

The Wandering Jew — Volume 05 eBook

The Wandering Jew — Volume 05 by Eugène Sue

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

The Wandering Jew — Volume 05 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	6
Page 1.....	7
Page 2.....	9
Page 3.....	11
Page 4.....	12
Page 5.....	14
Page 6.....	16
Page 7.....	17
Page 8.....	19
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	22
Page 11.....	24
Page 12.....	26
Page 13.....	28
Page 14.....	30
Page 15.....	32
Page 16.....	34
Page 17.....	36
Page 18.....	37
Page 19.....	39
Page 20.....	41
Page 21.....	43
Page 22.....	44

Page 23.....	45
Page 24.....	47
Page 25.....	49
Page 26.....	51
Page 27.....	53
Page 28.....	54
Page 29.....	56
Page 30.....	57
Page 31.....	59
Page 32.....	61
Page 33.....	63
Page 34.....	64
Page 35.....	65
Page 36.....	67
Page 37.....	68
Page 38.....	70
Page 39.....	71
Page 40.....	72
Page 41.....	74
Page 42.....	75
Page 43.....	76
Page 44.....	78
Page 45.....	79
Page 46.....	80
Page 47.....	82
Page 48.....	84

Page 49.....	86
Page 50.....	88
Page 51.....	89
Page 52.....	91
Page 53.....	93
Page 54.....	95
Page 55.....	97
Page 56.....	98
Page 57.....	99
Page 58.....	100
Page 59.....	102
Page 60.....	104
Page 61.....	106
Page 62.....	108
Page 63.....	110
Page 64.....	112
Page 65.....	114
Page 66.....	116
Page 67.....	118
Page 68.....	120
Page 69.....	122
Page 70.....	124
Page 71.....	126
Page 72.....	127
Page 73.....	129
Page 74.....	130



Page 75.....	132
Page 76.....	134

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
CHAPTER XIV.		1
CHAPTER XV.		7
CHAPTER XVI.		11
CHAPTER XVII.		20
CHAPTER XVIII.		24
CHAPTER XIX.		31
CHAPTER XX.		40
CHAPTER XXI.		46
CHAPTER XXII.		53
CHAPTER XXIII.		58
CHAPTER XXIV.		62
CHAPTER XXV.		69

Page 1

CHAPTER XIV.

The eve of A great day.

About two hours before the event last related took place at St. Mary's Convent, Rodin and Abbe d'Aigrigny met in the room where we have already seen them, in the Rue du Milieu-des-Ursins. Since the Revolution of July, Father d'Aigrigny had thought proper to remove for the moment to this temporary habitation all the secret archives and correspondence of his Order—a prudent measure, since he had every reason to fear that the reverend fathers would be expelled by the state from that magnificent establishment, with which the restoration had so liberally endowed their society. [11]

Rodin, dressed in his usual sordid style, mean and dirty as ever, was writing modestly at his desk, faithful to his humble part of secretary, which concealed, as we have already seen a far more important office—that of Socius—a function which, according to the constitutions of the Order, consists in never quitting his superior, watching his least actions, spying into his very thoughts, and reporting all to Rome.

In spite of his usual impassibility, Rodin appeared visibly uneasy and absent in mind; he answered even more briefly than usual to the commands and questions of Father d'Aigrigny, who had but just entered the room.

“Has anything new occurred during my absence?” asked he. “Are the reports still favorable?”

“Very favorable.”

“Read them to me.”

“Before giving this account to your reverence,” said Rodin, “I must inform you that Morok has been two days in Paris.”

“Morok?” said Abbe d'Aigrigny, with surprise. “I thought, on leaving Germany and Switzerland, he had received from Friburg the order to proceed southward. At Nismes, or Avignon, he would at this moment be useful as an agent; for the Protestants begin to move, and we fear a reaction against the Catholics.”

“I do not know,” said Rodin, “if Morok may not have had private reasons for changing his route. His ostensible reasons are, that he comes here to give performances.”

“How so?”

“A dramatic agent, passing through Lyons, engaged him and his menagerie for the Port Saint-Martin Theatre at a very high price. He says that he did not like to refuse such an offer.”

“Well,” said Father d’Aigrigny, shrugging his shoulders, “but by distributing his little books, and selling prints and chaplets, as well as by the influence he would certainly exercise over the pious and ignorant people of the South or of Brittany, he might render services, such as he can never perform in Paris.”

“He is now below, with a kind of giant, who travels about with him. In his capacity of your reverence’s old servant, Morok hoped to have the honor of kissing your hand this evening.”

“Impossible—impossible—you know how much I am occupied. Have you sent to the Rue Saint-Francois?”

Page 2

“Yes, I have. The old Jew guardian has had notice from the notary. To morrow, at six in the morning, the masons will unwall the door, and, for the first time since one hundred and fifty years, the house will be opened.”

Father d'Aigrigny remained in thought for a moment, and then said to Rodin: “On the eve of such a decisive day, we must neglect nothing, and call every circumstance to memory. Read me the copy of the note, inserted in the archives of the society, a century and a half ago, on the subject of Rennepont.”

The secretary took the note from the case, and read as follows:

“This 19th day of February, 1682, the Reverend Father-Provincial Alexander Bourdon sent the following advice, with these words in the margin: Of extreme importance for the future.

“We have just discovered, by the confession of a dying person to one of our fathers, a very close secret.

“Marius de Rennepont, one of the most active and redoubtable partisans of the Reformed Religion, and one of the most determined enemies of our Holy Society, had apparently re-entered the pale of our Mother Church, but with the sole design of saving his worldly goods, threatened with confiscation because of his irreligious and damnable errors. Evidence having been furnished by different persons of our company to prove that the conversion of Rennepont was not sincere, and in reality covered a sacrilegious lure, the possessions of the said gentleman, now considered a relapsed heretic, were confiscated by our gracious sovereign, his Majesty King Louis XIV, and the said Rennepont was condemned to the galleys for life.[12] He escaped his doom by a voluntary death; in consequence of which abominable crime, his body was dragged upon a hurdle, and flung to the dogs on the highway.

“From these preliminaries, we come to the great secret, which is of such importance to the future interests of our Society.

“His Majesty Louis XIV., in his paternal and Catholic goodness towards the Church in general, and our Order in particular, had granted to us the profit of this confiscation, in acknowledgment of our services in discovering the infamous and sacrilegious relapse of the said Rennepont.

“But we have just learned, for certain, that a house situated in Paris, No. 3, Rue Saint-Francois, and a sum of fifty thousand gold crowns, have escaped this confiscation, and have consequently been stolen from our Society.

“The house was conveyed, before the confiscation, by means of a feigned purchase, to a friend of Rennepont's a good Catholic, unfortunately, as against him we cannot take



any severe measures. Thanks to the culpable, but secure connivance of his friend, the house has been walled up, and is only to be opened in a century and a half, according to the last will of Rennepont. As for the fifty thousand gold crowns, they have been placed in hands which, unfortunately, are hitherto unknown to us, in order to be invested

Page 3

and put out to use for one hundred and fifty years, at the expiration of which time they are to be divided between the then existing descendants of the said Rennepont; and it is calculated that this sum, increased by so many accumulations, will by then have become enormous, and will amount to at least forty or fifty millions of livres tournois. From motives which are not known, but which are duly stated in a testamentary document, the said Rennepont has concealed from his family, whom the edicts against the Protestants have driven out of France, the investment of these fifty thousand crowns; and has only desired his relations to preserve in their line from generation to generation, the charge to the last survivors, to meet in Paris, Rue Saint-Francois, a hundred and fifty years hence, on February the 13th, 1832. And that this charge might not be forgotten, he employed a person, whose description is known, but not his real occupation, to cause to be manufactured sundry bronze medals, on which the request and date are engraved, and to deliver one to each member of the family—a measure the more necessary, as, from some other motive equally unknown, but probably explained in the testament, the heirs are to present themselves on the day in question, before noon, in person, and not by any attorney, or representative, or to forfeit all claim to the inheritance. The stranger who undertook to distribute the medals to the different members of the family of Rennepont is a man of thirty to thirty-six years of age, of tall stature, and with a proud and sad expression of countenance. He has black eyebrows, very thick, and singularly joined together. He is known as *Joseph*, and is much suspected of being an active and dangerous emissary of the wretched republicans and heretics of the Seven United Provinces. It results from these premises, that this sum, surreptitiously confided by a relapsed heretic to unknown hands, has escaped the confiscation decreed in our favor by our well-beloved king. A serious fraud and injury has therefore been committed, and we are bound to take every means to recover this our right, if not immediately, at least in some future time. Our Society being (for the greater glory of God and our Holy Father) imperishable, it will be easy, thanks to the connections we keep up with all parts of the world, by means of missions and other establishments, to follow the line of this family of Rennepont from generation to generation, without ever losing sight of it—so that a hundred and fifty years hence, at the moment of the division of this immense accumulation of property, our Company may claim the inheritance of which it has been so treacherously deprived, and recover it by any means in its power, fas aut nefas, even by craft or violence—our Company not being bound to act tenderly with the future detainers of our goods, of which we have been maliciously deprived by an infamous and sacrilegious heretic—and because it is right to defend, preserve, and recover

Page 4

one's own property by every means which the Lord may place within one's reach. Until, therefore, the complete restitution of this wealth, the family of Rennepont must be considered as reprobate and damnable, as the cursed seed of a Cain, and always to be watched with the utmost caution. And it is to be recommended, that, every year from this present date, a sort of inquisition should be held as to the situation of the successive members of this family."

Rodin paused, and said to Father d'Aigrigny: "Here follows the account, year by year, of the history of this family, from the year 1682, to our own day. It will be useless to read this to your reverence."

"Quite useless," said Abbe d'Aigrigny. "The note contains all the important facts." Then, after a moment's silence, he exclaimed, with an expression of triumphant pride: "How great is the power of the Association, when founded upon tradition and perpetuity! Thanks to this note, inserted in our archives a century and a half ago, this family has been watched from generation to generation—our Order has always had its eyes upon them, following them to all points of the globe, to which exile had distributed them—and at last, to-morrow, we shall obtain possession of this property, at first inconsiderable, but which a hundred and fifty years have raised to a royal fortune. Yes, we shall succeed, for we have foreseen every eventuality. One thing only troubles me."

"What is that?" asked Rodin.

"The information that we have in vain tried to obtain from the guardian of the house in the Rue Saint-Francois. Has the attempt been once more made, as I directed?"

"It has been made."

"Well?"

"This time, as always before, the old Jew has remained impenetrable. Besides he is almost in his second childhood, and his wife not much better."

"When I think," resumed Father d'Aigrigny, "that for a century and a half, this house in the Rue Saint-Francois has remained walled up, and that the care of it has been transmitted from generation to generation in this family of the Samuels—I cannot suppose that they have all been ignorant as to who were and are the successive holders of these funds, now become immense by accumulation."

"You have seen," said Rodin, "by the notes upon this affair, that the Order has always carefully followed it up ever since 1682. At different periods attempts have been made to obtain information upon subjects not fully explained in the note of Father Bourdon.

But this race of Jew guardians has ever remained dumb, and we must therefore conclude that they know nothing about it.”

“That has always struck me as impossible; for the ancestor of these Samuels was present at the closing of the house, a hundred and fifty years ago. He was according to the file, a servant or confidential clerk of De Rennepont. It is impossible that he should not have known many things, the tradition of which must have been preserved in the family.”

Page 5

"If I were allowed to hazard a brief observation," began Rodin, humbly.

"Speak."

"A few years ago we obtained certain information through the confessional, that the funds were in existence, and that they had risen to an enormous amount."

"Doubtless; and it was that which called the attention of the Reverend Father-General so strongly to this affair."

"We know, then, what probably the descendants of the family do not—the immense value of this inheritance?"

"Yes," answered Father d'Aigrigny, "the person who certified this fact in confession is worthy of all belief. Only lately, the same declaration was renewed; but all the efforts of the confessor could not obtain the name of the trustee, or anything beyond the assertion, that the money could not be in more honest hands."

"It seems to me, then," resumed Rodin, "that we are certain of what is most important."

"And who knows if the holder of this enormous sum will appear to-morrow, in spite of the honesty ascribed to him? The nearer the moment the more my anxiety increases. Ah!" continued Father d'Aigrigny, after a moment's silence, "the interests concerned are so immense that the consequences of success are quite incalculable. However, all that it was possible to do, has been at least tried."

To these words, which Father d'Aigrigny addressed to Rodin, as if asking for his assent, the socius returned no answer.

The abbe looked at him with surprise, and said: "Are you not of my opinion—could more have been attempted? Have we not gone to the extreme limit of the possible?"

Rodin bowed respectfully, but remained mute.

"If you think we have omitted some precaution," cried Father d'Aigrigny, with a sort of uneasy impatience, "speak out! We have still time. Once more, do you think it is possible to do more than I have done? All the other descendants being removed, when Gabriel appears to-morrow in the Rue Saint-Francois, will he not be the only representative of this family, and consequently the rightful possessor of this immense fortune? Now, according to his act of renunciation, and the provisions of our statutes, it is not to him, but to the Order, that these possessions must fall. Could I have acted better, or in any other manner? Speak frankly!"

"I cannot permit myself to offer an opinion on this subject," replied Rodin, humbly, and again bowing; "the success of the measures taken must answer your reverence."

Father d'Aigrigny shrugged his shoulders, and reproached himself for having asked advice of this writing-machine, that served him for a secretary, and to whom he only ascribed three qualities—memory, discretion, and exactness.

Page 6

[11] This was an idle fear, for we read in the *Constitutionnel*, Feb. 1st 1832, as follows: "When in 1822, M. de Corbiere abruptly abolished that splendid Normal School, which, during its few years' existence, had called forth or developed such a variety of talent, it was decided, as some compensation, that a house in the Rue des Postes should be purchased, where the congregation of the Holy Ghost should be located and endowed. The Minister of Marine supplied the funds for this purpose, and its management was placed at the disposal of the Society, which then reigned over France. From that period it has held quiet possession of the place, which at once became a sort of house of entertainment, where Jesuitism sheltered, and provided for, the numerous novitiates that flocked from all parts of the country, to receive instructions from Father Ronsin. Matters were in this state when the Revolution of July broke out, which threatened to deprive the Society of this establishment. But it will hardly be believed; this was not done. It is true that they suppressed their practice, but they left them in possession of the house in the Rue des Postes; and to this very day, the 31st of January, 1832, the members of the Sacred Heart are housed at the expense of government, during the whole of which time the Normal School has been without a shelter—and on its reorganization, thrust into a dirty hole, in a narrow corner of the College of Louis the Great."

The above appeared in the *Constitutionnel*, respecting the house in the Rue des Postes. We are certainly ignorant as to the nature of the transactions, since that period, that have taken place between the reverend fathers and the government; but we read further, in a recently published article that appeared in a journal, in reference to the Society of Jesus, that the house in the Rue des Postes, still forms a part of their landed property. We will here give some portions of the article in question.

"The following is a list of the property belonging to this branch of Jesuits:

Fr.

House in the Rue de Postes, worth about	500,000
One in the Rue de Sevres, estimated at	300,000
Farm, two leagues from Paris	150,000
House and church at Bourges	100,000
Notre Dame de Liesse, donation in 1843	60,000
Saint Acheul, House for Novitiates . .	400,000
Nantes, a house	100,000
Quimper, ditto	40,000
Laval, house and church	150,000
Rennes, a house	20,000
Vannes, ditto	20,000
Metz, ditto	40,000
Strasbourg	60,000
Rouen, ditto	15,000

Page 7

“By this it appears that these various items amount to little less than two millions. Teaching, moreover, is another important source of revenue to the Jesuits. The college at Broyclette alone brings in 200,000 francs. The two provinces in France (for the general of the Jesuits at Rome has divided France into two provinces, Lyons and Paris) possess, besides a large sum in ready money, Austrian bonds of more than 260,000 francs. Their Propagation of Faith furnishes annually some 50,000 francs; and the harvest which the priests collect by their sermons amounts to 150,000 francs. The alms given for charity may be estimated at the same figure, producing together a revenue of 540,000 francs. Now, to this revenue may be added the produce of the sale of the Society’s works, and the profit obtained by hawking pictures. Each plate costs, design and engraving included, about 600 francs, off which are struck about 10,000 copies, at 40 francs per thousand, and there is a further expense of 250 francs to their publisher; and they obtain a net profit of 210 francs on every thousand. This, indeed, is working to advantage. And it can easily be imagined with what rapidity all these are sold. The fathers themselves are the travellers for the Society, and it would be difficult to find more zealous or persevering ones. They are always well received, and do not know what it is to meet with a refusal. They always take care that the publisher should be one of their own body. The first person whom they selected for this occupation was one of their members, possessing some money; but they were obliged, notwithstanding, to make certain advances to enable him to defray the expenses of its first establishment. But, when they became fully convinced of the success of their undertaking, they suddenly called in these advances, which the publisher was not in a condition to pay. They were perfectly aware of this, and superseded him by a wealthy successor, with whom they could make a better bargain; and thus, without remorse, they ruined the man, by thrusting him from an appointment of which they had morally guaranteed the continuance.”

[12] Louis XIV., the great King, punished with the Galleys those Protestants who, once converted, often by force, afterwards returned to their first belief. As for those Protestants who remained in France, notwithstanding the rigor of the edicts against them, they were deprived of burial, dragged upon a hurdle, and given to the dogs.—E. S.

CHAPTER XV.

The thug.

After a moment’s silence, Father d’Aigrigny resumed “Read me to-day’s report on the situation of each of the persons designated.”

“Here is that of this evening; it has just come.”

“Let us hear.”

Rodin read as follows: “Jacques Rennepont, alias Sleepinbuff, was seen in the interior of the debtors’ prison at eight o’clock this evening.”

Page 8

"He will not disturb us to-morrow. One; go on."

"The lady superior of St. Mary's Convent, warned by the Princess de Saint-Dizier, has thought fit to confine still more strictly the Demoiselles Rose and Blanche Simon. This evening, at nine o'clock, they have been carefully locked in their cells, and armed men will make their round in the convent garden during the night."

"Thanks to these precautions, there is nothing to fear from that side," said Father d'Aigrigny. "Go on."

"Dr. Baleinier, also warned by the Princess de Saint-Dizier, continues to have Mdlle. de Cardoville very closely watched. At a quarter to nine the door of the building in which she is lodged was locked and bolted."

"That is still another cause the less for uneasiness."

"As for M. Hardy," resumed Rodin "I have received this morning, from Toulouse, a letter from his intimate friend, M. de Bressac, who has been of such service to us in keeping the manufacturer away for some days longer. This letter contains a note, addressed by M. Hardy to a confidential person, which M. de Bressac has thought fit to intercept, and send to us as another proof of the success of the steps he has taken, and for which he hopes we shall give him credit—as to serve us, he adds, he betrays his friend in the most shameful manner, and acts a part in an odious comedy. M. de Bressac trusts that, in return for these good offices, we will deliver up to him those papers, which place him in our absolute dependence, as they might ruin for ever a woman he loves with an adulterous passion. He says that we ought to have pity on the horrible alternative in which he is placed—either to dishonor and ruin the woman he adores, or infamously to betray the confidence of his bosom friend."

"These adulterous lamentations are not deserving of pity," answered Father d'Aigrigny, with contempt. "We will see about that; M. de Bressac may still be useful to us. But let us hear this letter of M. Hardy, that impious and republican manufacturer, worthy descendant of an accursed race, whom it is of the first importance to keep away."

"Here is M. Hardy's letter," resumed Rodin. "To-morrow, we will send it to the person to whom it is addressed." Rodin read as follows:

"*Toulouse*, February the 10th.

"At length I find a moment to write to you, and to explain the cause of the sudden departure which, without alarming, must at least have astonished you. I write also to ask you a service; the facts may be stated in a few words. I have often spoken to you of Felix de Bressac, one of my boyhood mates, though not nearly so old as myself. We have always loved each other tenderly, and have shown too many proofs of mutual

affection not to count upon one another. He is a brother to me. You know all I mean by that expression. Well—a few days ago, he wrote to me from Toulouse, where he was to spend some time: 'If you love me, come; I have

Page 9

the greatest need of you. At once! Your consolations may perhaps give me the courage to live. If you arrive too late—why, forgive me—and think sometimes of him who will be yours to the last.’ Judge of my grief and fear on receipt of the above. I seat instantly for post-horses. My old foreman, whom I esteem and revere (the father of General Simon), hearing that I was going to the south, begged me to take him with me, and to leave him for some days in the department of the Creuse, to examine some ironworks recently founded there. I consented willingly to this proposition, as I should thus at least have some one to whom I could pour out the grief and anxiety which had been caused by this letter from Bressac. I arrive at Toulouse; they tell me that he left the evening before, taking arms with him, a prey to the most violent despair. It was impossible at first to tell whither he had gone; after two days, some indications, collected with great trouble, put me upon his track. At last, after a thousand adventures, I found him in a miserable village. Never—no, never, have I seen despair like this. No violence, but a dreadful dejection, a savage silence. At first, he almost repulsed me; then, this horrible agony having reached its height, he softened by degrees, and, in about a quarter of an hour, threw himself into my arms, bathed in tears. Beside him were his loaded pistols: one day later, and all would have been over. I cannot tell you the reason of his despair; I am not at liberty to do so; but it did not greatly astonish me. Now there is a complete cure to effect. We must calm, and soothe, and heal this poor soul, which has been cruelly wounded. The hand of friendship is alone equal to this delicate task, and I have good hope of success. I have therefore persuaded him to travel for some time; movement and change of scene will be favorable to him. I shall take him first to Nice; we set out tomorrow. If he wishes to prolong this excursion. I shall do so too, for my affairs do not imperiously demand my presence in Paris before the end of March. As for the service I have to ask of you, it is conditional. These are the facts. According to some family papers that belonged to my mother, it seems I have a certain interest to present myself at No. 3, Rue Saint-Francois, in Paris, on the 13th of February. I had inquired about it, and could learn nothing, except that this house of very antique appearance, has been shut up for the last hundred and fifty years, through a whim of one of my maternal ancestors, and that it is to be opened on the 13th of this month, in presence of the co-heirs who, if I have any, are quite unknown to me. Not being able to attend myself, I have written to my foreman, the father of General Simon, in whom I have the greatest confidence, and whom I had left behind in the department of the Creuse, to set out for Paris, and to be present at the opening of this house, not as an agent (which would be useless), but as a spectator, and inform

Page 10

me at Nice what has been the result of this romantic notion of my ancestor's. As it is possible that my foreman may arrive too late to accomplish this mission, I should be much obliged if you would inquire at my house at Plessy, if he has yet come, and, in case of his still being absent, if you would take his place at the opening of the house in the Rue Saint-Francois. I believe that I have made a very small sacrifice for my friend Bressac, in not being in Paris on that day. But had the sacrifice been immense, I should have made it with pleasure, for my care and friendship are at present most necessary to the man whom I look upon as a brother. I count upon your compliance with my request, and, begging you to be kind enough to write me, 'to be called for,' at Nice, the result of your visit of inquiry, I remain, *etc.*, *etc.*

"Francis Hardy."

