

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"CAPTAIN THE CURÉ."*

Louvain! What depths of tragedy, romance and pathos now surround the name of that once beautiful city. The most unimaginative have been stirred to the heart's core at its fate.

The siege is the setting for the book under notice this week, and an appealing and moving record it is. Familiar as we are with its tragedy in our newspapers, we accept the incidents recorded, terrible and heart-breaking as they are, with the conviction that they, God help the city, are something less than the reality, and that the fate of the Oyyen family is but a restrained imagery of hundreds of its unhappy inhabitants.

The European War, eleven days old. Louvain keeping the Feast of the Assumption, with street processions, called forth remonstrance from some, and indignant partisanship from the Curé van Susterens, the central figure of the book.

A powerful masterful character, he had had his way in this as in all else with his flock.

Sister Dorothea is represented by a tall and unusually beautiful young woman, Marie-Ursule, the daughter of much respected Dr. Oyyen. Otilie, his other daughter, with her Greuze-like face, was on this occasion, as on many others, in disgrace with the Curé, but this fact sat but lightly on her frivolous disposition.

A few days later, following the hideous orgies by drunken Germans, Van Susterens meets a procession of horsemen, and on the pillion of the leading warrior was a bare-headed girl with a pair of white kid-shod feet dangling gracefully down by the horse's shoulder. Van Susterens pushed forward and fell back with a groan of horror. He had recognised Otilie Oyyen.

"Pushing up the Rue St. Anne he was only dully surprised to find himself and his companions imprisoned in their own church. As the night wore on he felt the creeping hands of other prisoners certain of being shot at sunrise asking to make their dying confessions. His dry lips could not utter a prayer. He was stunned into the stupidity of horror."

Towards morning he remembers the keys in his cassock pocket, which effect their release. The finding of the body of Marie-Ursule, the whitest flower of his flock, dead of shame, robs him of his faith in God.

Raving under the dawn, he says:

"From this moment I cease to be a priest, and become a soldier. The lambs of my fold are torn and ravaged by the wolf. I will be a wolf; I too will tear and revenge. Away with all I loved, all I worked for. All is gone. I take the sword instead of the Cross."

* By Margaret Baillie-Saunders. Hodder & Stoughton, London,

Vintmeyer, who has secretly loved Otilie, inquires of Van Susterens of her whereabouts, and learns that she has chosen dishonour before death. "They live," he said, "with wrecked souls—if they smile. It is those who resist the shame who are murdered." Marie-Ursule was buried at night by Jodoc and Vintmeyer, with the Curé's cassock for a shroud. On her breast lay the Curé's crucifix. "With groans and tears they said Aves for her soul. But they knew her white soul was already with her Redeemer."

As for Van Susterens, a fellow officer said of him, "he beats the whole *Garnisoen* for savagery. The men say he has the devil."

He meets poor little Otilie, who, disguised in uniform, is acting as a spy for her captors. Her pitiful, broken life, and her extreme youth, make a powerful appeal to his manhood, and he further defies his priesthood by giving her the protection of his name.

Very beautiful is the return of Van Susterens to his sacred office. He is appealed to to say the Easter Mass, there being no other priest available.

"He knew he must feed the hungry flock with his own hands. One after the other he stooped over them, said the words of administration, bent his brown, shamed face reverently down to theirs. He was not worthy to touch them. The boy with a curly, dark head at the end of the line, he was the last. God's mercy be thanked, he was able to—"

A violent noise and shock. "*Les Prussiens!* To the guns! To the guns!"

A little later on the doctor said, "That unknown *aumonier* of yours is curiously wounded. He happens to be hit on both hands, both feet, and the left side." H. H.

VERSES.

Tell me, tell me, smiling child,
What the past is like to thee.
An autumn evening, soft and mild,
With a wind that sighs mournfully.

Tell me, what is the present hour?
A green and flowery spray,
Where a young bird sits, gathering its power
To mount and fly away.

And what is the future, happy one?
A sea beneath a cloudless sun,
A mighty, dazzling, glorious sea,
Stretching into infinity.

—Emily Brontë.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"Don't imagine that hospitality is a gratuity. Every meal to which you are invited you must earn, and you must share the responsibility of every party you attend. Your success in life will depend not on how much you yourself enjoy things, but on how much you can make other people enjoy them."—*Edith Henrietta Fowler*.

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