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THE WANDERING JEW

By Eugene Sue

BOOK IV.

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PROLOGUE.—THE BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF TWO WORLDS.

As the eagle, perched upon the cliff, commands an all-comprehensive view—not only of what happens on the plains and in the woodlands, but of matters occurring upon the heights, which its aerie overlooks, so may the reader have sights pointed out to him, which lie below the level of the unassisted eye.

In the year 1831, the powerful Order of the Jesuits saw fit to begin to act upon information which had for some time been digesting in their hands.

As it related to a sum estimated at no less than thirty or forty millions of francs, it is no wonder that they should redouble all exertions to obtain it from the rightful owners.

These were, presumably, the descendants of Marius, Count of Rennepont, in the reign of Louis XIV. of France.

They were distinguished from other men by a simple token, which all, in the year above named, had in their hands.

It was a bronze medal, bearing these legends on reverse and obverse:

VICTIM
of
L. C. D. J.
Pray for me!

PARIS,
February the 13th, 1682.

IN PARIS
Rue St Francois, No. 3,
In a century and a half
you will be.

February the 13th, 1832.
PRAY FOR ME!

Those who had this token were descendants of a family whom, a hundred and fifty years ago, persecution scattered through the world, in emigration and exile; in changes of religion, fortune and name. For this family—what grandeur, what reverses, what obscurity, what lustre, what penury, what glory! How many crimes sullied, how many virtues honored it! The history of this single family is the history of humanity! Passing through many generations, throbbing in the veins of the poor and the rich, the sovereign and the bandit, the wise and the simple, the coward and the brave, the saint and the atheist, the blood flowed on to the year we have named.

Seven representatives summed up the virtue, courage, degradation, splendor, and poverty of the race. Seven: two orphan twin daughters of exiled parents, a dethroned prince, a humble missionary priest, a man of the middle class, a young lady of high name and large fortune, and a working man.

Fate scattered them in Russia, India, France, and America.

The orphans, Rose and Blanche Simon, had left their dead mother's grave in Siberia, under charge of a trooper named Francis Baudoin, alias Dagobert, who was as much attached to them as he had been devoted to their father, his commanding general.

On the road to France, this little party had met the first check, in the only tavern of Mockern village. Not only had a wild beast showman, known as Morok the lion-tamer, sought to pick a quarrel with the inoffensive veteran, but that failing, had let a panther of his menagerie loose upon the soldier's horse. That horse had carried Dagobert, under General Simon's and the Great Napoleon's eyes, through many battles; had borne the General's wife (a Polish lady under the Czar's ban) to her home of exile in Siberia, and their children now across Russia and Germany, but only to perish thus cruelly. An unseen hand appeared in a manifestation of spite otherwise unaccountable. Dagobert, denounced as a French spy, and his fair young companions accused of being adventuresses to help his designs, had so kindled at the insult, not less to him than to his old commander's daughters, that he had taught the pompous burgomaster of Mockern a lesson, which, however, resulted in the imprisonment of the three in Leipsic jail.

General Simon, who had vainly sought to share his master's St. Helena captivity, had gone to fight the English in India. But notwithstanding his drilling of Radja-sings sepoy, they had been beaten by the troops taught by Clive, and not only was the old king of Mundi slain, and the realm added to the Company's land, but his son, Prince Djalma, taken prisoner. However, at length released, he had gone to Batavia, with General Simon. The prince's mother was a Frenchwoman, and among the property she left him in the capital of Java, the general was delighted to find just such another medal as he knew was in his wife's possession.

The unseen hand of enmity had reached to him, for letters miscarried, and he did not know either his wife's decease or that he had twin daughters.

By a trick, on the eve of the steamship leaving Batavia for the Isthmus of Suez, Djalma was separated from his friend, and sailing for Europe alone, the latter had to follow in another vessel.

The missionary priest trod the war trails of the wilderness, with that faith and fearlessness which true soldiers of the cross should evince. In one of these heroic undertakings, Indians had captured him, and dragging him to their village under the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, they had nailed him in derision to a cross, and prepared to scalp him.

But if an unseen hand of a foe smote or stabbed at the sons of Rennepont, a visible interpositor had often shielded them, in various parts of the globe.

A man, seeming of thirty years of age, very tall, with a countenance as lofty as mournful, marked by the black eyebrows meeting, had thrown himself—during a battle's height—between a gun of a park which General Simon was charging and that officer. The cannon vomited its hail of death, but when the flame and smoke had passed, the tall man stood erect as before, smiling pityingly on the gunner, who fell on his knees as frightened as if he beheld Satan himself. Again, as General Simon lay upon the lost field of Waterloo, raging with his wounds, eager to die after such a defeat, this same man staunched his hurts, and bade him live for his wife's sake.

Years after, wearing the same unalterable look, this man accosted Dagobert in Siberia, and gave him for General Simon's wife, the diary and letters of her husband, written in India, in little hope of them ever reaching her hands. And at the year our story opens, this man unbarred the cell-door of Leipsic jail, and let Dagobert and the orphans out, free to continue their way into France.

On the other hand, when the scalping-knife had traced its mark around the head of Gabriel the missionary, and when only the dexterous turn and tug would have removed the trophy, a sudden apparition had terrified the superstitious savages. It was a woman of thirty, whose brown tresses formed a rich frame around a royal face, toned down by endless sorrowing. The red-skins shrank from her steady advance, and when her hand was stretched out between them and their young victim, they uttered a howl of alarm, and fled as if a host of their foemen were on their track. Gabriel was saved, but all his life he was doomed to bear that halo of martyrdom, the circling sweep of the scalper's knife.

He was a Jesuit. By the orders of his society he embarked for Europe. We should say here, that he, though owning a medal of the seven described, was unaware that he should have worn it. His vessel was driven by storms to refit at the Azores, where he had changed ship into the same as was bearing Prince Djalma to France, via Portsmouth.

But the gales followed him, and sated their fury by wrecking the "Black Eagle" on the Picardy coast. This was at the same point as were a disabled Hamburg steamer, among whose passengers were Dagobert and his two charges, was destroyed the same night. Happily the tempest did not annihilate them all. There were saved, Prince Djalma and a countryman of his, one Faringhea, a Thuggee chief, hunted out of British India; Dagobert, and Rose and Blanche Simon, whom Gabriel had rescued. These survivors had recovered, thanks to the care they had received in Cardoville House, a country mansion which had sheltered them, and except the prince and the Strangler chief, the others were speedily able to go on to Paris.

The old grenadier and the orphans—until General Simon should be heard from—dwelt in the former's house. His son had kept it, from his mother's love for the life-long home. It was such a mean habitation as a workman like Agricola Baudoin could afford to pay the rent of, and far from the fit abode of the daughters of the Duke de Ligny and Marshal of France, which Napoleon had created General Simon, though the rank had only recently been approved by the restoration.

But in Paris the unknown hostile hand showed itself more malignant than ever.

The young lady of high name and large fortune was Adrienne de Cardoville, whose aunt, the Princess de Saint-Dizier, was a Jesuit. Through her and her accomplices' machinations, the young lady's forward yet virtuous, wildly aspiring but sensible, romantic but just, character was twisted into a passable

reason for her immurement in a mad-house.

This asylum adjoined St. Mary's Convent, into which Rose and Blanche Simon were deceitfully conducted. To secure their removal, Dagobert had been decoyed into the country, under pretence of showing some of General Simon's documents to a lawyer; his son Agricola arrested for treason, on account of some idle verses the blacksmith poet was guilty of, and his wife rendered powerless, or, rather, a passive assistant, by the influence of the confessional! When Dagobert hurried back from his wild goose chase, he found the orphans gone: Mother Bunch (a fellow-tenant of the house, who had been brought up in the family) ignorant, and his wife stubbornly refusing to break the promise she had given her confessor, and acquaint a single soul where she had permitted the girls to be taken. In his rage, the soldier rashly accused that confessor, but instead of arresting the Abbe Dubois, it was Mrs. Baudoin whom the magistrate felt compelled to arrest, as the person whom alone he ventured to commit for examination in regard to the orphans' disappearance. Thus triumphs, for the time being, the unseen foe.

The orphans in a nunnery; the dethroned prince a poor castaway in a foreign land; the noble young lady in a madhouse; the missionary priest under the thumb of his superiors.

As for the man of the middle class, and the working man, who concluded the list of this family, we are to read of them, as well as of the others, in the pages which now succeed these.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASQUERADE.

The following day to that on which Dagobert's wife (arrested for not accounting for the disappearance of General Simon's daughters) was led away before a magistrate, a noisy and animated scene was transpiring on the Place du Chatelet, in front of a building whose first floor and basement were used as the tap-rooms of the "Sucking Calf" public-house.

A carnival night was dying out.

Quite a number of maskers, grotesquely and shabbily bedecked, had rushed out of the low dance-houses in the Guildhall Ward, and were roaring out staves of songs as they crossed the square. But on catching sight of a second troop of mummers running about the water-side, the first party stopped to wait for the others to come up, rejoicing, with many a shout, in hopes of one of those verbal battles of slang and smutty talk which made Vade so illustrious.

This mob—nearly all its members half seas over, soon swollen by the many people who have to be up early to follow their crafts—suddenly concentrated in one of the corners of the square, so that a pale, deformed girl, who was going that way, was caught in the human tide. This was Mother Bunch. Up with the lark, she was hurrying to receive some work from her employer. Remembering how a mob had treated her when she had been arrested in the streets only the day before, by mistake, the poor work-girl's fears may be imagined when she was now surrounded by the revellers against her will. But, spite of all her efforts—very feeble, alas!—she could not stir a step, for the band of merry-makers, newly arriving, had rushed in among the others, shoving some of them aside, pushing far into the mass, and sweeping Mother Bunch—who was in their way—clear over to the crowd around the public-house.

The new-comers were much finer rigged out than the others, for they belonged to the gay, turbulent class which goes frequently to the Chaumiere, the Prado, the Colisee, and other more or less rowdyish haunts of waltzers, made up generally of students, shop-girls, and counter skippers, clerks, unfortunates, etc., etc.

This set, while retorting to the chaff of the other party, seemed to be very impatiently expecting some singularly desired person to put in her appearance.

The following snatches of conversation, passing between clowns and columbines, pantaloons and fairies, Turks and sultans, debardeurs and debardeuses, paired off more or less properly, will give an idea of the importance of the wished-for personage.

"They ordered the spread to be for seven in the morning, so their carriages ought to have come up afore now."

"Werry like, but the Bacchanal Queen has got to lead off the last dance in the Prado."

"I wish to thunder I'd 'a known that, and I'd 'a stayed there to see her—my beloved Queen!"

"Gobinet; if you call her your beloved Queen again, I'll scratch you!
Here's a pinch for you, anyhow!"

"Ow, wow, Celeste! hands off! You are black-spotting the be-yutiful white satin jacket my mamma gave me when I first came out as Don Pasqually!"

"Why did you call the Bacchanal Queen your beloved, then? What am I, I'd like to know?"

"You are my beloved, but not my Queen, for there is only one moon in the nights of nature, and only one Bacchanal Queen in the nights at the Prado."

"That's a bit from a valentine! You can't come over me with such rubbish."

"Gobinet's right! the Queen was an out-and-outer tonight!"

"In prime feather!"

"I never saw her more on the go!"

"And, my eyes! wasn't her dress stunning?"

"Took your breath away!"

"Crushing!"

"Heavy!"

"Im-mense!"

"The last kick!"

"No one but she can get up such dresses."

"And, then, the dance!"

"Oh, yes! it was at once bounding waving, twisting! There is not such another bayadere under the night-cap of the sky!"

"Gobinet, give me back my shawl directly. You have already spoilt it by rolling it round your great body. I don't choose to have my things ruined for hulking beasts who call other women bayaderes!"

"Celeste, simmer down. I am disguised as a Turk, and, when I talk of bayaderes, I am only in character."

"Your Celeste is like them all, Gobinet; she's jealous of the Bacchanal Queen."

"Jealous!—do you think me jealous? Well now! that's too bad. If I chose to be as showy as she is they would talk of me as much. After all, it's only a nickname that makes her reputation! nickname!"

"In that you have nothing to envy her—since you are called Celeste!"

"You know well enough, Gobinet, that Celeste is my real name."

"Yes; but it's fancied a nickname—when one looks in your face."

"Gobinet, I will put that down to your account."

"And Oscar will help you to add it up, eh?"

"Yes; and you shall see the total. When I carry one, the remainder will not be you."

"Celeste, you make me cry! I only meant to say that your celestial name does not go well with your charming little face, which is still more mischievous than that of the Bacchanal Queen."

"That's right; wheedle me now, wretch!"

"I swear by the accursed head of my landlord, that, if you liked, you could spread yourself as much as the Bacchanal Queen—which is saying a great deal."

"The fact is, that the Bacchanal had cheek enough, in all conscience."

"Not to speak of her fascinating the bobbies!"

"And magnetizing the beaks."

"They may get as angry as they please; she always finishes by making them laugh."

"And they all call her: Queen!"

"Last night she charmed a slop (as modest as a country girl) whose purity took up arms against the famous dance of the Storm-blown Tulip."

"What a quadrille! Sleepinbuff and the Bacchanal Queen, having opposite to them Rose-Pompon and Ninny Moulin!"

"And all four making tulips as full-blown as could be!"

"By-the-bye, is it true what they say of Ninny Moulin?"

"What?"

"Why that he is a writer, and scribbles pamphlets on religion."

"Yes, it is true. I have often seen him at my employer's, with whom he deals; a bad paymaster, but a jolly fellow!"

"And pretends to be devout, eh?"