"Though his presence cannot be of any great importance, it would be preferable that Marshal Simon's father should not attend at the opening of this house to-morrow," said Father d'Aigrigny. "But no matter. M. Hardy himself is out of the way. There only remains the young Indian."

"As for him," continued the abbe, with a thoughtful air, "we acted wisely in letting M. Norval set out with the presents of Mdle. de Cardoville. The doctor who accompanies M. Norval, and who was chosen by M. Baleinier, will inspire no suspicion?"

"None," answered Rodin. "His letter of yesterday is completely satisfactory."

"There is nothing, then, to fear from the Indian prince," said D'Aigrigny. "All goes well."

"As for Gabriel," resumed Rodin, "he has again written this morning, to obtain from your reverence the interview that he has vainly solicited for the last three days. He is affected by the rigor exercised towards him, in forbidding him to leave the house for these five days past."

"To-morrow, when we take him to the Rue Saint-Francois, I will hear what he has to say. It will be time enough. Thus, at this hour," said Father d'Aigrigny, with an air of triumphant satisfaction, "all the descendants of this family, whose presence might ruin our projects, are so placed that it is absolutely impossible for them to be at the Rue Saint-Francois to-morrow before noon, while Gabriel will be sure to be there. At last our end is gained."

Two cautious knocks at the door interrupted Father d'Aigrigny. "Come in," said he.

An old servant in black presented himself, and said: "There is a man downstairs who wishes to speak instantly to M. Rodin on very urgent business."

“His name?” asked Father d’Aigrigny.

“He would not tell his name; but he says that he comes from M. Van Dael, a merchant in Java.”

Father d’Aigrigny and Rodin exchanged a glance of surprise, almost of alarm.

“See what this man is,” said D’Aigrigny to Rodin, unable to conceal his uneasiness, “and then come and give me an account of it.” Then, addressing the servant, he added: “Show him in”—and exchanging another expressive sign with Rodin, Father d’Aigrigny disappeared by a side-door.

Page 11

A minute after, Faringhea, the ex-chief of the Stranglers, appeared before Rodin, who instantly remembered having seen him at Cardoville Castle.

The socius started, but he did not wish to appear to recollect his visitor. Still bending over his desk, he seemed not to see Faringhea, but wrote hastily some words on a sheet of paper that lay before him.

"Sir," said the servant, astonished at the silence of Rodin, "here is the person."

Rodin folded the note that he had so precipitately written, and said to the servant: "Let this be taken to its address. Wait for an answer."

The servant bowed, and went out. Then Rodin, without rising, fixed his little reptile-eyes on Faringhea, and said to him courteously: "To whom, sir, have I the honor of speaking?"

CHAPTER XVI.

The two brothers of the good work.

Faringhea, as we have before stated, though born in India, had travelled a good deal, and frequented the European factories in different parts of Asia. Speaking well both English and French, and full of intelligence and sagacity, he was perfectly civilized.

Instead of answering Rodin's question, he turned upon him a fixed and searching look. The socius, provoked by this silence, and foreseeing vaguely that Faringhea's arrival had some connection—direct or indirect—with Djalma, repeated, though still with the greatest coolness: "To whom, sir, have I the honor of speaking?"

"Do you not recognize me," said Faringhea, advancing two steps nearer to Rodin's chair.

"I do not think I have ever had the honor of seeing you," answered the other, coldly.

"But I recognize you," said Faringhea; "I saw you at Cardoville Castle the day that a ship and a steamer were wrecked together."

"At Cardoville Castle? It is very possible, sir. I was there when a shipwreck took place."

"And that day I called you by your name, and you asked me what I wanted. I replied: 'Nothing now, brother—hereafter, much.' The time has arrived. I have come to ask for much."

“My dear sir,” said Rodin, still impassible, “before we continue this conversation, which appears hitherto tolerably obscure, I must repeat my wish to be informed to whom I have the advantage of speaking. You have introduced yourself here under pretext of a commission from Mynheer Joshua Van Dael, a respectable merchant of Batavia, and—”

“You know the writing of M. Van Dael?” said Faringhea, interrupting Rodin.

“I know it perfectly.”

“Look!” The half-caste drew from his pocket (he was shabbily dressed in European clothes) a long dispatch, which he had taken from one Mahal the Smuggler, after strangling him on the beach near Batavia. These papers he placed before Rodin’s eyes, but without quitting his hold of them.

Page 12

"It is, indeed, M. Van Dael's writing," said Rodin, and he stretched out his hand towards the letter, which Faringhea quickly and prudently returned to his pocket.

"Allow me to observe, my dear sir, that you have a singular manner of executing a commission," said Rodin. "This letter, being to my address, and having been entrusted to you by M. Van Dael, you ought—"

"This letter was not entrusted to me by M. Van Dael," said Faringhea, interrupting Rodin.

"How, then, is it in your possession?"

"A Javanese smuggler betrayed me. Van Dael had secured a passage to Alexandria for this man, and had given him this letter to carry with him for the European mail. I strangled the smuggler, took the letter, made the passage—and here I am."

The Thug had pronounced these words with an air of savage boasting; his wild, intrepid glance did not quail before the piercing look of Rodin, who, at this strange confession, had hastily raised his head to observe the speaker.

Faringhea thought to astonish or intimidate Rodin by these ferocious words; but, to his great surprise, the socius, impassible as a corpse, said to him, quite simply: "Oh! they strangle people in Java?"

"Yes, there and elsewhere," answered Faringhea, with a bitter smile.

"I would prefer to disbelieve you; but I am surprised at your sincerity M.—, what is your name?"

"Faringhea."

"Well, then, M. Faringhea, what do you wish to come to? You have obtained by an abominable crime, a letter addressed to me, and now you hesitate to deliver it."

"Because I have read it, and it may be useful to me."

"Oh! you have read it?" said Rodin, disconcerted for a moment. Then he resumed: "It is true, that judging by your mode of possessing yourself of other people's correspondence, we cannot expect any great amount of honesty on your part. And pray what have you found so useful to you in this letter?"

"I have found, brother, that you are, like myself, a son of the Good Work."

"Of what good work do you speak" asked Rodin not a little surprised.

Faringhea replied with an expression of bitter irony. "Joshua says to you in his letter—'Obedience and courage, secrecy and patience, craft and audacity, union between us, who have the world for our country, the brethren for our family, Rome for our queen.'"

"It is possible that M. Van Dael has written thus to me Pray, sir, what do you conclude from it?"

"We, too, have the world for our country, brother, our accomplices for our family, and for our queen Bowanee."

"I do not know that saint," said Rodin, humbly.

"It is our Rome," answered the Strangler. "Van Dael speaks to you of those of your Order, who, scattered over all the earth, labor for the glory of Rome, your queen. Those of our band labor also in divers countries, for the glory of Bowanee."

Page 13

“And who are these sons of Bowanee, M. Faringhea?”

“Men of resolution, audacious, patient, crafty, obstinate, who, to make the Good Work succeed, would sacrifice country and parents, and sister and brother, and who regard as enemies all not of their band!”

“There seems to be much that is good in the persevering and exclusively religious spirit of such an order,” said Rodin, with a modest and sanctified air; “only, one must know your ends and objects.”

“The same as your own, brother—we make corpses.”[13]

“Corpses!” cried Rodin.

“In this letter,” resumed Faringhea, “Van Dael tells you that the greatest glory of your Order is to make ‘a corpse of man.’ Our work also is to make corpses of men. Man’s death is sweet to Bowanee.”

“But sir,” cried Rodin, “M. Van Dael speaks of the soul, of the will, of the mind, which are to be brought down by discipline.”

“It is true—you kill the soul, and we the body. Give me your hand, brother, for you also are hunters of men.”

“But once more, sir,—understand, that we only meddle with the will, the mind,” said Rodin.

“And what are bodies deprived of soul, will, thought, but mere corpses? Come—come, brother; the dead we make by the cord are not more icy and inanimate than those you make by your discipline. Take my hand, brother; Rome and Bowanee are sisters.”

Notwithstanding his apparent calmness, Rodin could not behold, without some secret alarm, a wretch like Faringhea in possession of a long letter from Van Dael, wherein mention must necessarily have been made of Djalma. Rodin believed, indeed, that he had rendered it impossible for the young Indian to be at Paris on the morrow, but not knowing what connection might have been formed, since the shipwreck, between the prince and the half-caste, he looked upon Faringhea as a man who might probably be very dangerous. But the more uneasy the socius felt in himself, the more he affected to appear calm and disdainful. He replied, therefore: “This comparison between Rome and Bowanee is no doubt very amusing; but what, sir, do you deduce from it?”

“I wish to show you, brother, what I am, and of what I am capable, to convince you that it is better to have me for a friend than an enemy.”

“In other terms, sir,” said Rodin, with contemptuous irony, “you belong to a murderous sect in India, and, you wish, by a transparent allegory, to lead me to reflect on the fate of the man from whom you have stolen the letter addressed to me. In my turn, I will take the freedom just to observe to you, in all humility, M. Faringhea, that here it is not permitted to strangle anybody, and that if you were to think fit to make any corpses for the love of Bowanee, your goddess, we should make you a head shorter, for the love of another divinity commonly called justice.”

“And what would they do to me, if I tried to poison any one?”

Page 14

"I will again humbly observe to you, M. Faringhea, that I have no time to give you a course of criminal jurisprudence; but, believe me, you had better resist the temptation to strangle or poison any one. One word more: will you deliver up to me the letters of M. Van Dael, or not?"

"The letters relative to Prince Djalma?" said the half-caste, looking fixedly at Rodin, who, notwithstanding a sharp and sudden twinge, remained impenetrable, and answered with the utmost simplicity: "Not knowing what the letters which you, sir, are pleased to keep from me, may contain, it is impossible for me to answer your question. I beg, and if necessary, I demand, that you will hand me those letters—or that you will retire."

"In a few minutes, brother, you will entreat me to remain."

"I doubt it."

"A few words will operate—this miracle. If just now I spoke to you about poisoning, brother, it was because you sent a doctor to Cardoville Castle, to poison (at least for a time) Prince Djalma."

In spite of himself, Rodin started almost imperceptibly, as he replied: "I do not understand you."

"It is true, that I am a poor foreigner, and doubtless speak with an accent; I will try and explain myself better. I know, by Van Dael's letters, the interest you have that Prince Djalma should not be here to morrow, and all that you have done with this view. Do you understand me now?"

"I have no answer for you."

Two cautious taps at the door here interrupted the conversation. "Come in," said Rodin.

"The letter has been taken to its address, sir," said the old servant, bowing, "and here is the answer."

Rodin took the paper, and, before he opened it, said courteously to Faringhea: "With your permission, sir?"

"Make no ceremonies," said the half-caste.

"You are very kind," replied Rodin, as, having read the letter he received, he wrote hastily some words at the bottom, saying: "Send this back to the same address."

The servant bowed respectfully, and withdrew.

"Now can I continue?" asked the half-caste, of Rodin.

“Certainly.”

“I will continue, then,” resumed Faringhea:

“The day before yesterday, just as the prince, all wounded as he was, was about, by my advice, to take his departure for Paris, a fine carriage arrived, with superb presents for Djalma, from an unknown friend. In this carriage were two men—one sent by the unknown friend—the other a doctor, sent by you to attend upon Djalma, and accompany him to Paris. It was a charitable act, brother—was it not so?”

“Go on with your story, sir.”

Page 15

"Djalma set out yesterday. By declaring that the prince's wound would grow seriously worse, if he did not lie down in the carriage during all the journey, the doctor got rid of the envoy of the unknown friend, who went away by himself. The doctor wished to get rid of me too; but Djalma so strongly insisted upon it, that I accompanied the prince and doctor. Yesterday evening, we had come about half the distance. The doctor proposed we should pass the night at an inn. 'We have plenty of time,' said he, 'to reach Paris by to-morrow evening'—the prince having told him, that he must absolutely be in Paris by the evening of the 12th. The doctor had been very pressing to set out alone with the prince. I knew by Van Dael's letter, that it was of great importance to you for Djalma not to be here on the 13th; I had my suspicions, and I asked the doctor if he knew you; he answered with an embarrassed air, and then my suspicion became certainty. When we reached the inn, whilst the doctor was occupied with Djalma, I went up to the room of the former, and examined a box full of phials that he had brought with him. One of them contained opium—and then I guessed—"

"What did you guess, sir?"

"You shall know. The doctor said to Djalma, before he left him: 'Your wound is doing well, but the fatigue of the journey might bring on inflammation; it will be good for you, in the course of to-morrow, to take a soothing potion, that I will make ready this evening, to have with us in the carriage.' The doctor's plan was a simple one," added Faringhea; "to-day the prince was to take the potion at four or five o'clock in the afternoon—and fall into a deep sleep—the doctor to grow uneasy, and stop the carriage—to declare that it would be dangerous to continue the journey—to pass the night at an inn, and keep close watch over the prince, whose stupor was only, to cease when it suited your purposes. That was your design—it was cleverly planned—I chose to make use of it myself, and I have succeeded."

"All that you are talking about, my dear sir," said Rodin, biting his nails, "is pure Hebrew to me."

"No doubt, because of my accent. But tell me, have you heard speak of array—mow?"

"No."

"Your loss! It is an admirable production of the Island of Java, so fertile in poisons."

"What is that to me?" said Rodin, in a sharp voice, but hardly able to dissemble his growing anxiety.

"It concerns you nearly. We sons of Bowanee have a horror of shedding blood," resumed Faringhea; "to pass the cord round the neck of our victims, we wait till they are asleep. When their sleep is not deep enough, we know how to make it deeper. We are skillful at our work; the serpent is not more cunning, or the lion more valiant, Djalma

himself bears our mark. The array-mow is an impalpable powder, and, by letting the sleeper inhale a few grains of it, or by mixing it with the tobacco to be smoked

Page 16

by a waking man, we can throw our victim into a stupor, from which nothing will rouse him. If we fear to administer too strong a dose at once, we let the sleeper inhale a little at different times, and we can thus prolong the trance at pleasure, and without any danger, as long as a man does not require meat and drink—say, thirty or forty hours. You see, that opium is mere trash compared to this divine narcotic. I had brought some of this with me from Java—as a mere curiosity, you know—without forgetting the counter poison.”

“Oh! there is a counter-poison, then?” said Rodin, mechanically.

“Just as there are people quite contrary to what we are, brother of the good work. The Javanese call the juice of this root tooboe; it dissipates the stupor caused by the array-mow, as the sun disperses the clouds. Now, yesterday evening, being certain of the projects of your emissary against Djalma, I waited till the doctor was in bed and asleep. I crept into his room, and made him inhale such a dose of array-mow—that he is probably sleeping still.”

“Miscreant!” cried Rodin, more and more alarmed by this narrative, for Faringhea had dealt a terrible blow at the machinations of the socius and his friends. “You risk poisoning the doctor.”

“Yes, brother; just as he ran the risk of poisoning Djalma. This morning we set out, leaving your doctor at the inn, plunged in a deep sleep. I was alone in the carriage with Djalma. He smoked like a true Indian; some grains of array-mow, mixed with the tobacco in his long pipe, first made him drowsy; a second dose, that he inhaled, sent him to sleep; and so I left him at the inn where we stopped. Now, brother, it depends upon me, to leave Djalma in his trance, which will last till to-morrow evening or to rouse him from it on the instant. Exactly as you comply with my demands or not, Djalma will or will not be in the Rue Saint-Francois to morrow.”

So saying, Faringhea drew from his pocket the medal belonging to Djalma, and observed, as he showed it to Rodin: “You see that I tell you the truth. During Djalma’s sleep, took from him this medal, the only indication he has of the place where he ought to be to-morrow. I finish, then as I began: Brother, I have come to ask you for a great deal.”

For some minutes, Rodin had been biting his nails to the quick, as was his custom when seized with a fit of dumb and concentrated rage. Just then, the bell of the porter’s lodge rang three times in a particular manner. Rodin did not appear to notice it, and yet a sudden light sparkled in his small reptile eyes; while Faringhea, with his arms folded, looked at him with an expression of triumph and disdainful superiority. The socius bent down his head, remained silent for some seconds, took mechanically a pen from his



desk, and began to gnaw the feather, as if in deep reflection upon what Faringhea had just said. Then, throwing down the pen upon the desk, he turned suddenly towards the half-caste, and addressed him with an air of profound contempt "Now, really, M. Faringhea—do you think to make game of us with your cock-and bull stories?"

Page 17

Amazed, in spite of his audacity, the half-caste recoiled a step.

“What, sir!” resumed Rodin. “You come here into a respectable house, to boast that you have stolen letters, strangled this man, drugged that other?—Why, sir, it is downright madness. I wished to hear you to the end, to see to what extent you would carry your audacity—for none but a monstrous rascal would venture to plume himself on such infamous crimes. But I prefer believing, that they exist only in your imagination.”

As he barked out these words, with a degree of animation not usual in him, Rodin rose from his seat, and approached the chimney, while Faringhea, who had not yet recovered from his surprise, looked at him in silence. In a few seconds, however, the half-caste returned, with a gloomy and savage mien: “Take care, brother; do not force me to prove to you that I have told the truth.”

“Come, come, sir; you must be fresh from the Antipodes, to believe us Frenchmen such easy dupes. You have, you say, the prudence of a serpent, and the courage of a lion. I do not know if you are a courageous lion, but you are certainly not a prudent serpent. What! you have about you a letter from M. Van Dael, by which I might be compromised—supposing all this not to be a fable—you have left Prince Djalma in a stupor, which would serve my projects, and from which you alone can rouse him—you are able, you say, to strike a terrible blow at my interests—and yet you do not consider (bold lion! crafty serpent as you are!) that I only want to gain twenty-four hours upon you. Now, you come from the end of India to Paris, an unknown stranger—you believe me to be as great a scoundrel as yourself,—since you call me brother—and do not once consider, that you are here in my power—that this street and house are solitary, and that I could have three or four persons to bind you in a second, savage Strangler though you are!—and that just by pulling this bell-rope,” said Rodin, as he took it in his hand. “Do not be alarmed,” added he, with a diabolical smile, as he saw Faringhea make an abrupt movement of surprise and fright; “would I give you notice, if I meant to act in this manner?—But just answer me. Once bound and put in confinement for twenty-four hours, how could you injure me? Would it not be easy for me to possess myself of Van Dael’s letter, and Djalma’s medal? and the latter, plunged in a stupor till to-morrow evening, need not trouble me at all. You see, therefore, that your threats are vain because they rest upon falsehood—because it is not true, that Prince Djalma is here and in your power. Begone, sir—leave the house; and when next you wish to make dupes, show more judgment in the selection.”

Page 18

Faringhea seemed struck with astonishment. All that he had just heard seemed very probable. Rodin might seize upon him, the letter, and the medal, and, by keeping him prisoner, prevent Djalma from being awakened. And yet Rodin ordered him to leave the house, at the moment when Faringhea had imagined himself so formidable. As he thought for the motives of this inexplicable conduct, it struck him that Rodin, notwithstanding the proofs he had brought him, did not yet believe that Djalma was in his power. On that theory, the contempt of Van Dael's correspondent admitted of a natural explanation. But Rodin was playing a bold and skillful game; and, while he appeared to mutter to himself, as in anger, he was observing, with intense anxiety, the Strangler's countenance.

The latter, almost certain that he had divined the secret motive of Rodin, replied: "I am going—but one word more. You think I deceive you?"

"I am certain of it. You have told me nothing but a tissue of fables, and I have lost much time in listening to them. Spare me the rest; it is late—and I should like to be alone."

"One minute more: you are a man, I see, from whom nothing should be hid," said Faringhea, "from Djalma, I could now only expect alms and disdain—for, with a character like this, to say to him, 'Pay me, because I might have betrayed you and did not,' would be to provoke his anger and contempt. I could have killed him twenty times over, but his day is not yet come," said the Thug, with a gloomy air; "and to wait for that and other fatal days, I must have gold, much gold. You alone can pay me for the betrayal of Djalma, for you alone profit by it. You refuse to hear me, because you think I am deceiving you. But I took the direction of the inn where we stopped—and here it is. Send some one to ascertain the truth of what I tell you, and then you will believe me. But the price of my services will be high; for I told you that I wanted much."

So saying, Faringhea offered a printed card to Rodin: the socius, who, out of the corner of his eye, followed all the half-caste's movements, appeared to be absorbed in thought, and taking no heed of anything.

"Here is the address," repeated Faringhea, as he held out the card to Rodin; "assure yourself that I do not lie."

"Eh? what is it?" said the other, casting a rapid but stolen glance at the address, which he read greedily, without touching the card.

"Take this address," repeated the half-caste, "and you may then assure yourself—"

"Really, sir," cried Rodin, pushing back the card with his hand, "your impudence confounds me. I repeat that I wish to have nothing in common with you. For the last time, I tell you to leave the house. I know nothing about your Prince Djalma. You say



you can injure me—do so—make no ceremonies—but, in heaven's name, leave me to myself.”

So saying, Rodin rang the bell violently. Faringhea made a movement as if to stand upon the defensive; but only the old servant, with his quiet and placid mien, appeared at the door.

Page 19

"Lapierre, light the gentleman out," said Rodin, pointing to Faringhea.

Terrified at Rodin's calmness, the half-caste hesitated to leave the room.

"Why do you wait, sir?" said Rodin, remarking his hesitation. "I wish to be alone."

"So, sir," said Faringhea, as he withdrew, slowly, "you refuse my offers? Take care! tomorrow it will be too late."

"I have the honor to be your most humble servant, sir," said Rodin, bowing courteously. The Strangler went out, and the door closed upon him.

Immediately, Father d'Aigrigny entered from the next room. His countenance was pale and agitated.

"What have you done?" exclaimed he addressing Rodin.

"I have heard all. I am unfortunately too sure that this wretch spoke the truth. The Indian is in his power, and he goes to rejoin him."

"I think not," said Rodin, humbly, as bowing, he reassumed his dull and submissive countenance.

"What will prevent this man from rejoining the prince?"

"Allow me. As soon as the rascal was shown in, I knew him; and so, before speaking a word to him, I wrote a few lines to Morok, who was waiting below with Goliath till your reverence should be at leisure. Afterwards, in the course of the conversation, when they brought me Morok's answer, I added some fresh instructions, seeing the turn that affairs were taking."

"And what was the use of all this, since you have let the man leave the house?"

