible to study in detail, since M. Edmund Hugues has given them to the world in three magnificent quarto volumes, of which the last was issued from the press early in 1887. A glimpse at their contents, and especially at some of the representations by photogravure of such early originals as have come down to us, will give an impression of the heroism of those who took part in their deliberations, more vivid than any which I could hope to convey by any words of mine. Here, the art which compels the sun's rays to do office in exactly reproducing the records of a former age, has placed before our eyes the very counterpart of the loose sheet of paper on which the scribe had compressed the transactions of the meeting. Dangerous paper this, to write or to have in one's possession,—a paper that might serve as a very passport, needing no addition of countersign or *visé*, to conduct him upon whose person it might be found straight to prison and galleys, or—more likely still—to death by hang-

ing or by being broken upon the wheel. I remember that L'Estoile, in his journal somewhere, tells us of his having burned a certain libel during the time of the League, "lest it should burn him." Well, the minutes I am speaking of, give evidence of belonging just to that dangerous kind of literature—a kind of which it would be quite as well for a disguised *pasteur du Désert* when overhauled by Bâville's guards not to be found possessed—compact enough when folded (the marks of the fold are there) to go easily into the sole of the shoe or into the lining of the coat. And yet, what eloquence there is in those tell-tale bits of paper, often no larger than a man's hand—what incidental allusions to perilous, truly manly and Christian work, work done quietly and unostentatiously, work not only unrewarded here below according to its deserts, but requited with ignominious death.

And how was this body of heroic men recruited? It was manifestly impossible to look abroad for candidates for so perilous a ministry. Few men, if any, would deem it their duty to enter a service whose labors were so constant and ill-paid, and the discharge from which was not unfrequently through a martyr's death. Moreover, the conditions were such that a stranger unacquainted with the geography of the country, the towns and villages, the roads and rivers, the woods and mountains and fords—above all, unfamiliar with the manners and customs of the inhabitants—could scarcely hope to escape for a single month the vigilant eye of the government agents, with a multitude of clerical spies of all grades, only too ready to denounce any suspicious person.

And yet the Huguenots of the *Désert* must have an educated ministry, as their fathers had had one ever since the first dawn of the Reformation.

To secure it they early lighted upon this method. If within the bounds of any synod there were discovered boys or young men of earnest character and of good parts, showing a readiness to devote themselves to the ministry, they were placed under the charge of some one of the pastors who had the greatest aptitude for teaching. But this pastor, like all his brethren, led a roving life, scarcely remaining two consecutive

days in the same town or village lest his presence should become known to the enemy, concealing himself by day and often travelling long distances in the disguise of a trader or a pedlar, sleeping on the bleak mountain-side much more frequently than in a comfortable house, and accustomed to rest as contentedly upon a bed of moss and twigs of trees as on a bed of down. His pupils had to share his fortunes and become inured to the hardship which he supported. The preparatory school for the study of theology from its migratory habits was well named "*école ambulante*."

Antoine Court, in one of his reminiscences, gives us a charming little pen-picture of such an institution, as primitive in its appointments as the university which the fancy of the lamented Garfield created, with Mark Hopkins upon one end of a log and the solitary student upon the other, and all around an unbroken wilderness. The Huguenot preacher is describing a scene in his own life in the Désert :

"I had our field-beds spread by the side of a torrent, and underneath a rock. . . . Here we encamped nearly a week; this was our lecture room, these were our grounds, these our rooms for study. In order that our time might not be wasted, and that our candidates might gain practice, I assigned them a passage of Sacred Scripture to comment upon. It was the first eleven verses of the fifth chapter of Saint Luke. They were not allowed to communicate their views to each other, nor to use other helps than the Bible. In the hours of recreation I propounded to them now a doctrinal point to explain, now a passage of Scripture, or a moral precept, or I gave them passages to harmonize. And this is the plan I pursued. As soon as I had proposed the question, I asked the youngest for his opinion, and then the rest in turn until I reached the eldest. When each one had expressed his sentiments, I again addressed the youngest, asking him whether he had not an objection to offer to the opinions of the others, and so I passed from one to another. All having argued, I gave them my own views respecting the subject proposed. When their exercises were ready, a pole was placed upon two forked sticks, and this served as a pulpit for preaching. Whenever one of the young men

resigned it, I asked all to state what they had noticed, observing the method given above."