"I believe you, my boy—when it is necessary; then he is my Lord Dumoulin, as large as life. He rolls his eyes, walks with his head on one side, and his toes turned in; but, when the piece is played out, he slips away to the balls of which he is so fond. The girls christened him Ninny Moulin. Add, that he drinks like a fish, and you have the photo of the cove. All this doesn't prevent his writing for the religious newspapers; and the saints, whom he lets in even oftener than himself, are ready to swear by him. You should see his articles and his tracts—only see, not read!—every page is full of the devil and his horns, and the desperate fryings which await your impious revolutionists—and then the authority of the bishops, the power of the Pope—hang it! how could I know it all? This toper, Ninny Moulin, gives good measure enough for their money!"

"The fact is, that he is both a heavy drinker and a heavy swell. How he rattled on with little Rose-Pompon in the dance and the full-blown tulip!"

"And what a rum chap he looked in his Roman helmet and top-boots."

"Rose-Pompon dances divinely, too; she has the poetic twist."

"And don't show her heels a bit!"

"Yes; but the Bacchanal Queen is six thousand feet above the level of any common leg-shaker. I always come back to her step last night in the full-blown tulip."

"It was huge!"

"It was serene!"

"If I were father of a family, I would entrust her with the education of my sons!"

"It was that step, however, which offended the bobby's modesty."

"The fact is, it was a little free."

"Free as air—so the policeman comes up to her, and says: 'Well, my Queen, is your foot to keep on a goin' up forever?' 'No, modest warrior!' replies the Queen; 'I practice the step only once every evening, to be able to dance it when I am old. I made a vow of it, that you might become an inspector.'"

"What a comic card!"

"I don't believe she will remain always with Sleepinbuff."

"Because he has been a workman?"

"What nonsense! it would precious become us, students and shop-boys, to give ourselves airs! No;

but I am astonished at the Queen's fidelity."

"Yes—they've been a team for three or four good months."

"She's wild upon him, and he on her."

"They must lead a gay life."

"Sometimes I ask myself where the devil Sleepinbuff gets all the money he spends. It appears that he pays all last night's expenses, three coaches-and-four, and a breakfast this morning for twenty, at ten francs a-head."

"They say he has come into some property. That's why Ninny Moulin, who has a good nose for eating and drinking, made acquaintance with him last night—leaving out of the question that he may have some designs on the Bacchanal Queen."

"He! In a lot! He's rather too ugly. The girls like to dance with him because he makes people laugh—but that's all. Little Rose-Pompon, who is such a pretty creature, has taken him as a harmless chap-her-own, in the absence of her student."

"The coaches! the coaches!" exclaimed the crowd, all with one voice.

Forced to stop in the midst of the maskers, Mother Bunch had not lost a word of this conversation, which was deeply painful to her, as it concerned her sister, whom she had not seen for a long time. Not that the Bacchanal Queen had a bad heart; but the sight of the wretched poverty of Mother Bunch—a poverty which she had herself shared, but which she had not had the strength of mind to bear any longer—caused such bitter grief to the gay, thoughtless girl, that she would no more expose herself to it, after she had in vain tried to induce her sister to accept assistance, which the latter always refused, knowing that its source could not be honorable.

"The coaches! the coaches!" once more exclaimed the crowd, as they pressed forward with enthusiasm, so that Mother Bunch, carried on against her will, was thrust into the foremost rank of the people assembled to see the show.

It was, indeed, a curious sight. A man on horseback, disguised as a postilion, his blue jacket embroidered with silver, and enormous tail from which the powder escaped in puffs, and a hat adorned with long ribbons, preceded the first carriage, cracking his whip, and crying with all his might: "Make way for the Bacchanal Queen and her court!"

In an open carriage, drawn by four lean horses, on which rode two old postilions dressed as devils, was raised a downright pyramid of men and women, sitting, standing, leaning, in every possible variety of odd, extravagant, and grotesque costume; altogether an indescribable mass of bright colors, flowers, ribbons, tinsel and spangles. Amid this heap of strange forms and dresses appeared wild or graceful countenances, ugly or handsome features—but all animated by the feverish excitement of a jovial frenzy—all turned with an expression of fanatical admiration towards the second carriage, in which the Queen was enthroned, whilst they united with the multitude in reiterated shouts of "Long live the Bacchanal Queen."

This second carriage, open like the first, contained only the four dancers of the famous step of the Storm-blown Tulip—Ninny Moulin, Rose Pompon, Sleepinbuff, and the Bacchanal Queen.

Dumoulin, the religious writer, who wished to dispute possession of Mme. de la Sainte-Colombe with his patron, M. Rodin—Dumoulin, surnamed Ninny Moulin, standing on the front cushions, would have presented a magnificent study for Callot or Gavarni, that eminent artist, who unites with the biting strength and marvellous fancy of an illustrious caricaturist, the grace, the poetry, and the depth of Hogarth.

Ninny Moulin, who was about thirty-five years of age, wore very much back upon his head a Roman helmet of silver paper. A voluminous plume of black feathers, rising from a red wood holder, was stuck on one side of this headgear, breaking the too classic regularity of its outline. Beneath this casque, shone forth the most rubicund and jovial face, that ever was purpled by the fumes of generous wine. A prominent nose, with its primitive shape modestly concealed beneath a luxuriant growth of pimples, half red, half violet, gave a funny expression to a perfectly beardless face; while a large mouth, with thick lips turning their insides outwards, added to the air of mirth and jollity which beamed from his large gray eyes, set flat in his head.

On seeing this joyous fellow, with a paunch like Silenus, one could not help asking how it was, that he had not drowned in wine, a hundred times over, the gall, bile, and venom which flowed from his

pamphlets against the enemies of Ultramontanism, and how his Catholic beliefs could float upwards in the midst of these mad excesses of drink and dancing. The question would have appeared insoluble, if one had not remembered how many actors, who play the blackest and most hateful first robbers on the stage, are, when off it, the best fellow in the world.

The weather being cold, Ninny Moulin wore a kind of box-coat, which, being half-open, displayed his cuirass of scales, and his flesh-colored pantaloons, finishing just below the calf in a pair of yellow tops to his boots. Leaning forward in front of the carriage, he uttered wild shouts of delight, mingled with the words: "Long live the Bacchanal Queen!"—after which, he shook and whirled the enormous rattle he held in his hand. Standing beside him, Sleepinbuff waved on high a banner of white silk, on which were the words: "Love and joy to the Bacchanal Queen!"

Sleepinbuff was about twenty-five years of age. His countenance was gay and intelligent, surrounded by a collar of chestnut-colored whiskers; but worn with late hours and excesses, it expressed a singular mixture of carelessness and hardihood, recklessness and mockery; still, no base or wicked passion had yet stamped there its fatal impress. He was the perfect type of the Parisian, as the term is generally applied, whether in the army, in the provinces, on board a king's ship, or a merchantman. It is not a compliment, and yet it is far from being an insult; it is an epithet which partakes at once of blame, admiration, and fear; for if, in this sense, the Parisian is often idle and rebellious, he is also quick at his work, resolute in danger, and always terribly satirical and fond of practical jokes.

He was dressed in a very flashy style. He wore a black velvet jacket with silver buttons, a scarlet waistcoat, trousers with broad blue stripes, a Cashmere shawl for a girdle with ends loosely floating, and a chimney-pot hat covered with flowers and streamers. This disguise set off his light, easy figure to great advantage.

At the back of the carriage, standing up on the cushions, were Rose Pompon and the Bacchanal Queen.

Rose-Pompon, formerly a fringe-maker, was about seventeen years old, and had the prettiest and most winning little face imaginable. She was gayly dressed in debardeur costume. Her powdered wig, over which was smartly cocked on one side an orange and green cap laced with silver, increased the effect of her bright black eyes, and of her round, carnation cheeks. She wore about her neck an orange-colored cravat, of the same material as her loose sash. Her tight jacket and narrow vest of light green velvet, with silver ornaments, displayed to the best advantage a charming figure, the pliancy of which must have well suited the evolutions of the Storm blown Tulip. Her large trousers, of the same stuff and color as the jacket, were not calculated to hide any of her attractions.

The Bacchanal Queen, being at the least a head taller, leaned with one hand on the shoulder of Rose-Pompon. Mother Bunch's sister ruled, like a true monarch, over this mad revelry, which her very presence seemed to inspire, such influence had her own mirth and animation over all that surrounded her.

She was a tall girl of about twenty years of age, light and graceful, with regular features, and a merry, racketing air. Like her sister, she had magnificent chestnut hair, and large blue eyes; but instead of being soft and timid, like those of the young sempstress, the latter shone with indefatigable ardor in the pursuit of pleasure. Such was the energy of her vivacious constitution, that, notwithstanding many nights and days passed in one continued revel, her complexion was as pure, her cheeks as rosy, her neck as fresh and fair, as if she had that morning issued from some peaceful home. Her costume, though singular and fantastic, suited her admirably. It was composed of a tight, long-waisted bodice in cloth of gold, trimmed with great bunches of scarlet ribbon, the ends of which streamed over her naked arms, and a short petticoat of scarlet velvet, ornamented with golden beads and spangles. This petticoat reached half way down a leg, at once trim and strong, in a white silk stocking, and red buskin with brass heel.

Never had any Spanish dancer a more supple, elastic, and tempting form, than this singular girl, who seemed possessed with the spirit of dancing and perpetual motion, for, almost every moment, a slight undulation of head, hips, and shoulders seemed to follow the music of an invisible orchestra; while the tip of her right foot, placed on the carriage door in the most alluring manner, continued to beat time—for the Bacchanal Queen stood proudly erect upon the cushions.

A sort of gilt diadem, the emblem of her noisy sovereignty, hung with little bells, adorned her forehead. Her long hair, in two thick braids, was drawn back from her rosy cheeks, and twisted behind her head. Her left hand rested on little Rose-Pompon's shoulder, and in her right she held an enormous nose-gay, which she waved to the crowd, accompanying each salute with bursts of laughter.

It would be difficult to give a complete idea of this noisily animated and fantastic scene, which

included also a third carriage, filled, like the first, with a pyramid of grotesque and extravagant masks. Amongst the delighted crowd, one person alone contemplated the picture with deep sorrow. It was Mother Bunch, who was still kept, in spite of herself, in the first rank of spectators.

Separated from her sister for a long time, she now beheld her in all the pomp of her singular triumph, in the midst of the cries of joy, and the applause of her companions in pleasure. Yet the eyes of the young sempstress grew dim with tears; for, though the Bacchanal Queen seemed to share in the stunning gayety of all around her—though her face was radiant with smiles, and she appeared fully to enjoy the splendors of her temporary elevation—yet she had the sincere pity of the poor workwoman, almost in rags, who was seeking, with the first dawn of morning, the means of earning her daily bread.

Mother Bunch had forgotten the crowd, to look only at her sister, whom she tenderly loved—only the more tenderly, that she thought her situation to be pitied. With her eyes fixed on the joyous and beautiful girl, her pale and gentle countenance expressed the most touching and painful interest.

All at once, as the brilliant glance of the Bacchanal Queen travelled along the crowd, it lighted on the sad features of Mother Bunch.

"My sister!" exclaimed Cephyse—such was the name of the Bacchanal Queen—"My sister!"—and with one bound, light as a ballet-dancer, she sprang from her movable throne (which fortunately just happened to be stopping), and, rushing up to the hunchback, embraced her affectionately.

All this had passed so rapidly, that the companions of the Bacchanal Queen, still stupefied by the boldness of her perilous leap, knew not how to account for it; whilst the masks who surrounded Mother Bunch drew back in surprise, and the latter, absorbed in the delight of embracing her sister, whose caresses she returned, did not even think of the singular contrast between them, which was sure to soon excite the astonishment and hilarity of the crowd.

Cephyse was the first to think of this, and wishing to save her sister at least one humiliation, she turned towards the carriage, and said: "Rose Pompon, throw me down my cloak; and, Ninny Moulin, open the door directly!"

Having received the cloak, the Bacchanal Queen hastily wrapped it round her sister, before the latter could speak or move. Then, taking her by the hand, she said to her: "Come! come!"

"I!" cried Mother Bunch, in alarm. "Do not think of it!"

"I must speak with you. I will get a private room, where we shall be alone. So make haste, dear little sister! Do not resist before all these people—but come!"

The fear of becoming a public sight decided Mother Bunch, who, confused moreover with the adventure, trembling and frightened, followed her sister almost mechanically, and was dragged by her into the carriage, of which Ninny Moulin had just opened the door. And so, with the cloak of the Bacchanal Queen covering Mother Bunch's poor garments and deformed figure, the crowd had nothing to laugh at, and only wondered what this meeting could mean, while the coaches pursued their way to the eating house in the Place du Chatelet.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONTRAST.

Some minutes after the meeting of Mother Bunch with the Bacchanal Queen, the two sisters were alone together in a small room in the tavern.

"Let me kiss you again," said Cephyse to the young sempstress; "at least now we are alone, you will not be afraid?"

In the effort of the Bacchanal Queen to clasp Mother Bunch in her arms, the cloak fell from the form of the latter. At sight of those miserable garments, which she had hardly had time to observe on the Place du Chatelet, in the midst of the crowd, Cephyse clasped her hands, and could not repress an exclamation of painful surprise. Then, approaching her sister, that she might contemplate her more closely, she took her thin, icy palms between her own plump hands, and examined for some minutes, with increasing grief, the suffering, pale, unhappy creature, ground down by watching and privations,

and half-clothed in a poor, patched cotton gown.

"Oh, sister! to see you thus!" Unable to articulate another word, the Bacchanal Queen threw herself on the other's neck, and burst into tears. Then, in the midst of her sobs, she added: "Pardon! pardon!"

"What is the matter, my dear Cephyse?" said the young sewing-girl, deeply moved, and gently disengaging herself from the embrace of her sister. "Why do you ask my pardon?"

"Why?" resumed Cephyse, raising her countenance, bathed in tears, and purple with shame; "is it not shameful of me to be dressed in all this frippery, and throwing away so much money in follies, while you are thus miserably clad, and in need of everything—perhaps dying of want, for I have never seen your poor face look so pale and worn."