"Your reverence will perhaps deign to observe that he did not leave it; till he had given me the direction of the hotel where the Indian now is, thanks to my innocent stratagem of appearing to despise him. But, if it had failed, Faringhea would still have fallen into the hands of Goliath and Morok, who are waiting for him in the street, a few steps from the door. Only we should have been rather embarrassed, as we should not have known where to find Prince Djalma."

"More violence!" said Father d'Aigrigny, with repugnance.

"It is to be regretted, very much regretted," replied Rodin; "but it was necessary to follow out the system already adopted."

“Is that meant for a reproach?” said Father d’Aigrigny, who began to think that Rodin was something more than a mere writing-machine.

“I could not permit myself to blame your reverence,” said Rodin, cringing almost to the ground. “But all that will be required is to confine this man for twenty-four hours.”

“And afterwards—his complaints?”

“Such a scoundrel as he is will not dare to complain. Besides, he left this house in freedom. Morok and Goliath will bandage his eyes when they seize him. The house has another entrance in the Rue Vieille-des-Ursins. At this hour, and in such a storm, no one will be passing through this deserted quarter of the town. The knave will be confused by the change of place; they will put him into a cellar, of the new building, and to-morrow night, about the same hour, they will restore him to liberty with the like precautions. As for the East Indian, we now know where to find him; we must send to him a confidential person, and, if he recovers from his trance, there would be, in my humble opinion,” said Rodin, modestly, “a very simple and quiet manner of keeping him away from the Rue Saint Francois all day to-morrow.”

Page 20

The same servant with the mild countenance, who had introduced and shown out Faringhea, here entered the room, after knocking discreetly at the door. He held in his hand a sort of game-bag, which he gave to Rodin, saying: "Here is what M. Morok has just brought; he came in by the Rue Vieille."

The servant withdrew, and Rodin, opening the bag, said to Father d'Aigrigny, as he showed him the contents: "The medal, and Van Dael's letter. Morok has been quick at his work."

"One more danger avoided," said the marquis; "it is a pity to be forced to such measures."

"We must only blame the rascal who has obliged us to have recourse to them. I will send instantly to the hotel where the Indian lodges."

"And, at seven in the morning, you will conduct Gabriel to the Rue Saint Francois. It is there that I must have with him the interview which he has so earnestly demanded these three days."

"I informed him of it this evening, and he awaits your orders."

"At last, then," said Father d'Aigrigny, "after so many struggles, and fears, and crosses, only a few hours separate us from the moment which we have so long desired."

We now conduct the reader to the house in the Rue Saint-Francois.

[13] The doctrine of passive and absolute obedience, the principal tool in the hands of the Jesuits, as summed up in these terrible words of the dying Loyola—that every member of the order should be in the hands of his superiors as a dead body—'perinde ad cadaver'.

CHAPTER XVII.

The house in the Rue saint-Francois.

On entering the Rue Saint-Gervais, by the Rue Dore (in the Marais), you would have found yourself, at the epoch of this narrative, directly opposite to an enormously high wall, the stones of which were black and worm-eaten with age. This wall, which extended nearly the whole length of that solitary street, served to support a terrace shaded by trees of some hundred years old, which thus grew about forty feet above the causeway. Through their thick branches appeared the stone front, peaked roof and tall brick chimneys of an antique house, the entrance of which was situated in the Rue Saint-Francois, not far from the Rue Saint Gervais corner. Nothing could be more gloomy than the exterior of this abode. On the entrance-side also was a very high wall,



pierced with two or three loop-holes, strongly grated. A carriage gateway in massive oak, barred with iron, and studded with large nail-heads, whose primitive color disappeared beneath a thick layer of mud, dust, and rust, fitted close into the arch of a deep recess, forming the swell of a bay window above. In one of these massive gates was a smaller door, which served for ingress and egress to Samuel the Jew, the guardian of this dreary abode. On passing the threshold, you came to a passage, formed in the building which

Page 21

faced in the street. In this building was the lodging of Samuel, with its windows opening upon the rather spacious inner court yard, through the railing of which you perceived the garden. In the middle of this garden stood a two-storied stone house, so strangely built, that you had to mount a flight of steps, or rather a double-flight of at least twenty steps, to reach the door, which had been walled up a hundred and fifty years before. The window-blinds of this habitation had been replaced by large thick plates of lead, hermetically soldered and kept in by frames of iron clamped in the stone. Moreover, completely to intercept air and light, and thus to guard against decay within and without, the roof had been covered with thick sheets of lead, as well as the vents of the tall chimneys, which had previously been bricked up. The same precautions had been taken with respect to a small square belvedere, situated on the top of the house; this glass cage was covered with a sort of dome, soldered to the roof. Only, in consequence of some singular fancy, in every one of the leaden plates, which concealed the four sides of the belvedere, corresponding to the cardinal points, seven little round holes had been bored in the form of a cross, and were easily distinguishable from the outside. Everywhere else the plates of lead were completely unpierced. Thanks to these precautions, and to the substantial structure of the building, nothing but a few outward repairs had been necessary; and the apartments, entirely removed from the influence of the external air, no doubt remained, during a century and a half, exactly in the same state as at the time of their being shut up. The aspect of walls in crevices, of broken, worm-eaten shutters, of a roof half fallen in, and windows covered with wall-flowers, would perhaps have been less sad than the appearance of this stone house, plated with iron and lead, and preserved like a mausoleum. The garden, completely deserted, and only regularly visited once a week by Samuel, presented to the view, particularly in summer, an incredible confusion of parasites and brambles. The trees, left to themselves, had shot forth and mingled their branches in all directions; some straggling vines, reproduced from offshoots, had crept along the ground to the foot of the trees, and, climbing up their trunks, had twined themselves about them, and encircled their highest branches with their inextricable net. You could only pass through this virgin forest by following the path made by the guardian, to go from the grating to the house, the approaches to which were a little sloped to let the water run off, and carefully paved to the width of about ten feet. Another narrow path which extended all around the enclosure, was every night perambulated by two or three Pyrenees dogs—a faithful race, which had been perpetuated in the house during a century and a half. Such was the habitation destined for the meeting of the descendants of the family of Rennepont. The night which separated the 12th from the 13th day of February was near its close. A calm had succeeded the storm, and the rain had ceased; the sky was clear and full of stars; the moon, on its decline, shone with a mild lustre, and threw a melancholy light over that deserted, silent house, whose threshold for so many years no human footstep had crossed.

Page 22

A bright gleam of light, issuing from one of the windows of the guardian's dwelling, announced that Samuel was awake. Figure to yourself a tolerably large room, lined from top to bottom with old walnut wainscoting browned to an almost black, with age. Two half-extinguished brands are smoking amid the cinders on the hearth. On the stone mantelpiece, painted to resemble gray granite, stands an old iron candlestick, furnished with a meagre candle, capped by an extinguisher. Near it one sees a pair of double-barrelled pistols, and a sharp cutlass, with a hilt of carved bronze, belonging to the seventeenth century. Moreover, a heavy rifle rests against one of the chimney jambs. Four stools, an old oak press, and a square table with twisted legs, formed the sole furniture of this apartment. Against the wall were systematically suspended a number of keys of different sizes, the shape of which bore evidence to their antiquity, whilst to their rings were affixed divers labels. The back of the old press, which moved by a secret spring, had been pushed aside, and discovered, built in the wall, a large and deep iron chest, the lid of which, being open, displayed the wondrous mechanism of one of those Florentine locks of the sixteenth century, which, better than any modern invention, set all picklocks at defiance; and, moreover, according to the notions of that age, are supplied with a thick lining of asbestos cloth, suspended by gold wire at a distance from the sides of the chest, for the purpose of rendering incombustible the articles contained in it. A large cedar-wood box had been taken from the chest, and placed upon a stool; it contained numerous papers, carefully arranged and docketed. By the light of a brass lamp, the old keeper Samuel, was writing in a small register, whilst Bathsheba, his wife, was dictating to him from an account. Samuel was about eighty two years old, and, notwithstanding his advanced age, a mass of gray curling hair covered his head. He was short, thin, nervous, and the involuntary petulance of his movements proved that years had not weakened his energy and activity; though, out of doors, where, however, he made his appearance very seldom, he affected a sort of second childhood, as had been remarked by Rodin to Father d'Aigrigny. An old dressing-gown, of maroon-colored camlet, with large sleeves, completely enveloped the old man, and reached to his feet.

Samuel's features were cast in the pure, Eastern mould of his race. His complexion was of a dead yellow, his nose aquiline, his chin shaded by a little tuft of white beard, while projecting cheek-bones threw a harsh shadow upon the hollow and wrinkled cheeks. His countenance was full of intelligence, fine sharpness, and sagacity. On his broad, high forehead one might read frankness, honesty, and firmness; his eyes, black and brilliant as an Arab's, were at once mild and piercing.

His wife, Bathsheba, some fifteen years younger than himself, was of tall stature, and dressed entirely in black. A low cap, of starched lawn, which reminded one of the grave head-dresses of Dutch matrons, encircled a pale and austere countenance, formerly of a rare and haughty beauty, and impressed with the Scriptural character. Some lines in the forehead, caused by the almost continual knitting of her gray brows, showed that this woman had often suffered from the pressure of intense grief.

Page 23

At this very moment her countenance betrayed inexpressible sorrow. Her look was fixed, her head resting on her bosom. She had let her right hand, which held a small account-book, fall upon her lap, while the other hand grasped convulsively a long tress of jet-black hair, which she bore about her neck. It was fastened by a golden clasp, about an inch square, in which, under a plate of crystal, that shut in one side of it like a relic-case, could be seen a piece of linen, folded square, and almost entirely covered with dark red spots that resembled blood a long time dried.

After a short silence, during which Samuel was occupied with his register, he read aloud what he had just been writing: "Per contra, 5,000 Austrian Metallics of 1,000 florins, under date of October 19th, 1826."

After which enumeration, Samuel raised his head, and said to his wife: "Well, is it right, Bathsheba? Have you compared it with the account book?"

Bathsheba did not answer. Samuel looked at her, and, seeing that she was absorbed in grief, said to her, with an expression of tender anxiety: "What is the matter? Good heaven! what is the matter with you?"

"The 19th of October, 1826," said she, slowly, with her eyes still fixed, and pressing yet more closely the lock of black hair which she wore about her neck; "It was a fatal day—for, Samuel, it was the date of the last letter which we received from—"

Bathsheba was unable to proceed. She uttered a long sigh, and concealed her face in her hands.

"Oh! I understand you," observed the old man, in a tremulous voice; "a father may be taken up by the thought of other cares; but the heart of a mother is ever wakeful." Throwing his pen down upon the table, Samuel leaned his forehead upon his hands in sorrow.

Bathsheba resumed, as if she found a melancholy pleasure in these cruel remembrances: "Yes; that was the last day on which our son, Abel, wrote to us from Germany, to announce to us that he had invested the funds according to your desire and was going thence into Poland, to effect another operation."

"And in Poland he met the death of a martyr," added Samuel. "With no motive and no proof, they accused him falsely of coming to organize smuggling, and the Russian governor, treating him as they treat our brothers in that land of cruel tyranny, condemned him to the dreadful punishment of the knout, without even hearing him in his defence. Why should they hear a Jew? What is a Jew? A creature below a serf, whom they reproach for all the vices that a degrading slavery has engendered. A Jew beaten to death? Who would trouble themselves about it?"

“And poor Abel, so good, so faithful, died beneath their stripes, partly from shame, partly from the wounds,” said Bathsheba, shuddering. “One of our Polish brethren obtained with great difficulty permission to bury him. He cut off this lock of beautiful black hair—which, with this scrap of linen, bathed in the blood of our dear son, is all that now remains to us of him.” Bathsheba covered the hair and clasp with convulsive kisses.

Page 24

"Alas!" said Samuel, drying his tears, which had burst forth at these sad recollections, "the Lord did not at last remove our child, until the task which our family has accomplished faithfully for a century and a half was nearly at an end. Of what use will our race be henceforth upon earth?" added Samuel, most bitterly. "Our duty is performed. This casket contains a royal fortune—and yonder house, walled up for a hundred and fifty years, will be opened to-morrow to the descendants of my ancestor's benefactor." So saying, Samuel turned his face sorrowfully towards the house, which he could see through the window. The dawn was just about to appear. The moon had set; belvedere, roof, and chimneys formed a black mass upon the dark blue of the starry firmament.

Suddenly, Samuel grew pale, and, rising abruptly, said to his wife in a tremulous tone, whilst he still pointed to the house: "Bathsheba! the seven points of light—just as it was thirty years ago. Look! look:"

Indeed, the seven round holes, bored in the form of a cross in the leaden plates which covered the window of the belvedere, sparkled like so many luminous points, as if some one in the house ascended with a light to the roof.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Debit and credit.

For some seconds, Samuel and Bathsheba remained motionless, with their eyes fixed in fear and uneasiness on the seven luminous points, which shone through the darkness of the night from the summit of the belvedere; while, on the horizon, behind the house, a pale, rosy hue announced the dawn of day.

Samuel was the first to break silence, and he said to his wife, as he drew his hand across his brow: "The grief caused by the remembrance of our poor child has prevented us from reflecting that, after all, there should be nothing to alarm us in what we see."

"How so, Samuel?"

"My father always told me that he, and my grandfather before him, had seen such lights at long intervals."

"Yes, Samuel—but without being able, any more than ourselves, to explain the cause."

"Like my father and grandfather, we can only suppose that some secret passage gives admittance to persons who, like us, have some mysterious duty to fulfil in this dwelling. Besides, my father warned me not to be uneasy at these appearances, foretold by him, and now visible for the second time in thirty years."

“No matter for that, Samuel, it does strike one as if it was something supernatural.”

“The days of miracles are over.” said the Jew, shaking his head sorrowfully: “many of the old houses in this quarter have subterraneous communications with distant places—some extending even to the Seine and the Catacombs. Doubtless, this house is so situated, and the persons who make these rare visits enter by some such means.”

“But that the belvedere should be thus lighted up?”

Page 25

"According to the plan of the building, you know that the belvedere forms a kind of skylight to the apartment called the Great Hall of Mourning, situated on the upper story. As it is completely dark, in consequence of the closing of all the windows, they must use a light to visit this Hall of Mourning—a room which is said to contain some very strange and gloomy things," added the Jew, with a shudder.

Bathsheba, as well as her husband, gazed attentively on the seven luminous points, which diminished in brightness as the daylight gradually increased.

"As you say, Samuel, the mystery may be thus explained," resumed the Hebrew's wife. "Besides, the day is so important a one for the family of Rennepont, that this apparition ought not to astonish us under the circumstances."

"Only to think," remarked Samuel, "that these lights have appeared at several different times throughout a century and a half! There must, therefore, be another family that, like ours, has devoted itself, from generation to generation, to accomplish a pious duty."

"But what is this duty? It will perhaps be explained today."

"Come, come, Bathsheba," suddenly exclaimed Samuel, as if roused from his reverie, and reproaching himself with idleness; this is the day, and, before eight o'clock, our cash account must be in order, and these titles to immense property arranged, so that they may be delivered to the rightful owners"—and he pointed to the cedar-wood box.

"You are right, Samuel; this day does not belong to us. It is a solemn day—one that would have been sweet, oh! very sweet to you and me—if now any days could be sweet to us," said Bathsheba bitterly, for she was thinking of her son.

"Bathsheba," said Samuel, mournfully, as he laid his hand on his wife's; "we shall at least have the stern satisfaction of having done our duty. And has not the Lord been very favorable to us, though He has thus severely tried us by the death of our son? Is it not thanks to His providence that three generations of my family have been able to commence, continue, and finish this great work?"

"Yes, Samuel," said the Jewess, affectionately, "and for you at least this satisfaction will be combined with calm and quietness, for on the stroke of noon you will be delivered from a very terrible responsibility."

So saying, Bathsheba pointed to the box.

"It is true," replied the old man; "I had rather these immense riches were in the hands of those to whom they belong, than in mine; but, to day, I shall cease to be their trustee. Once more then, I will check the account for the last time, and compare the register with the cash-book that you hold in your hand."



Bathsheba bowed her head affirmatively, and Samuel, taking up his pen, occupied himself once more with his calculations. His wife, in spite of herself, again yielded to the sad thoughts which that fatal date had awakened, by reminding her of the death of her son.

Page 26

Let us now trace rapidly the history, in appearance so romantic and marvellous, in reality so simple, of the fifty thousand crowns, which, thanks to the law of accumulation, and to a prudent, intelligent and faithful investment, had naturally, and necessarily, been transformed, in the space of a century and a half, into a sum far more important than the forty millions estimated by Father d'Aigrigny—who, partially informed on this subject, and reckoning the disastrous accidents, losses, and bankruptcies which might have occurred during so long a period, believed that forty millions might well be considered enormous.

The history of this fortune being closely connected with that of the Samuel family, by whom it had been managed for three generations, we shall give it again in a few words.

About the period 1670, some years before his death, Marius de Rennepont, then travelling in Portugal, had been enabled, by means of powerful interest, to save the life of an unfortunate Jew, condemned to be burnt alive by the Inquisition, because of his religion. This Jew was Isaac Samuel, grandfather of the present guardian of the house in the Rue Saint-Francois.

Generous men often attach themselves to those they have served, as much, at least, as the obliged parties are attached to their benefactors. Having ascertained that Isaac, who at that time carried on a petty broker's business at Lisbon, was industrious, honest, active, laborious, and intelligent, M. de Rennepont, who then possessed large property in France, proposed to the Jew to accompany him, and undertake the management of his affairs. The same hatred and suspicion with which the Israelites have always been followed, was then at its height. Isaac was therefore doubly grateful for this mark of confidence on the part of M. de Rennepont. He accepted the offer, and promised from that day to devote his existence to the service of him who had first saved his life, and then trusted implicitly to his good faith and uprightness, although he was a Jew, and belonged to a race generally suspected and despised. M. de Rennepont, a man of great soul, endowed with a good spirit, was not deceived in his choice. Until he was deprived of his fortune, it prospered wonderfully in the hands of Isaac Samuel, who, gifted with an admirable aptitude for business, applied himself exclusively to advance the interests of his benefactor.

Then came the persecution and ruin of M. de Rennepont, whose property was confiscated and given up to the reverend fathers of the Company of Jesus only a few days before his death. Concealed in the retreat he had chosen, therein to put a violent end to his life, he sent secretly for Isaac Samuel, and delivered to him fifty thousand crowns in gold, the last remains of his fortune. This faithful servant was to invest the money to the best advantage, and, if he should have a son, transmit to him the same obligation; or, should he have no child, he was to seek out some relation worthy of continuing this trust, to which would moreover be annexed a fair reward. It was thus to be transmitted and perpetuated from relative to relative, until the expiration of a century and a half. M. de Rennepont also begged Isaac to take charge, during his life, of the

house in the Rue Saint-Francois, where he would be lodged gratis, and to leave this function likewise to his descendants, if it were possible.

Page 27

If even Isaac Samuel had not had children, the powerful bond of union which exists between certain Jewish families, would have rendered practicable the last will of De Rennepont. The relations of Isaac would have become partner; in his gratitude to his benefactor, and they, and their succeeding generations, would have religiously accomplished the task imposed upon one of their race. But, several years after the death of De Rennepont, Isaac had a son.

This son, Levy Samuel, born in 1689, not having had any children by his first wife, married again at nearly sixty years of age, and, in 1750, he also had a son—David Samuel, the guardian of the house in the Rue Saint Francois, who, in 1832 (the date of this narrative), was eighty-two years old, and seemed likely to live as long as his father, who had died at the age of ninety-three. Finally, Abel Samuel, the son whom Bathsheba so bitterly regretted, born in 1790, had perished under the Russian knout, at the age of thirty-six.

Having established this humble genealogy, we easily understand how this successive longevity of three members of the Samuel family, all of whom had been guardians of the walled house, by uniting, as it were, the nineteenth with the seventeenth century, simplified and facilitated the execution of M. de Rennepont's will; the latter having declared his desire to the grandfather of the Samuels, that the capital should only be augmented by interest at five per cent.—so that the fortune might come to his descendants free from all taint of usurious speculation.

The fellow men of the Samuel family, the first inventors of the bill of exchange, which served them in the Middle Ages to transport mysteriously considerable amounts from one end of the world to the other, to conceal their fortune, and to shield it from the rapacity of their enemies—the Jews, we say, having almost the monopoly of the trade in money and exchanges, until the end of the eighteenth century, aided the secret transactions and financial operations of this family, which, up to about 1820, placed their different securities, which had become progressively immense, in the hands of the principal Israelitish bankers and merchants of Europe. This sure and secret manner of acting had enabled the present guardian of the house in the Rue Saint-Francois, to effect enormous investments, unknown to all; and it was more especially during the period of his management, that the capital sum had acquired, by the mere fact of compound interest, an almost incalculable development. Compared with him, his father and grandfather had only small amounts to manage. Though it had only been necessary to find successively sure and immediate investments, so that the money might not remain as it were one day without bearing interest, it had acquired financial capacity to attain this result, when so many millions were in question. The last of the Samuels, brought up in the school of his father, had exhibited this

Page 28

capacity in a very high degree, as will be seen immediately by the results. Nothing could be more touching, noble, and respectable, than the conduct of the members of this Jewish family, who, partners in the engagement of gratitude taken by their ancestor, devote themselves for long years, with as much disinterestedness as intelligence and honesty, to the slow acquisition of a kingly fortune, of which they expect no part themselves, but which, thanks to them, would come pure, as immense, to the hands of the descendants of their benefactor! Nor could anything be more honorable to him who made, and him who received this deposit, than the simple promise by word of mouth, unaccompanied by any security save mutual confidence and reciprocal esteem, when the result was only to be produced at the end of a century and a half!

After once more reading his inventory with attention, Samuel said to his wife: "I am certain of the correctness of my additions. Now please to compare with the account-book in your hand the summary of the investments that I have just entered in the register. I will assure myself, at the same time, that the bonds and vouchers are properly arranged in this casket, that, on the opening of the will, they may be delivered in order to the notary."

"Begin, my dear, and I will check you," said Bathsheba.

Samuel read as follows, examining as he went on, the contents of his casket:

Statement of the account of the heirs of M. *De Rennepont*, delivered by *David Samuels*.

Debit.

2,000,000 francs per annum, in the French 5 P. C., bought from 1825 to 1832, at an average price of 99f. 50c. 39,800,000

900,000 francs, ditto, in the French 3 P. C., bought during the same years, at an average of 74f 25c 22,275,000

5;000 shares in the Bank of France, bought at 1,900 9,500,000

3,000 shares in the Four

Canals, in a certificate from the Company, bought at 1,115f 3,345,000

125,000 ducats of

Neapolitans, at an average of 82. 2,050,000 ducats, at 4f. 400 9,020,000

5,000 Austrian Metallics, of 1,000 florins, at 93

—say 4,650,000 florins, at 2f. 50c 11,625,000

75,000 pounds sterling per annum, English

Consolidated 3 P. C., at 88 3/4—say 2,218,750, at 25f 55,468,750

1,200,000 florins, Dutch

2 1/2 P. C., at 60-28,

860,000 florins, at 2f.