Such a school might serve the purpose of a preparatory school, but for the higher branches of a theological education the candidates must go elsewhere. But whither should they go? At Geneva there was a university, the famous "Académie" founded by Calvin; and to its theological department the young men from the Désert might have been sent. But Geneva was too near the French borders, and was much too fearful of the armies of Louis, to be hospitable to the youth whose avowed intention it was to return and preach the gospel in France, in the very teeth of the King's commands. Besides, the instruction given at Geneva was too scholastic, the time of study too protracted, to suit the case of the candidates sent at the expense of the poor Protestants of France. It was necessary to found a new institution, the more unpretending the better, at a place somewhat less conspicuous than Geneva. It was at Lausanne then that the theological school of the churches of the Désert was established. An obscure room or two in a back street were all the outward signs of its existence, with three or four instructors, pastors of churches or professors in the State university, performing this service as a pure labor of love, and with a handful of poor lads deriving a meagre support from such sums as at irregular intervals came to them from the other side of the Jura Mountains, or from the occasional collections made in their behalf by the benevolent of Germany and Switzerland. All this was very small, almost contemptible. But, gentlemen, what is small, what is contemptible, becomes invested with importance and honor when poverty and privation link themselves to the accomplishment of great moral designs. What has induced that ill-clothed, under-fed young man, whose touching letters to his family in France may have fallen under your eyes, to come to Lausanne and undergo so much want and hardship? Is it the prospect of honorable distinction, ease or wealth? So far from it, he is educating himself for a career than which few could be supposed to offer less to allure the imagination or to gratify the ambition of men. The theological school of the Désert at Lausanne is well designated in the

expressive words of Michelet, as "that strange school of death, which, while it forbade an exaggerated enthusiasm (*l'exaltation*) in a modest and prosaic way, never tired of sending forth martyrs and of furnishing food for the scaffold to fatten upon."

The heroism displayed by the Huguenots of the Désert was not, however, let us remember it, confined to the pastors who had devoted themselves to their perilous undertaking. Simple men taken from the lowest ranks set a precious example which the highest might well have emulated. If the veteran minister Jacques Roger, when asked by the officer sent to arrest him what his name was, could answer with perfect composure, "I am he whom you have been seeking for six-and-thirty years; it was high time you found me," the plain peasant Roque, falsely accused of having, single-handed, undertaken to rescue seven Huguenot women from the hands of a detachment of soldiers that was escorting them, so conducted himself before his execution as to amaze both friends and foes by the aptness of his repartees. An over-zealous abbé, noticing Roque's rejection of the spiritual consolation offered by some dozen or more of monks, took the poor Huguenot by the collar with both his hands, and bade him remember that within two hours he would appear in the presence of his Maker, and that, being in a damnable religion, it was impossible but that, if he did not forsake it, he would go to hell. "Ah, sir," instantly replied Roque, in his *patois*—"ah, sir, if you believed that there is a hell, you would not persecute me as you do!" And a little later, when urged to embrace Roman Catholicism as the better religion, "What! How can I believe your religion to be good, when I see you every day dipping your hands in the blood of Christians?" The learned and eloquent judge Anne du Bourg, whose last words before his execution, in 1559, almost two full centuries earlier, are said to have made more converts than a hundred ministers could have done—Anne du Bourg himself, the most illustrious victim ever immolated on the funeral pyre in France, could not have expressed the argument against a persecuting church more tersely and forcibly than did this illiterate peasant of Languedoc.

Nor were the Huguenot women a whit behind the men in courage and endurance. Of this fact the sombre *Tour de Constance*, at Aigues-Mortes, where so many were imprisoned ten, twenty, thirty, or more years, still stands an unimpeachable witness. No more forbidding and hopeless spot could have been selected.

About a score of miles from Nismes towards the south lies a tract of flat ground, broken up here and there only by pools and marshes, and sluggish streams, and canals. Another such desolate region, another such pestilential neighborhood, it would be hard to find. The only inhabited place above the size of a hamlet is the town of Aigues-Mortes, the dwellers in which depend for a livelihood upon fishing and the making of salt on the adjacent morasses. The place stands on the western verge of the delta of alluvial soil brought down by the Rhône and its tributary, the Saône, from the rocky sides of the Alps and the vine-clad hills of the Côte-d'Or; but the Rhône, having long since capriciously turned its streams into other channels, now seeks the Mediterranean much to the east.

Aigues-Mortes, that is, *Aquæ Mortuæ* or *Eaux-Mortes*, is the appropriate name of a place from which the waters have dried up and disappeared, save as they still linger in stagnant pools and channels, and where the very life flow of the human community has undergone a general paralysis. Yet Aigues-Mortes has a history stretching far back into the past, and is even now a strikingly picturesque spot. On the seashore, some three miles distant, lay the fleet of Louis IX., or St. Louis, when, in the year 1248, he undertook to fulfil the vow he had made in his illness, to lead another crusade for the recovery of the Holy Land; and it was right at the foot of the still existing walls that he entered the small bark which carried him through the narrow channel, now neglected and almost choked with rubbish, to take his place upon his principal ship.

