

CHAPTER XVII

THE HUGUENOTS—TRAVELS IN FRANCE

MY new occupation was of a comparatively easy sort. It required attention, judgment, trustworthiness ; and I hope that I did the work allotted to me, thoroughly and faithfully. But there is no need to go into any details about it.

Among other things, I required to travel about the country a good deal. In this occupation I gained change of scene, healthy associations, and increasing knowledge of character. I did not altogether give up the use of my literary faculty. I read a good deal, and made many notes. In course of time, I arranged a perfect storehouse of information relative to race and biography. Some of this I have used, but the bulk of it remains unused.

In the course of my travels, I think I must have visited all the principal towns and cities in Britain. I was asked to deliver lectures at the Philosophical Institution at Edinburgh, at the Glasgow Athenæum, and at Liverpool and Manchester. But I was averse to lecturing, and declined the invitations. I did, however, go to Huddersfield, and deliver an address on Technical Education, in October 1867—long before the subject had become matter of public agitation. The Society of Arts did me the honour of printing

my address in their Journal of the 13th December of that year.

When I went to Dublin, I consented to give a lecture on "The Huguenots" before the Young Men's Christian Association. I had an excellent and most sympathising audience; and received many compliments from the distinguished persons who were present, and I afterwards gave the same lecture at Hull. I was induced to prosecute my inquiries into the subject, and at length became greatly interested in it. The Huguenots, banished out of France for conscience' sake about two hundred years ago, were all men of a high standard of character; and their descendants for the most part shared in their distinction.

A man who is ready to give up his fortune and his country for the sake of his religion, will commonly be found a man not only of unusual virtue, but of unusual vigour and determination. Aristocrats who were ready to sacrifice their honours and titles, and owners of broad lands who were ready to surrender their estates rather than give up their religion, must necessarily have been persons of remarkable courage and inflexibility of character. Hence the British officers descended from the Huguenot refugees were among the bravest; the merchants were among the truest and most conscientious; and the mechanics were among the cleverest and most ingenious. They were for the most part marked men, even among themselves; and when they came among us, they generally became leaders.

At the same time, I may say that the history of the Huguenots was the history of a party who were beaten in the battle of life. The usual feeling is in favour of men who have succeeded; and the men

who have failed are generally supposed to have deserved their failure. Hence the Huguenots have been neglected. Courtly writers blot them out of history, as Louis XIV. desired to blot them out of France. Most of the histories of France published in England contain little notice of them. I might have used as the motto of my book the following lines by Mr Story :—

“ I sing the hymn of the conquered, who fell in the Battle of Life,—
 The hymn of the wounded, the beaten, who died overwhelmed in the
 strife ;
 The hymn of the low and the humble, the weary, the broken in
 heart,
 Who strove and who failed, acting bravely a silent and desperate
 part ;
 Whose youth bore no flower on its branches, whose hopes burned in
 ashes away,
 From whose hands slipped the prize they had grasped at, who stood
 at the dying of day
 With the wreck of their life all around them, unpitied, unheeded,
 alone,
 With Death swooping down o'er their failure, and all but their Faith
 overthrown.” *

The Huguenots was published in November 1867, and was, on the whole, well received. Some 10,000 copies of the book were printed and sold. It was nothing like so successful as some of my other books, but it was a source of great pleasure to me to write it ; and I believe that it led the way to more elaborate works. In the first editions I invited communications from the descendants of banished Huguenots. This led to much pleasant correspondence, and the influx of a considerable amount of additional material. Some of my correspondents desired to obtain for me information regarding their missing ancestry ; while

* W. W. Story—*A Poet's Portfolio*.

others corrected the statements I had made. The latter were very welcome, as they enabled me to correct the genealogical history in all further issues of the work. I will only quote one of these letters—that from Lord Eversley, for eighteen years speaker of the House of Commons — because of its peculiar interest :—

“HECKFIELD PLACE, WINCHFIELD,
“*20th February 1868.*”

“SIR,—

“I have read with great interest your account of the religious persecutions in France, consequent upon the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. But I am anxious to correct an inaccuracy with respect to that branch of the Lefevre Family with which I am connected.

“I cannot find an old pedigree which was in existence some years ago in our family ; but I have been unable to trace any connection between them and Dr Lefevre of Poitou, or the celebrated martyr Isaac Lefevre, who, after suffering great persecution for many years, died in the prisons of France. But I enclose a pedigree, commencing with Peter Lefevre, who was born in 1650, having succeeded to his paternal estates in Normandy, a few years before he was forced to fly with his family to England rather than renounce his faith. When he arrived there, he settled at Canterbury, and embarked in trade with the capital he brought over with him. At his death, his son Isaac was apprenticed to the trade, and afterwards set up for himself as a scarlet dyer near Spitalfields. His brother, as you have correctly stated, entered Marlborough’s army as a lieut.-colonel, and afterwards resided at Walthamstow, and was high sheriff, I believe, for Essex. Isaac Lefevre’s son John was my maternal grandfather, and owned the property at Old Ford and Bromley, which is at present in my possession.