100. 60,606,000
Cash in banknotes, gold
and silver 535,250

Francs 212,175,000

Paris, 12th February, 1832.
Credit.

150,000 francs received from M. de Rennepont, in 1682, by Isaac
Samuel my grandfather; and invested by him, my father, and myself, in different
securities, at Five per Cent.
Interest, with a settlement of account and Investment of interest every six months,
producing, as by annexed vouchers, 225,950,000

Page 29

Less losses sustained by failures, expenses of commission and brokerage, and salary of three generations of trustees, as per statement annexed 13,775,000

212,175,000

Francs 212,175,000

“It is quite right,” said Samuel, after examining the papers, contained in the cedar-wood box. “There remains in hand, at the absolute disposal of the heirs of the Rennepont family, the Sum Of *two hundred and twelve millions, one hundred and seventy-five thousand francs*.” And the old man looked at his wife with an expression of legitimate pride. “It is hardly credible!” cried Bathsheba, struck with surprise. “I knew that you had immense property in your hands; but I could never have believed, that one hundred and fifty thousand francs, left a century and a half ago, should be the only source of this immense fortune.”

“It is even so, Bathsheba,” answered the old man, proudly. ‘Doubtless, my grandfather, my father, and myself, have all been exact and faithful in the management of these funds; doubtless, we have required some sagacity in the choice of investments, in times of revolution and commercial panics; but all this was easy to us, thanks to our relations with our brethren in all countries—and never have I, or any of mine, made an usurious investment, or even taken the full advantage of the legal rate of interest. Such were the positive demands of M. de Rennepont, given to my grandfather; nor is there in the world a fortune that has been obtained by purer means. Had it not been for this disinterestedness, we might have much augmented this two hundred and twelve millions, only by taking advantage of a few favorable circumstances.”

“Dear me! is it possible?”

“Nothing is more simple, Bathsheba. Every one knows, that in fourteen years a capital will be doubled, by the mere accumulation of interest and compound interest at five per cent. Now reflect, that in a century and a half there are ten times fourteen years, and that these one hundred and fifty thousands francs have thus been doubled and redoubled, over and over again. All that astonishes you will then appear plain enough. In 1682, M. de Rennepont entrusted my grandfather with a hundred and fifty thousand francs; this sum, invested as I have told you, would have produced in 1696, fourteen years after, three hundred thousand francs. These last, doubled in 1710, would produce six hundred thousand. On the death of my grandfather in 1719, the amount was already near a million; in 1724, it would be twelve hundred thousand francs; in 1738, two millions four hundred thousand; in 1752, about two years after my birth, four millions eight hundred thousand; in 1766, nine millions six hundred thousand; in 1780, nineteen millions two hundred thousand; in 1794, twelve years after the death of my father, thirty-eight millions

Page 30

four hundred thousand; in 1808, seventy-six millions eight hundred thousand; in 1822, one hundred and fifty-three millions six hundred thousand; and, at this time, taking the compound interest for ten years, it should be at least two hundred and twenty-five millions. But losses and inevitable charges, of which the account has been strictly kept, have reduced the sum to two hundred and twelve millions one hundred and seventy-five thousand francs, the securities for which are in this box.”

“I now understand you, my dear,” answered Bathsheba, thoughtfully; “but how wonderful is this power of accumulation! and what admirable provision may be made for the future, with the smallest present resources!”

“Such, no doubt, was the idea of M. de Rennepont; for my father has often told me, and he derived it from his father, that M. de Rennepont was one of the soundest intellects of his time,” said Samuel, as he closed the cedar-box.

“God grant his descendants may be worthy of this kingly fortune, and make a noble use of it!” said Bathsheba, rising.

It was now broad day, and the clock had just struck seven.

“The masons will soon be here,” said Samuel, as he replaced the cedar-box in the iron safe, concealed behind the antique press. “Like you, Bathsheba, I am curious and anxious to know, what descendants of M. de Rennepont will now present themselves.”

Two or three loud knocks on the outer gate resounded through the house. The barking of the watch-dogs responded to this summons.

Samuel said to his wife: “It is no doubt the masons, whom the notary has sent with his clerk. Tie all the keys and their labels together; I will come back and fetch them.”

So saying, Samuel went down to the door with much nimbleness, considering his age, prudently opened a small wicket, and saw three workmen, in the garb of masons, accompanied by a young man dressed in black.

“What may you want, gentlemen?” said the Jew, before opening the door, as he wished first to make sure of the identity of the personages.

“I am sent by M. Dumesnil, the notary,” answered the clerk, “to be present at the unwalling of a door. Here is a letter from my master, addressed to M. Samuel, guardian of the house.”

“I am he, sir,” said the Jew; “please to put the letter through the slide, and I will take it.”



The clerk did as Samuel desired, but shrugged his shoulders at what he considered the ridiculous precautions of a suspicious old man. The housekeeper opened the box, took the letter, went to the end of the vaulted passage in order to read it, and carefully compared the signature with that of another letter which he drew from the pocket of his long coat; then, after all these precautions, he chained up his dogs, and returned to open the gate to the clerk and masons.

“What the devil, my good man!” said the clerk, as he entered; “there would not be more formalities in opening the gates of a fortress!”

Page 31

The Jew bowed, but without answering.

“Are you deaf, my good fellow?” cried the clerk, close to his ears.

“No, sir,” said Samuel, with a quiet smile, as he advanced several steps beyond the passage. Then pointing to the old house, he added: “That, sir, is the door which you will have to open; you will also have to remove the lead and iron from the second window to the right.”

“Why not open all the windows?” asked the clerk.

“Because, sir, as guardian of this house, I have received particular orders on the subject.”

“Who gave you these orders?”

“My father, sir, who received them from his father, who transmitted them from the master of this house. When I cease to have the care of it, the new proprietor will do as he pleases.”

“Oh! very well,” said the clerk, not a little surprised. Then, addressing himself to the masons, he added: “This is your business, my fine fellows; you are to unwall the door, and remove the iron frame-work of the second window to the right.”

Whilst the masons set to work, under the inspection of the notary’s clerk, a coach stopped before the outer gate, and Rodin, accompanied by Gabriel, entered the house in the Rue Saint-Francois.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HEIR

Samuel opened the door to Gabriel and Rodin.

The latter said to the Jew, “You, sir, are the keeper of this house?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Samuel.

“This is Abbe Gabriel de Rennepont,” said Rodin, as he introduced his companion, “one of the descendants of the family of the Renneponts.”

“Happy to hear it, sir,” said the Jew, almost involuntarily, struck with the angelic countenance of Gabriel—for nobleness and serenity of soul were visible in the glance of the young priest, and were written upon his pure, white brow, already crowned with the

halo of martyrdom. Samuel looked at Gabriel with curiosity and benevolent interest; but feeling that this silent contemplation must cause some embarrassment to his guest, he said to him, "M. Abbe, the notary will not be here before ten o'clock."

Gabriel looked at him in turn, with an air of surprise, and answered, "What notary, sir?"

"Father d'Aigrigny will explain all this to you," said Rodin, hastily. Then addressing Samuel, he added, "We are a little before the time. Will you allow us to wait for the arrival of the notary?"

"Certainly," said Samuel, "if you please to walk into my house."

"I thank you, sir," answered Rodin, "and accept your offer."

"Follow me, then, gentlemen," said the old man.

A few moments after, the young priest and the socius, preceded by Samuel, entered one of the rooms occupied by the latter, on the ground-floor of the building, looking out upon the court-yard.

"The Abbe d'Aigrigny, who has been the guardian of M. Gabriel, will soon be coming to ask for us," added Rodin; "will you have the kindness, sir to show him into this room?"

Page 32

"I will not fail to do so, sir," said Samuel, as he went out.

The socius and Gabriel were left alone. To the adorable gentleness which usually gave to the fine features of the missionary so touching a charm, there had succeeded in this moment a remarkable expression of sadness, resolution, and severity. Rodin not having seen Gabriel for some days, was greatly struck by the change he remarked in him. He had watched him silently all the way from the Rue des Postes to the Rue Saint-Francois. The young priest wore, as usual, a long black cassock, which made still more visible the transparent paleness of his countenance. When the Jew had left the room, Gabriel said to Rodin, in a firm voice, "Will you at length inform me, sir, why, for some days past, I have been prevented from speaking to his reverence Father d'Aigrigny? Why has he chosen this house to grant me an interview?"

"It is impossible for me to answer these questions," replied Rodin, coldly. "His reverence will soon arrive, and will listen to you. All I can tell you is, that the reverend father lays as much stress upon this meeting as you do. If he has chosen this house for the interview, it is because you have an interest to be here. You know it well—though you affected astonishment on hearing the guardian speak of a notary."

So saying, Rodin fixed a scrutinizing, anxious look upon Gabriel, whose countenance expressed only surprise.

"I do not understand you," said he, in reply to Rodin. "What have I to do with this house?"

"It is impossible that you should not know it," answered Rodin, still looking at him with attention.

"I have told you, sir, that I do not know it," replied the other, almost offended by the pertinacity of the socius.

"What, then, did your adopted mother come to tell you yesterday? Why did you presume to receive her without permission from Father d'Aigrigny, as I have heard this morning? Did she not speak with you of certain family papers, found upon you when she took you in?"

"No, sir," said Gabriel; "those papers were delivered at the time to my adopted mother's confessor, and they afterwards passed into Father d'Aigrigny's hands. This is the first I hear for a long time of these papers."

"So you affirm that Frances Baudoin did not come to speak to you on this subject?" resumed Rodin, obstinately, laying great emphasis on his words.

“This is the second time, sir, that you seem to doubt my affirmation,” said the young priest, mildly, while he repressed a movement of impatience, “I assure you that I speak the truth.”

Page 33

"He knows nothing," thought Rodin; for he was too well convinced of Gabriel's sincerity to retain the least doubt after so positive a declaration. "I believe you," went on he. "The idea only occurred to me in reflecting what could be the reason of sufficient weight to induce you to transgress Father d'Aigrigny's orders with regard to the absolute retirement he had commanded, which was to exclude all communication with those without. Much more, contrary to all the rules of our house, you ventured to shut the door of your room, whereas it ought to remain half open, that the mutual inspection enjoined us might be the more easily practiced. I could only explain these sins against discipline, by the necessity of some very important conversation with your adopted mother."

"It was to a priest, and not to her adopted son, that Madame Baudoin wished to speak," replied Gabriel, in a tone of deep seriousness. "I closed my door because I was to hear a confession."

"And what had Frances Baudoin of such importance to confess?"

"You will know that by-and-bye, when I speak to his reverence—if it be his pleasure that you should hear me."

These words were so firmly spoken, that a long silence ensued. Let us remind the reader that Gabriel had hitherto been kept by his superiors in the most complete ignorance of the importance of the family interests which required his presence in the Rue Saint-Francois. The day before, Frances Baudoin, absorbed in her own grief, had forgotten to tell him that the two orphans also should be present at this meeting, and had she even thought of it, Dagobert would have prevented her mentioning this circumstance to the young priest.

Gabriel was therefore quite ignorant of the family ties which united him with the daughters of Marshal Simon, with Mdlle. de Cardoville, with M. Hardy, Prince Djalma, and Sleepinbuff. In a word, if it had then been revealed to him that he was the heir of Marius de Rennepont, he would have believed himself the only descendant of the family. During the moment's silence which succeeded his conversation with Rodin, Gabriel observed through the windows the mason's at their work of unwalling the door. Having finished this first operation, they set about removing the bars of iron by which a plate of lead was fixed over the same entrance.

At this juncture, Father d'Aigrigny, conducted by Samuel, entered the room. Before Gabriel could turn around, Rodin had time to whisper to the reverend father, "He knows nothing—and we have no longer anything to fear from the Indian."

Page 34

Notwithstanding his affected calmness, Father d'Aigrigny's countenance was pale and contracted, like that of a player who is about to stake all on a last, decisive game. Hitherto, all had favored the designs of the Society; but he could not think without alarm of the four hours which still remained before they should reach the fatal moment. Gabriel having turned towards him, Father d'Aigrigny offered him his hand with a smile, and said to him in an affectionate and cordial tone, "My dear son, it has pained me a good deal to have been obliged to refuse you till now the interview that you so much desired. It has been no less distressing to me to impose on you a confinement of some days. Though I cannot give any explanation of what I may think fit to order, I will just observe to you that I have acted only for your interest."

"I am bound to believe your reverence," answered Gabriel, bowing his head.

In spite of himself, the young priest felt a vague sense of fear, for until his departure for his American mission, Father d'Aigrigny, at whose feet he had pronounced the formidable vows which bound him irrevocably to the Society of Jesus, had exercised over him that frightful species of influence which, acting only by despotism, suppression, and intimidation, breaks down all the living forces of the soul, and leaves it inert, trembling, and terrified. Impressions of early youth are indelible, and this was the first time, since his return from America, that Gabriel found himself in presence of Father d'Aigrigny; and although he did not shrink from the resolution he had taken, he regretted not to have been able, as he had hoped, to gather new strength and courage from an interview with Agricola and Dagobert. Father d'Aigrigny knew mankind too well not to have remarked the emotion of the young priest, and to have endeavored to explain its cause. This emotion appeared to him a favorable omen; he redoubled, therefore, his seductive arts, his air of tenderness and amenity, reserving to himself, if necessary, the choice of assuming another mask. He sat down, while Gabriel and Rodin remained standing in a respectful position, and said to the former: "You desire, my dear son, to have an important interview with me?"

"Yes, father," said Gabriel, involuntarily casting down his eyes before the large, glittering gray pupil of his superior.

"And I also have matters of great importance to communicate to you. Listen to me first; you can speak afterwards."

"I listen, father."

"It is about twelve years ago, my dear son," said Father d'Aigrigny, affectionately, "that the confessor of your adopted mother, addressing himself to me through M. Rodin, called my attention to yourself, by reporting the astonishing progress you had made at the school of the Brothers. I soon found, indeed, that your excellent conduct, your gentle, modest character, and your precocious intelligence, were worthy of the most tender interest. From

Page 35

that moment I kept my eyes upon you, and at the end of some time, seeing that you did not fall off, it appeared to me that there was something more in you than the stuff that makes a workman. We agreed with your adopted mother, and through my intervention, you were admitted gratuitously to one of the schools of our Company. Thus one burden the less weighed upon the excellent woman who had taken charge of you, and you received from our paternal care all the benefits of a religious education. Is not this true, my dear son?"

"It is true, father," answered Gabriel, casting down his eyes.

"As you grew up, excellent and rare virtues displayed themselves in your character. Your obedience and mildness were above all exemplary. You made rapid progress in your studies. I knew not then to what career you wished to devote yourself, but I felt certain that, in every station of life, you would remain a faithful son of the Church. I was not deceived in my hopes, or rather, my dear son, you surpassed them all. Learning, by a friendly communication, that your adopted mother ardently desired to see you take orders, you acceded generously and religiously to the wish of the excellent woman to whom you owed so much. But as the Lord is always just in His recompenses, He willed that the most touching work of gratitude you could show to your adopted mother, should at the same time be divinely profitable by making you one of the militant members of our holy Church."

At these words, Gabriel could not repress a significant start, as he remembered Frances' sad confidences. But he restrained himself, whilst Rodin stood leaning with his elbow on the corner of the chimney-piece, continuing to examine him with singular and obstinate attention.

Father d'Aigrigny resumed: "I do not conceal from you, my dear son, that your resolution filled me with joy. I saw in you one of the future lights of the Church, and I was anxious to see it shine in the midst of our Company. You submitted courageously to our painful and difficult tests; you were judged worthy of belonging to us, and, after taking in my presence the irrevocable and sacred oath, which binds you for ever to our Company for the greater glory of God, you answered the appeal of our Holy Father^[14] to willing souls, and offered yourself as a missionary, to preach to savages the one Catholic faith. Though it was painful to us to part with our dear son, we could not refuse to accede to such pious wishes. You set out a humble missionary you return a glorious martyr—and we are justly proud to reckon you amongst our number. This rapid sketch of the past was necessary, my dear son to arrive at what follows, for we wish now, if it be possible, to draw still closer the bonds that unite us. Listen to me, my dear son; what I am about to say is confidential and of the highest importance, not only for you, but the whole Company."

“Then, father,” cried Gabriel hastily, interrupting the Abbe d’Aigrigny, “I cannot—I ought not to hear you.”

Page 36

The young priest became deadly pale; one saw, by the alteration of his features, that a violent struggle was taking place within him, but recovering his first resolution, he raised his head, and casting an assured look on Father d'Aigrigny and Rodin, who glanced at each other in mute surprise, he resumed: "I repeat to you, father, that if it concerns confidential matters of the Company, I must not hear you."

"Really, my dear son, you occasion me the greatest astonishment. What is the matter?—Your countenance changes, your emotion is visible. Speak without fear; why can you not hear me?"

"I cannot tell you, father, until I also have, in my turn, rapidly sketched the past—such as I have learned to judge it of late. You will then understand, father, that I am no longer entitled to your confidence, for an abyss will doubtlessly soon separate us."

At these words, it is impossible to paint the look rapidly exchanged between Rodin and Father d'Aigrigny. The socius began to bite his nails, fixing his reptile eye angrily upon Gabriel; Father d'Aigrigny grew livid, and his brow was bathed in cold sweat. He asked himself with terror, if, at the moment of reaching the goal, the obstacle was going to come from Gabriel, in favor of whom all other obstacles had been removed. This thought filled him with despair. Yet the reverend father contained himself admirably, remained calm, and answered with affectionate unction: "It is impossible to believe, my dear son, that you and I can ever be separated by an abyss—unless by the abyss of grief, which would be caused by any serious danger to your salvation. But speak; I listen to you."

"It is true, that, twelve years ago, father," proceeded Gabriel, in a firm voice, growing more animated as he proceeded, "I entered, through your intervention, a college of the Company of Jesus. I entered it loving, truthful, confiding. How did they encourage those precious instincts of childhood? I will tell you. The day of my entrance, the Superior said to me, as he pointed out two children a little older than myself: 'These are the companions that you will prefer. You will always walk three together. The rules of the house forbid all intercourse between two persons only. They also require, that you should listen attentively to what your companions say, so that you may report it to me; for these dear children may have, without knowing it, bad thoughts or evil projects. Now, if you love your comrades, you must inform me of these evil tendencies, that my paternal remonstrances may save them from punishment; it is better to prevent evil than to punish it.'"

"Such are, indeed, my dear son," said Father d'Aigrigny, "the rules of our house, and the language we hold to all our pupils on their entrance."

Page 37

"I know it, father," answered Gabriel, bitterly; "three days after, a poor, submissive, and credulous child, I was already a spy upon my comrades, hearing and remembering their conversation, and reporting it to the superior, who congratulated me on my zeal. What they thus made me do was shameful, and yet, God knows! I thought I was accomplishing a charitable duty. I was happy in obeying the commands of a superior whom I respected, and to whose words I listened, in my childish faith, as I should have listened to those of Heaven. One day, that I had broken some rule of the house, the superior said to me: 'My child, you have deserved a severe punishment; but you will be pardoned, if you succeed in surprising one of your comrades in the same fault that you have committed.' And for that, notwithstanding my faith and blind obedience, this encouragement to turn informer, from the motive of personal interest, might appear odious to me, the superior added. 'I speak to you, my child, for the sake of your comrade's salvation. Were he to escape punishment, his evil habits would become habitual. But by detecting him in a fault, and exposing him to salutary correction, you will have the double advantage of aiding in his salvation, and escaping yourself a merited punishment, which will have been remitted because of your zeal for your neighbor—"

"Doubtless," answered Father d'Aigrigny, more and more terrified by Gabriel's language; "and in truth, my dear son, all this is conformable to the rule followed in our colleges, and to the habits of the members of our Company, 'who may denounce each other without prejudice to mutual love and charity, and only for their greater spiritual advancement, particularly when questioned by their superior, or commanded for the greater glory of God,' as our Constitution has it."

"I know it," cried Gabriel; "I know it. 'Tis in the name of all that is most sacred amongst men, that we are encouraged to do evil."

"My dear son," said Father d'Aigrigny, trying to conceal his secret and growing terror beneath an appearance of wounded dignity, "from you to me these words are at least strange."

At this, Rodin quitted the mantelpiece, on which he had been leaning, began to walk up and down the room, with a meditative air, and without ceasing to bite his nails.

"It is cruel to be obliged to remind you, my dear son, that you are indebted to us for the education you have received," added Father d'Aigrigny.

"Such were its fruits, father," replied Gabriel. "Until then I had been a spy on the other children, from a sort of disinterestedness; but the orders of the superior made me advance another step on that shameful road. I had become an informer, to escape a merited punishment. And yet, such was my faith, my humility, my confidence, that I performed with innocence and candor this doubly odious part. Once, indeed, tormented by vague scruples, the last remains of generous aspirations that they were stifling within

me, I asked myself if the charitable and religious end could justify the means, and I communicated my doubts to the superior. He replied, that I had not to judge, but to obey, and that to him alone belonged the responsibility of my acts."

Page 38

“Go on, my dear son,” said Father d’Aigrigny, gelding, in spite of himself, to the deepest dejection. “Alas! I was right in opposing your travel to America.”

“And yet it was the will of Providence, in that new, productive, and free country, that, enlightened by a singular chance, on past and present, my eyes were at length opened. Yes!” cried Gabriel, “it was in America that, released from the gloomy abode where I had spent so many years of my youth, and finding myself for the first time face to face with the divine majesty of Nature, in the heart of immense solitudes through which I journeyed—it was there that, overcome by so much magnificence and grandeur, I made a vow—” Here Gabriel interrupted himself, to continue: “Presently, father, I will explain to you that vow; but believe me,” added the missionary, with an accent of deep sorrow, “it was a fatal day to me when I first learned to fear and condemn all that I had hitherto most revered and blessed. Oh! I assure you father,” added Gabriel, with moist eyes, “it was not for myself alone, that I then wept.”

“I know the goodness of your heart, my dear son,” replied Father d’Aigrigny, catching a glimpse of hope, on seeing Gabriel’s emotion; “I fear that you have been led astray. But trust yourself to us, as to your spiritual fathers, and I doubt not we shall confirm your faith, so unfortunately shaken, and disperse the darkness which at present obscures your sight. Alas, my dear son, in your vain illusions, you have mistaken some false glimmer for the pure light of day. But go on.”