"Be at ease, dear sister! I am not ill. I was up rather late last night, and that makes me a little pale—but pray do not cry—it grieves me."

The Bacchanal Queen had but just arrived, radiant in the midst of the intoxicated crowd, and yet it was Mother Bunch who was now employed in consoling her!

An incident occurred, which made the contrast still more striking. Joyous cries were heard suddenly in the next apartment, and these words were repeated with enthusiasm: "Long live the Bacchanal Queen!"

Mother Bunch trembled, and her eyes filled with tears, as she saw her sister with her face buried in her hands, as if overwhelmed with shame. "Cephyse," she said, "I entreat you not to grieve so. You will make me regret the delight of this meeting, which is indeed happiness to me! It is so long since I saw you! But tell me—what ails you?"

"You despise me perhaps—you are right," said the Bacchanal Queen, drying her tears.

"Despise you? for what?"

"Because I lead the life I do, instead of having the courage to support misery along with you."

The grief of Cephyse was so heart-breaking, that Mother Bunch, always good and indulgent, wishing to console her, and raise her a little in her own estimation, said to her tenderly: "In supporting it bravely for a whole year, my good Cephyse, you have had more merit and courage than I should have in bearing with it my whole life."

"Oh, sister! do not say that."

"In simple truth," returned Mother Bunch, "to what temptations is a creature like me exposed? Do I not naturally seek solitude, even as you seek a noisy life of pleasure? What wants have I? A very little suffices."

"But you have not always that little?"

"No—but, weak and sickly as I seem, I can endure some privations better than you could. Thus hunger produces in me a sort of numbness, which leaves me very feeble—but for you, robust and full of life, hunger is fury, is madness. Alas! you must remember how many times I have seen you suffering from those painful attacks, when work failed us in our wretched garret, and we could not even earn our four francs a week—so that we had nothing—absolutely nothing to eat—for our pride prevented us from applying to the neighbors."

"You have preserved the right to that honest pride."

"And you as well! Did you not struggle as much as a human creature could? But strength fails at last—I know you well, Cephyse—it was hunger that conquered you; and the painful necessity of constant labor, which was yet insufficient to supply our common wants."

"But you could endure those privations—you endure them still."

"Can you compare me with yourself? Look," said Mother Bunch, taking her sister by the hand, and leading her to a mirror placed above a couch, "look!—Dost think that God made you so beautiful, endowed you with such quick and ardent blood, with so joyous, animated, grasping a nature and with such taste and fondness for pleasure, that your youth might be spent in a freezing garret, hid from the sun, nailed constantly to your chair, clad almost in rags, and working without rest and without hope? No! for He has given us other wants than those of eating and drinking. Even in our humble condition, does not beauty require some little ornament? Does not youth require some movement, pleasure,

gayety? Do not all ages call for relaxation and rest? Had you gained sufficient wages to satisfy hunger, to have a day or so's amusement in the week, after working every other day for twelve or fifteen hours, and to procure the neat and modest dress which so charming a face might naturally claim—you would never have asked for more, I am sure of it—you have told me as much a hundred times. You have yielded, therefore, to an irresistible necessity, because your wants are greater than mine."

"It is true," replied the Bacchanal Queen, with a pensive air; "if I could but have gained eighteenpence a day, my life would have been quite different; for, in the beginning, sister, I felt cruelly humiliated to live at a man's expense."

"Yes, yes—it was inevitable, my dear Cephyse; I must pity, but cannot blame you. You did not choose your destiny; but, like me, you have submitted to it."

"Poor sister!" said Cephyse, embracing the speaker tenderly; "you can encourage and console me in the midst of your own misfortunes, when I ought to be pitying you."

"Be satisfied!" said Mother Bunch; "God is just and good. If He has denied me many advantages, He has given me my joys, as you have yours."

"Joys?"

"Yes, and great ones—without which life would be too burdensome, and I should not have the courage to go through with it."

"I understand you," said Cephyse, with emotion; "you still know how to devote yourself for others, and that lightens your own sorrows."

"I do what I can, but, alas! it is very little; yet when I succeed," added Mother Bunch, with a faint smile, "I am as proud and happy as a poor little ant, who, after a great deal of trouble, has brought a big straw to the common nest. But do not let us talk any more of me."

"Yes, but I must, even at the risk of making you angry," resumed the Bacchanal Queen, timidly; "I have something to propose to you which you once before refused. Jacques Rennepont has still, I think, some money left—we are spending it in follies—now and then giving a little to poor people we may happen to meet—I beg of you, let me come to your assistance—I see in your poor face, you cannot conceal it from me, that you are wearing yourself out with toil."

"Thanks, my dear Cephyse, I know your good heart; but I am not in want of anything. The little I gain is sufficient for me."

"You refuse me," said the Bacchanal Queen, sadly, "because you know that my claim to this money is not honorable—be it so—I respect your scruples. But you will not refuse a service from Jacques; he has been a workman, like ourselves, and comrades should help each other. Accept it I beseech you, or I shall think you despise me."

"And I shall think you despise me, if you insist any more upon it, my dear Cephyse," said Mother Bunch, in a tone at once so mild and firm that the Bacchanal Queen saw that all persuasion would be in vain. She hung her head sorrowfully, and a tear again trickled down her cheek.

"My refusal grieves you," said the other, taking her hand; "I am truly sorry—but reflect—and you will understand me."

"You are right," said the Bacchanal Queen, bitterly, after a moment's silence; "you cannot accept assistance from my lover—it was an insult to propose it to you. There are positions in life so humiliating, that they soil even the good one wishes to do."

"Cephyse, I did not mean to hurt you—you know it well."

"Oh! believe me," replied the Bacchanal Queen, "gay and giddy as I am, I have sometimes moments of reflection, even in the midst of my maddest joy. Happily, such moments are rare."

"And what do you think of, then?"

"Why, that the life I lead is hardly the thing; then resolve to ask Jacques for a small sum of money, just enough to subsist on for a year, and form the plan of joining you, and gradually getting to work again."

"The idea is a good one; why not act upon it?"

"Because, when about to execute this project, I examined myself sincerely, and my courage failed. I

feel that I could never resume the habit of labor, and renounce this mode of life, sometimes rich, as to day, sometimes precarious,—but at least free and full of leisure, joyous and without care, and at worst a thousand times preferable to living upon four francs a week. Not that interest has guided me. Many times have I refused to exchange a lover, who had little or nothing, for a rich man, that I did not like. Nor have I ever asked anything for myself. Jacques has spent perhaps ten thousand francs the last three or four months, yet we only occupy two half-furnished rooms, because we always live out of doors, like the birds: fortunately, when I first loved him, he had nothing at all, and I had just sold some jewels that had been given me, for a hundred francs, and put this sum in the lottery. As mad people and fools are always lucky, I gained a prize of four thousand francs. Jacques was as gay, and light-headed, and full of fun as myself, so we said: 'We love each other very much, and, as long as this money lasts, we will keep up the racket; when we have no more, one of two things will happen—either we shall be tired of one another, and so part—or else we shall love each other still, and then, to remain together, we shall try and get work again; and, if we cannot do so, and yet will not part—a bushel of charcoal will do our business!'"

"Good heaven!" cried Mother Bunch, turning pale.

"Be satisfied! we have not come to that. We had still something left, when a kind of agent, who had paid court to me, but who was so ugly that I could not bear him for all his riches, knowing that I was living with Jacques asked me to—But why should I trouble you with all these details? In one word, he lent Jacques money, on some sort of a doubtful claim he had, as was thought, to inherit some property. It is with this money that we are amusing ourselves—as long as its lasts."

"But, my dear Cephyse, instead of spending this money so foolishly, why not put it out to interest, and marry Jacques, since you love him?"

"Oh! in the first place," replied the Bacchanal Queen, laughing, as her gay and thoughtless character resumed its ascendancy, "to put money out to interest gives one no pleasure. All the amusement one has is to look at a little bit of paper, which one gets in exchange for the nice little pieces of gold, with which one can purchase a thousand pleasures. As for marrying, I certainly like Jacques better than I ever liked any one; but it seems to me, that, if we were married, all our happiness would end—for while he is only my lover, he cannot reproach me with what has passed—but, as my husband, he would be stare to upbraid me, sooner or later, and if my conduct deserves blame, I prefer giving it to myself, because I shall do it more tenderly."

"Mad girl that you are! But this money will not last forever. What is to be done next?"

"Afterwards!—Oh! that's all in the moon. To-morrow seems to me as if it would not come for a hundred years. If we were always saying: 'We must die one day or the other'—would life be worth having?"

The conversation between Cephyse and her sister was here again interrupted by a terrible uproar, above which sounded the sharp, shrill noise of Ninny Moulin's rattle. To this tumult succeeded a chorus of barbarous cries, in the midst of which were distinguishable these words, which shook the very windows: "The Queen! the Bacchanal Queen!"

Mother Bunch started at this sudden noise.

"It is only my court, who are getting impatient," said Cephyse—and this time she could laugh.

"Heavens!" cried the sewing-girl, in alarm; "if they were to come here in search of you?"

"No, no—never fear."

"But listen! do you not hear those steps? they are coming along the passage—they are approaching. Pray, sister, let me go out alone, without being seen by all these people."

That moment the door was opened, and Cephyse, ran towards it. She saw in the passage a deputation headed by Ninny Moulin, who was armed with his formidable rattle, and followed by Rose-Pompon and Sleepinbuff.

"The Bacchanal Queen! or I poison myself with a glass of water;" cried Ninny Moulin.

"The Bacchanal Queen! or I publish my banns of marriage with Ninny Moulin!" cried little Rose-Pompon, with a determined air.

"The Bacchanal Queen! or the court will rise in arms, and carry her off by force!" said another voice.

"Yes, yes—let us carry her off!" repeated a formidable chorus.

"Jacques, enter alone!" said the Bacchanal Queen, notwithstanding these pressing summonses; then, addressing her court in a majestic tone, she added: "In ten minutes, I shall be at your service—and then for a—of a time!"

"Long live the Bacchanal Queen," cried Dumoulin, shaking his rattle as he retired, followed by the deputation, whilst Sleepinbuff entered the room alone.

"Jacques," said Cephyse, "this is my good sister."

"Enchanted to see you," said Jacques, cordially; "the more so as you will give me some news of my friend Agricola. Since I began to play the rich man, we have not seen each other, but I like him as much as ever, and think him a good and worthy fellow. You live in the same house. How is he?"

"Alas, sir! he and his family have had many misfortunes. He is in prison."

"In prison!" cried Cephyse.

"Agricola in prison! what for?" said Sleepinbuff.

"For a trifling political offence. We had hoped to get him out on bail."

"Certainly; for five hundred francs it could be done," said Sleepinbuff.

"Unfortunately, we have not been able; the person upon whom we relied—"

The Bacchanal Queen interrupted the speaker by saying to her lover: "Do you hear, Jacques? Agricola in prison, for want of five hundred francs!"

"To be sure! I hear and understand all about it. No need of your winking. Poor fellow! he was the support of his mother."

"Alas! yes, sir—and it is the more distressing, as his father has but just returned from Russia, and his mother—"

"Here," said Sleepinbuff, interrupting, and giving Mother Bunch a purse; "take this—all the expenses here have been paid beforehand—this is what remains of my last bag. You will find here some twenty-five or thirty Napoleons, and I cannot make a better use of them than to serve a comrade in distress. Give them to Agricola's father; he will take the necessary steps, and to-morrow Agricola will be at his forge, where I had much rather he should be than myself."

"Jacques, give me a kiss!" said the Bacchanal Queen.

"Now, and afterwards, and again and again!" said Jacques, joyously embracing the queen.

Mother Bunch hesitated for a moment; but reflecting that, after all, this sum of money, which was about to be spent in follies, would restore life and happiness to the family of Agricola, and that hereafter these very five hundred francs, when returned to Jacques, might be of the greatest use to him, she resolved to accept this offer. She took the purse, and with tearful eyes, said to him: "I will not refuse your kindness M. Jacques; you are so good and generous, Agricola's father will thus at least have one consolation, in the midst of heavy sorrows. Thanks! many thanks!"

"There is no need to thank me; money was made for others as well as ourselves."

Here, without, the noise recommenced more furiously than ever, and Ninny Moulin's rattle sent forth the most doleful sounds.

"Cephyse," said Sleepinbuff, "they will break everything to pieces, if you do not return to them, and I have nothing left to pay for the damage. Excuse us," added he, laughing, "but you see that royalty has its duties."

Cephyse deeply moved, extended her arms to Mother Bunch, who threw herself into them, shedding sweet tears.

"And now," said she, to her sister, "when shall I see you again?"

"Soon—though nothing grieves me more than to see you in want, out of which I am not allowed to help you."

"You will come, then, to see me? It is a promise?"

"I promise you in her name," said Jacques; "we will pay a visit to you and your neighbor Agricola."

"Return to the company, Cephyse, and amuse yourself with a light heart, for M. Jacques has made a whole family happy."

So saying, and after Sleepinbuff had ascertained that she could go down without being seen by his noisy and joyous companions, Mother Bunch quietly withdrew, eager to carry one piece of good news at least to Dagobert; but intending, first of all, to go to the Rue de Babylone, to the garden-house formerly occupied by Adrienne de Cardoville. We shall explain hereafter the cause of this determination.

As the girl quitted the eating-house, three men plainly and comfortably dressed, were watching before it, and talking in a low voice. Soon after, they were joined by a fourth person, who rapidly descended the stairs of the tavern.

"Well?" said the three first, with anxiety.

"He is there."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Are there two Sleepers-in-buff on earth?" replied the other. "I have just seen him; he is togged out like one of the swell mob. They will be at table for three hours at least."

"Then wait for me, you others. Keep as quiet as possible. I will go and fetch the captain, and the game is bagged." So saying, one of the three men walked off quickly, and disappeared in a street leading from the square.

