

Eight years later Tescelin was again seated 'neath a solitary light; but this time it burned in the Castle of the Duke of Burgundy, not Fontaines; while across from him sat, not Alice, but the noisy and somewhat angry Hugh II.

“But, Tawny, you’re too old for that sort of thing,” growled the Duke. “Your decision makes me think that you are getting childish.”

“Well, Your Excellency,” answered Tescelin with a laugh, “did not Our Lord say something would happen to us if we all did not become like little children?”

“Yes,” came the quick and gruff reply, “but He wasn’t talking about second childhood! It’s simplicity that He wants, not senility; and senility is all that I can see in this act of yours. Come, be yourself!”

“Isn’t it strange, my lord, that you should make use of the very expression my boy, Bernard, used? His answer to every objection and his final exhortation was, ‘Come, be yourself!’”

“That Bernard of yours has caused me more trouble in the past five years than a besieging army. He began by taking thirty of my best men to Citeaux. Since then my Duchy has gone fanatic; every knight that was or was-to-be goes to Citeaux, Clairvaux, or one of their filiations. Now he’s taking you, my best counselor. When and where will he stop? Will it be my turn next?”

There was an undercurrent of humor in Tescelin’s voice as he made answer saying, “Hugh I ended his days at Cluny; why shouldn’t Hugh II go to Clairvaux?”

“Because it’s madness! That’s why. Sheer madness. Come, Tescelin, you’re almost seventy years old. What can you do at the Abbey?”

Tescelin arose at that question, clasped his hands behind his back, and started to pace up and down in front of Burgundy’s Duke. “Your Excellency,” he finally said, “I’m going to tell you a story. Don’t interrupt unless you have to. As you say, I’m almost seventy years old. I’ve had a full life, a long life, a happy life. Oh, there have been shadows and sorrows and bitter disappointments; but looking at it whole and entire, it has been happy. I was born of noble parents; for that I have to thank God. From my father I received my strength of body and from my mother, Eva of Grancy, whatever piety of soul I had. When I was twenty-five, I saw the Sepulchre of Christ and stood on Mount Calvary. That does something to a person, Your Excellency. Life looks a lot different after that. On my way back from the Holy Land I almost died of fever. I was cured by a relic of St. Ambrosia. And let me tell you, *that* does something to a person!

“You know, Your Excellency, we men of nobility and prowess at arms become very self-sufficient; we practically forget that we are dependent beings. A skirmish with Death or a visit to the place where God died makes one think differently. Well, these two telling experiences had hardly settled in my soul when I married an angel, if ever earth held one. She taught me more practical piety than even my pilgrimage had. Alice of Montbar, my lord, was a soul of burning Faith. She saw the world and all things in the world through eyes that you and I and the rest of us seldom use; she saw everything in the light of Faith, everything as part of God’s plan. Nothing could disturb her, for every happening was somehow or other a ‘coming of Christ’ to her. Constant contact with such a person does

much to a man. She made my life different. She made me different.”

Tescelin paused in his talking, but not in his pacing. After making two turns of the room he resumed his narrative in a lower tone but one that had a more gripping ring to it. “She died young,” he said. “Alice was only forty when she left us. That hurt, Your Excellency, hurt much; hurt deep in the dark of night and in the sunlit glory of day. It still hurts. They say, ‘Time heals all wounds’; maybe they are right; but let me tell you that it takes a long, long time for some wounds. Understand me, my lord, I’m talking about loneliness, not about lack of resignation. I know that it was God’s will that she go when she did; I was resigned then, and have ever been. But resignation does not fill the void. No, indeed! And yet, God does balance things. I had a replica of Alice in Humbeline; she acted like her, looked like her, almost thought like her. Then a vision of a stirring old age was given me as I saw my older sons win knighthood. First Guy, then Gerard, and then young Andrew. I thought that my down-going years would be spent amidst the clatter of hoofs and the clash of armor as my lads did all that I had done and more. But you know what happened. Bernard took every one of them. Think of that, my lord, every one of them! And I was left with a Castle that was filled with empty echoes. Don’t you think that that hurt?”