Whilst Father d’Aigrigny was thus speaking, Rodin stopped, took a pocket book from his coat, and wrote down several notes. Gabriel was becoming more and more pale and agitated. It required no small courage in him, to speak as he was speaking, for, since his journey to America, he had learned to estimate the formidable power of the Company. But this revelation of the past, looked at from the vantage-ground of a more enlightened present, was for the young priest the excuse, or rather the cause of the determination he had just signified to his superior, and he wished to explain all faithfully, notwithstanding the danger he knowingly encountered. He continued therefore, in an agitated voice:

“You know, father, that the last days of my childhood, that happy age of frankness and innocent joy, were spent in an atmosphere of terror, suspicion, and restraint. Alas! how could I resign myself to the least impulse of confiding trust, when I was recommended to shun the looks of him who spoke with me, in order to hide the impression that his words might cause—to conceal whatever I felt, and to observe and listen to everything? Thus I reached the age of fifteen; by degrees, the rare visits that I was allowed to pay, but always in presence of one of our fathers, to my adopted mother and brother, were quite suppressed, so as to shut my heart against all soft and tender emotions. Sad and fearful

Page 39

in that large, old noiseless, gloomy house, I felt that I became more and more isolated from the affections and the freedom of the world. My time was divided between mutilated studies, without connection and without object, and long hours of minute devotional exercises. I ask you, father, did they ever seek to warm our young souls by words of tenderness or evangelic love? Alas, no! For the words of the divine Saviour—Love ye one another, they had substituted the command: Suspect ye one another. Did they ever, father, speak to us of our country or of liberty?—No! ah, no! for those words make the heart beat high; and with them, the heart must not beat at all. To our long hours of study and devotion, there only succeeded a few walks, three by three—never two and two—because by threes, the spy-system is more practicable, and because intimacies are more easily formed by two alone; and thus might have arisen some of those generous friendships, which also make the heart beat more than it should.¹⁵ And so, by the habitual repression of every feeling, there came a time when I could not feel at all. For six months, I had not seen my adopted mother and brother; they came to visit me at the college; a few years before, I should have received them with transports and tears; this time my eyes were dry, my heart was cold. My mother and brother quitted me weeping. The sight of this grief struck me and I became conscious of the icy insensibility which had been creeping upon me since I inhabited this tomb. Frightened at myself, I wished to leave it, while I had still strength to do so. Then, father, I spoke to you of the choice of a profession; for sometimes, in waking moments, I seemed to catch from afar the sound of an active and useful life, laborious and free, surrounded by family affections. Oh! then I felt the want of movement and liberty, of noble and warm emotions—of that life of the soul, which fled before me. I told it you, father on my knees, bathing your hands with my tears. The life of a workman or a soldier—anything would have suited me. It was then you informed me, that my adopted mother, to whom I owed my life—for she had taken me in, dying of want, and, poor herself, had shared with me the scanty bread of her child—admirable sacrifice for a mother!—that she,” continued Gabriel, hesitating and casting down his eyes, for noble natures blush for the guilt of others, and are ashamed of the infamies of which they are themselves victims, “that she, that my adopted mother, had but one wish, one desire—”

“That of seeing you takes orders, my dear son,” replied Father d’Aigrigny; “for this pious and perfect creature hoped, that, in securing your salvation, she would provide for her own: but she did not venture to inform you of this thought, for fear you might ascribe it to an interested motive.”

“Enough, father!” said Gabriel, interrupting the Abbe d’Aigrigny, with a movement of involuntary indignation; “it is painful for me to hear you assert an error. Frances Baudoin never had such a thought.”

Page 40

"My dear son, you are too hasty in your judgments," replied Father d'Aigrigny, mildly. "I tell you, that such was the one, sole thought of your adopted mother."

"Yesterday, father, she told me all. She and I were equally deceived."

"Then, my dear son," said Father d'Aigrigny, sternly, "you take the word of your adopted mother before mine?"

"Spare me an answer painful for both of us, father," said Gabriel, casting down his eyes.

"Will you now tell me," resumed Father d'Aigrigny, with anxiety, "what you mean to—"

The reverend father was unable to finish. Samuel entered the room, and said: "A rather old man wishes to speak to M. Rodin."

"That is my name, sir," answered the socius, in surprise; "I am much obliged to you." But, before following the Jew, he gave to Father d'Aigrigny a few words written with a pencil upon one of the leaves of his packet-book.

Rodin went out in very uneasy mood, to learn who could have come to seek him in the Rue Saint-Francois. Father d'Aigrigny and Gabriel were left alone together.

[14] It is only in respect to Missions that the Jesuits acknowledge the papal supremacy.

[15] This rule is so strict in Jesuit Colleges, that if one of three pupils leaves the other two, they separate out of earshot till the first comes back.

CHAPTER XX.

The rupture.

Plunged into a state of mortal anxiety, Father d'Aigrigny had taken mechanically the note written by Rodin, and held it in his hand without thinking of opening it. The reverend father asked himself in alarm, what conclusion Gabriel would draw from these recriminations upon the past; and he durst not make any answer to his reproaches, for fear of irritating the young priest, upon whose head such immense interests now reposed. Gabriel could possess nothing for himself, according to the constitutions of the Society of Jesus. Moreover, the reverend father had obtained from him, in favor of the Order, an express renunciation of all property that might ever come to him. But the commencement of his conversation seemed to announce so serious a change in Gabriel's views with regard to the Company, that he might choose to break through the ties which attached him to it; and in that case, he would not be legally bound to fulfil any of his engagements.[16] The donation would thus be cancelled de facto, just at the moment of being so marvellously realized by the possession of the immense fortune of

the Rennepont family, and d'Aigrigny's hopes would thus be completely and for ever frustrated. Of all these perplexities which the reverend father had experienced for some time past, with regard to this inheritance, none had been more unexpected and terrible than this. Fearing to interrupt or question Gabriel, Father d'Aigrigny waited, in mute terror, the end of this interview, which already bore so threatening an aspect.

Page 41

The missionary resumed: "It is my duty, father, to continue this sketch of my past life, until the moment of my departure for America. You will understand, presently, why I have imposed on myself this obligation."

Father d'Aigrigny nodded for him to proceed.

"Once informed of the pretended wishes of my adopted mother, I resigned myself to them, though at some cost of feeling. I left the gloomy abode, in which I had passed my childhood and part of my youth, to enter one of the seminaries of the Company. My resolution was not caused by an irresistible religious vocation, but by a wish to discharge the sacred debt I owed my adopted mother. Yet the true spirit of the religion of Christ is so vivifying, that I felt myself animated and warmed by the idea of carrying out the adorable precepts of our Blessed Saviour. To my imagination, a seminary, instead of resembling the college where I had lived in painful restraint, appeared like a holy place, where all that was pure and warm in the fraternity of the Gospel would be applied to common life—where, for example, the lessons most frequently taught would be the ardent love of humanity, and the ineffable sweets of commiseration and tolerance—where the everlasting words of Christ would be interpreted in their broadest sense—and where, in fine, by the habitual exercise and expansion of the most generous sentiments, men were prepared for the magnificent apostolic mission of making the rich and happy sympathize with the sufferings of their brethren, by unveiling the frightful miseries of humanity—a sublime and sacred morality, which none are able to withstand, when it is preached with eyes full of tears, and hearts overflowing with tenderness and charity!"

As he delivered these last words with profound emotion, Gabriel's eyes became moist, and his countenance shone with angelic beauty.

"Such is, indeed, my dear son, the spirit of Christianity; but one must also study and explain the letter," answered Father d'Aigrigny, coldly. "It is to this study that the seminaries of our Company are specially destined. Now the interpretation of the letter is a work of analysis, discipline, and submission—and not one of heart and sentiment."

"I perceive that only too well, father. On entering this new house, I found, alas! all my hopes defeated. Dilating for a moment, my heart soon sunk within me. Instead of this centre of life, affection, youth, of which I had dreamed. I found, in the silent and ice-cold seminary, the same suppression of every generous emotion, the same inexorable discipline, the same system of mutual prying, the same suspicion, the same invincible obstacles to all ties of friendship. The ardor which had warmed my soul for an instant soon died out; little by little, I fell back into the habits of a stagnant, passive, mechanical life, governed by a pitiless power with mechanical precision, just like the inanimate works of a watch."

Page 42

“But order, submission and regularity are the first foundations of our Company, my dear son.”

“Alas, father! it was death, not life, that I found thus organized. In the midst of this destruction of every generous principle, I devoted myself to scholastic and theological studies—gloomy studies—a wily, menacing, and hostile science which, always awake to ideas of peril, contest, and war, is opposed to all those of peace, progress, and liberty.”

“Theology, my dear son,” said Father d’Aigrigny, sternly, “is at once a buckler and a sword; a buckler, to protect and cover the Catholic faith—a sword, to attack and combat heresy.”

“And yet, father, Christ and His apostles knew not this subtle science: their simple and touching words regenerated mankind, and set freedom over slavery. Does not the divine code of the Gospel suffice to teach men to love one another? But, alas! far from speaking to us this language, our attention was too often occupied with wars of religion, and the rivers of blood that had flowed in honor of the Lord, and for the destruction of heresy. These terrible lessons made our life still more melancholy. As we grew near to manhood, our relations at the seminary assumed a growing character of bitterness, jealousy and suspicion. The habit of tale bearing against each other, applied to more serious subjects, engendered silent hate and profound resentments. I was neither better nor worse than the others. All of us, bowed down for years beneath the iron yoke of passive obedience, unaccustomed to reflection or free-will, humble and trembling before our superiors, had the same pale, dull, colorless disposition. At last I took orders; once a priest, you invited me, father, to enter the Company of Jesus, or rather I found myself insensibly brought to this determination. How, I do not know. For a long time before, my will was not my own. I went through all my proofs; the most terrible was decisive; for some months, I lived in the silence of my cell, practicing with resignation the strange and mechanical exercises that you ordered me. With the exception of your reverence, nobody approached me during that long space of time; no human voice but yours sounded in my ear. Sometimes, in the night, I felt vague terrors; my mind, weakened by fasting, austerity, and solitude, was impressed with frightful visions. At other times, on the contrary, I felt a sort of quiescence, in the idea that, having once pronounced my vows, I should be delivered for ever from the burden of thought and will. Then I abandoned myself to an insurmountable torpor, like those unfortunate wretches, who, surprised by a snow-storm, yield to a suicidal repose. Thus I awaited the fatal moment. At last, according to the rule of discipline, choking with the death rattle,[17] I hastened the moment of accomplishing the final act of my expiring will—the vow to renounce it for ever.”

“Remember, my dear son,” replied Father d’Aigrigny, pale and tortured by increasing anguish, “remember, that, on the eve of the day fixed for the completion of your vows; I offered, according to the rule of our Company, to absolve you from joining us—leaving you completely free, for we accept none but voluntary vocations.”

Page 43

"It is true, father," answered Gabriel, with sorrowful bitterness; "when, worn out and broken by three months of solitude and trial, I was completely exhausted, and unable to move a step, you opened the door of my cell, and said to me: 'If you like, rise and walk; you are free; Alas! I had no more strength. The only desire of my soul, inert and paralyzed for so long a period, was the repose of the grave; and pronouncing those irrevocable vows, I fell, like a corpse, into your hands.'"

"And, till now, my dear son, you have never failed in this corpse—like obedience,—to use the expression of our glorious founder—because, the more absolute this obedience, the more meritorious it must be."

After a moment's silence, Gabriel resumed: "You had always concealed from me, father, the true ends of the Society into which I entered. I was asked to abandon my free-will to my superiors, in the name of the Greater Glory of God. My vows once pronounced, I was to be in your hands a docile and obedient instrument; but I was to be employed, you told me, in a holy, great and beautiful work. I believed you, father—how should I not have believed you? but a fatal event changed my destiny—a painful malady caused by—"

"My son," cried Father d'Aigrigny, interrupting Gabriel, "it is useless to recall these circumstances."

"Pardon me, father, I must recall them. I have the right to be heard. I cannot pass over in silence any of the facts, which have led me to take the immutable resolution that I am about to announce to you."

"Speak on, my son," said Father d'Aigrigny, frowning; for he was much alarmed at the words of the young priest, whose cheeks, until now pale, were covered with a deep blush.

"Six months before my departure for America," resumed Gabriel, casting down his eyes, "you informed me, that I was destined to confess penitents; and to prepare then for that sacred ministry, you gave me a book."

Gabriel again hesitated. His blushes increased. Father d'Aigrigny could scarcely restrain a start of impatience and anger.

"You gave me a book," resumed the young priest, with a great effort to control himself, "a book containing questions to be addressed by a confessor to youths, and young girls, and married women, when they present themselves at the tribunal of penance. My God!" added Gabriel, shuddering at the remembrance. "I shall never forget that awful moment. It was night. I had retired to my chamber, taking with me this book, composed, you told me, by one of our fathers, and completed by a holy bishop.[18] Full of respect, faith, and confidence, I opened those pages. At first, I did not understand



them—afterwards I understood—and then I was seized with shame and horror—struck with stupor—and had hardly strength to close, with trembling hand, this abominable volume. I ran to you, father, to accuse myself of having involuntarily cast my eyes on those nameless pages, which, by mistake, you had placed in my hands.”

Page 44

“Remember, also, my dear son,” said Father d’Aigrigny, gravely, “that I calmed your scruples, and told you that a priest, who is bound to hear everything under the seal of confession, must be able to know and appreciate everything; and that our Company imposes the task of reading this Compendium, as a classical work, upon young deacons seminarists, and priests, who are destined to be confessors.”

“I believed you, father. In me the habit of inert obedience was so powerful, and I was so unaccustomed to independent reflection, that, notwithstanding my horror (with which I now reproached myself as with a crime), I took the volume back into my chamber, and read. Oh, father! what a dreadful revelation of criminal fancies, guilty of guiltiest in their refinement!”

“You speak of this book in blamable terms,” said Father d’Aigrigny, severely; “you were the victim of a too lively imagination. It is to it that you must attribute this fatal impression, and not to an excellent work, irreproachable for its special purpose, and duly authorized by the Church. You are not able to judge of such a production.”

“I will speak of it no more, father,” said Gabriel: and he thus resumed: “A long illness followed that terrible night. Many times, they feared for my reason. When I recovered, the past appeared to me like a painful dream. You told me, then, father, that I was not yet ripe for certain functions; and it was then that I earnestly entreated you to be allowed to go on the American missions. After having long refused my prayer, you at length consented. From my childhood, I had always lived in the college or seminary, to a state of continual restraint and subjection. By constantly holding down my head and eyes, I had lost the habit of contemplating the heavens and the splendors of nature. But, oh! what deep, religious happiness I felt, when I found myself suddenly transported to the centre of the imposing grandeur of the seas-half-way between the ocean and the sky! —I seemed to come forth from a place of thick darkness; for the first time, for many years, I felt my heart beat freely in my bosom; for the first time, I felt myself master of my own thoughts, and ventured to examine my past life, as from the summit of a mountain, one looks down into a gloomy vale. Then strange doubts rose within me. I asked myself by what right, and for what end, any beings had so long repressed, almost annihilated, the exercise of my will, of my liberty, of my reason, since God had endowed me with these gifts. But I said to myself, that perhaps, one day, the great, beautiful, and holy work, in which I was to have my share, would be revealed to me, and would recompense my obedience and resignation.”

At this moment, Rodin re-entered the room. Father d’Aigrigny questioned him with a significant look. The socius approached, and said to him in a low voice, so, that Gabriel could not hear: “Nothing serious. It was only to inform me, that Marshal Simon’s father is arrived at M. Hardy’s factory.”

Page 45

Then, glancing at Gabriel, Rodin appeared to interrogate Father d'Aigrigny, who hung his head with a desponding air. Yet he resumed, again addressing Gabriel, whilst Rodin took his old place, with his elbow on the chimney-piece: "Go on, my dear son. I am anxious to learn what resolution you have adopted."

"I will tell you in a moment, father. I arrived at Charleston. The superior of our establishment in that place, to whom I imparted my doubts as to the object of our Society, took upon himself to clear them up, and unveiled it all to me with alarming frankness. He told me the tendency not perhaps of all the members of the Company, for a great number must have shared my ignorance—but the objects which our leaders have pertinaciously kept in view, ever since the foundation of the Order. I was terrified. I read the casuists. Oh, father! that was a new and dreadful revelation, when, at every page, I read the excuse and justification of robbery, slander, adultery, perjury, murder, regicide. When I considered that I, the priest of a God of charity, justice, pardon, and love, was to belong henceforth to a Company, whose chiefs professed and glorified in such doctrines, I made a solemn oath to break for ever the ties which bound me to it!"[19]

On these words of Gabriel, Father d'Aigrigny and Rodin exchanged a look of terror. All was lost; their prey had escaped them. Deeply moved by the remembrances he recalled, Gabriel did not perceive the action of the reverend father and the socius, and thus continued: "In spite of my resolution, father, to quit the Company, the discovery I had made was very painful to me. Oh! believe me, for the honest and loving soul, nothing is more frightful than to have to renounce what it has long respected!—I suffered so much, that, when I thought of the dangers of my mission, I hoped, with a secret joy, that God would perhaps take me to Himself under these circumstances: but, on the contrary, He watched over me with providential solicitude."

As he said this, Gabriel felt a thrill, for he remembered a Mysterious Woman who had saved his life in America. After a moment's silence, he resumed: "My mission terminated, I returned hither to beg, father, that you would release me from my vows. Many times but in vain, I solicited an interview. Yesterday, it pleased Providence that I should have a long conversation with my adopted mother; from her I learned the trick by which my vocation had been forced upon me—and the sacrilegious abuse of the confessional, by which she had been induced to entrust to other persons the orphans that a dying mother had confided to the care of an honest soldier. You understand, father, that, if even I had before hesitated to break these bonds, what I have heard yesterday must have rendered my decision irrevocable. But at this solemn moment, father, I am bound to tell you, that I do not accuse the whole Society; many simple, credulous, and confiding men, like myself, must no doubt form part of it. Docile instruments, they see not in their blindness the work to which they are destined. I pity them, and pray God to enlighten them, as he has enlightened me."

Page 46

“So, my son,” said Father d’Aigrigny, rising with livid and despairing look, “you come to ask of me to break the ties which attach you to the Society?”

“Yes, father; you received my vows—it is for you to release me from them.”

“So, my son, you understand that engagements once freely taken by you, are now to be considered as null and void?”

“Yes, father.”

“So, my son, there is to be henceforth nothing in common between you and our Company?”

“No, father—since I request you to absolve me of my vows.”

“But, you know, my son, that the Society may release you—but that you cannot release yourself.”

“The step I take proves to you, father, the importance I attach to an oath, since I come to you to release me from it. Nevertheless, were you to refuse me, I should not think myself bound in the eyes of God or man.”

“It is perfectly clear,” said Father d’Aigrigny to Rodin, his voice expiring upon his lips, so deep was his despair.

Suddenly, whilst Gabriel, with downcast eyes, waited for the answer of Father d’Aigrigny, who remained mute and motionless, Rodin appeared struck with a new idea, on perceiving that the reverend father still held in his hand the note written in pencil. The socius hastily approached Father d’Aigrigny, and said to him in a whisper, with a look of doubt and alarm: “Have you not read my note?”

“I did not think of it,” answered the reverend father, mechanically.

Rodin appeared to make a great effort to repress a movement of violent rage. Then he said to Father d’Aigrigny, in a calm voice: “Read it now.”

Hardly had the reverend father cast his eyes upon this note, than a sudden ray of hope illumined his hitherto despairing countenance. Pressing the hand of the socius with an expression of deep gratitude, he said to him in a low voice: “You are right. Gabriel is ours.”

[16] The statutes formally state that the Company can expel all drones and wasps, but that no man can break his ties, if the Order wishes to retain him.

[17] This is their own command. The constitution expressly bids the novice wait for this decisive climax of the ordeal before taking the vows of God.

[18] It is impossible, even in Latin, to give our readers an idea of this infamous work.

[19] This is true. See the extracts from the Compendium for the use of Schools, published under the title of "Discoveries by a Bibliophilist." Strasburg, 1843. For regicide, see Sanchez and others.

CHAPTER XXI.

The change.

Before again addressing Gabriel, Father d'Aigrigny carefully reflected; and his countenance, lately so disturbed, became gradually once more serene. He appeared to meditate and calculate the effects of the eloquence he was about to employ, upon an excellent and safe theme, which the socius struck with the danger of the situation, had suggested in a few lines rapidly written with a pencil, and which, in his despair, the reverend father had at first neglected. Rodin resumed his post of observation near the mantelpiece, on which he leaned his elbow, after casting at Father d'Aigrigny a glance of disdainful and angry superiority, accompanied by a significant shrug of the shoulders.

Page 47

After this involuntary manifestation, which was luckily not perceived by Father d'Aigrigny, the cadaverous face of the socius resumed its icy calmness, and his flabby eyelids, raised a moment with anger and impatience, fell, and half-veiled his little, dull eyes. It must be confessed that Father d'Aigrigny, notwithstanding the ease and elegance of his speech, notwithstanding the seduction of his exquisite manners, his agreeable features, and the exterior of an accomplished and refined man of the world, was often subdued and governed by the unpying firmness, the diabolical craft and depth of Rodin, the old, repulsive, dirty, miserably dressed man, who seldom abandoned his humble part of secretary and mute auditor. The influence of education is so powerful, that Gabriel, notwithstanding the formal rupture he had just provoked, felt himself still intimidated in presence of Father d'Aigrigny, and waited with painful anxiety for the answer of the reverend father to his express demand to be released from his old vows. His reverence having, doubtless, regularly laid his plan of attack, at length broke silence, heaved a deep sigh, gave to his countenance, lately so severe and irritated, a touching expression of kindness, and said to Gabriel, in an affectionate voice: "Forgive me, my dear son, for having kept silence so long; but your abrupt determination has so stunned me, and has raised within me so many painful thoughts, that I have had to reflect for some moments, to try and penetrate the cause of this rupture, and I think I have succeeded. You have well considered, my dear son, the serious nature of the step you are taking?"

"Yes, father."

"And you have absolutely decided to abandon the Society, even against my will?"

"It would be painful to me, father—but I must resign myself to it."

"It should be very painful to you, indeed, my dear son; for you took the irrevocable vow freely, and this vow, according to our statutes, binds you not to quit the Society, unless with the consent of your superiors."

"I did not then know, father, the nature of the engagement I took. More enlightened now, I ask to withdraw myself; my only desire is to obtain a curacy in some village far from Paris. I feel an irresistible vocation for such humble and useful functions. In the country, there is so much misery, and such ignorance of all that could contribute to ameliorate the condition of the agricultural laborer, that his existence is as unhappy as that of a negro slave; for what liberty has he? and what instruction? Oh! it seems to me, that, with God's help, I might, as a village curate, render some services to humanity. It would therefore be painful to me, father, to see you refuse—"

"Be satisfied, my son," answered Father d'Aigrigny; "I will no longer seek to combat your desire to separate yourself from us."