At this same instant the Bacchanal Queen entered the banqueting-room, accompanied by Jacques, and was received with the most frenzied acclamations from all sides.

"Now then," cried Cephyse, with a sort of feverish excitement, as if she wished to stun herself; "now then, friends—noise and tumult, hurricane and tempest, thunder and earthquake—as much as you please!" Then, holding out her glass to Ninny Moulin, she added: "Pour out! pour out!"

"Long live the Queen!" cried they all, with one voice.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAROUSE.

The Bacchanal Queen, having Sleepinbuff and Rose-Pompon opposite her, and Ninny Moulin on her right hand, presided at the repast, called a reveille-matin (wake-morning), generously offered by Jacques to his companions in pleasure.

Both young men and girls seemed to have forgotten the fatigues of a ball, begun at eleven o'clock in the evening, and finished at six in the morning; and all these couples, joyous as they were amorous and indefatigable, laughed, ate, and drank, with youthful and Pantagruelian ardor, so that, during the first part of the feast, there was less chatter than clatter of plates and glasses.

The Bacchanal Queen's countenance was less gay, but much more animated than usual; her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes announced a feverish excitement; she wished to drown reflection, cost what it might. Her conversation with her sister often recurred to her, and she tried to escape from such sad remembrances.

Jacques regarded Cephyse from time to time with passionate adoration; for, thanks to the singular conformity of character, mind, and taste between him and the Bacchanal Queen, their attachment had deeper and stronger roots than generally belong to ephemeral connections founded upon pleasure. Cephyse and Jacques were themselves not aware of all the power of a passion which till now had been surrounded only by joys and festivities, and not yet been tried by any untoward event.

Little Rose-Pompon, left a widow a few days before by a student, who, in order to end the carnival in style, had gone into the country to raise supplies from his family, under one of those fabulous pretences which tradition carefully preserves in colleges of law and medicine—Rose Pompon, we repeat, an example of rare fidelity, determined not to compromise herself, had taken for a chaperon the

inoffensive Ninny Moulin.

This latter, having doffed his helmet, exhibited a bald head, encircled by a border of black, curling hair, pretty long at the back of the head. By a remarkable Bacchic phenomenon, in proportion as intoxication gained upon him, a sort of zone, as purple as his jovial face, crept by degrees over his brow, till it obscured even the shining whiteness of his crown. Rose-Pompon, who knew the meaning of this symptom, pointed it out to the company, and exclaimed with a loud burst of laughter: "Take care, Ninny Moulin! the tide of the wine is coming in."

"When it rises above his head he will be drowned," added the Bacchanal Queen.

"Oh, Queen! don't disturb me; I am meditating, answered Dumoulin, who was getting tipsy. He held in his hand, in the fashion of an antique goblet, a punch-bowl filled with wine, for he despised the ordinary glasses, because of their small size.

"Meditating," echoed Rose-Pompon, "Ninny Moulin is meditating. Be attentive!"

"He is meditating; he must be ill then!"

"What is he meditating? an illegal dance?"

"A forbidden Anacreontic attitude?"

"Yes, I am meditating," returned Dumoulin, gravely; "I am meditating upon wine, generally and in particular—wine, of which the immortal Bossuet"—Dumoulin had the very bad habit of quoting Bossuet when he was drunk—"of which the immortal Bossuet says (and he was a judge of good liquor): 'In wine is courage, strength joy, and spiritual fervor'—when one has any brains," added Ninny Moulin, by way of parenthesis.

"Oh, my! how I adore your Bossuet!" said Rose-Pompon.

"As for my particular meditation, it concerns the question, whether the wine at the marriage of Cana was red or white. Sometimes I incline to one side, sometimes to the other—and sometimes to both at once."

"That is going to the bottom of the question," said Sleepinbuff.

"And, above all, to the bottom of the bottles," added the Bacchanal Queen.

"As your majesty is pleased to observe; and already, by dint of reflection and research, I have made a great discovery—namely, that, if the wine at the marriage of Cana was red—"

"It couldn't 'a' been white," said Rose-Pompon, judiciously.

"And if I had arrived at the conviction that it was neither white nor red?" asked Dumoulin, with a magisterial air.

"That could only be when you had drunk till all was blue," observed Sleepinbuff.

"The partner of the Queen says well. One may be too athirst for science; but never mind! From all my studies on this question, to which I have devoted my life—I shall await the end of my respectable career with the sense of having emptied tuns with a historical—theological—and archeological tone!"

It is impossible to describe the jovial grimace and tone with which Dumoulin pronounced and accentuated these last words, which provoked a general laugh.

"Archieologically?" said Rose-Pompon. "What sawnee is that? Has he a tail? does he live in the water?"

"Never mind," observed the Bacchanal Queen; "these are words of wise men and conjurers; they are like horsehair bustles—they serve for filling out—that's all. I like better to drink; so fill the glasses, Ninny Moulin; some champagne, Rose-Pompon; here's to the health of your Philemon and his speedy return!"

"And to the success of his plant upon his stupid and stingy family!" added Rose-Pompon.

The toast was received with unanimous applause.

"With the permission of her majesty and her court," said Dumoulin, "I propose a toast to the success of a project which greatly interests me, and has some resemblance to Philemon's jockeying. I fancy that the toast will bring me luck."

"Let's have it, by all means!"

"Well, then—success to my marriage!" said Dumoulin, rising.

These words provoked an explosion of shouts, applause, and laughter. Ninny Moulin shouted, applauded, laughed even louder than the rest, opening wide his enormous mouth, and adding to the stunning noise the harsh springing of his rattle, which he had taken up from under his chair.

When the storm had somewhat subsided, the Bacchanal Queen rose and said: "I drink to the health of the future Madame Ninny Moulin."

"Oh, Queen! your courtesy touches me so sensibly that I must allow you to read in the depths of my heart the name of my future spouse," exclaimed Dumoulin. "She is called Madame Honoree-Modeste-Messaline-Angele de la Sainte-Colombe, widow."

"Bravo! bravo!"

"She is sixty years old, and has more thousands of francs-a-year than she has hair in her gray moustache or wrinkles on her face; she is so superbly fat that one of her gowns would serve as a tent for this honorable company. I hope to present my future spouse to you on Shrove Tuesday, in the costume of a shepherdess that has just devoured her flock. Some of them wish to convert her—but I have undertaken to divert her, which she will like better. You must help me to plunge her headlong into all sorts of skylarking jollity."

"We will plunge her into anything you please."

"She shall dance like sixty!" said Rose-Pompon, humming a popular tune.

"She will overawe the police."

"We can say to them: 'Respect this lady; your mother will perhaps be as old some day!'"

Suddenly, the Bacchanal Queen rose; her countenance wore a singular expression of bitter and sardonic delight. In one hand she held a glass full to the brim. "I hear the Cholera is approaching in his seven-league boots," she cried. "I drink luck to the Cholera!" And she emptied the bumper.

Notwithstanding the general gayety, these words made a gloomy impression; a sort of electric shudder ran through the assemblage, and nearly every countenance became suddenly serious.

"Oh, Cephyse!" said Jacques, in a tone of reproach.

"Luck to the Cholera," repeated the Queen, fearlessly. "Let him spare those who wish to live, and kill together those who dread to part!"

Jacques and Cephyse exchanged a rapid glance, unnoticed by their joyous companions, and for some time the Bacchanal Queen remained silent and thoughtful.

"If you put it that way, it is different," cried Rose-Pompon, boldly. "To the Cholera! may none but good fellows be left on earth!"

In spite of this variation, the impression was still painfully impressive. Dumoulin, wishing to cut short this gloomy subject, exclaimed: "Devil take the dead, and long live the living! And, talking of chaps who both live and live well, I ask you to drink a health most dear to our joyous queen, the health of our Amphytrion. Unfortunately, I do not know his respectable name, having only had the advantage of making his acquaintance this night; he will excuse me, then, if I confine myself to proposing the health of Sleepinbuff—a name by no means offensive to my modesty, as Adam never slept in any other manner. I drink to Sleepinbuff."

"Thanks, old son!" said Jacques, gayly; "were I to forget your name, I should call you 'Have-a-sip?' and I am sure that you would answer: 'I will.'"

"I will directly!" said Dumoulin, making the military salute with one hand, and holding out the bowl with the other.

"As we have drunk together," resumed Sleepinbuff, cordially, "we ought to know each other

thoroughly. I am Jacques Rennepont?"

"Rennepont!" cried Dumoulin, who appeared struck by the name, in spite of his half-drunkenness; "you are Rennepont?"

"Rennepont in the fullest sense of the word. Does that astonish you?"

"There is a very ancient family of that name—the Counts of Rennepont."

"The deuce there is!" said the other, laughing.

"The Counts of Rennepont are also Dukes of Cardoville," added Dumoulin.

"Now, come, old fellow! do I look as if I belonged to such a family?—I, a workman out for a spree?"

"You a workman? why, we are getting into the Arabian Nights!" cried Dumoulin, more and more surprised. "You give us a Belshazzar's banquet, with accompaniment of carriages and four, and yet are a workman? Only tell me your trade, and I will join you, leaving the Vine of the Divine to take care of itself."

"Come, I say! don't think that I am a printer of flimsies, and a smasher!" replied Jacques, laughing.

"Oh, comrade! no such suspicion—"

"It would be excusable, seeing the rigs I run. But I'll make you easy on that point. I am spending an inheritance."

"Eating and drinking an uncle, no doubt?" said Dumoulin, benevolently.

"Faith, I don't know."

"What! you don't know whom you are eating and drinking?"

"Why, you see, in the first place, my father was a bone-grubber."

"The devil he was!" said Dumoulin, somewhat out of countenance, though in general not over-scrupulous in the choice of his bottle-companions: but, after the first surprise, he resumed, with the most charming amenity: "There are some rag-pickers very high by scent—I mean descent!"

"To be sure! you may think to laugh at me," said Jacques, "but you are right in this respect, for my father was a man of very great merit. He spoke Greek and Latin like a scholar, and often told me that he had not his equal in mathematics; besides, he had travelled a good deal."

"Well, then," resumed Dumoulin, whom surprise had partly sobered, "you may belong to the family of the Counts of Rennepont, after all."

"In which case," said Rose-Pompon, laughing, "your father was not a gutter-snipe by trade, but only for the honor of the thing."

"No, no—worse luck! it was to earn his living," replied Jacques; "but, in his youth, he had been well off. By what appeared, or rather by what did not appear, he had applied to some rich relation, and the rich relation had said to him: 'Much obliged! try the work'us.' Then he wished to make use of his Greek, and Latin, and mathematics. Impossible to do anything—Paris, it seems, being choke-full of learned men—so my father had to look for his bread at the end of a hooked stick, and there, too, he must have found it, for I ate of it during two years, when I came to live with him after the death of an aunt, with whom I had been staying in the country."

"Your respectable father must have been a sort of philosopher," said Dumoulin; "but, unless he found an inheritance in a dustbin, I don't see how you came into your property."

"Wait for the end of the song. At twelve years of age I was an apprentice at the factory of M. Tripeaud; two years afterwards, my father died of an accident, leaving me the furniture of our garret—a mattress, a chair, and a table—and, moreover, in an old Eau de Cologne box, some papers (written, it seems, in English), and a bronze medal, worth about ten sous, chain and all. He had never spoken to me of these papers, so, not knowing if they were good for anything, I left them at the bottom of an old trunk, instead of burning them—which was well for me, since it is upon these papers that I have had money advanced."

"What a godsend!" said Dumoulin. "But somebody must have known that you had them?"

"Yes; one of those people that are always looking out for old debts came to Cephyse, who told me all

about it; and, after he had read the papers, he said that the affair was doubtful, but that he would lend me ten thousand francs on it, if I liked. Ten thousand francs was a large sum, so I snapped him up!"

"But you must have supposed that these old papers were of great value."

"Faith, no! since my father, who ought to have known their value, had never realized on them—and then, you see, ten thousand francs in good, bright coin, falling as it were from the clouds, are not to be sneezed at—so I took them—only the man made me do a bit of stiff as guarantee, or something of that kind."

"Did you sign it?"

"Of course—what did I care about it? The man told me it was only a matter of form. He spoke the truth, for the bill fell due a fortnight ago, and I have heard nothing of it. I have still about a thousand francs in his hands, for I have taken him for my banker. And that's the way, old pal, that I'm able to flourish and be jolly all day long, as pleased as Punch to have left my old grinder of a master, M. Tripeaud."

As he pronounced this name, the joyous countenance of Jacques became suddenly overcast. Cephyse, no longer under the influence of the painful impression she had felt for a moment, looked uneasily at Jacques, for she knew the irritation which the name of M. Tripeaud produced within him.

"M. Tripeaud," resumed Sleepinbuff, "is one that would make the good bad, and the bad worse. They say that a good rider makes a good horse; they ought to say that a good master makes a good workman. Zounds! when I think of that fellow!" cried Sleepinbuff, striking his hand violently on the table.

"Come, Jacques—think of something else!" said the Bacchanal Queen. "Make him laugh, Rose-Pompon."

"I am not in a humor to laugh," replied Jacques, abruptly, for he was getting excited from the effects of the wine; "it is more than I can bear to think of that man. It exasperates me! it drives me mad! You should have heard him saying: 'Beggary workmen! rascally workmen! they grumble that they have no food in their bellies; well, then, we'll give them bayonets to stop their hunger.' [11] And there's the children in his factory—you should see them, poor little creatures!—working as long as the men—wasting away, and dying by the dozen—what odds? as soon as they were dead plenty of others came to take their places—not like horses, which can only be replaced with money."

"Well, it is clear, that you do not like your old master," said Dumoulin, more and more surprised at his Amphytrion's gloomy and thoughtful air, and, regretting that the conversation had taken this serious turn, he whispered a few words in the ear of the Bacchanal Queen, who answered by a sign of intelligence.