Again Tescelin stopped talking but kept pacing. Suddenly, however, he stopped short before the Duke’s chair and said, “Now, Your Excellency, let me tell you something. I have had what many will call ‘a blessed life’. And why? Because I was nobly born, given tremendous estates, won a lovely wife, have always been fortunate in battle, had the high favor of my liege lord and a family that was a credit. But, Your Excellency, these people do not know the real blessings of my life. No! But I’ll tell you, and I’ll say that the greatest blessings that I ever received were those that most people would call sorrows! I can thank God for much, my lord, but I can never thank Him enough for beating me to my knees, putting tears in my eyes and tears in my heart, and forcing me to say, ‘Thou art the Lord God of all.’ Your Excellency, there is nothing in the whole wide world that will make us realize what we are, that we are only tiny, dependent creatures of God—there is nothing, I say, like sorrow”; and with that he brought his fist down on the table before the Duke of Burgundy’s face.

After a little pause he went on saying, “Five years have passed since Bernard and the boys went to Citeaux. They have been the longest and loneliest five years of my life; and yet, perhaps the most profitable. Ah, my lord, there is nothing like solitude to mother thought. My huge, empty Castle has been a solitude to me and the big thought that it has brought forth is this: Life is only to get close to God; nothing else matters!”

He paced the length of the room again, then said, “Well, to come to my point. You know that Bernard was at Fontaines a short while ago. You likewise know that he preached a very powerful sermon on hell. But what you don’t know is that he and I had a long talk in which I told him much that I have just told you. His reply was that God was calling me to the cloister. I was not exactly startled, but I did object and objected on the very grounds you have objected this evening. ‘What can a man of seventy do in the Abbey?’ Do you know his answer?”

“What was it?”

“He answered with a single question. He looked at me and said, ‘Can’t you pray?’”

Tescelin let the three words have their effect on the Duke before he went on by saying, "Without waiting for reply he said, 'A child of seven can lift its heart and mind to God; I suppose a man of seventy can do the same. We have plenty of strong, young workers; we can make use of more old, ardent prayers. Martha got dinner for Our Lord, but Mary chose the better part.' Then, my lord, he said a thing that has given me food for thought ever since; it is the most helpful truth that I have meditated in months, aye, in years; it is the most inspiring fact that I have thought on all my life. He said, 'There is no such thing as a useless old man in God's wide world! God never does a useless thing. He does not give life to one who is useless; as long as man breathes God has a special use for him!' Isn't that but common sense, my lord? And yet, how often do we look upon people, especially old people, as useless! We're all wrong. God never gives life to one who is useless! So you see why I go to Clairvaux—I am not useless and I can pray."

The Duke was greatly impressed by Tescelin's manner and message. He watched his counselor's every move and grasped his every word. The last sentence struck him so forcefully that he started visibly. But before he could speak Tescelin resumed his story with, "And now, Your Excellency, one last reason. All my life I have had a great concern for God's Church; and all my life my heart has ached because of what princes have done to that Church. Hence, it was like my own heart speaking when my boy said, 'Come to Clairvaux and pray for God's Church; come and weep for sinners.' There, my lord, in very brief is why an old man of seventy goes to the Abbey to become a lay brother. It's not loneliness for my boys; it is love for my God. My arms are weak. My step is slow. But my heart and my mind can be lifted up to Him; and that is prayer. I will not be useless. I'll do penance and I'll pray. That will be giving glory to God, and to give Him glory is the only purpose for existing. Can a man of my years make any other answer to the sharp, short, inspiring question, 'Can't you pray?'"

The Duke's whole demeanor had changed as Tescelin spoke. He had never seen his Counselor so animated or deeply serious before, nor had he ever heard him speak with such force and feeling. He arose at Tescelin's last question, put out his hand and said, "Give me your hand, Tawny, and let me say that I feel favored by God to have known you. Go, by all means, go! I'll take care of your estates as you have outlined and I'll look after Humbeline as if she were my own daughter. Go and serve me in a new way. Pray for me. And tell your boy, Bernard, that his question, 'Can't you pray?' and his remark that no creature is useless mean much to me. I shall never forget them." With that two noblemen clasped hands and said more by the pressure of fingers and the light in their eyes than they had with their lips.