"Then, father, you release me from my vows?"

“I have not the power to do so, my dear son; but I will write immediately to Rome, to ask the necessary authority from our general.”

Page 48

"I thank you, father."

"Soon, my dear son, you will be delivered from these bonds, which you deem so heavy; and the men you abandon will not the less continue to pray for you, that God may preserve you from still greater wanderings. You think yourself released with regard to us, my dear son; but we do not think ourselves released with regard to you. It is not thus that we can get rid of the habit of paternal attachment. What would you have? We look upon ourselves as bound to our children, by the very benefits with which we have loaded them. You were poor, and an orphan; we stretched out our arms to you, as much from the interest which you deserved, my dear son, as to spare your excellent adopted mother too great a burden."

"Father," said Gabriel, with suppressed emotion, "I am not ungrateful."

"I wish to believe so, my dear son. For long years, we gave to you, as to our beloved child, food for the body and the soul. It pleases you now to renounce and abandon us. Not only do we consent to it—but now that I have penetrated the true motives of your rupture with us, it is my duty to release you from your vow."

"Of what motives do you speak, Father?"

"Alas! my dear son, I understand your fears. Dangers menace us—you know it well."

"Dangers, father?" cried Gabriel.

"It is impossible, my dear son, that you should not be aware that, since the fall of our legitimate sovereigns, our natural protectors, revolutionary impiety becomes daily more and more threatening. We are oppressed with persecutions. I can, therefore, comprehend and appreciate, my dear son, the motive which under such circumstances, induces you to separate from us."

"Father!" cried Gabriel, with as much indignation as grief, "you do not think that of me—you cannot think it."

Without noticing the protestations of Gabriel, Father d'Aigrigny continued his imaginary picture of the dangers of the Company, which, far from being really in peril, was already beginning secretly to recover its influence.

"Oh! if our Company were now as powerful as it was some years ago," resumed the reverend father; "if it were still surrounded by the respect and homage which are due to it from all true believers—in spite of the abominable calumnies with which we are assailed—then, my dear son, we should perhaps have hesitated to release you from your vows, and have rather endeavored to open your eyes to the light, and save you from the fatal delusion to which you are a prey. But now that we are weak, oppressed,

threatened on every side, it is our duty, it is an act of charity, not to force you to share in perils from which you have the prudence to wish to withdraw yourself.”

So, saying, Father d'Aigrigny cast a rapid glance at his socius, who answered with a nod of approbation, accompanied by a movement of impatience that seemed to say: “Go on! go on!”

Gabriel was quite overcome. There was not in the whole world a heart more generous, loyal, and brave than his. We may judge of what he must have suffered, on hearing the resolution he had come to thus misinterpreted.

Page 49

"Father," he resumed, in an agitated voice, whilst his eyes filled with tears, "your words are cruel and unjust. You know that I am not a coward."

"No," said Rodin, in his sharp, cutting voice, addressing Father d'Aigrigny, and pointing to Gabriel with a disdainful look; "your dear son is only prudent."

These words from Rodin made Gabriel start; a slight blush colored his pale cheeks; his large and blue eyes sparkled with a generous anger; then, faithful to the precepts of Christian humility and resignation, he conquered this irritable impulse, hung down his head, and, too much agitated to reply, remained silent, and brushed away an unseen tear. This tear did not escape the notice of the socius. He saw in it no doubt, a favorable symptom, for he exchanged a glance of satisfaction with Father d'Aigrigny. The latter was about to touch on a question of great interest, so, notwithstanding his self-command, his voice trembled slightly; but encouraged, or rather pushed on by a look from Rodin, who had become extremely attentive, he said to Gabriel: "Another motive obliges us not to hesitate in releasing you from your vow, my dear son. It is a question of pure delicacy. You probably learned yesterday from your adopted mother, that you will perhaps be called upon to take possession of an inheritance, of which the value is unknown."

Gabriel raised his head hastily and said to Father d'Aigrigny: "As I have already stated to M. Rodin, my adopted mother only talked of her scruples of conscience, and I was completely ignorant of the existence of the inheritance of which you speak."

The expression of indifference with which the young priest pronounced these last words, was remarked by Rodin.

"Be it so," replied Father d'Aigrigny. "You were not aware of it—I believe you—though all appearances would tend to prove the contrary—to prove, indeed, that the knowledge of this inheritance was not unconnected with your resolution to separate from us."

"I do not understand you, Father."

"It is very simple. Your rupture with us would then have two motives. First, we are in danger, and you think it prudent to leave us—"

"Father!"

"Allow me to finish, my dear son, and come to the second motive. If I am deceived, you can tell me so. These are the facts. Formerly, on the hypothesis that your family, of which you knew nothing, might one day leave you some property, you made, in return for the care bestowed on you by the Company, a free gift of all you might hereafter possess, not to us—but to the poor, of whom we are the born shepherds."

"Well, father?" asked Gabriel, not seeing to what this preamble tended.



“Well, my dear son—now that you are sure of enjoying a competence, you wish, no doubt, by separating from us, to annul this donation made under other circumstances.”

“To speak plainly, you violate your oath, because we are persecuted, and because you wish to take back your gifts,” added Rodin, in a sharp voice, as if to describe in the clearest and plainest manner the situation of Gabriel with regard to the Society.

Page 50

At this infamous accusation, Gabriel could only raise his hands and eyes to heaven, and exclaim, with an expression of despair, "Oh, heaven!"

Once more exchanging a look of intelligence with Rodin, Father d'Aigrigny said to him, in a severe tone, as if reproaching him for his too savage frankness: "I think you go too far. Our dear son could only have acted in the base and cowardly manner you suggest, had he known his position as an heir; but, since he affirms the contrary, we are bound to believe him—in spite of appearances."

"Father," said Gabriel, pale, agitated trembling, and with half suppressed grief and indignation, "I thank you, at least, for having suspended your judgment. No, I am not a coward; for heaven is my witness, that I knew of no danger to which the Society was exposed. Nor am I base and avaricious; for heaven is also my witness, that only at this moment I learn from you, father, that I may be destined to inherit property, and—"

"One word, my dear son. It is quite lately that I became informed of this circumstance, by the greatest chance in the world," said Father d'Aigrigny, interrupting Gabriel; "and that was thanks to some family papers which your adopted mother had given to her confessor, and which were entrusted to us when you entered our college. A little before your return from America, in arranging the archives of the Company, your file of papers fell into the hands of our father-attorney. It was examined, and we thus learned that one of your paternal ancestors, to whom the house in which we now are belonged, left a will which is to be opened to day at noon. Yesterday, we believed you one of us; our statutes command that we should possess nothing of our own; you had corroborated those statutes, by a donation in favor of the patrimony of the poor—which we administer. It was no longer you, therefore, but the Company, which, in my person, presented itself as the inheritor in your place, furnished with your titles, which I have here ready in order. But now, my dear son, that you separate from us, you must present yourself in your own name. We came here as the representatives of the poor, to whom in former days you piously abandoned whatever goods might fall to your share. Now, on the contrary, the hope of a fortune changes your sentiments. You are free to resume your gifts."

Gabriel had listened to Father d'Aigrigny with painful impatience. At length he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say, father, that you think me capable of canceling a donation freely made, in favor of the Company, to which I am indebted for my education? You believe me infamous enough to break my word, in the hope of possessing a modest patrimony?"

"This patrimony, my dear, son, may be small; but it may also be considerable."

Page 51

"Well, father! if it were a king's fortune," cried Gabriel, with proud and noble indifference, "I should not speak otherwise—and I have, I think, the right to be believed listen to my fixed resolution. The Company to which I belong runs, you say, great dangers. I will inquire into these dangers. Should they prove threatening—strong in the determination which morally separates me from you—I will not leave you till I see the end of your perils. As for the inheritance, of which you believe me so desirous, I resign it to you formally, father, as I once freely promised. My only wish is, that this property may be employed for the relief of the poor. I do not know what may be the amount of this fortune, but large or small, it belongs to the Company, because I have thereto pledged my word. I have told you, father, that my chief desire is to obtain a humble curacy in some poor village—poor, above all—because there my services will be most useful. Thus, father, when a man, who never spoke falsehood in his life, affirms to you, that he only sighs for so humble an existence, you ought, I think, to believe him incapable of snatching back, from motives of avarice, gifts already made."

Father d'Aigrigny had now as much trouble to restrain his joy, as he before had to conceal his terror. He appeared, however, tolerably calm, and said to Gabriel: "I did not expect less from you, my dear son."

Then he made a sign to Rodin, to invite him to interpose. The latter perfectly understood his superior. He left the chimney, drew near to Gabriel, and leaned against the table, upon which stood paper and inkstand. Then, beginning mechanically to beat the tattoo with the tips of his coarse fingers, in all their array of flat and dirty nails, he said to Father d'Aigrigny: "All this is very fine! but your dear son gives you no security for the fulfilment of his promise except an oath—and that, we know, is of little value."

"Sir!" cried Gabriel

"Allow me," said Rodin, coldly. "The law does not acknowledge our existence and therefore can take no cognizance of donations made in favor of the Company. You might resume to-morrow what you are pleased to give us to-day."

"But my oath, sir!" cried Gabriel.

Rodin looked at him fixedly, as he answered: "Your oath? Did you not swear eternal obedience to the Company, and never to separate from us?—and of what weight now are these oaths?"

For a moment Gabriel was embarrassed; but, feeling how false was this logic, he rose, calm and dignified, went to seat himself at the desk, took up a pen, and wrote as follows:

"Before God, who sees and hears me, and in the presence of you, Father d'Aigrigny and M. Rodin, I renew and confirm, freely and voluntarily, the absolute donation made

by me to the Society of Jesus, in the person of the said Father d'Aigrigny, of all the property which may hereafter belong to me, whatever may be its value. I swear, on pain of infamy, to perform tis irrevocable promise, whose accomplishment I regard, in my soul and conscience, as the discharge of a debt, and the fulfilment of a pious duty.

Page 52

"This donation having for its object the acknowledgment of past services, and the relief of the poor, no future occurrences can at all modify it. For the very reason that I know I could one day legally cancel the present free and deliberate act, I declare, that if ever I were to attempt such a thing, under any possible circumstances, I should deserve the contempt and horror of all honest people.

"In witness whereof I have written this paper, on the 13th of February, 1832, in Paris, immediately before the opening of the testament of one of my paternal ancestors.

"Gabriel de Rennepont."

As he rose, the young priest delivered this document to Rodin, without uttering a word. The socius read it attentively, and, still impassible, answered, as he looked at Gabriel: "Well, it is a written oath—that is all."

Gabriel dwelt stupefied at the audacity of Rodin, who ventured to tell him, that this document, in which he renewed his donation in so noble, generous, and spontaneous a manner, was not all sufficient. The socius was the first again to break the silence, and he said to Father d'Aigrigny, with his usual cool impudence. "One of two things must be. Either your dear son means to render his donation absolutely valuable and irrevocable,—or—"

"Sir," exclaimed Gabriel, interrupting him, and hardly able to restrain himself, "spare yourself and me such a shameful supposition."

"Well, then," resumed Rodin, impassible as ever, "as you are perfectly decided to make this donation a serious reality, what objection can you have to secure it legally?"

"None, sir," said Gabriel, bitterly, "since my written and sworn promise will not suffice you."

"My dear son," said Father d'Aigrigny, affectionately, "if this were a donation for my own advantage, believe me I should require no better security than your word. But here I am, as it were, the agent of the Society, or rather the trustee of the poor, who will profit by your generosity. For the sake of humanity, therefore, we cannot secure this gift by too many legal precautions, so that the unfortunate objects of our care may have certainty instead of vague hopes to depend upon. God may call you to him at any moment, and who shall say that your heirs will be so ready to keep the oath you have taken?"

"You are right, father," said Gabriel, sadly; "I had not thought of the case of death, which is yet so probable."

Hereupon, Samuel opened the door of the room, and said: "Gentlemen, the notary has just arrived. Shall I show him in? At ten o'clock precisely, the door of the house will be opened."

"We are the more glad to see the notary," said Rodin, "as we just happen to have some business with him. Pray ask him to walk in."

"I will bring him to you instantly," replied Samuel, as he went out.

"Here is a notary," said Rodin to Gabriel. "If you have still the same intentions, you can legalize your donation in presence of this public officer, and thus save yourself from a great burden for the future."

Page 53

“Sir,” said Gabriel, “happen what may, I am as irrevocably engaged by this written promise, which I beg you to keep, father”—and he handed the paper to Father d’Aigrigny “as by the legal document, which I am about to sign,” he added, turning to Rodin.

“Silence, my dear son,” said Father d’Aigrigny; “here is the notary,” just as the latter entered the room.

During the interview of the administrative officer with Rodin, Gabriel, and Father d’Aigrigny, we shall conduct the reader to the interior of the walled-up house.

CHAPTER XXII.

The red room.

As Samuel had said, the door of the walled-up house had just been disencumbered of the bricks, lead, and iron, which had kept it from view, and its panels of carved oak appeared as fresh and sound, as on the day when they had first been withdrawn from the influence of the air and time. The laborers, having completed their work, stood waiting upon the steps, as impatient and curious as the notary’s clerk, who had superintended the operation, when they saw Samuel slowly advancing across the garden, with a great bunch of keys in his hand.

“Now, my friends,” said the old man, when he had reached the steps, “your work is finished. The master of this gentleman will pay you, and I have only to show you out by the street door.”

“Come, come, my good fellow,” cried the clerk, “you don’t think. We are just at the most interesting and curious moment; I and these honest masons are burning to see the interior of this mysterious house, and you would be cruel enough to send us away? Impossible!”

“I regret the necessity, sir, but so it must be. I must be the first to enter this dwelling, absolutely alone, before introducing the heirs, in order to read the testament.”

“And who gave you such ridiculous and barbarous orders?” cried the clerk, singularly disappointed.

“My father, sir.”

“A most respectable authority, no doubt; but come, my worthy guardian, my excellent guardian,” resumed the clerk, “be a good fellow, and let us just take a peep in at the door.”

“Yes, yes, sir, only a peep!” cried the heroes of the trowel, with a supplicating air.

“It is disagreeable to have to refuse you, gentlemen,” answered Samuel; “but I cannot open this door, until I am alone.”

The masons, seeing the inflexibility of the old man, unwillingly descended the steps; but the clerk had resolved to dispute the ground inch by inch, and exclaimed: “I shall wait for my master. I do not leave the house without him. He may want me—and whether I remain on these steps or elsewhere, can be of little consequence to you my worthy keeper.”

The clerk was interrupted in his appeal by his master himself, who called out from the further side of the courtyard, with an air of business: “M. Piston! quick, M. Piston—come directly!”

Page 54

"What the devil does he want with me?" cried the clerk, in a passion. "He calls me just at the moment when I might have seen something."

"M. Piston," resumed the voice, approaching, "do you not hear?"

While Samuel let out the masons, the clerk saw, through a clump of trees, his master running towards him bareheaded, and with an air of singular haste and importance. The clerk was therefore obliged to leave the steps, to answer the notary's summons, towards whom he went with a very bad grace.

"Sir, sir," said M. Dumesnil, "I have been calling you this hour with all my might."

"I did not hear you sir," said M. Piston.

"You must be deaf, then. Have you any change about you?"

"Yes sir," answered the clerk, with some surprise.

"Well, then, you must go instantly to the nearest stamp-office, and fetch me three or four large sheets of stamped paper, to draw up a deed. Run! it is wanted directly."

"Yes, sir," said the clerk, casting a rueful and regretful glance at the door of the walled-up house.

"But make haste, will you, M. Piston," said the notary.

"I do not know, sir, where to get any stamped paper."

"Here is the guardian," replied M. Dumesnil. "He will no doubt be able to tell you."

At this instant, Samuel was returning, after showing the masons out by the street-door.

"Sir," said the notary to him, "will you please to tell me where we can get stamped paper?"

"Close by, sir," answered Samuel; "in the tobacconist's, No. 17, Rue Vieille-du-Temple."

"You hear, M. Piston?" said the notary to his clerk. "You can get the stamps at the tobacconist's, No. 17, Rue Vieille-du-Temple. Be quick! for this deed must be executed immediately before the opening of the will. Time presses."

"Very well, sir; I will make haste," answered the clerk, discontentedly, as he followed his master, who hurried back into the room where he had left Rodin, Gabriel, and Father d'Aigrigny.



During this time, Samuel, ascending the steps, had reached the door, now disencumbered of the stone, iron, and lead with which it had been blocked up. It was with deep emotion that the old man having selected from his bunch of keys the one he wanted, inserted it in the keyhole, and made the door turn upon its hinges. Immediately he felt on his face a current of damp, cold air, like that which exhales from a cellar suddenly opened. Having carefully re-closed and double-locked the door, the Jew advanced along the hall, lighted by a glass trefoil over the arch of the door. The panes had lost their transparency by the effect of time, and now had the appearance of ground-glass. This hall, paved with alternate squares of black and white marble, was vast, sonorous, and contained a broad staircase leading to the first story. The walls of smooth stone offered not the least appearance of decay or dampness; the stair-rail of wrought iron presented no traces of rust; it was inserted, just above the bottom step, into a column of gray granite, which sustained a statue of black marble, representing a negro bearing a flambeau. This statue had a strange countenance, the pupils of the eyes being made of white marble.

Page 55

The Jew's heavy tread echoed beneath the lofty dome of the hall. The grandson of Isaac Samuel experienced a melancholy feeling, as he reflected that the footsteps of his ancestor had probably been the last which had resounded through this dwelling, of which he had closed the doors a hundred and fifty years before; for the faithful friend, in favor of whom M. de Rennepont had made a feigned transfer of the property, had afterwards parted with the same, to place it in the name of Samuel's grandfather, who had transmitted it to his descendants, as if it had been his own inheritance.

To these thoughts, in which Samuel was wholly absorbed, was joined the remembrance of the light seen that morning through the seven openings in the leaden cover of the belvedere; and, in spite of the firmness of his character, the old man could not repress a shudder, as, taking a second key from his bunch, and reading upon the label, The Key of the Red Room, he opened a pair of large folding doors, leading to the inner apartments. The window which, of all those in the house, had alone been opened, lighted this large room, hung with damask, the deep purple of which had undergone no alteration. A thick Turkey carpet covered the floor, and large arm-chairs of gilded wood, in the severe Louis XIV. style, were symmetrically arranged along the wall. A second door, leading to the next room, was just opposite the entrance. The wainscoting and the cornice were white, relieved with fillets and mouldings of burnished gold. On each side of this door was a large piece of buhl-furniture, inlaid with brass and porcelain, supporting ornamental sets of sea crackle vases. The window was hung with heavy deep-fringed damask curtains, surmounted by scalloped drapery, with silk tassels, directly opposite the chimney-piece of dark-gray marble, adorned with carved brass-work. Rich chandeliers, and a clock in the same style as the furniture, were reflected in a large Venice glass, with basiled edges. A round table, covered with a cloth of crimson velvet, was placed in the centre of this saloon.

As he approached this table, Samuel perceived a piece of white vellum, on which were inscribed these words: "My testament is to be opened in this saloon. The other apartments are to remain closed, until after the reading of my last will—M. De R."

"Yes," said the Jew, as he perused with emotion these lines traced so long ago; "this is the same recommendation as that which I received from my father; for it would seem that the other apartments of this house are filled with objects, on which M. de Rennepont set a high value, not for their intrinsic worth, but because of their origin. The Hall of Mourning must be a strange and mysterious chamber. Well," added Samuel, as he drew from his pocket a register bound in black shagreen, with a brass lock, from which he drew the key, after placing it upon the table, "here is the statement of the property in hand, which I have been ordered to bring hither, before the arrival of the heirs."

Page 56

The deepest silence reigned in the room, at the moment when Samuel placed the register on the table. Suddenly a simple and yet most startling occurrence roused him from his reverie. In the next apartment was heard the clear, silvery tone of a clock, striking slowly ten. And the hour was ten! Samuel had too much sense to believe in perpetual motion, or in the possibility of constructing a clock to go far one hundred and fifty years. He asked himself, therefore, with surprise and alarm, how this clock could still be going, and how it could mark so exactly the hour of the day. Urged with restless curiosity, the old man was about to enter the room; but recollecting the recommendation of his father, which had now been confirmed by the few lines he had just read from De Rennepont's pen, he stopped at the door, and listened with extreme attention.

He heard nothing—absolutely nothing, but the last dying vibration of the clock. After having long reflected upon this strange fact, Samuel, comparing it with the no less extraordinary circumstance of the light perceived that morning through the apertures in the belvedere, concluded that there must be some connection between these two incidents. If the old man could not penetrate the true cause of these extraordinary appearances, he at least explained them to himself, by remembering the subterraneous communications, which, according to tradition, were said to exist between the cellars of this house and distant places; and he conjectured that unknown and mysterious personages thus gained access to it two or three times in a century. Absorbed in these thoughts Samuel approached the fireplace, which, as we have said, was directly opposite the window. Just then, a bright ray of sunlight, piercing the clouds, shone full upon two large portraits, hung upon either side of the fireplace, and not before remarked by the Jew. They were painted life size, and represented one a woman, the other a man. By the sober yet powerful coloring of these paintings, by the large and vigorous style, it was easy to recognize a master's hand. It would have been difficult to find models more fitted to inspire a great painter. The woman appeared to be from five-and-twenty to thirty years of age. Magnificent brown hair, with golden tints, crooned a forehead, white, noble, and lofty. Her head-dress, far from recalling the fashion, which Madame de Sevigne brought in during the age of Louis XIV., reminded one rather of some of the portraits of Paul Veronese, in which the hair encircles the face in broad, undulating bands, surmounted by a thick plait, like a crown, at the back of the head. The eyebrows, finely pencilled, were arched over large eyes of bright, sapphire blue. Their gaze at once proud and mournful, had something fatal about it. The nose, finely formed, terminated in slight dilated nostrils: a half smile, almost of pain, contracted the mouth; the face was a long oval, and the complexion, extremely pale, was hardly shaded on the cheek by a light rose-color. The position of the head and neck announced a rare mixture of grace and dignity. A sort of tunic or robe, of glossy black material, came as high as the commencement of her shoulders, and just marking her lithe and tall figure, reached down to her feet, which were almost entirely concealed by the folds of this garment.