"I don't like M. Tripeaud!" exclaimed Jacques. "I hate him—and shall I tell you why? Because it is as much his fault as mine, that I have become a good-for-nothing loafer. I don't say it to screen myself; but it is the truth. When I was 'prenticed to him as a lad, I was all heart and ardor, and so bent upon work, that I used to take my shirt off to my task, which, by the way, was the reason that I was first called Sleepinbuff. Well! I might have toiled myself to death; not one word of encouragement did I receive. I came first to my work, and was the last to leave off; what matter? it was not even noticed. One day, I was injured by the machinery. I was taken to the hospital. When I came out, weak as I was, I went straight to my work; I was not to be frightened; the others, who knew their master well, would often say to me: 'What a muff you must be, little one! What good will you get by working so hard?'—still I went on. But, one day, a worthy old man, called Father Arsene, who had worked in the house many years, and was a model of good conduct, was suddenly turned away, because he was getting too feeble. It was a death-blow to him; his wife was infirm, and, at his age, he could not get another place. When the foreman told him he was dismissed, he could not believe it, and he began to cry for grief. At that moment, M. Tripeaud passes; Father Arsene begs him with clasped hands to keep him at half-wages. 'What!' says M. Tripeaud, shrugging his shoulders; 'do you think that I will turn my factory into a house of invalids? You are no longer able to work—so be off!' 'But I have worked forty years of my life; what is to become of me?' cried poor Father Arsene. 'That is not my business,' answered M. Tripeaud; and, addressing his clerk, he added: 'Pay what is due for the week, and let him cut his stick.' Father Arsene did cut his stick; that evening, he and his old wife suffocated themselves with charcoal. Now, you see, I was then a lad; but that story of Father Arsene taught me, that, however hard you might work, it would only profit your master, who would not even thank you for it, and leave you to die on the flags in your old age. So all my fire was damped, and I said to myself: 'What's the use of doing more than I just need? If I gain heaps of gold for M. Tripeaud, shall I get an atom of it?' Therefore, finding neither pride nor profit in my work, I took a disgust for it—just did barely enough to earn my wages—became an idler

and a rake—and said to myself: 'When I get too tired of labor, I can always follow the example of Father Arsene and his wife.'"

Whilst Jacques resigned himself to the current of these bitter thoughts, the other guests, incited by the expressive pantomime of Dumoulin and the Bacchanal Queen, had tacitly agreed together; and, on a signal from the Queen, who leaped upon the table, and threw down the bottles and glasses with her foot, all rose and shouted, with the accompaniment of Ninny Moulin's rattle "The storm-blown Tulip! the quadrille of the Storm-blown Tulip!"

At these joyous cries, which burst suddenly, like shell, Jacques started; then gazing with astonishment at his guests, he drew his hand across his brow, as if to chase away the painful ideas that oppressed him, and exclaimed: "You are right. Forward the first couple! Let us be merry!"

In a moment, the table, lifted by vigorous arms, was removed to the extremity of the banqueting-room; the spectators, mounted upon chairs, benches, and window-ledges, began to sing in chorus the well-known air of les Etudiants, so as to serve instead of orchestra, and accompany the quadrille formed by Sleepinbuff, the Queen, Ninny Moulin, and Rose Pompon.

Dumoulin, having entrusted his rattle to one of the guests, resumed his extravagant Roman helmet and plume; he had taken off his great-coat at the commencement of the feast, so that he now appeared in all the splendor of his costume. His cuirass of bright scales ended in a tunic of feathers, not unlike those worn by the savages, who form the oxen's escort on Mardi Gras. Ninny Moulin had a huge paunch and thin legs, so that the latter moved about at pleasure in the gaping mouths of his large top boots.

Little Rose-Pompon, with her pinched-up cocked-hat stuck on one side, her hands in the pockets of her trousers, her bust a little inclined forward, and undulating from right to left, advanced to meet Ninny-Moulin; the latter danced, or rather leaped towards her, his left leg bent under him, his right leg stretched forward, with the toe raised, and the heel gliding on the floor; moreover, he struck his neck with his left hand, and by a simultaneous movement, stretched forth his right, as if he would have thrown dust in the eyes of his opposite partner.

This first figure met with great success, and the applause was vociferous, though it was only the innocent prelude to the step of the Storm-blown Tulip—when suddenly the door opened, and one of the waiters, after looking about for an instant, in search of Sleepinbuff, ran to him, and whispered some words in his ear.

"Me!" cried Jacques, laughing; "here's a go!"

The waiter added a few more words, when Sleepinbuff's face assumed an expression of uneasiness, as he answered. "Very well! I come directly,"—and he made a step towards the door.

"What's the matter, Jacques?" asked the Bacchanal Queen, in some surprise.

"I'll be back immediately. Some one take my place. Go on with the dance," said Sleepinbuff, as he hastily left the room.

"Something, that was not put down in the bill," said Dumoulin; "he will soon be back."

"That's it," said Cephyse. "Now cavalier suez!" she added, as she took Jacques's place, and the dance continued.

Ninny Moulin had just taken hold of Rose Pompon with his right hand, and of the Queen with his left, in order to advance between the two, in which figure he showed off his buffoonery to the utmost extent, when the door again opened, and the same waiter, who had called out Jacques, approached Cephyse with an air of consternation, and whispered in her ear, as he had before done to Sleepinbuff.

The Bacchanal Queen grew pale, uttered a piercing scream, and rushed out of the room without a word, leaving her guests in stupefaction.

[11] These atrocious words were actually spoken during the Lyons Riots.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAREWELL

The Bacchanal Queen, following the waiter, arrived at the bottom of the staircase. A coach was standing before the door of the house. In it she saw Sleepinbuff, with one of the men who, two hours before, had been waiting on the Place du Chatelet.

On the arrival of Cephyse, the man got down, and said to Jacques, as he drew out his watch: "I give you a quarter of an hour; it is all that I can do for you, my good fellow; after that we must start. Do not try to escape, for we'll be watching at the coach doors."

With one spring, Cephyse was in the coach. Too much overcome to speak before, she now exclaimed, as she took her seat by Jacques, and remarked the paleness of his countenance: "What is it? What do they want with you?"

"I am arrested for debt," said Jacques, in a mournful voice.

"You!" exclaimed Cephyse, with a heart-rending sob.

"Yes, for that bill, or guarantee, they made me sign. And yet the man said it was only a form—the rascal!"

"But you have money in his hands; let him take that on account."

"I have not a copper; he sends me word by the bailiff, that not having paid the bill, I shall not have the last thousand francs."

"Then let us go to him, and entreat him to leave you at liberty. It was he who came to propose to lend you this money. I know it well, as he first addressed himself to me. He will have pity on you."

"Pity?—a money broker pity? No! no!"

"Is there then no hope? none?" cried Cephyse clasping her hands in anguish. "But there must be something done," she resumed. "He promised you!"

"You can see how he keeps his promises," answered Jacques, with bitterness. "I signed, without even knowing what I signed. The bill is over-due; everything is in order, it would be vain to resist. They have just explained all that to me."

"But they cannot keep you long in prison. It is impossible."

"Five years, if I do not pay. As I'll never be able to do so, my fate is certain."

"Oh! what a misfortune! and not to be able to do anything!" said Cephyse, hiding her face in her hands.

"Listen to me, Cephyse," resumed Jacques, in a voice of mournful emotion; "since I am here, I have thought only of one thing—what is to become of you?"

"Never mind me!"

"Not mind you?—art mad? What will you do? The furniture of our two rooms is not worth two hundred francs. We have squandered our money so foolishly, that we have not even paid our rent. We owe three quarters, and we must not therefore count upon the furniture. I leave you without a coin. At least I shall be fed in prison—but how will you manage to live?"

"What is the use of grieving beforehand?"

"I ask you how you will live to-morrow?" cried Jacques.

"I will sell my costume, and some other clothes. I will send you half the money, and keep the rest. That will last some days."

"And afterwards?—afterwards?"

"Afterwards?—why, then—I don't know—how can I tell you! Afterwards—I'll look about me."

"Hear me, Cephyse," resumed Jacques, with bitter agony. "It is now that I first know how much I love you. My heart is pressed as in a vise at the thought of leaving you and I shudder to think what is to become of you." Then—drawing his hand across his forehead, Jacques added: "You see we have been ruined by saying—'To-morrow will never come!'—for to-morrow has come. When I am no longer with

you, and you have spent the last penny of the money gained by the sale of your clothes—unfit for work as you have become—what will you do next? Must I tell you what you will do!—you will forget me and —" Then, as if he recoiled from his own thoughts, Jacques exclaimed, with a burst of rage and despair —"Great Heaven! if that were to happen, I should dash my brains out against the stones!"

Cephyse guessed the half-told meaning of Jacques, and throwing her arms around his neck, she said to him: "I take another lover?—never! I am like you, for I now first know how much I love you."

"But, my poor Cephyse—how will you live?"

"Well, I shall take courage. I will go back and dwell, with my sister, as in old times; we will work together, and so earn our bread. I'll never go out, except to visit you. In a few days your creditor will reflect, that, as you can't pay him ten thousand francs, he may as well set you free. By that time I shall have once more acquired the habit of working. You shall see, you shall see!—and you also will again acquire this habit. We shall live poor, but content. After all, we have had plenty of amusement for six months, while so many others have never known pleasure all their lives. And believe me, my dear Jacques, when I say to you—I shall profit by this lesson. If you love me, do not feel the least uneasiness; I tell you, that I would rather die a hundred times, than have another lover."

"Kiss me," said Jacques, with eyes full of tears. "I believe you—yes, I believe you—and you give me back my courage, both for now and hereafter. You are right; we must try and get to work again, or else nothing remains but Father Arsene's bushel of charcoal; for, my girl," added Jacques, in a low and trembling voice, "I have been like a drunken man these six months, and now I am getting sober, and see whither we are going. Our means once exhausted, I might perhaps have become a robber, and you —"

"Oh, Jacques! don't talk so—it is frightful," interrupted Cephyse; "I swear to you that I will return to my sister—that I will work—that I will have courage!"

Thus saying, the Bacchanal Queen was very sincere; she fully intended to keep her word, for her heart was not yet completely corrupted. Misery and want had been with her, as with so many others, the cause and the excuse of her worst errors. Until now, she had at least followed the instincts of her heart, without regard to any base or venal motive. The cruel position in which she beheld Jacques had so far exalted her love, that she believed herself capable of resuming, along with Mother Bunch, that life of sterile and incessant toil, full of painful sacrifices and privations, which once had been impossible for her to bear, and which the habits of a life of leisure and dissipation would now render still more difficult.

Still, the assurances which she had just given Jacques calmed his grief and anxiety a little; he had sense and feeling enough to perceive that the fatal track which he had hitherto so blindly followed was leading both him and Cephyse directly to infamy.

One of the bailiffs, having knocked at the coach-door, said to Jacques: "My lad, you have only five minutes left—so make haste."

"So, courage, my girl—courage!" said Jacques.

"I will; you may rely upon me."

"Are you going upstairs again?"

"No—oh no!" said Cephyse. "I have now a horror of this festivity."

"Everything is paid for, and the waiter will tell them not to expect us back. They will be much astonished," continued Jacques, "but it's all the same now."

"If you could only go with me to our lodging," said Cephyse, "this man would perhaps permit it, so as not to enter Sainte-Pelagie in that dress."

"Oh! he will not forbid you to accompany me; but, as he will be with us in the coach, we shall not be able to talk freely in his presence. Therefore, let me speak reason to you for the first time in my life. Remember what I say, my dear Cephyse—and the counsel will apply to me as well as to yourself," continued Jacques, in a grave and feeling tone—"resume from to-day the habit of labor. It may be painful, unprofitable—never mind—do not hesitate, for too soon will the influence of this lesson be forgotten. By-and-bye it will be too late, and then you will end like so many unfortunate creatures—"

"I understand," said Cephyse, blushing; "but I will rather die than lead such a life."

"And there you will do well—for in that case," added Jacques, in a deep and hollow voice, "I will

myself show you how to die."

"I count upon you, Jacques," answered Cephyse, embracing her lover with excited feeling; then she added, sorrowfully: "It was a kind of presentiment, when just now I felt so sad, without knowing why, in the midst of all our gayety—and drank to the Cholera, so that we might die together."

"Well! perhaps the Cholera will come," resumed Jacques, with a gloomy air; "that would save us the charcoal, which we may not even be able to buy."

"I can only tell you one thing, Jacques, that to live and die together, you will always find me ready."

"Come, dry your eyes," said he, with profound emotion. "Do not let us play the children before these men."

Some minutes after, the coach took the direction to Jacques's lodging, where he was to change his clothes, before proceeding to the debtors' prison.

Let us repeat, with regard to the hunchback's sister—for there are things which cannot be too often repeated—that one of the most fatal consequences of the Inorganization of Labor is the Insufficiency of Wages.

The insufficiency of wages forces inevitably the greater number of young girls, thus badly paid, to seek their means of subsistence in connections which deprave them.

Sometimes they receive a small allowance from their lovers, which, joined to the produce of their labor, enables them to live. Sometimes like the sempstress's sister, they throw aside their work altogether, and take up their abode with the man of their choice, should he be able to support the expense. It is during this season of pleasure and idleness that the incurable leprosy of sloth takes lasting possession of these unfortunate creatures.

This is the first phase of degradation that the guilty carelessness of Society imposes on an immense number of workwomen, born with instincts of modesty, and honesty, and uprightness.

After a certain time they are deserted by their seducers—perhaps when they are mothers. Or, it may be, that foolish extravagance consigns the imprudent lover to prison, and the young girl finds herself alone, abandoned, without the means of subsistence.

Those who have still preserved courage and energy go back to their work—but the examples are very rare. The others, impelled by misery, and by habits of indolence, fall into the lowest depths.