The massive walls, to which I have alluded, a great rectangle with some fifteen towers of different shapes and sizes—some square and some round—were built or completed by Philip the Bold, son of Louis IX.; but that great circular work which graces one of the angles, dwarfing all the rest by the

comparison, and which bears the strangely significant name of the *Tour de Constance*, is said by some to have been reared by Louis IX. himself. Two great round chambers, the one placed over the other, form the interior. The upper one was, during the greater part of the last century, the dungeon to which the Huguenot women were consigned—the most gloomy, the most hopeless of prisons. But little light enters the place. A few narrow slits in the walls, made to serve as embrasures, and above, a circular aperture in the high vaulted roof—these alone give a glimpse of the outside world, but admit an abundance of wind and of rain or snow in the inclement part of the year. In the centre of the dungeon a well-hole, directly under the aperture in the roof, communicates with the lower chamber, the ordinary station of the guards.

I have a list of heroic women here imprisoned, immured within these walls eighteen feet in thickness. It is due to the labors of the late M. Charles Sagnier (whose premature death, on the 15th of June last, is one of the very many and grave losses which our sister society of Paris has this year been called upon to mourn). Though far from complete, it reaches from 1706 to December 28th, 1768, when the last Huguenot woman was released, and comprises it may be eighty or one hundred names. The total number of prisoners from first to last may have been twice or thrice as great. Another official list, dated 1741, gives me the names of the thirty-two women confined in the *Tour de Constance* at that time. And would you know the reasons of their imprisonment? Here are some of them as officially noted down: “for religion’s sake,” “for having come from Geneva,” “for having been present at an assembly” (*i.e.*, of Protestant worship)—this many times—“sister of a minister executed at Montpellier,” “for relations contrary to the good of religion,” “for having been married by a minister,” because “the preacher was arrested in her house.” One of these women, a captive for merely having been present at a religious meeting, is put down as a matron of eighty years of age, and she has been already languishing two years in this damp and inclement place. But others have been here much longer—eighteen, twenty, twenty-two years—and God alone knows how many years they are yet

to stay. When, in January, 1767, the Chevalier de Boufflers visits the place, he finds, it is true, but fourteen women remaining, but the youngest of them, he affirms, is fifty years of age, she was but eight years old when she entered, and there she still remains ! It may be Marie Durand to whom the Chevalier refers, and his statement is virtually correct, though the more accurate investigator may show that he has understated her age at her admission,—she appears to have been fourteen or fifteen instead of eight,—but he does not state that poor Marie Durand's imprisonment of thirty-eight years was due solely to the fact that she was the sister of a Huguenot preacher, Pierre Durand, who away back, in 1730, was captured and executed at Montpellier ! Of this Marie Durand, it so happens that we have a simple but touching reminder in the Tour de Constance itself. Around the shaft or opening which communicates with the lower room, a sort of curb is found, and on it a few letters can still be descried—rough scratches made as with a pointed instrument. It was Marie Durand who is said to have made them with her knitting-needle, thus giving employment to a few moments of time somewhere in that long interval in which she was passing from a mere child to a gray-haired old woman. You can put the letters together. They form but one word, and the spelling defies the canons of the learned compilers of the "Dictionnaire de l'Académie"—R.E.C.I.S.T.E.Z. There you have it—"Résistez !"—"Resist !" "Endure !" "Hold your ground !" The poor prisoner of the Tour de Constance summed up in a single, ill-spelt word the history of her beloved church of the Désert during the slowly passing years, while her youthful locks were gradually blanching with years. The word might have served for the motto of the one hundred and two years of the official suppression of Protestantism. The Huguenot women in the Tour de Constance *resisted*, and lo ! the creaking door, over which Boufflers suggested that there should have been inscribed the words "*Lasciate ogni speranza o voi ch'entrate,*" opens to release the last of the many who have shed tears of anguish behind its bars. The Huguenots in many a town, village and hamlet resist ; they continue to hold their secret meetings, to preach, to celebrate marriages, to

baptize their children in the Désert ; they suffer every form of malice and manfully endure ; they do not cease to try to move the government to a more humane course ; they do not intermit their demands for the reversal of a legislation that denies them the common rights of man ; but meanwhile they continue to organize their churches, to raise up and educate new ministers, to conquer new territory, or, rather, to reconquer for Protestantism the territory it once possessed as its own, to add synod to synod, church to church, until a great part of France is dotted with places of worship. They resist, they endure ; and at length, in 1787, comes the joyful news that they are once more tolerated, and the confident and well-grounded hope that this toleration shall develop into a full and glorious liberty.

It was, under God, the resistance, the endurance of the Huguenots of the " Désert " that effected this great consummation. I would not deny the credit that may be due to foreign intercession in their behalf. I would not overlook the part which the growing intellectual movement of the age may have played. Nor could I gainsay the assertion that the interest taken by Voltaire in the cases of Jean Calas and of Paul Sirven conduced powerfully to the end. But, after all, it was the sturdy endurance of a truly religious race, that believed in a God who is concerned in the affairs of men and of nations, a race that never wavered in the conviction that that God will in due time confound exultant Injustice and give the victory to oppressed Innocence—I say, it was the sturdy endurance of the Huguenots of the Désert which enabled them to furnish to the world another signal illustration of the truth, that the battle for the Right is never lost.