Page 57

The attitude was full of nobleness and simplicity. The head looked white and luminous, standing out from a dark gray sky, marbled at the horizon by purple clouds, upon which were visible the bluish summits of distant hills, in deep shadow. The arrangement of the picture, as well as the warm tints of the foreground, contrasting strongly with these distant objects, showed that the woman was placed upon an eminence, from which she could view the whole horizon. The countenance was deeply pensive and desponding. There was an expression of supplicating and resigned grief, particularly in her look, half raised to heaven, which one would have thought impossible to picture. On the left side of the fireplace was the other portrait, painted with like vigor. It represented a man, between thirty and thirty-five years of age, of tall stature. A large brown cloak, which hung round him in graceful folds, did not quite conceal a black doublet, buttoned up to the neck, over which fell a square white collar. The handsome and expressive head was marked with stern powerful lines, which did not exclude an admirable air of suffering, resignation, and ineffable goodness. The hair, as well as the beard and eyebrows, was black; and the latter, by some singular caprice of nature, instead of being separated and forming two distinct arches, extended from one temple to the other, in a single bow, and seemed to mark the forehead of this man with a black line.

The background of this picture also represented a stormy sky; but, beyond some rocks in the distance, the sea was visible, and appeared to mingle with the dark clouds. The sun, just now shining upon these two remarkable figures (which it appeared impossible to forget, after once seeing them), augmented their brilliancy.

Starting from his reverie, and casting his eyes by chance upon these portraits, Samuel was greatly struck with them. They appeared almost alive. "What noble and handsome faces!" he exclaimed, as he approached to examine them more closely. "Whose are these portraits? They are not those of any of the Rennepont family, for my father told me that they are all in the Hall of Mourning. Alas!" added the old man, "one might think, from the great sorrow expressed in their countenances, that they ought to have a place in that mourning-chamber."

After a moment's silence, Samuel resumed: "Let me prepare everything for this solemn assembly, for it has struck ten." So saying, he placed the gilded arm-chairs round the table, and then continued, with a pensive air: "The hour approaches, and of the descendants of my grandfather's benefactor, we have seen only this young priest, with the angelic countenance. Can he be the sole representative of the Rennepont family? He is a priest, and this family will finish with him! Well! the moment is come when I must open this door, that the will may be read. Bathsheba is bringing hither the notary. They knock at the door; it is time!" And Samuel, after casting a last glance towards the place where the clock had struck ten, hastened to the outer door, behind which voices were now audible.

Page 58

He turned the key twice in the lock, and threw the portals open. To his great regret, he saw only Gabriel on the steps, between Rodin and Father d'Aigrigny. The notary, and Bathsheba, who had served them as a guide, waited a little behind the principal group.

Samuel could not repress a sigh, as he stood bowing on the threshold, and said to them: "All is ready, gentlemen. You may walk in."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The testament.

When Gabriel, Rodin, and Father d'Aigrigny entered the Red Room, they were differently affected. Gabriel, pale and sad, felt a kind of painful impatience. He was anxious to quit this house, though he had already relieved himself of a great weight, by executing before the notary, secured by every legal formality, a deed making over all his rights of inheritance to Father d'Aigrigny. Until now it had not occurred to the young priest, that in bestowing the care upon him, which he was about to reward so generously, and in forcing his vocation by a sacrilegious falsehood, the only object of Father d'Aigrigny might have been to secure the success of a dark intrigue. In acting as he did, Gabriel was not yielding, in his view of the question, to a sentiment of exaggerated delicacy. He had made this donation freely, many years before. He would have looked upon it as infamy now to withdraw it. It was hard enough to be suspected of cowardice: for nothing in the world would he have incurred the least reproach of cupidity.

The missionary must have been endowed with a very rare and excellent nature, or this flower of scrupulous probity would have withered beneath the deleterious and demoralizing influence of his education; but happily, as cold sometimes preserves from corruption, the icy atmosphere in which he had passed a portion of his childhood and youth had benumbed, but not vitiated, his generous qualities, which had indeed soon revived in the warm air of liberty. Father d'Aigrigny, much paler and more agitated than Gabriel, strove to excuse and explain his anxiety by attributing it to the sorrow he experienced at the rupture of his dear son with the Order. Rodin, calm, and perfectly master of himself, saw with secret rage the strong emotion of Father d'Aigrigny, which might have inspired a man less confiding than Gabriel with strange suspicions. Yet, notwithstanding his apparent indifference, the socius was perhaps still more ardently impatient than his superior for the success of this important affair. Samuel appeared quite desponding, no other heir but Gabriel having presented himself. No doubt the old man felt a lively sympathy for the young priest; but then he was a priest, and with him would finish the line of Rennepont; and this immense fortune, accumulated with so much labor, would either be again distributed, or employed otherwise than the testator had desired. The different actors in this scene were standing around the table. As they were about to seat themselves, at the invitation of the notary, Samuel pointed to the

register bound in black shagreen, and said: "I was ordered, sir, to deposit here this register. It is locked. I will deliver up the key, immediately after the reading of the will."

Page 59

"This course is, in fact, directed by the note which accompanies the will," said M. Dumesnil, "as it was deposited, in the year 1682, in the hands of Master Thomas Le Semelier, king's counsel, and notary of the Chatelet of Paris, then living at No. 13, Place Royale."

So saying, M. Dumesnil drew from a portfolio of red morocco a large parchment envelope, grown yellow with time; to this envelope was annexed, by a silken thread, a note also upon vellum.

"Gentlemen," said the notary, "if you please to sit down, I will read the subjoined note, to regulate the formalities at the opening of the will."

The notary, Rodin, Father d'Aigrigny, and Gabriel, took seats. The young priest, having his back turned to the fireplace, could not see the two portraits. In spite of the notary's invitation, Samuel remained standing behind the chair of that functionary, who read as follows:

"On the 13th February, 1832, my will shall be carried to No. 3, in the Rue Saint-Francois.

"At ten o'clock precisely, the door of the Red Room shall be opened to my heirs, who will no doubt have arrived long before at Paris, in anticipation of this day, and will have had time to establish their line of descent.

"As soon as they are assembled, the will shall be read, and, at the last stroke of noon, the inheritance shall be finally settled in favor of those of my kindred, who according to my recommendation (preserved, I hope, by tradition in my family, during a century and a half); shall present themselves in person, and not by agents, before twelve o'clock, on the 13th of February, in the Rue Saint-Francois."

Having read these words in a sonorous voice, the notary stopped an instant, and resumed, in a solemn tone: "M. Gabriel Francois Marie de Rennepont, priest, having established, by legal documents, his descent on the father's side, and his relationship to the testator, and being at this hour the only one of the descendants of the Rennepont family here present, I open the testament in his presence, as it has been ordered."

So saying, the notary drew from its envelope the will, which had been previously opened by the President of the Tribunal, with the formalities required by law. Father d'Aigrigny leaned forward, and resting his elbow on the table, seemed to pant for breath. Gabriel prepared himself to listen with more curiosity than interest. Rodin was seated at some distance from the table, with his old hat between his knees, in the bottom of which, half hidden by the folds of a shabby blue cotton handkerchief, he had placed his watch. The attention of the socius was divided between the least noise from without, and the slow evolution of the hands of the watch, which he followed with his

little, wrathful eye, as if hastening their progress, so great was his impatience for the hour of noon.

The notary, unfolding the sheet of parchment, read what follows, in the midst of profound attention:



Page 60

Hameau de Villetaneuse,

“February 13th, 1682.

“I am about to escape, by death, from the disgrace of the galleys, to which the implacable enemies of my family have caused me to be condemned as a relapsed heretic.

“Moreover, life is too bitter for me since the death of my son, the victim of a mysterious crime.

“At nineteen years of age—poor Henry!—and his murderers unknown—no, not unknown—if I may trust my presentiments.

“To preserve my fortune for my son, I had feigned to abjure the Protestant faith. As long as that beloved boy lived, I scrupulously kept up Catholic appearances. The imposture revolted me, but the interest of my son was concerned.

“When they killed him, this deceit became insupportable to me. I was watched, accused, and condemned as relapsed. My property has been confiscated, and I am sentenced to the galleys.

“Tis a terrible time we live in! Misery and servitude! sanguinary despotism and religious intolerance! Oh, it is sweet to abandon life! sweet to rest and see no more such evils and such sorrows!

“In a few hours, I shall enjoy that rest. I shall die. Let me think of those who will survive—or rather, of those who will live perhaps in better times.

“Out of all my fortune, there remains to me a sum of fifty thousand crowns, deposited in a friend's hands.

“I have no longer a son; but I have numerous relations, exiled in various parts of Europe. This sum of fifty thousand crowns, divided between them, would profit each of them very little. I have disposed of it differently.

“In this I have followed the wise counsels of a man, whom I venerate as the image of God on earth, for his intelligence, wisdom, and goodness are almost divine.

“Twice in the course of my life have I seen this man, under very fatal circumstances—twice have I owed him safety, once of the soul, once of the body.

“Alas! he might perhaps have saved my poor child, but he came too late—too late.

“Before he left me, he wished to divert me from the intention of dying—for he knew all. But his voice was powerless. My grief, my regret, my discouragement, were too much for him.

“It is strange! when he was convinced of my resolution to finish my days by violence, some words of terrible bitterness escaped him, making me believe that he envied me—my fate—my death!

“Is he perhaps condemned to live?

“Yes; he has, no doubt, condemned himself to be useful to humanity, and yet life is heavy on him, for I heard him repeat one day, with an expression of despair and weariness that I have never forgotten: “Life! life! who will deliver me from it?”

“Is life then so very burdensome to him?

“He is gone. His last words have made me look for my departure with serenity. Thanks to him, my death shall not be without fruit.

Page 61

“Thanks to him, these lines, written at this moment by a man who, in a few hours, will have ceased to live, may perhaps be the parents of great things a century and a half hence—yes! great and noble things, if my last will is piously followed by my descendants, for it is to them that I here address myself.

“That they may understand and appreciate this last will—which I commend to the care of the unborn, who dwell in the future whither I am hastening—they must know the persecutors of my family and avenge their ancestor, but by a noble vengeance.

“My grandfather was a Catholic. Induced by perfidious counsels rather than religious zeal, he attached himself, though a layman, to a Society whose power has always been terrible and mysterious—the Society of Jesus—”

At these words of the testament, Father d'Aigrigny, Rodin, and Gabriel looked involuntarily at each other: The notary, who had not perceived this action, continued to read:

“After some years, during which he had never ceased to profess the most absolute devotion to this Society, he was suddenly enlightened by fearful revelations as to the secret ends it pursued, and the means it employed.

“This was in 1510, a month before the assassination of Henry IV.

“My grandfather, terrified at the secret of which he had become the unwilling depositary, and which was to be fully explained by the death of the best of kings, not only broke with the Society, but, as if Catholicism itself had been answerable for the crimes of its members, he abandoned the Romish religion, in which he had hitherto lived, and became a Protestant.

“Undeniable proofs, attesting the connivance of two members of the Company with Ravailac, a connivance also proved in the case of Jean Chatel, the regicide, were in my grandfather's possession.

“This was the first cause of the violent hatred of the Society for our family. Thank Heaven, these papers have been placed in safety, and if my last will is executed, will be found marked A. M.C. D. G., in the ebony casket in the Hall of Mourning, in the house in the Rue Saint-Francois.

“My father was also exposed to these secret persecutions. His ruin, and perhaps his death, would have been the consequence, had it not been for the intervention of an angelic woman, towards whom he felt an almost religious veneration.

“The portrait of this woman, whom I saw a few years ago, as well as that of the man whom I hold in the greatest reverence, were painted by me from memory, and have

been placed in the Red Room in the Rue Saint-Francois—to be gratefully valued, I hope, by the descendants of my family.”

Page 62

For some moments Gabriel had become more and more attentive to the reading of this testament. He thought within himself by how strange a coincidence one of his ancestors had, two centuries before, broken with the Society of Jesus, as he himself had just done; and that from this rupture, two centuries old, dated also that species of hatred with which the Society of Jesus had always pursued his family. Nor did the young priest find it less strange that this inheritance, transmitted to him after a lapse of a hundred and fifty years, from one of his kindred (the victim of the Society of Jesus), should return by a voluntary act to the coffers of this same society. When the notary read the passage relative to the two portraits, Gabriel, who, like Father d'Aigrigny, sat with his back towards the pictures, turned round to look at them. Hardly had the missionary cast his eyes on the portrait of the woman, than he uttered a loud cry of surprise, and almost terror. The notary paused in his reading, and looked uneasily at the young priest.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The last stroke of noon.

At the cry uttered by Gabriel, the notary had stopped reading the testament, and Father d'Aigrigny hastily drew near the young priest. The latter rose trembling from his seat and gazed with increasing stupor at the female portrait.

Then he said in a low voice, as if speaking to himself. "Good Heaven! is it possible that nature can produce such resemblances? Those eyes—so proud and yet so sad—that forehead—that pale complexion—yes, all her features, are the same—all of them!"

"My dear son, what is the matter?" said Father d'Aigrigny, as astonished as Samuel and the notary.

"Eight months ago," replied the missionary, in a voice of deep emotion, without once taking his eyes from the picture, "I was in the power of the Indians, in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. They had crucified, and were beginning to scalp me; I was on the point of death, when Divine Providence sent me unexpected aid—sent me this woman for a deliverer."

"That woman!" cried Samuel, Father d'Aigrigny, and the notary, all together.

Rodin alone appeared completely indifferent to this episode of the picture. His face contracted with angry impatience, he bit his nails to the quick, as he contemplated with agony the slow progress of the hands of his watch.

"What! that woman saved your life?" resumed Father d'Aigrigny.



“Yes, this woman,” replied Gabriel, in a still lower and more trembling voice; “this woman—or rather a woman so much resembling her, that if this picture had not been here for a century and a half, I should have felt sure it was the same—nor can I explain to myself that so striking a resemblance could be the effect of chance. Well,” added he, after a moment’s silence, as he heaved a profound sigh, “the mysteries of Nature, and the will of God, are impenetrable.”

Page 63

Gabriel fell back into his chair, in the midst of a general silence, which was broken by Father d'Aigrigny saying, "It is a case of extraordinary resemblance; that is all, my dear son. Only, the natural gratitude which you feel towards your benefactress, makes you take a deep interest in this singular coincidence."

Rodin, bursting with impatience, here said to the notary, by whose side he stood, "It seems to me, sir, that all this little romance has nothing to do with the testament."

"You are right," answered the notary, resuming his seat; "but the fact is so extraordinary, and as you say, romantic, that one cannot help sharing in this gentleman's astonishment."

He pointed to Gabriel, who, with his elbow resting on the arms of the chair, leaned his forehead upon his hand, apparently quite absorbed in thought. The notary continued the reading of the will, as follows:

"Such are the persecutions to which my family has been exposed on the part of the Society of Jesus.

"The Society possesses at this hour the whole of my confiscated property. I am about to die. May its hatred perish with me, and spare my kindred, whose fate at this solemn moment is my last and only thought.

"This morning I sent for a man of long tried probity Isaac Samuel. He owes his life to me, and every day I congratulate myself on having been able to preserve to the world so honest and excellent a creature.

"Before the confiscation of my property, Isaac Samuel had long managed it with as much intelligence as uprightness. I have entrusted him with the fifty thousand crowns, returned to me by a faithful friend. Isaac Samuel, and his descendants after him, to whom he will leave this debt of gratitude, will invest the above sum, and allow it to accumulate, until the expiration of the hundred and fiftieth year from this time.

"The amount thus accumulated may become enormous, and constitute a royal fortune, if no unfavorable event should occur. May my descendants attend to my wishes, as to the division and employment of this immense sum!

"In a century and a half, there happen so many changes, so many varieties of fortunes, such a rise and fall in the condition of the successive generations of a family, that probably, a hundred and fifty years hence, my descendants will belong to various classes of society, and thus represent the divers social elements of their time.

"There may, perhaps, be among them men of great intelligence great courage, or great virtue—learned men, or names illustrious in arts and arms. There may, perhaps, also be obscure workmen, or humble citizens—perhaps, also, alas! great criminals.

“However, this may be, my most earnest desire is that my descendants should combine together, and, reconstituting one family, by a close and sincere union, put into practice the divine words of Christ, “Love ye one another.”

Page 64

“This union would have a salutary tendency; for it seems to me that upon union, upon the association of men together, must depend the future happiness of mankind.

“The Company, which so long persecuted my family, is one of the most striking examples of the power of association, even when applied to evil.

“There is something so fruitful and divine in this principle, that it sometimes forces to good the worst and most dangerous combinations.

“Thus, the missions have thrown a scanty but pure and generous light on the darkness of this Company of Jesus—founded with the detestable and impious aim of destroying, by a homicidal education, all will, thought, liberty, and intelligence, in the people, so as to deliver them, trembling, superstitious, brutal, and helpless, to the despotism of kings, governed in their turn by confessors belonging to the Society.”

At this passage of the will, there was another strange look exchanged between Gabriel and Father d'Aigrigny. The notary continued:

“If a perverse association, based upon the degradation of humanity, upon fear and despotism, and followed by the maledictions of the people, has survived for centuries, and often governed the world by craft and terror—how would it be with an association, which, taking fraternity and evangelic love for its means, had for its end to deliver man and woman from all degrading slavery, to invite to the enjoyment of terrestrial happiness those who have hitherto known nothing of life but its sorrows and miseries, and to glorify and enrich the labor that feeds the state?—to enlighten those whom ignorance has depraved?—to favor the free expansion of all the passions, which God, in His infinite wisdom, and inexhaustible goodness, gave to man as so many powerful levers?—to sanctify all the gifts of Heaven: love, maternity, strength, intelligence, beauty, genius?—to make men truly religious, and deeply grateful to their Creator, by making them understand the splendors of Nature, and bestowing on them their rightful share in the treasures which have been poured upon us?

“Oh! if it be Heaven's will that, in a century and a half, the descendants of my family, faithful to the last wishes of a heart that loved humanity, meet in this sacred union!—if it be Heaven's will that amongst them be found charitable and passionate souls, full of commiseration for those who suffer, and lofty minds, ardent for liberty! warm and eloquent natures! resolute characters! women, who unite beauty and wit with goodness—oh! then, how fruitful, how powerful will be the harmonious union of all these ideas, and influences, and forces—of all these attractions grouped round that princely fortune, which, concentrated by association, and wisely managed, would render practicable the most admirable Utopias!

“What a wondrous centre of fertile and generous thoughts! What precious and life-giving rays would stream incessantly from this focus of charity, emancipation, and love!

What great things might be attempted what magnificent examples given to the world!
What a divine mission! What an irresistible tendency towards good might be impressed
on the whole human race by a family thus situated, and in possession of such means!

Page 65

“And, then, such a beneficent association would be able to combat the fatal conspiracy of which I am the victim, and which, in a century and a half, may have lost none of its formidable power.

“So, to this work of darkness, restraint, and despotism, which weighs heavily on the Christian world, my family would oppose their work of light, expansion, and liberty!

“The genii of good and evil would stand face to face. The struggle would commence, and God would protect the right.

“And that these immense pecuniary resources, which will give so much power to my family, may not be exhausted by the course of years, my heirs, following my last will, are to place out, upon the same conditions, double the sum that I have invested—so that, a century and a half later, a new source of power and action will be at the disposal of their descendants. What a perpetuity of good!

“In the ebony cabinet of the Hall of Mourning will be found some practical suggestions on the subject of this association.

“Such is my last will—or rather, such are my last hopes.

“When I require absolutely that the members of my family should appear in person in the Rue Saint-Francois, on the day of the opening of this testament, it is so that, united in that solemn moment, they may see and know each other. My words may then, perhaps, have some effect upon them; and, instead of living divided, they will combine together. It will be for their own interest, and my wishes will thus be accomplished.

“When I sent, a few days ago, to those of my family whom exile has dispersed over Europe, a medal on which is engravers the date of the convocation of my heirs, a century and a half from this time, I was forced to keep secret my true motive, and only to tell them, that my descendants would find it greatly to their interest to attend this meeting.

“I have acted thus, because I know the craft and perseverance of the society of which I have been the victim. If they could guess that my descendants would hereafter have to divide immense sums between them, my family would run the risk of much fraud and malice, through the fatal recommendations handed down from age to age in the Society of Jesus.

“May these precautions be successful! May the wish, expressed upon these medals, be faithfully transmitted from generation to generation!

“If I fix a day and hour, in which my inheritance shall irrevocably fall to those of my descendants who shall appear in the Rue Saint-Francois on the 13th February, in 1832,

it is that all delays must have a term, and that my heirs will have been sufficiently informed years before of the great importance of this meeting.

“After the reading of my testament, the person who shall then be the trustee of the accumulated funds, shall make known their amount, so that, with the last stroke of noon, they may be divided between my heirs then and there present.

Page 66

“The different apartments of the house shall then be opened to them. They will see in them divers objects, well worthy of interest, pity, and respect—particularly in the Hall of Mourning.

“My desire is, that the house may not be sold, but that it may remain furnished as it is, and serve as a place of meeting for my descendants, if, as I hope, they attend to my last wishes.

“If, on the contrary, they are divided amongst themselves—if, instead of uniting for one of the most generous enterprises that ever signalized an age, they yield to the influence of selfish passions—if they prefer a sterile individuality to a fruitful association—if, in this immense fortune, they see only an opportunity for frivolous dissipation, or sordid interest—may they be accursed by all those whom they might have loved, succored, and disfettered!—and then let this house be utterly demolished and destroyed, and the papers, of which Isaac Samuel possesses the inventory, as well as the two portraits in the Red Room, be burnt by the guardian of the property.

“I have spoken. My duty is accomplished. In all this, I have followed the counsels of the man whom I revere and love as the image of God upon earth.

“The faithful friend, who preserved for me the fifty thousand crowns, the wreck of my fortune, knows the use I mean to make of them. I could not refuse his friendship this mark of confidence. But I have concealed from him the name of Isaac Samuel—for to have mentioned it might have exposed this latter and his descendants to great dangers.

“In a short time, this friend, who knows not that my resolution to die is so near its accomplishment, will come hither with my notary. Into their hands, after the usual formalities, I shall deliver my sealed testament.

“Such is my last will. I leave its execution to the superintending care of Providence. God will protect the cause of love, peace, union, and liberty.

“This mystic testament,[20] having been freely made by me, and written entirely with my own hand, I intend and will its scrupulous execution both in spirit and the letter.

“This 13th day of February, 1682, at one o’clock in the afternoon.

“*Mariusde Rennepont.*”

As the notary had proceeded with the reading of the testament, Gabriel was successively agitated by divers painful impressions. At first, as we have before said, he was struck with the singular fatality which restored this immense fortune, derived from a victim of the Society of Jesus, to the hands of that very association, by the renewal of his deed of gift. Then, as his charitable and lofty soul began fully to comprehend the admirable tendency of the association so earnestly recommended by Marius de

Rennepont, he reflected with bitter remorse, that, in consequence of his act of renunciation, and of the absence of any other heir, this great idea would never be realized,

Page 67

and a fortune, far more considerable than had even been expected, would fall to the share of an ill-omened society, in whose hands it would become a terrible means of action. At the same time, it must be said that the soul of Gabriel was too pure and noble to feel the slightest personal regret, on hearing the great probable value of the property he had renounced. He rejoiced rather in withdrawing his mind, by a touching contrast, from the thought of the wealth he had abandoned, to the humble parsonage, where he hoped to pass the remainder of his life, in the practice of most evangelical virtue.

