

THE RED VINEYARD

**BY
REV. B. J. MURDOCH**

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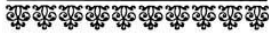
Chapter XCIX Through the Rhineland

Chapter C L'Envoi

THE RED VINEYARD



REV. B. J. MURDOCH



THE RED VINEYARD

*To the memory of
all those men
With whom I
walked up and
down
The ways of The
Red Vineyard;
But especially to
the memory of
those
Who stopped in
the journey, and
now
Rest softly in
their little green
bivouacs
In the shadow of
the small white
crosses,
This book is
affectionately
dedicated by
their
Friend and
Comrade*

The Author

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THE RED VINEYARD

CHAPTER I

A LITTLE SPECULATION

“I’ll give you just three nights in the front line trench before your hair will turn grey,” said a brown haired priest, looking at me with a slightly aggressive air.

I remained quiet.

“You’ll not be very long in the army till you’ll wish yourself out of it again,” was the not very encouraging assertion of a tall, thin priest who suffered intermittently from dyspeptic troubles.

Still I did not speak.

Another priest, whose work was oftener among old tomes than among men, said slowly and, as was his wont, somewhat seriously, that it surprised him very much to note my eagerness to go to war. He did not consider it in keeping with the dignity of the priest to be so belligerently inclined. Did I not recall that I was an ambassador of the meek and lowly Christ—the Prince of Peace?

Had I obeyed the first impulse, I think my reply would have been colored with a little asperity; but as I was weighing my words, a gentle white-haired old priest, stout and with red cheeks, said to me as he smiled kindly; “Ah, Father, you are to be envied. Think of all the good you will be able to do for our poor boys! Think of the souls you will usher up to the gates of heaven!”

He shook his head slowly from side to side two or three times, and the smile on his kind old face gave place to a look of longing as he

continued, somewhat regretfully: “Ah, if I were a younger man I’d be with you, Father. All we older men can do now is to pray, and you may rest assured I shall remember you often—you and your men.”

I looked at the old priest gratefully. “Thank you, Father,” I said, and I thought of Moses of old, with arms outstretched.

None of the other priests spoke for a while, and I gazed into the fire of dry hardwood that murmured and purred so comfortably in the large open fire-place, built of small field stones. I was thinking earnestly and when the conversation was again resumed I took no part in it. In fact, I did not follow it at all, for I was wondering, among other things, if my hair would really turn grey after a few nights in the front line trenches. However, I did not worry; for I concluded it would be wiser to wait until I should arrive at the trenches, where I might have the evidence of my senses.

I gave but a passing thought to the words of the good priest who was a little dyspeptic. He had never been in the Army, and where was his reason for assuming that I should not like the life? Of course, I did not mind what the old priest, whose work was so often among old books, had said about my being an ambassador of the Prince of Peace. I felt that this priest had got his ideas a little mixed. Not very long before I had heard him vent his outraged feelings when the French government had called the priests of France to fight for the Colors. He had been horrified. So I surmised that he imagined I had voluntarily offered my services as a combatant. I had not.

The conversation continued, but I heeded it not. I was busy meditating on the words of the saintly old priest with the red

cheeks. How well he understood, I thought. And the flames of the fire shot in and out among the wood, purring pleasantly the while.

CHAPTER II

THE BISHOP WRITES

Up to this time I did not have the Bishop's consent. In fact, I cannot remember having mentioned in his presence my desire to go to the front with the soldiers as chaplain; but I had talked it over frequently with priests, and it never occurred to me that the Bishop had not heard of my wish, nor that he would not be in accord with it. But one morning I received a letter from the Bishop telling me plainly and firmly that he wished me to keep quiet, and not to talk so much about going to the front until I should know whether or not I would be permitted to go. He mentioned a recruiting meeting of a few nights previous, at which I had offered my services as chaplain to the battalion that was then being recruited in the diocese.

Perhaps I had been a little too outspoken at the meeting, but I had considered myself quite justified in breaking silence, since it had already come to pass that three ministers of different Protestant denominations had offered themselves as chaplains to the battalion which, though still in rather an embryonic state, gave promise of being complete in a few months. I foresaw that it would be more than half Catholic, as the population of the district from which it was being recruited was three-fourths Catholic. So I offered myself generously, not wishing to be outdone by the ministers, and then had sat down feeling that I had done well.

The following morning, however, I was not quite so sure, for when I read my words printed in the daily paper I felt just a little perturbed. What would the Bishop think? I wondered. I had not

long to wait before I knew exactly what His Lordship thought. His letter told me quite plainly.

I kept quiet. Keeping quiet, however, did not prevent me from following with interest the activities of others. Almost every evening recruiting meetings were held in different places throughout the diocese, at which old men spoke and orchestras played, and sometimes a young boy would step dance. But, most important of all, many young men enlisted. They came in great numbers, the Catholics far in the majority. Then, one morning early in the spring, the paper announced that the battalion had been recruited to full strength. The different companies would stay in the town till the following June, when the battalion would go into camp to train as a unit.

That evening a letter came from the officer in command, saying that as eighty per cent of his men were Catholics he had decided to take a Roman Catholic chaplain, and that he intended going to see the Bishop that evening.

A few days later another letter came from the Bishop saying that he had been asked for a Catholic chaplain, and as he remembered that I had seemed very eager to go with the men, he was glad to say that he was giving me permission to go. He had decided this, he added, on the Feast of the Seven Dolors of Our Lady.

“The Seven Dolors,” I said to myself quietly, two or three times. Then I fell to wishing that the Bishop had made his decision on some other feast of Our Lady. I remember now, as I stood in the quiet little room with the letter in my hand, recalling the words of the priest—that he would not give me three nights in the front line trenches before my hair would turn grey. But this thought did not

bother me very long, for I began to think of something else, and as I did the letter trembled a little with the hand that held it. "Perhaps I am not coming back," I said to myself. Then I repeated: "The Feast of the Seven Dolors! The Feast of the Seven Dolors!"

CHAPTER III

A LITTLE ADJUSTING

During the next seven or eight days from all sides I heard one question asked by young and old: "When are you going to put on the uniform, Father?" Little children to whom I had taught catechism rushed around corners or panted up narrow streets of the little town where I was stationed and smilingly asked me. Their fathers and mothers, after saying good-morning, remarked pleasantly, as an afterthought: "I suppose we'll soon be seeing you in the khaki, Father?" They seemed to anticipate real pleasure in seeing me decked in full regimentals. But the more I had evidence of this seemingly pleasant anticipation, the less inclined I felt to appear publicly in my chaplain's uniform. When the time came for a last fitting at the tailor's, I found other duties to claim my attention, until a polite little note from the proprietor of the establishment informed me that my presence was requested for a last fitting of my uniform.

Then one morning, when the spring birds that had returned were singing merrily among the trees with not the slightest thought as to their raiment, and when bursting buds were making the trees beautiful in their eagerness to drape them with bright green robes, I appeared on the public streets of the quiet little town clad in full regimentals.

I had chosen an early hour for my public appearance, thinking that my ordeal would not be so trying.

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