And yet we must pity, rather than blame them, for the first and virtual cause of their fall has been the insufficient remuneration of labor and sudden reduction of pay.

Another deplorable consequence of this inorganization is the disgust which workmen feel for their employment, in addition to the insufficiency of their wages. And this is quite conceivable, for nothing is done to render their labor attractive, either by variety of occupations, or by honorary rewards, or by proper care, or by remuneration proportionate to the benefits which their toil provides, or by the hope of rest after long years of industry. No—the country thinks not, cares not, either for their wants or their rights.

And yet, to take only one example, machinists and workers in foundries, exposed to boiler explosions, and the contact of formidable engines, run every day greater dangers than soldiers in time of war, display rare practical sagacity, and render to industry—and, consequently, to their country—the most incontestable service, during a long and honorable career, if they do not perish by the bursting of a boiler, or have not their limbs crushed by the iron teeth of a machine.

In this last case, does the workman receive a recompense equal to that which awaits the soldier's praiseworthy, but sterile courage—a place in an asylum for invalids? No.

What does the country care about it? And if the master should happen to be ungrateful, the mutilated workman, incapable of further service, may die of want in some corner.

Finally, in our pompous festivals of commerce, do we ever assemble any of the skillful workmen who alone have woven those admirable stuffs, forged and damascened those shining weapons, chiselled those goblets of gold and silver, carved the wood and ivory of that costly furniture, and set those dazzling jewels with such exquisite art? No.

In the obscurity of their garrets, in the midst of a miserable and starving family, hardly able to subsist on their scanty wages, these workmen have contributed, at least, one half to bestow those wonders

upon their country, which make its wealth, its glory, and its pride.

A minister of commerce, who had the least intelligence of his high functions and duties, would require of every factory that exhibits on these occasions, the selection by vote of a certain number of candidates, amongst whom the manufacturer would point out the one that appeared most worthy to represent the working classes in these great industrial solemnities.

Would it not be a noble and encouraging example to see the master propose for public recompense and distinction the workman, deputed by his peers, as amongst the most honest, laborious, and intelligent of his profession? Then one most grievous injustice would disappear, and the virtues of the workman would be stimulated by a generous and noble ambition—he would have an interest in doing well.

Doubtless, the manufacturer himself, because of the intelligence he displays, the capital he risks, the establishment he founds, and the good he sometimes does, has a legitimate right to the prizes bestowed upon him. But why is the workman to be rigorously excluded from these rewards, which have so powerful an influence upon the people? Are generals and officers the only ones that receive rewards in the army? And when we have remunerated the captains of this great and powerful army of industry, why should we neglect the privates?

Why for them is there no sign of public gratitude? no kind or consoling word from august lips? Why do we not see in France, a single workman wearing a medal as a reward for his courageous industry, his long and laborious career? The token and the little pension attached to it, would be to him a double recompense, justly deserved. But, no! for humble labor that sustains the State, there is only forgetfulness, injustice, indifference, and disdain!

By this neglect of the public, often aggravated by individual selfishness and ingratitude, our workmen are placed in a deplorable situation.

Some of them, notwithstanding their incessant toil, lead a life of privations, and die before their time cursing the social system that rides over them. Others find a temporary oblivion of their ills in destructive intoxication. Others again—in great number—having no interest, no advantage, no moral or physical inducement to do more or better, confine themselves strictly to just that amount of labor which will suffice to earn their wages. Nothing attaches them to their work, because nothing elevates, honors, glorifies it in their eyes. They have no defence against the reductions of indolence; and if, by some chance, they find means of living awhile in repose, they give way by degrees to habits of laziness and debauchery, and sometimes the worst passions soil forever natures originally willing, healthy and honest—and all for want of that protecting and equitable superintendence which should have sustained, encouraged, and recompensed their first worthy and laborious tendencies.

We now follow Mother Bunch, who after seeking for work from the person that usually employed her, went to the Rue de Babylone, to the lodge lately occupied by Adrienne de Cardoville.

CHAPTER V.

FLORINE.

While the Bacchanal Queen and Sleepinbuff terminated so sadly the most joyous portion of their existence, the sempstress arrived at the door of the summer-house in the Rue de Babylone.

Before ringing she dried her tears; a new grief weighed upon her spirits. On quitting the tavern, she had gone to the house of the person who usually found her in work; but she was told that she could not have any because it could be done a third more cheaply by women in prison. Mother Bunch, rather than lose her last resource, offered to take it at the third less; but the linen had been already sent out; and the girl could not hope for employment for a fortnight to come, even if submitting to this reduction of wages. One may conceive the anguish of the poor creature; the prospect before her was to die of hunger, if she would not beg or steal. As for her visit to the lodge in the Rue de Babylone, it will be explained presently.

She rang the bell timidly; a few minutes after, Florine opened the door to her. The waiting-maid was no longer adorned after the charming taste of Adrienne; on the contrary, she was dressed with an affectation of austere simplicity. She wore a high-necked dress of a dark color, made full enough to

conceal the light elegance of her figure. Her bands of jet-black hair were hardly visible beneath the flat border of a starched white cap, very much resembling the head-dress of a nun. Yet, in spite of this unornamental costume, Florine's pale countenance was still admirably beautiful.

We have said that, placed by former misconduct at the mercy of Rodin and M. d'Aigrigny, Florine had served them as a spy upon her mistress, notwithstanding the marks of kindness and confidence she had received from her. Yet Florine was not entirely corrupted; and she often suffered painful, but vain, remorse at the thought of the infamous part she was thus obliged to perform.

At the sight of Mother Bunch, whom she recognized—for she had told her, the day before, of Agricola's arrest and Mdlle. de Cardoville's madness—Florine recoiled a step, so much was she moved with pity at the appearance of the young sempstress. In fact, the idea of being thrown out of work, in the midst of so many other painful circumstances, had made a terrible impression upon the young workwoman, the traces of recent tears furrowed her cheeks—without her knowing it, her features expressed the deepest despair—and she appeared so exhausted, so weak, so overcome, that Florine offered her arm to support her, and said to her kindly: "Pray walk in and rest yourself; you are very pale, and seem to be ill and fatigued."

So saying, Florine led her into a small room; with fireplace and carpet, and made her sit down in a tapestried armchair by the side of a good fire. Georgette and Hebe had been dismissed, and Florine was left alone in care of the house.

When her guest was seated, Florine said to her with an air of interest: "Will you not take anything? A little orange flower-water and sugar, warm."

"I thank you, mademoiselle," said Mother Bunch, with emotion, so easily was her gratitude excited by the least mark of kindness; she felt, too, a pleasing surprise, that her poor garments had not been the cause of repugnance or disdain on the part of Florine.

"I thank you, mademoiselle," said she, "but I only require a little rest, for I come from a great distance. If you will permit me—"

"Pray rest yourself as long as you like, mademoiselle; I am alone in this pavilion since the departure of my poor mistress,"—here Florine blushed and sighed;—"so, pray make yourself quite at home. Draw near the fire—you will be more comfortable—and, gracious! how wet your feet are!—place them upon this stool."

The cordial reception given by Florine, her handsome face and agreeable manners, which were not those of an ordinary waiting-maid, forcibly struck Mother Bunch, who, notwithstanding her humble condition, was peculiarly susceptible to the influence of everything graceful and delicate. Yielding, therefore, to these attractions, the young sempstress, generally so timid and sensitive, felt herself almost at her ease with Florine.

"How obliging you are, mademoiselle!" said she in a grateful tone. "I am quite confused with your kindness."

"I wish I could do you some greater service than offer you a place at the fire, mademoiselle. Your appearance is so good and interesting."

"Oh, mademoiselle!" said the other, with simplicity, almost in spite of herself; "it does one so much good to sit by a warm fire!" Then, fearing, in her extreme delicacy, that she might be thought capable of abusing the hospitality of her entertainer, by unreasonably prolonging her visit, she added: "the motive that has brought me here is this. Yesterday, you informed me that a young workman, named Agricola Baudoin, had been arrested in this house."

"Alas! yes, mademoiselle. At the moment, too, when my poor mistress was about to render him assistance."

"I am Agricola's adopted sister," resumed Mother Bunch, with a slight blush; "he wrote to me yesterday evening from prison. He begged me to tell his father to come here as soon as possible, in order to inform Mdlle. de Cardoville that he, Agricola, had important matters to communicate to her, or to any person that she might send; but that he could not venture to mention them in a letter, as he did not know if the correspondence of prisoners might not be read by the governor of the prison."

"What!" said Florine, with surprise; "to my mistress, M. Agricola has something of importance to communicate?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; for, up to this time, Agricola is ignorant of the great calamity that has befallen

Mdlle. de Cardoville."

"True; the attack was indeed so sudden," said Florine, casting down her eyes, "that no one could have foreseen it."

"It must have been so," answered Mother Bunch; "for, when Agricola saw Mdlle. de Cardoville for the first time, he returned home, struck with her grace, and delicacy, and goodness."

"As were all who approached my mistress," said Florine, sorrowfully.

"This morning," resumed the sewing-girl, "when, according to Agricola's instructions, I wished to speak to his father on the subject, I found him already gone out, for he also is a prey to great anxieties; but my adopted brother's letter appeared to me so pressing, and to involve something of such consequence to Mdlle. de Cardoville, who had shown herself so generous towards him, that I came here immediately."

"Unfortunately, as you already know, my mistress is no longer here."

"But is there no member of her family to whom, if I could not speak myself, I might at least send word by you, that Agricola has something to communicate of importance to this young lady?"

"It is strange!" said Florine, reflecting, and without replying. Then, turning towards the sempstress, she added: "You are quite ignorant of the nature of these revelations?"

"Completely so, mademoiselle; but I know Agricola. He is all honor and truth, and you may believe whatever he affirms. Besides, he would have no interest—"

"Good gracious!" interrupted Florine, suddenly, as if struck with a sudden light; "I have just remembered something. When he was arrested in a hiding-place where my mistress had concealed him, I happened to be close at hand, and M. Agricola said to me, in a quick whisper: 'Tell your generous mistress that her goodness to me will not go unrewarded, and that my stay in that hiding-place may not be useless to her.' That was all he could say to me, for they hurried him off instantly. I confess that I saw in those words only the expression of his gratitude, and his hope of proving it one day to my mistress; but now that I connect them with the letter he has written you—" said Florine, reflecting.

"Indeed!" remarked Mother Bunch, "there is certainly some connection between his hiding-place here and the important secrets which he wishes to communicate to your mistress, or one of her family."

"The hiding-place had neither been inhabited nor visited for some time," said Florine, with a thoughtful air; "M. Agricola may have found therein something of interest to my mistress."

"If his letter had not appeared to me so pressing," resumed the other, "I should not have come hither; but have left him to do so himself, on his release from prison, which now, thanks to the generosity of one of his old fellow-workmen, cannot be very distant. But, not knowing if bail would be accepted to-day, I have wished faithfully to perform his instructions. The generous kindness of your mistress made it my first duty."

Like all persons whose better instincts are still roused from time to time, Florine felt a sort of consolation in doing good whenever she could with impunity—that is to say, without exposing herself to the inexorable resentments of those on whom she depended. Thanks to Mother Bunch, she might now have an opportunity of rendering a great service to her mistress. She knew enough of the Princess de Saint-Dizier's hatred of her niece, to feel certain that Agricola's communication could not, from its very importance, be made with safety to any but Mdlle. de Cardoville herself. She therefore said very gravely: "Listen to me, mademoiselle! I will give you a piece of advice which will, I think, be useful to my poor mistress—but which would be very fatal to me if you did not attend to my recommendations."

"How so, mademoiselle?" said the hunchback, looking at Florine with extreme surprise.

"For the sake of my mistress, M. Agricola must confide to no one, except herself, the important things he has to communicate."

"But, if he cannot see Mdlle. Adrienne, may he not address himself to some of her family?"

"It is from her family, above all, that he must conceal whatever he knows. Mdlle. Adrienne may recover, and then M. Agricola can speak to her. But should she never get well again, tell your adopted brother that it is better for him to keep his secret than to place it (which would infallibly happen) at the disposal of the enemies of my mistress."

"I understand you, mademoiselle," said Mother Bunch, sadly. "The family of your generous mistress

do not love her, and perhaps persecute her?"

"I cannot tell you more on this subject now; and, as regards myself, let me conjure you to obtain M. Agricola's promise that he will not mention to any one in the world the step you have taken, or the advice I have given you. The happiness—no, not the happiness," resumed Florine bitterly, as if that were a lost hope, "not the happiness—but the peace of my life depends upon your discretion."

"Oh! be satisfied!" said the sewing-girl, both affected and amazed by the sorrowful expression of Florine's countenance; "I will not be ungrateful. No one in the world but Agricola shall know that I have seen you."

"Thank you—thank you, mademoiselle," cried Florine, with emotion.

"Do you thank me?" said the other, astonished to see the large tears roll down her cheeks.

"Yes! I am indebted to you for a moment of pure, unmixed happiness; for I have perhaps rendered a service to my dear mistress, without risking the increase of the troubles that already overwhelm me."

"You are not happy, then?"

"That astonishes you; but, believe me, whatever may be, your fate, I would gladly change with you."

"Alas, mademoiselle!" said the sempstress: "you appear to have too good a heart, for me to let you entertain such a wish—particularly now."

"What do you mean?"

"I hope sincerely, mademoiselle," proceeded Mother Bunch, with deep sadness, "that you may never know what it is to want work, when labor is your only resource."

"Are you reduced to that extremity?" cried Florine, looking anxiously at the young sempstress, who hung her head, and made no answer. She reproached herself, in her excessive delicacy, with having made a communication which resembled a complaint, though it had only been wrung from her by the thought of her dreadful situation.

"If it is so," went on Florine, "I pity you with all my heart; and yet I know not, if my misfortunes are not still greater than yours."

Then, after a moment's reflection, Florine exclaimed, suddenly: "But let me see! If you are really in that position, I think I can procure you some work."