“The pedigree I send you was made out from some old MSS. in our family, and may be relied upon as authentic ; and I forward it to you, as I have no doubt you will be glad, in the next edition of your

work, to make the corrections it suggests.—I remain,
Sir, your obedient servant,

“EVERSLEY.”

I may also give the following letter from Sir J. R. Lefroy, the member of a family which has given some distinguished men to the army and the bench:—

“9th June 1868.

“MY DEAR SIR,—

“You asked me two or three months ago for some information respecting the descent of the Lefroy family from the Walloon refugees. I happened at the time to be engaged in some family researches, and postponed my reply until I had concluded them. The Irish family of the name is descended from the elder son of Anthony Lefroy, a merchant of Leghorn, who died in 1779; and my family from his second son. Thus Chief-Justice Lefroy and my father were first cousins.

“Anthony Lefroy was the descendant of Anthoine Loffroy of Cambray, who came to England in Elizabeth’s reign, probably in 1579, and settled at Canterbury, where his descendants followed the business of silk-dyeing for about one hundred and fifty years—as long, in fact, as that branch of trade flourished in Kent. Although the family is now very numerous, it all died down to my great grandfather, the second Anthony, in the last century; and from him we all come. He was a great antiquary and collector. His museum, when it was sold in 1763, was one of the finest ever collected by a private person: it contained over 6600 coins.

“The tradition is that the family motto, ‘Unitare Sperno,’ relates to the resistance of our ancestors to the persecutions of Alva, and that a Cap of Liberty which we bear in our arms, is derived from the Beggar’s Cap assumed when the party of Egmont took the name of ‘Les Gueux.’ Anthony Lefroy was a friend of Thomas Hollis, and is frequently mentioned in his Memoirs. Hollis displayed excessive fondness for that emblem, and I have sometimes conjectured that it may have a more modern origin.

We possess, I think, nearly all Hollis's publications presented to Anthony Lefroy.—Believe me faithfully,
"J. H. LEFROY."

In the course of preparing *The Huguenots, their Settlements, Churches, and Industries in England and Ireland*, and another subsequent work, *The Huguenots in France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, I made several journeys through France for the purpose of visiting the places made memorable by these illustrious men. I was now able to extend my holidays to three weeks, instead of a fortnight, which was the extent of my usual holiday while I was connected with the railway company. But a great deal of interest can be crammed into three weeks' or even a fortnight's holiday. Among other places, I went to visit the port of La Rochelle, so celebrated in the early history of the Huguenots.

The town is very little changed since it was besieged and taken by the king's army under Cardinal Richelieu in the year 1628; although the embankment or *digue* has been cleared away. It was by means of this that the Cardinal blockaded the mouth of the port, and starved the inhabitants of La Rochelle into submission to the royal authority. Indeed, the two towers erected at the entrance to the harbour, for the purpose of commanding the approach, while the port was still in possession of the English (in the time of Charles V. of France), are still standing complete, a testimony to the admirable mason work of the English artisans.

After the town was captured by Richelieu, it never regained its former pre-eminence. It is now a sluggish, sleepy place, and seems to belong to an old world, which we have long left behind us. Most of the old houses are standing, though some of them

are riddled by bullets fired during the siege, especially one of the towers above referred to—the Tour de la Chaine. The Church of Ste Marguérite, in which Richelieu celebrated mass after entering the town, now forms part of the establishment of the Oratorian Frères Chrétiens. The Huguenot temple was pulled down, but the street in which it stood is still called the Rue de la Prêche. The descendants of Guiton, the heroic governor of the town, still live in the place; but they are Catholics, like the descendants of the great Duquesne at Poitiers.

M. Delmas, the Protestant pastor, took me over the town, and pointed out the most notable places during the siege—more especially the Bastion de l'Évangile, where the Duke of Anjou's assault was repulsed with immense loss. He took me also to his chapel, and took out a mass of old worm-eaten papers from his document box; but he said the principal manuscripts connected with the Rochelle Protestants were in the Marsh Library at Dublin, whither they had been carried by Dr Bouherau, whose father had been pastor of the place. M. Delmas said that the old Protestant families almost entirely disappeared after the siege; many of them emigrated to England, and the others went into the country—where they either belonged to the "Church in the Desert," or belonged to no church whatever—except to the Church not made with hands.

M. Delmas was not hopeful of the future. "If they teach fatalism," he said, "from our professors' chairs, how can we hope to gain adherents? We cannot even expel materialists or deists without the consent of the Government. Of course we are divided—how can it be otherwise? As for the Catholics,

they are for the most part formalists—especially as regards the men. When they do know anything, unfortunately they go out into the void of infidelity. They do not come to us.”