These ideas passed confusedly through his brain. The sight of that woman's portrait, the dark revelations contained in the testament, the grandeur of the views exhibited in this last will of M. de Rennepont, all these extraordinary incidents had thrown Gabriel into a sort of stupor, in which he was still plunged, when Samuel offered the key of the register to the notary, saying: "You will find, sir, in this register, the exact statement of the sums in my possession, derived from the investment and accumulation of the one hundred and fifty thousand francs, entrusted to my grandfather by M. Marius de Rennepont."

"Your grandfather!" cried Father d'Aigrigny, with the utmost surprise; "it is then your family that has always had the management of this property."

"Yes, sir; and, in a few minutes, my wife will bring hither the casket which contains the vouchers."

"And to what sum does this property amount?" asked Rodin, with an air of the most complete indifference.

"As M. Notary may convince himself by this statement," replied Samuel, with perfect frankness, and as if he were only talking of the original one hundred and fifty thousand francs, "I have in my possession various current securities to the amount of two hundred and twelve millions, one hundred and seventy—"

"You say, sir?" cried Father d'Aigrigny, without giving Samuel time to finish, for the odd money did not at all interest his reverence.

"Yes, the sum!" added Rodin, in an agitated voice, and, for the first time, perhaps, in his life losing his presence of mind; "the sum—the sum—the sum!"

"I say, sir," resumed the old man, "that I hold securities for two hundred and twelve millions, one hundred and seventy-five thousand francs, payable to self or bearer—as you may soon convince yourself, M. Notary, for here is my wife with the casket."

Indeed, at this moment, Bathsheba entered, holding in her arms the cedar wood chest, which contained the securities in question; she placed it upon the table, and withdrew,

after exchanging an affectionate glance with Samuel. When the latter declared the enormous amount of the sum in hand, his words were received with silent stupor. All the actors in this scene, except himself, believed that they were the sport of some delusion. Father d'Aigrigny and Rodin had counted upon forty millions. This

Page 68

sum, in itself enormous, was more than quintupled. Gabriel, when he heard the notary read those passages in the testament, which spoke of a princely fortune, being quite ignorant of the prodigious effects of eligible investments, had valued the property at some three or four millions. He was, therefore, struck dumb with amazement at the exorbitant amount named. Notwithstanding his admirable disinterestedness and scrupulous honor, he felt dazzled and giddy at the thought, that all these immense riches might have belonged to him—alone. The notary, almost as much amazed as Gabriel, examined the statement, and could hardly believe his eyes. The Jew also remained mute, and seemed painfully absorbed in thought, that no other heir made his appearance.

In the depth of this profound silence, the clock in the next room began slowly to strike twelve. Samuel started, and heaved a deep sigh. A few seconds more, and the fatal term would be at an end. Rodin, Father d'Aigrigny, Gabriel, and the notary, were all under the influence of such complete surprise, that not one of them even remarked how strange it was to hear the sound of this clock.

"Noon!" cried Rodin, as, by an involuntary movement, he hastily placed his two hands upon the casket, as if to take possession of it.

"At last!" cried Father d'Aigrigny, with an expression of joy, triumph transport, which it is impossible to describe. Then he added, as he threw himself into Gabriel's arms, whom he embraced warmly: "Oh, my dear son! how the poor will bless you! You will be a second Vincent de Paul. You will be canonized, I promise you."

"Let us first thank Providence," said Rodin, in a grave and solemn tone, as he fell upon his knees, "let us thank Providence, that He has permitted so much wealth to be employed for His glory!"

Father d'Aigrigny, having again embraced Gabriel, took him by the hand, and said: "Rodin is right. Let us kneel, my dear son, and render thanks to Providence!"

So saying, Father d'Aigrigny knelt down, dragging Gabriel with him, and the latter, confused and giddy with so many precipitate events, yielded mechanically to the impulse. It was the last stroke of twelve when they all rose together.

Then said the notary, in a slightly agitated voice, for there was something extraordinary and solemn in this scene—

"No other heir of M. Marius de Rennepont having presented himself, before noon on this day, I execute the will of the testator, by declaring, in the name of law and justice, that M. Francois Marie Gabriel de Rennepont, here present, is the sole heir and possessor

of all the estate, real and personal, bequeathed under the said will; all which estate the said Gabriel de Rennepont, priest, has freely and voluntarily made over by deed of gift to Frederic Emanuel de Bordeville, Marquis d'Aigrigny, priest, who has accepted the same, and is, therefore, the only legal holder of such property, in the room of the said Gabriel de Rennepont, by virtue of the said deed, drawn up and engrossed by me this morning, and signed in my presence by the said Gabriel de Rennepont and Frederic d'Aigrigny."

Page 69

At this moment, the sound of loud voices was heard from the garden. Bathsheba entered hastily, and said to her husband with an agitated air: "Samuel—a soldier—who insists—"

She had not time to finish. Dagobert appeared at the door of the Red Room. The soldier was fearfully pale. He seemed almost fainting; his left arm was in a sling, and he leaned upon Agricola. At sight of Dagobert, the pale and flabby eyelids of Rodin were suddenly distended, as if all the blood in his body had flowed towards the head. Then the socius threw himself upon the casket, with the haste of ferocious rage and avidity, as if he were resolved to cover it with his body, and defend it at the peril of his life.

[20] This term is sanctioned by legal usage.

CHAPTER XXV.

The deed of gift.

Father d'Aigrigny did not recognize Dagobert, and had never seen Agricola. He could not therefore, at first explain the kind of angry alarm exhibited by Rodin. But the reverend father understood it all, when he heard Gabriel utter a cry of joy, and saw him rush into the arms of the smith, exclaiming: "My brother! my second father—oh! it is heaven that sends you to me."

Having pressed Gabriel's hand, Dagobert advanced towards Father d'Aigrigny, with a rapid but unsteady step. As he remarked the soldier's threatening countenance, the reverend father, strong in his acquired rights, and feeling that, since noon, he was at home here; drew back a little, and said imperiously to the veteran: "Who are you, sir!—What do you want here?"

Instead of answering, the soldier continued to advance, then, stopping just facing Father d'Aigrigny, he looked at him for a second with such an astounding mixture of curiosity, disdain, aversion, and audacity, that the ex-colonel of hussars quailed before the pale face and glowing eye of the veteran. The notary and Samuel, struck with surprise, remained mute spectators of this scene, while Agricola and Gabriel followed with anxiety Dagobert's least movements. As for Rodin, he pretended to be leaning on the casket, in order still to cover it with his body.

Surmounting at length the embarrassment caused by the steadfast look of the soldier, Father d'Aigrigny raised his head, and repeated. "I ask you, sir, who you are, and what you want?"

"Do you not recognize me?" said Dagobert, hardly able to restrain himself.

"No, sir—"



“In truth,” returned the soldier, with profound contempt, “You cast down your eyes for shame when, at Leipsic, you fought for the Russians against the French, and when General Simon, covered with wounds, answered you, renegade that you were, when you asked him for his sword, ‘I do not surrender to a traitor!’—and dragged himself along to one of the Russian grenadiers, to whom he yielded up his weapon. Well! there was then a wounded soldier by the side of General Simon—I am he.”

Page 70

"In brief, sir, what do you want?" said Father d'Aigrigny, hardly, able to control himself.

"I have come to unmask you—you, that are as false and hateful a priest, as Gabriel is admirable and beloved by all."

"Sir!" cried the marquis, becoming livid with rage and emotion.

"I tell you, that you are infamous," resumed the soldier, with still greater force. "To rob Marshal Simon's daughters, and Gabriel, and Mdlle. de Cardoville of their inheritance, you have had recourse to the most shameful means."

"What do you say?" cried Gabriel. "The daughters of Marshal Simon?"

"Are your relations, my dear boy, as is also that worthy Mdlle. de Cardoville, the benefactress of Agricola. Now, this priest," he added, pointing to Father d'Aigrigny, "has had them shut up—the one as mad, in a lunatic asylum—the others in a convent. As for you, my dear boy, I did not hope to find you here, believing that they would have prevented you, like the others, from coming hither this morning. But, thank God, you are here, and I arrive in time. I should have been sooner, but for my wound. I have lost so much blood, that I have done nothing but faint all the morning."

"Truly!" cried Gabriel, with uneasiness. "I had not remarked your arm in a sling. What is the wound?"

At a sign from Agricola, Dagobert answered: "Nothing; the consequence of a fall. But here I am, to unveil many infamies."

It is impossible to paint the curiosity, anguish, surprise, or fear, of the different actors in this scene, as they listened to Dagobert's threatening words. But the most overcome was Gabriel. His angelic countenance was distorted, his knees trembled under him. Struck by the communication of Dagobert which revealed the existence of other heirs, he was unable to speak for some time; at length, he cried out, in a tone of despair: "And it is I—oh, God! I—who am the cause of the spoliation of this family!"

"You, brother?" exclaimed Agricola.

"Did they not wish to rob you also?" added Dagobert.

"The will," cried Gabriel, with increasing agony, "gave the property to those of the heirs that should appear before noon."

"Well?" said Dagobert, alarmed at the emotion of the young priest.

“Twelve o’clock has struck,” resumed the latter. “Of all the family, I alone was present. Do you understand it now? The term is expired. The heirs have been thrust aside by me!”

“By you!” said Dagobert, stammering with joy. “By you, my brave boy! then all is well.”

“But—”

“All is well,” resumed Dagobert, radiant with delight. “You will share with the others—I know you.”

“But all this property I have irrevocably, made over to another,” cried Gabriel, in despair.

“Made over the property!” cried Dagobert, quite petrified. “To whom, then?—to whom?”

“To this gentleman,” said Gabriel, pointing to Father d’Aigrigny.

Page 71

"To him!" exclaimed Dagobert, overwhelmed by the news; "to him—the renegade—who has always been the evil genius of this family!"

"But, brother," cried Agricola, "did you then know your claim to this inheritance?"

"No," answered the young priest, with deep dejection; "no—I only learned it this morning, from Father d'Aigrigny. He told me, that he had only recently been informed of my rights, by family papers long ago found upon me, and sent by our mother to her confessor."

A sudden light seemed to dawn upon the mind of the smith, as he exclaimed: "I understand it all now. They discovered in these papers, that you would one day have a chance of becoming rich. Therefore, they interested themselves about you—therefore, they took you into their college, where we could never see you—therefore, they deceived you in your vocation by shameful falsehoods, to force you to become a priest, and to lead you to make this deed of gift. Oh, sir!" resumed Agricola, turning towards Father d'Aigrigny, with indignation, "my father is right—such machinations are indeed infamous!"

During this scene, the reverend father and his socius, at first alarmed and shaken in their audacity, had by degrees recovered all their coolness. Rodin, still leaning upon the casket, had said a few words in a low voice to Father d'Aigrigny. So that when Agricola, carried away by his indignation, reproached the latter with his infamous machinations, he bowed his head humbly, and answered: "We are bound to forgive injuries, and offer them to the Lord as a mark of our humility."

Dagobert, confounded at all he had just heard, felt his reason begin to wander. After so much anxiety, his strength failed beneath this new and terrible blow. Agricola's just and sensible words, in connection with certain passages of the testament, at once enlightened Gabriel as to the views of Father d'Aigrigny, in taking charge of his education, and leading him to join the Society of Jesus. For the first time in his life, Gabriel was able to take in at a glance all the secret springs of the dark intrigue, of which he had been the victim. Then, indignation and despair surmounting his natural timidity, the missionary, with flashing eye, and cheeks inflamed with noble wrath, exclaimed, as he addressed Father d'Aigrigny: "So, father, when you placed me in one of your colleges, it was not from any feeling of kindness or commiseration, but only in the hope of bringing me one day to renounce in favor of your Order my share in this inheritance; and it did not even suffice you to sacrifice me to your cupidity, but I must also be rendered the involuntary instrument of a shameful spoliation! If only I were concerned—if you only coveted my claim to all this wealth, I should not complain. I am the minister of a religion which honors and sanctifies poverty; I have consented to the donation in your favor, and I have not, I could never have any claim upon

Page 72

it. But property is concerned which belong to poor orphans, brought from a distant exile by my adopted father, and I will not see them wronged. But the benefactress of my adopted brother is concerned, and I will not see her wronged. But the last will of a dying man is concerned, who, in his ardent love of humanity, bequeathed to his descendants an evangelic mission—an admirable mission of progress, love, union, liberty—and I will not see this mission blighted in its bud. No, no; I tell you, that this his mission shall be accomplished, though I have to cancel the donation I have made.”

On these words, Father d'Aigrigny and Rodin looked at each other with a slight shrug of the shoulders. At a sign from the socius, the reverend father began to speak with immovable calmness, in a slow and sanctified voice, keeping eyes constantly cast down: “There are many incidents connected with this inheritance of M. de Rennepont, which appear very complicated—many phantoms, which seem un usually menacing—and yet, nothing could be really more simple and natural. Let us proceed in regular order. Let us put aside all these calumnious imputations; we will return to them afterwards. M. Gabriel de Rennepont—and I humbly beg him to contradict me, if I depart in the least instance from the exact truth—M. Gabriel de Rennepont, in acknowledgment of the care formerly bestowed on him by the society to which I have the honor to belong, made over to me, as its representative, freely and voluntarily, all the property that might come to him one day, the value of which was unknown to him, as well as to myself.”

Father d'Aigrigny here looked at Gabriel, as if appealing to him for the truth of this statement.

“It is true,” said the young priest: “I made this donation freely.”

“This morning, in consequence of a private conversation, which I will not repeat—and in this, I am certain beforehand, of the Abbe Gabriel—”

“True,” replied Gabriel, generously; “the subject of this conversation is of little importance.”

“It was then, in consequence of this conversation that the Abbe Gabriel manifested the desire to confirm this donation—not in my favor, for I have little to do with earthly wealth—but in favor of the sacred and charitable works of which our Company is the trustee. I appeal to the honor of M. Gabriel to declare if he have not engaged himself towards us, not only by a solemn oath, but by a perfectly legal act, executed in presence of M. Dumesnil, here present?”

“It is all true,” answered Gabriel.

“The deed was prepared by me,” added the notary.

“But Gabriel could only give you what belonged to him,” cried Dagobert. “The dear boy never supposed that you were making use of him to rob other people.”

“Do me the favor, sir, to allow me to explain myself,” replied Father d’Aigrigny, courteously; “you can afterwards make answer.”

Page 73

Dagobert repressed with difficulty his painful impatience. The reverend father continued: "The Abbe Gabriel has therefore, by the double engagement of an oath and a legal act, confirmed his donation. Much more," resumed Father d'Aigrigny: "when to his great astonishment and to ours, the enormous amount of the inheritance became known, the Abbe Gabriel, faithful to his own admirable generosity, far from repenting of his gifts, consecrated them once more by a pious movement of gratitude to Providence—for M. Notary will doubtless remember, that, after embracing the Abbe Gabriel with transport, and telling him that he was a second Vincent de Paul in charity, I took him by the hand, and we both knelt down together to thank heaven for having inspired him with the thought too offer these immense riches to the Greater Glory of the Lord."

"That is true, also," said Gabriel, honestly; "so long as myself was concerned, though I might be astounded for a moment by the revelation of so enormous a fortune, I did not think for an instant of cancelling the donation I had freely made."

"Under these circumstances," resumed Father d'Aigrigny, "the hour fixed for the settlement of the inheritance having struck, and Abbe Gabriel being the only heir that presented himself, he became necessarily the only legitimate possessor of this immense wealth—enormous, no doubt—and charity makes me rejoice that it is enormous, for, thanks to it, many miseries will be relieved and many tears wiped away. But, all on a sudden, here comes this gentleman," said Father d'Aigrigny, pointing to Dagobert; "and, under some delusion, which I forgive from the bottom of my soul, and which I am sure he will himself regret, accuses me, with insults and threats, with having carried off (I know not where) some persons (I know not whom), in order to prevent their being here at the proper time—"

"Yes, I accuse you of this infamy!" cried the soldier exasperated by the calmness and audacity of the reverend father: "yes—and I will—"

"Once again, sir, I conjure you to be so good as to let me finish; you can reply afterwards," said Father d'Aigrigny, humbly, in the softest and most honeyed accents.

"Yes, I will reply, and confound you!" cried Dagobert.

"Let him finish, father. You can speak presently," said Agricola.

The soldier was silent as Father d'Aigrigny continued with new assurance: "Doubtless, if there should really be any other heirs, besides the Abbe Gabriel, it is unfortunate for them that they have not appeared in proper time. And if, instead of defending the cause of the poor and needy, I had only to look to my own interest, I should be far from availing myself of this advantage, due only to chance; but, as a trustee for the great family of the poor, I am obliged to maintain my absolute right to this inheritance; and I do not doubt that M. Notary will acknowledge the validity of my claim, and deliver to me these securities, which are now my legitimate property."

Page 74

"My only mission," replied the notary, in an agitated voice, "is faithfully to execute the will of the testator. The Abbe Gabriel de Rennepont alone presented himself, within the term fixed by the testament. The deed of gift is in due form; I cannot refuse, therefore, to deliver to the person named in the deed the amount of the heritage—"

On these words Samuel hid his face in his hands, and heaved a deep sigh; he was obliged to acknowledge the rigorous justice of the notary's observations.

"But, sir," cried Dagobert, addressing the man of law, "this cannot be. You will not allow two poor orphans to be despoiled. It is in the name of their father and mother that I speak to you. I give you my honor—the honor of a soldier!—that they took advantage of the weakness of my wife to carry the daughters of Marshal Simon to a convent, and thus prevent me bringing them here this morning. It is so true, that I have already laid my charge before a magistrate."

"And what answer did you receive?" said the notary.

"That my deposition was not sufficient for the law to remove these young girls from the convent in which they were, and that inquiries would be made—"

"Yes, sir," added Agricola, "and it was the same with regard to Mdle. de Cardoville, detained as mad in a lunatic asylum, though in the full enjoyment of her reason. Like Marshal Simon's daughters, she too has a claim to this inheritance. I took the same steps for her, as my father took for Marshal Simon's daughters."

"Well?" asked the notary.

"Unfortunately, sir," answered Agricola, "they told me; as they did my father, that my deposition would not suffice, and that they must make inquiries."

At this moment, Bathsheba, having heard the street-bell ring, left the Red Room at a sign from Samuel. The notary resumed, addressing Agricola and his father: "Far be it from me, gentlemen, to call in question your good faith; but I cannot, to my great regret, attach such importance to your accusations, which are not supported by proof, as to suspend the regular legal course. According to your own confession, gentlemen, the authorities, to whom you addressed yourselves, did not see fit to interfere on your depositions, and told you they would inquire further. Now, really, gentlemen, I appeal to you: how can I, in so serious a matter, take upon myself a responsibility, which the magistrates themselves have refused to take?"

"Yes, you should do so, in the name of justice and honor?" cried Dagobert.

"It may be so, sir, in your opinion; but in my view of the case, I remain faithful to justice and honor, by executing with exactness the last will of the dead. For the rest you have no occasion to despair. If the persons, whose interests you represent, consider



themselves injured, they may hereafter have recourse to an action at law, against the person receiving as donee of the Abbe Gabriel—but in the meanwhile, it is my duty to put him in immediate possession of the securities. I should be gravely injured, were I to act in any, other manner.”

Page 75

The notary's observations seemed so reasonable, that Samuel, Dagobert and Agricola were quite confounded. After a moment's thought, Gabriel appeared to take a desperate resolution, and said to the notary, in a firm voice—

“Since, under these circumstances, the law is powerless to obtain the right, I must adopt, sir, an extreme course. Before doing so, I will ask M. l'Abbe d'Aigrigny, for the last time, if he will content himself with that portion of the property which falls justly to me, on condition that the rest shall be placed in safe hands, till the heirs, whose names have been brought forward, shall prove their claim.”

“To this proposition I must answer as I have done already,” replied Father d'Aigrigny; “it is not I who am concerned, but an immense work of charity. I am, therefore, obliged to refuse the part-offer of the Abbe Gabriel, and to remind him of his engagements of every kind.”

“Then you refuse this arrangement?” asked Gabriel, in an agitated voice.

“Charity commands me to do so.”

“You refuse it—absolutely?”

“I think of all the good and pious institutions that these treasures will enable us to establish for the Greater Glory of the Lord, and I have neither the courage nor the desire to make the least concession.”

“Then, sir,” resumed the good priest, in a still more agitated manner, “since you force me to do it, I revoke my donation. I only intended to dispose of my own property, and not of that which did not belong to me.”

“Take care M. l'Abbe,” said rather d'Aigrigny; “I would observe that I hold in my hand a written, formal promise.”

“I know it, sir; you have a written paper, in which I take an oath never to revoke this donation, upon any pretext whatever, and on pain of incurring the aversion and contempt of all honest men. Well, sir! be it so,” said Gabriel, with deep bitterness; “I will expose myself to all the consequences of perjury; you may proclaim it everywhere. I may be hated and despised by all—but God will judge me!” The young priest dried a tear, which trickled from his eye.

“Oh! do not be afraid, my dear boy!” cried Dagobert, with reviving hope. “All honest men will be on your side!”

“Well done, brother!” said Agricola.

“M. Notary,” said Rodin, in his little sharp voice, “please to explain to Abbe Gabriel, that he may perjure himself as much as he thinks fit, but that the Civil Code is much less easy to violate than a mere promise, which is only—sacred!”

“Speak, sir,” said Gabriel.

“Please to inform Abbe Gabriel,” resumed Rodin, “that a deed of gift, like that made in favor of Father d’Aigrigny, can only be cancelled for one of three reasons—is it not so?”

“Yes, sir, for three reasons,” said the notary.

“The first is in case of the birth of a child,” said Rodin, “and I should blush to mention such a contingency to the Abbe Gabriel. The second is the ingratitude of the donee—and the Abbe Gabriel may be certain of our deep and lasting gratitude. The last case is the non-fulfilment of the wishes of the donor, with regard to the employment of his gifts.

Page 76

“Now, although the Abbe Gabriel may have suddenly conceived a very bad opinion of us, he will at least give us some time to show that his gifts have been disposed of according to his wishes, and applied to the Greater Glory of the Lord.”

“Now, M. Notary,” added Father d’Aigrigny, “it is for you to decide and say, if Abbe Gabriel can revoke the donation he has made.”

Just as the notary was going to answer, Bathsheba reentered the room, followed by two more personages, who appeared in the Red Room at a little distance from each other.