"Is it possible, mademoiselle?" cried Mother Bunch. "I should never have dared to ask you such a service; but your generous offer commands my confidence, and may save me from destruction. I will confess to you, that, only this morning, I was thrown out of an employment which enabled me to earn four francs a week."

"Four francs a week!" exclaimed Florine, hardly able to believe what she heard.

"It was little, doubtless," replied the other; "but enough for me. Unfortunately, the person who employed me, has found out where it can be done still cheaper."

"Four francs a week!" repeated Florine, deeply touched by so much misery and resignation. "Well! I think I can introduce you to persons, who will secure you wages of at least two francs a day."

"I could earn two francs a day? Is it possible?"

"Yes, there is no doubt of it; only, you will have to go out by the day, unless you chose to take a pace as servant."

"In my position," said Mother Bunch, with a mixture of timidity and pride, "one has no right, I know, to be overnice; yet I should prefer to go out by the day, and still more to remain at home, if possible, even though I were to gain less."

"To go out is unfortunately an indispensable condition," said Florine.

"Then I must renounce this hope," answered Mother Bunch, timidly; "not that I refuse to go out to work—but those who do so, are expected to be decently clad—and I confess without shame, because there is no disgrace in honest poverty, that I have no better clothes than these."

"If that be all," said Florine, hastily, "they will find you the means of dressing yourself properly."

Mother Bunch looked at Florine with increasing surprise. These offers were so much above what she could have hoped, and what indeed was generally earned by needlewomen, that she could hardly credit them.

"But," resumed she, with hesitation, "why should any one be so generous to me, mademoiselle? How should I deserve such high wages?"

Florine started. A natural impulse of the heart, a desire to be useful to the sempstress, whose mildness and resignation greatly interested her, had led her to make a hasty proposition; she knew at what price would have to be purchased the advantages she proposed, and she now asked herself, if the hunchback would ever accept them on such terms. But Florine had gone too far to recede, and she durst not tell all. She resolved, therefore, to leave the future to chance and as those, who have themselves fallen, are little disposed to believe in the infallibility of others, Florine said to herself, that perhaps in the desperate position in which she was, Mother Bunch would not be so scrupulous after all. Therefore she said: "I see, mademoiselle, that you are astonished at offers so much above what you usually gain; but I must tell you, that I am now speaking of a pious institution, founded to procure work for deserving young women. This establishment, which is called St. Mary's Society, undertakes to place them out as servants, or by the day as needlewomen. Now this institution is managed by such charitable persons, that they themselves undertake to supply an outfit, when the young women, received under their protection are not sufficiently well clothed to accept the places destined for them."

This plausible explanation of Florine's magnificent offers appeared to satisfy the hearer. "I can now understand the high wages of which you speak, mademoiselle," resumed she; "only I have no claim to be patronized by the charitable persons who direct this establishment."

"You suffer—you are laborious and honest—those are sufficient claims; only, I must tell you, they will ask if you perform regularly your religious duties."

"No one loves and blesses God more fervently than I do, mademoiselle," said the hunchback, with mild firmness; "but certain duties are an affair of conscience, and I would rather renounce this patronage, than be compelled—"

"Not the least in the world. Only, as I told you, there are very pious persons at the head of this institution, and you must not be astonished at their questions on such a subject. Make the trial, at all events; what do you risk? If the propositions are suitable—accept them; if, on the contrary, they should appear to touch your liberty of conscience, you can always refuse—your position will not be the worse for it."

Mother Bunch had nothing to object to this reasoning which left her at perfect freedom, and disarmed her of all suspicion. "On these terms, mademoiselle," said she, "I accept your offer, and thank you with all my heart. But who will introduce me?"

"I will—to-morrow, if you please."

"But they will perhaps desire to make some inquiries about me."

"The venerable Mother Sainte-Perpetue, Superior of St. Mary's Convent, where the institution is established, will, I am sure, appreciate your good qualities without inquiry; but if otherwise, she will tell you, and you can easily satisfy her. It is then agreed—to-morrow."

"Shall I call upon you here, mademoiselle?"

"No; as I told you before, they must not know that you came here on the part of M. Agricola, and a second visit might be discovered, and excite suspicion. I will come and fetch you in a coach; where do you live?"

"At No. 3, Rue Brise-Miche; as you are pleased to give yourself so much trouble, mademoiselle, you have only to ask the dyer, who acts as porter, to call down Mother Bunch."

"Mother Bunch?" said Florine, with surprise.

"Yes, mademoiselle," answered the sempstress, with a sad smile; "it is the name every one gives me. And you see," added the hunchback, unable to restrain a tear, "it is because of my ridiculous infirmity, to which this name alludes, that I dread going out to work among strangers, because there are so many people who laugh at one, without knowing the pain they occasion. But," continued she, drying her eyes, "I have no choice, and must make up my mind to it."

Florine, deeply affected, took the speaker's hand, and said to her: "Do not fear. Misfortunes like yours must inspire compassion, not ridicule. May I not inquire for you by your real name?"

"It is Magdalen Soliveau; but I repeat, mademoiselle, that you had better ask for Mother Bunch, as I am hardly known by any other name."

"I will, then, be in the Rue Brise-Miche to-morrow, at twelve o'clock."

"Oh, mademoiselle! How can I ever requite your goodness?"

"Don't speak of it: I only hope my interference may be of use to you. But of this you must judge for yourself. As for M. Agricola, do not answer his letter; wait till he is out of prison, and then tell him to keep his secret till he can see my poor mistress."

"And where is the dear young lady now?"

"I cannot tell you. I do not know where they took her, when she was attacked with this frenzy. You will expect me to-morrow?"

"Yes—to-morrow," said Mother Bunch.

The convent whither Florine was to conduct the hunchback contained the daughters of Marshal Simon, and was next door to the lunatic asylum of Dr. Baleinier, in which Adrienne de Cardoville was confined.

CHAPTER VI.

MOTHER SAINTE-PERPETUE.

St. Mary's Convent, whither the daughters of Marshal Simon had been conveyed, was a large old building, the vast garden of which was on the Boulevard de l'Hopital, one of the most retired places in Paris, particularly at this period. The following scenes took place on the 12th February, the eve of the fatal day, on which the members of the family of Rennepont, the last descendants of the sister of the Wandering Jew, were to meet together in the Rue St. Francois. St. Mary's Convent was a model of perfect regularity. A superior council, composed of influential ecclesiastics, with Father d'Aigrigny for president, and of women of great reputed piety, at the head of whom was the Princess de Saint Dizier, frequently assembled in deliberation, to consult on the means of extending and strengthening the secret and powerful influence of this establishment, which had already made remarkable progress.

Skillful combinations and deep foresight had presided at the foundation of St. Mary's Convent, which, in consequence of numerous donations, possessed already real estate to a great extent, and was daily augmenting its acquisitions. The religious community was only a pretext; but, thanks to an extensive connection, kept up by means of the most decided members of the ultramontane (i. e. high-church) party, a great number of rich orphans were placed in the convent, there to receive a solid, austere, religious education, very preferable, it was said, to the frivolous instruction which might be had in the fashionable boarding schools, infected by the corruption of the age. To widows also, and lone women who happened moreover to be rich, the convent offered a sure asylum from the dangers and temptations of the world; in this peaceful retreat, they enjoyed a delightful calm, and secured their salvation, whilst surrounded by the most tender and affectionate attentions. Nor was this all. Mother Sainte-Perpetue, the superior of the convent, undertook in the name of the institution to procure for the faithful, who wished to preserve the interior of their houses from the depravity of the age, companions for aged ladies, domestic servants, or needlewomen working by the day, all selected persons whose morality could be warranted. Nothing would seem more worthy of sympathy and encouragement than such an institution; but we shall presently unveil the vast and dangerous network of intrigue concealed under these charitable and holy appearances. The lady Superior, Mother Sainte-Perpetue, was a tall woman of about forty years of age, clad in a stuff dress of the Carmelite tan color, and wearing a long rosary at her waist; a white cap tied under the chin, and a long black veil, closely encircled her thin, sallow face. A number of deep wrinkles had impressed their transverse furrows in her forehead of yellow ivory; her marked and prominent nose was bent like the beak of a bird of prey; her black eye was knowing and piercing; the expression of her countenance was at once intelligent, cold and firm.

In the general management of the pecuniary affairs of the community, Mother Sainte-Perpetue would have been a match for the most cunning attorney. When women are possessed of what is called a talent for business, and apply to it their keen penetration, their indefatigable perseverance, their prudent dissimulation, and, above all, that quick and exact insight, which is natural to them, the results are

often prodigious. To Mother Sainte-Perpetue, a woman of the coolest and strongest intellect, the management of the vast transactions of the community was mere child's play. No one knew better how to purchase a depreciated property, to restore it to its former value, and then sell it with advantage; the price of stock, the rate of exchange, the current value of the shares in the different companies, were all familiar to her; she had yet never been known to make bad speculation, when the question was to invest any of the funds which were given by pious souls for the purposes of the convent. She had established in the house the utmost order and discipline, and, above all, an extreme economy. The constant aim of all her efforts was to enrich, not herself, but the community she directed; for the spirit of association, when become a collective egotism, gives to corporations the faults and vices of an individual. Thus a congregation may dote upon power and money, just as a miser loves them for their own sake. But it is chiefly with regard to estates that congregations act like a single man. They dream of landed property; it is their fixed idea, their fruitful monomania. They pursue it with their most sincere, and warm, and tender wishes.

The first estate is to a rising little community what the wedding trousseau is to a young bride, his first horse to a youth, his first success to a poet, to a gay girl her first fifty-guinea shawl; because, after all, in this material age, an estate gives a certain rank to a society on the Religious Exchange, and has so much the more effect upon the simple-minded, that all these partnerships in the work of salvation, which end by becoming immensely rich, begin with modest poverty as social stock-in-trade, and charity towards their neighbors as security reserve fund. We may therefore imagine what bitter and ardent rivalry must exist between the different congregations with regard to the various estates that each can lay claim to; with what ineffable satisfaction the richer society crushes the poorer beneath its inventory of houses, and farms and paper securities! Envy and hateful jealousy, rendered still more irritable by the leisure of a cloistered life, are the necessary consequences of such a comparison; and yet nothing is less Christian—in the adorable acceptance of that divine word—nothing has less in common with the true, essential, and religiously social spirit of the gospel, than this insatiable ardor to acquire wealth by every possible means—this dangerous avidity, which is far from being atoned for, in the eyes of public opinion, by a few paltry alms, bestowed in the narrow spirit of exclusion and intolerance.

Mother Sainte-Perpetue was seated before a large cylindrical-fronted desk in the centre of an apartment simply but comfortably furnished. An excellent fire burned within the marble chimney, and a soft carpet covered the floor. The superior, to whom all letters addressed to the sisters or the boarders were every day delivered, had just been opening she first, according to her acknowledged right, and carefully unsealing the second, without their knowing it, according to a right that she ascribed to herself, of course, with a view to the salvation of those dear creatures; and partly, perhaps, a little to make herself acquainted with their correspondence, for she also had imposed on herself the duty of reading all letters that were sent from the convent, before they were put into the post. The traces of this pious and innocent inquisition were easily effaced, for the good mother possessed a whole arsenal of steel tools, some very sharp, to cut the paper imperceptibly round the seal—others, pretty little rods, to be slightly heated and rolled round the edge of the seal, when the letter had been read and replaced in its envelope, so that the wax, spreading as it melted, might cover the first incision. Moreover, from a praiseworthy feeling of justice and equality, there was in the arsenal of the good mother a little fumigator of the most ingenious construction, the damp and dissolving vapor of which was reserved for the letters humbly and modestly secured with wafers, thus softened, they yielded to the least efforts, without any tearing of the paper. According to the importance of the revelations, which she thus gleaned from the writers of the letters, the superior took notes more or less extensive. She was interrupted in this investigation by two gentle taps at the bolted door. Mother Sainte-Perpetue immediately let down the sliding cylinder of her cabinet, so as to cover the secret arsenal, and went to open the door with a grave and solemn air. A lay sister came to announce to her that the Princess de Saint-Dizier was waiting for her in the parlor, and that Mdlle. Florine, accompanied by a young girl, deformed and badly dressed, was waiting at the door of the little corridor.

"Introduce the princess first," said Mother Sainte Perpetue. And, with charming forethought, she drew an armchair to the fire. Mme. de Saint Dizier entered.

Without pretensions to juvenile coquetry, still the princess was tastefully and elegantly dressed. She wore a black velvet bonnet of the most fashionable make, a large blue cashmere shawl, and a black satin dress, trimmed with sable, to match the fur of her muff.

"To what good fortune am I again to-day indebted for the honor of your visit, my dear daughter?" said the superior, graciously.

"A very important recommendation, my dear mother, though I am in a great hurry. I am expected at the house of his Eminence, and have, unfortunately, only a few minutes to spare. I have again to speak of the two orphans who occupied our attention so long yesterday."

"They continue to be kept separate, according to your wish; and this separation has had such an effect upon them that I have been obliged to send this morning for Dr. Baleinier, from his asylum. He found much fever joined to great depression, and, singular enough, absolutely the same symptoms in both cases. I have again questioned these unfortunate creatures, and have been quite confounded and terrified to find them perfect heathens."

"It was, you see, very urgent to place them in your care. But to the subject of my visit, my dear mother: we have just learned the unexpected return of the soldier who brought these girls to France, and was thought to be absent for some days; but he is in Paris, and, notwithstanding his age, a man of extraordinary boldness, enterprise and energy. Should he discover that the girls are here (which, however, is fortunately almost impossible), in his rage at seeing them removed from his impious influence, he would be capable of anything. Therefore let me entreat you, my dear mother, to redouble your precautions, that no one may effect an entrance by night. This quarter of the town is so deserted!"