As I paced the ramparts of La Rochelle, I bethought me of the enormous sums raised by taxes on human industry, apparently for the purpose of perpetuating hatred between different classes of the community. The money expended on these unproductive works would have been much better cast into the sea. Wherever I went, there were still armed men to be seen—foot and dragoons—without any apparent cause for their existence. The thought occurred, not so much whether Europe is Catholic or Protestant, but whether it is Christianised—whether it is civilised?

When I left La Rochelle, I crossed the centre of France by Poitiers, Gueret, and Montluçon to Moulins, the scene of Sterne's encounter with Maria. The inn at which I put up—though the best in the place—was a very poor one, without any of the appliances of modern and even healthy comfort; so I sped off for a few days' rest at Vichy, where the hotel accommodation is of an unexceptionable character. I then went on to Lyons to join my friend Mr Milsom, who, though a Londoner, had settled in that city as a silk merchant. He was about to take his annual journey of inspection and relief to the poor Protestant ministers of Dauphiny, and had invited me to accompany him.

We went by railway to Grenoble, whence we drove along the valley of the Romanche and the Drac to Briançon, a fortified frontier town situated almost on the confines of France. From thence the journey was performed principally by walking, some-

times at the rate of from twenty-five to thirty miles a day. But, as I have already fully described this journey in *The Country of the Vaudois* annexed to my volume on *The Huguenots in France after the Revocation*, I need not further refer to it here.

I availed myself of the opportunity of another summer holiday in a following year, to visit the mountainous country of the Cevennes, and see the places made memorable by the peasant Camisards, during the war which they carried on against their tyrant monarch during so many years. I also visited the fine southern towns and cities of Nismes, Arles, Montpellier, and Marseilles. But, as I have given the results of my journey elsewhere, I need not repeat them here.

After the appearance of the *Huguenots in England and Ireland*, a French translation of it appeared in the following year. But as the sheets were printed at Strasburg, part of the impression was destroyed during the siege of that city by the German army. When those sheets had been reprinted, the work was published with an introductory preface by M. Athanase Coquerel, *fil.* M. Coquerel, after some complimentary remarks, says of the author of the work: "He is not an author by profession. Occupied day by day in his place of business in London, he has almost unconsciously acquired the habit of consecrating his leisure to literary work free from pretence, and inspired by the serious desire of being useful. Become an author almost without dreaming of it, Mr Smiles has found reputation in this persevering and elevating employment of his hours of liberty. He thus forms one more example, and not the least remarkable, of the self-helping men whose lives he has celebrated, and he has found rich

resources in himself by the constant and rational exercise of a firm and persevering will."

M. Coquerel complimented me very much; yet I did not quite become an author without dreaming of it. Indeed, from what I have said, it will be observed that I served a long apprenticeship to literature. It was only by dint of labour that I eventually overcame the difficulties that stood in my way. Success in authorship is not to be achieved without labour, any more than success in art, science, or business.

I remember very well the visit of M. Coquerel to my place of daily occupation. He was a kind, bright, cheerful gentleman—a very Celt. I have forgotten the subject of our conversation, but he refers to it in his preface, and I quote his words:—

"How had he been led to turn from his ordinary studies, to devote himself to the history of French refugees in England because of their religion? Here is his answer to this question addressed to myself: 'In writing out the history of many celebrated inventors and mechanics, I was struck with meeting on my way with so large a number of inventors with French names. Surprised at the fact, I sought for the cause, and there soon accumulated before me so large a number of interesting facts, that instead of devoting a chapter to the subject, I found enough to occupy an entire volume. I then studied from the beginning the history of the Huguenots: before long they inspired me with a vivid interest, which increased when I had been able to examine the Registers of their churches or congregations in England, as contained in the numerous books and documents preserved at Somerset House in the offices of the Registrar-General. Besides these, I obtained a great deal of information from the descendants of the Exiles for Conscience' Sake; and now you have the results of my investigations in the published book.'"

The editor thus concludes his preface: "We are amongst those who wish to see become more common, more close, more affectionate, the relations of France and England, not only in the interest of these two great peoples, magnificently gifted and endowed each with a genius that is the complement the one of the other, but for the good of the entire human family. We are happy, indeed, to contribute our part, however feeble it may be, to draw closer bonds so useful. It seems to us that, by their community of religion, by their history, their spirit of inquiry and examination, the French Protestants have in this respect incurred a peculiar responsibility. It is with such sentiments that we are happy to recommend to French readers the present work. To the special esteem which the author deserves, we associate the most cordial sympathy for the conscientious efforts of his translator, a gentleman equally familiar with both languages since his birth. It is with pleasure that he consecrates his pen to a work of filial piety in memory of our persecuted ancestors, and in ardent fraternal goodwill toward our brothers of England, their descendants, or their hosts."