Death on the World's Most Bitter Battlefield

Just two years from the time Tescelin and Hugh of Burgundy parted, Gerard, the man of one idea, was found kneeling beside the heaped up mound of a freshly filled grave. Standing across from him and watching his every move was Geoffrey de la Roche, the Prior of Clairvaux. Gerard had been kneeling statuelike for some time; his eyes alone moved; they wandered from iron cross at the head of the grave to the dank dirt that formed the mound. Suddenly he flung himself full length on the grave, kissed the cross and the mound and broke into a heart-broken sob as he moaned, "Forgive me, Father, for ever thinking that you could be a coward." Tears flowed fast and the stern, ascetic monk was

but a boy again. The Prior had been waiting for something like this. He moved now, bent down, put his hands on the shaking shoulders and said, "Come, Gerard, come to my room and tell me all about it."

Hardly had they entered the room when Gerard broke out again and sobbed, "I'm not crying in sorrow Geoffrey; I'm crying in shame. It's not for my father I weep; it's for myself. Think of it! One time I said that he was a coward. Oh, what sort of a fool was I? He told me that I'd understand one day, and I'm telling you, this is the day!" Geoffrey wisely waited for the deeply moved man to tell his story in his own way. Gerard went on, "You've seen him for two full years, Geoffrey; he was regular, wasn't he?"

"Most regular," came the reply.

"Would anyone, who did not know, suspect that this aged lay brother known as Tescelin was the father of Clairvaux's Abbot and the father of five others in the community?"

"Never."

"Have you ever thought what that meant, Geoffrey? My father, who had commanded hundreds all his life, who was Counselor and intimate friend of Burgundy's Duke, who was Lord of Fontaines and all its dependencies, took orders from his boys! Geoffrey, that calls for heroism. We can all get used to the demands of our vow of Poverty, and find no great difficulty in observing our vow of Chastity; but who is there, who calls himself a man and has had any experience, who will not admit that he feels an almost instinctive rebellion against obeying a fellow man?"

"It is the surging of our innate independence," agreed Geoffrey.

"Yes, and how it surges when the one who commands is in many respects your equal! What must it have cost my father, then, to have obeyed his boys? Geoffrey, it's miraculous."

"It is," put in the Prior, "and I say that, not because he is your father, but because I know something of his life before he came here. Contrast his last two years with any other years of his life and you'll have more reason to exclaim. Think of it, Gerard, your father rose at two A.M.—and why? Only to praise God. He worked on the farm and with the cattle for long hours at a stretch—and why? Why should he, who had been lord, knight, and counselor, soil his hands and weary his back at such menial labors? Why? Only to praise God. He kept silence almost the whole day through, was satisfied with the poorest of clothing and the plainest of food—and why?"

"Why should Tescelin, Lord of Fontaines and favorite of the Duke, spend his old age doing the seemingly foolish thing of wearying his body with hard work and denying it all the niceties of life, resting it on a hard bed for only a few hours and refreshing it with only the plainest of plain vegetables? Why? Why? Why?—Only to praise God! What an inspiration he has been to all of us! Manuscripts and books are good to help us on to sanctity; the voice of the living teacher is better, but for real results give me the sight of an old warrior going through the routine of the day with the light of love in his eyes and a song in his heart that is best of all! And that, Gerard, was your father."

"Thank you, Geoffrey," said Gerard as he wiped away the tears. "I am his son; naturally I would admire him, but to have you pay the tribute that I feel is his due, consoles me

greatly. He was a warrior, every inch of him. And his last two years proved it more conclusively than his sixty-eight preceding. He died on what I am coming to consider the world's most bitter battlefield, where man must conquer not only the world and the devil, but also and especially himself. My father told me that there was a greater conquest than that of vanquishing a foe who comes at you from without, clad in armor and armed with steel. He proved that to me the past two years. But what I am ashamed of, Geoffrey, and what I will be eternally ashamed of is the fact that one day I thought him a coward. I was young then. I didn't know what bravery was. I have learned since, for I have learned what it takes to prove your love for God. My father has taught me well; I must live worthy of such a sire. He told me that he'd teach me a deeper loyalty and a greater love. He has. It is love for God that makes the life of a man great, and makes a man live greatly. My father had it."

There was a new light in Gerard's eyes as he said it and Geoffrey was glad that he had waited at the grave. This interview had made an admirer out of a grieving man. Gerard left then to seek out his brother Bernard; and as the door closed on his retreating form Geoffrey said, "Yes, your father had it; and without any fear of error I say 'like father, like son.'"

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Can you blame the grateful and ever appreciative Order of Citeaux for calling this grand old warrior "Venerable"?

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