"Be satisfied, my dear daughter; we are sufficiently guarded. Our porter and gardeners, all well armed, make a round every night on the side of the Boulevard de l'Hopital. The walls are high, and furnished with spikes at the more accessible places. But I thank you, my dear daughter, for having warned me. We will redouble our precautions."

"Particularly this night, my dear mother."

"Why so?"

"Because if this infernal soldier has the audacity to attempt such a thing, it will be this very night."

"How do you know, my dear daughter?"

"We have information which makes us certain of it," replied the princess, with a slight embarrassment, which did not escape the notice of the Superior, though she was too crafty and reserved to appear to see it; only she suspected that many things were concealed from her.

"This night, then," resumed Mother Sainte-Perpetue, "we will be more than ever on our guard. But as I have the pleasure of seeing you, my dear daughter, I will take the opportunity to say a word or two on the subject of that marriage we mentioned."

"Yes, my dear mother," said the princess, hastily, "for it is very important. The young Baron de Brisville is a man full of ardent devotion in these times of revolutionary impiety; he practises openly, and is able to render us great services. He is listened to in the Chamber, and does not want for a sort of aggressive and provoking eloquence; I know not any one whose tone is more insolent with regard to his faith, and the plan is a good one, for this cavalier and open manner of speaking of sacred things raises and excites the curiosity of the indifferent. Circumstances are happily such that he may show the most audacious violence towards our enemies, without the least danger to himself, which, of course, redoubles his ardor as a would-be martyr. In a word, he is altogether ours, and we, in return, must bring about this marriage. You know, besides, my dear mother, that he proposes to offer a donation of a hundred thousand francs to St. Mary's the day he gains possession of the fortune of Mdle. Baudricourt."

"I have never doubted the excellent intentions of M. de Brisville with regard to an institution which merits the sympathy of all pious persons," answered the superior, discreetly; "but I did not expect to meet with so many obstacles on the part of the young lady."

"How is that?"

"This girl, whom I always believed a most simple, submissive, timid, almost idiotic person—instead of being delighted with this proposal of marriage, asks time to consider!"

"It is really pitiable!"

"She opposes to me an inert resistance. It is in vain for me to speak severely, and tell her that, having no parents or friends, and being absolutely confided to my care, she ought to see with my eyes, hear with my ears, and when I affirm that this union is suitable in all respects, give her adhesion to it without delay or reflection."

"No doubt. It would be impossible to speak more sensibly."

"She answers that she wishes to see M. de Brisville, and know his character before being engaged."

"It is absurd—since you undertake to answer for his morality, and esteem this a proper marriage."

"Therefore, I remarked to Mdlle. Baudricourt, this morning, that till now I had only employed gentle persuasion, but that, if she forced me to it, I should be obliged, in her own interest, to act with rigor, to conquer so much obstinacy that I should have to separate her from her companions, and to confine her closely in a cell, until she made up her mind, after all, to consult her own happiness, and—marry an honorable man."

"And these menaces, my dear mother?"

"Will, I hope, have a good effect. She kept up a correspondence with an old school-friend in the country. I have put a stop to this, for it appeared to me dangerous. She is now under my sole influence, and I hope we shall attain our ends; but you see, my dear daughter, it is never without crosses and difficulties that we succeed in doing good!"

"And I feel certain that M. de Brisville will even go beyond his first promise, and I will pledge myself for him, that, should he marry Mdlle. Baudricourt—"

"You know, my dear daughter," said the superior, interrupting the princess, "that if I were myself concerned, I would refuse everything; but to give to this institution is to give to Heaven, and I cannot prevent M. de Brisville from augmenting the amount of his good works. Then, you see, we are exposed to a sad disappointment."

"What is that, my dear mother?"

"The Sacred Heart Convent disputes an estate with us that would have suited us exactly. Really, some people are quite insatiable! I gave the lady superior my opinion upon it pretty freely."

"She told me as much," answered Madame de Saint-Dizier, "and laid the blame on the steward."

"Oh! so you see her, my dear daughter?" exclaimed the superior, with an air of great surprise.

"I met her at the bishop's," answered Madame de Saint-Dizier, with a slight degree of hesitation, that Mother Sainte-Perpetue did not appear to notice.

"I really do not know," resumed the latter, "why our establishment should excite so violently the jealousy of the Sacred Heart. There is not an evil report that they have not spread with regard to St. Mary's Convent. Certain persons are always offended by the success of their neighbors!"

"Come, my dear mother," said the princess, in a conciliating tone, "we must hope that the donation of M. de Brisville will enable you to outbid the Sacred Heart. This marriage will have a double advantage, you see, my dear mother; it will place a large fortune at the disposal of a man who is devoted to us, and who will employ it as we wish; and it will also greatly increase the importance of his position as our defender, by the addition to his income of 100,000 francs a year. We shall have at length an organ worthy of our cause, and shall no longer be obliged to look for defenders amongst such people as that Dumoulin."

"There is great power and much learning in the writings of the man you name. It is the style of a Saint Bernard, in wrath at the impiety of the age."

"Alas, my dear mother! if you only knew what a strange Saint Bernard this Dumoulin is! But I will not offend your ears; all I can tell you is, that such defenders would compromise the most sacred cause. Adieu, my dear mother! pray redouble your precautions to-night—the return of this soldier is alarming."

"Be quite satisfied, my dear daughter! Oh! I forgot. Mdlle. Florine begged me to ask you a favor. It is to let her enter your service. You know the fidelity she displayed in watching your unfortunate niece; I think that, by rewarding her in this way, you will attach her to you completely, and I shall feel grateful on her account."

"If you interest yourself the least in the world in Florine, my dear mother, the thing is done. I will take her into my service. And now it strikes me, she may be more useful to me than I thought."

"A thousand thanks, my dear daughter, for such obliging attention to my request. I hope we shall soon meet again. The day after to-morrow, at two o'clock, we have a long conference with his Eminence and the Bishop; do not forget!"

"No, my dear mother; I shall take care to be exact. Only, pray, redouble your precautions to-night for fear of a great scandal!"

After respectfully kissing the hand of the superior, the princess went out by the great door, which led to an apartment opening on the principal staircase. Some minutes after, Florine entered the room by

another way. The superior was seated and Florine approached her with timid humility.

"Did you meet the Princess de Saint-Dizier?" asked Mother Sainte Perpetue.

"No, mother; I was waiting in the passage, where the windows look out on the garden."

"The princess takes you into her service from to-day," said the superior.

Florine made a movement of sorrowful surprise, and exclaimed: "Me, mother! but—"

"I asked her in your name, and you have only to accept," answered the other imperiously.

"But, mother, I had entreated you—"

"I tell you, that you accept the offer," said the superior, in so firm and positive a tone that Florine cast down her eyes, and replied in a low voice: "I accept."

"It is in M. Rodin's name that I give you this order."

"I thought so, mother," replied Florine, sadly; "on what conditions am I to serve the princess?"

"On the same conditions as those on which you served her niece."

Florine shuddered and said: "I am, then, to make frequent secret reports with regard to the princess?"

"You will observe, you will remember, and you will give an account."

"Yes, my mother."

"You will above all direct your attention to the visits that the princess may receive from the lady superior of the Sacred Heart. You must try and listen—for we have to preserve the princess from evil influences."

"I will obey, my mother."

"You will also try and discover why two young orphans have been brought hither, and recommended to be severely treated, by Madame Grivois, the confidential waiting-woman of the princess."

"Yes, mother."

"Which must not prevent you from remembering anything else that may be worthy of remark. Tomorrow I will give you particular instructions upon another subject."

"It is well, mother."

"If you conduct yourself in a satisfactory manner, and execute faithfully the instructions of which I speak, you will soon leave the princess to enter the service of a young bride; it will be an excellent and lasting situation always on the same conditions. It is, therefore, perfectly understood that you have asked me to recommend you to Madame de Saint Dizier."

"Yes, mother; I shall remember."

"Who is this deformed young girl that accompanies you?"

"A poor creature without any resources, very intelligent, and with an education above her class; she works at her needle, but is at present without employment, and reduced to the last extremity. I have made inquiries about her this morning; she has an excellent character."

"She is ugly and deformed, you say?"

"She has an interesting countenance, but she is deformed."

The superior appeared pleased at this information, and added, after a moment's reflection: "She appears intelligent?"

"Very intelligent."

"And is absolutely without resources?"

"Yes, without any."

"Is she pious?"

"She does not practice."

"No matter," said the superior to herself; "if she be intelligent, that will suffice." Then she resumed aloud. "Do you know if she is a good workwoman?"

"I believe so, mother."

The superior rose, took a register from a shelf, appeared to be looking into it attentively for some time, and then said, as she replaced it: "Fetch in this young girl, and go and wait for me in the press-room."

"Deformed—intelligent—clever at her needle," said the superior, reflecting; "she will excite no suspicion. We must see."

In about a minute, Florine returned with Mother Bunch, whom she introduced to the superior, and then discreetly withdrew. The young sempstress was agitated, trembling, and much troubled, for she could, as it were, hardly believe a discovery which she had chanced to make during Florine's absence. It was not without a vague sense of terror that the hunchback remained alone with the lady superior.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TEMPTATION.

This was the cause of Mother Bunch's emotion. Florine, when she went to see the superior, had left the young sempstress in a passage supplied with benches, and forming a sort of ante-chamber on the first story. Being alone, the girl had mechanically approached a window which looked upon the convent garden, shut in by a half demolished wall, and terminating at one end in an open paling. This wall was connected with a chapel that was still building, and bordered on the garden of a neighboring house. The sewing-girl, at one of the windows on the ground floor of this house—a grated window, still more remarkable by the sort of tent-like awning above it—beheld a young female, with her eyes fixed upon the convent, making signs with her hand, at once encouraging and affectionate. From the window where she stood, Mother Bunch could not see to whom these signs were addressed; but she admired the rare beauty of the telegrapher, the brilliancy of her complexion, the shining blackness of her large eyes, the sweet and benevolent smile which lingered on her lips. There was, no doubt, some answer to her graceful and expressive pantomime, for, by a movement full of elegance, the girl laid her left hand on her bosom, and waved her right, which seemed to indicate that her heart flew towards the place on which she kept her eyes. One faint sunbeam, piercing the clouds, came at this moment to play with the tresses of the pale countenance, which, now held close to the bars of the window, was suddenly, as it were, illuminated by the dazzling reflection of her splendid golden hair. At sight of that charming face, set in its admirable frame of red curls, Mother Bunch started involuntarily; the thought of Mdlle. de Cardoville crossed her mind, and she felt persuaded (nor was she, indeed, mistaken), that the protectress of Agricola was before her. On thus beholding, in that gloomy asylum, this young lady, so marvellously beautiful, and remembering the delicate kindness with which a few days before she had received Agricola in her luxurious little palace of dazzling splendor, the work-girl felt her heart sink within her. She believed Adrienne insane; and yet, as she looked attentively at her, it seemed as if intelligence and grace animated that adorable countenance. Suddenly, Mdlle. de Cardoville laid her fingers upon her lips, blew a couple of kisses in the direction towards which she had been looking, and all at once disappeared. Reflecting upon the important revelations which Agricola had to make to Mdlle. de Cardoville, Mother Bunch regretted bitterly that she had no means of approaching her; for she felt sure that, if the young lady were mad, the present was a lucid interval. She was yet absorbed in these uneasy reflections, when she saw Florine return, accompanied by one of the nuns. Mother Bunch was obliged, therefore, to keep silence with regard to the discovery she had made, and soon after she found herself in the superior's presence. This latter, after a rapid and searching examination of the countenance of the young workwoman, judged her appearance so timid, gentle and honest, that she thought she might repose full confidence in the information given by Florine.

"My dear daughter," said Mother Sainte-Perpetue, in an affectionate voice, "Florine has told me in what a cruel situation you are placed. Is it true that you are entirely without work?"

"Alas! yes, madame."

"Call me mother, my dear daughter; that name is dearer to me, and it is the rule of our house. I need not ask you what are your principles?"

"I have always lived honestly by my labor, mother," answered the girl, with a simplicity at once dignified and modest.

"I believe you, my dear daughter, and I have good reasons for so doing. We must thank the Lord, who has delivered you from temptation; but tell me—are you clever at your trade?"

"I do my best, mother, and have always satisfied my employers. If you please to try me, you will be able to judge."

"Your affirmation is sufficient, my dear daughter. You prefer, I think, to go out by the day?"

"Mdlle. Florine told me, mother, that I could not have work at home."

"Why, no—not for the present, my child. If hereafter an opportunity should offer, I will think of it. Just now I have this to propose to you. A very respectable old lady has asked me to recommend to her a needle-woman by the day; introduced by me, you will certainly suit her. The institution will undertake to clothe you becomingly, and this advance we shall retain by degrees out of your wages, for you will look to us for payment. We propose to give you two francs a day; does that appear to you sufficient?"

"Oh, mother! it is much more than I could have expected."

"You will, moreover, only be occupied from nine o'clock in the morning till six in the evening; you will thus have still some off hours, of which you might make use. You see, the situation is not a hard one."

"Oh! quite the contrary, mother."

"I must tell you, first of all, with whom the institution intends to place you. It is a widow lady, named Mme. de Bremant, a person of the most steadfast piety. In her house, I hope, you will meet with none but excellent examples. If it should be otherwise, you can come and inform me."

"How so, mother?" said the sewing-girl, with surprise.

"Listen to me, my dear daughter," said Mother Sainte-Perpetue, in a tone ever more and more affectionate; "the institution of St. Mary has a double end in view. You will perfectly understand that, if it is our duty to give to masters and mistresses every possible security as to the morality of the persons that we place in their families, we are likewise bound to give to the persons that we so place out every possible security as to the morality of their employers."

"Nothing can be more just and of a wiser foresight, mother."

"Naturally, my dear daughter; for even as a servant of bad morals may cause the utmost trouble in a respectable family, so the bad conduct of a master or mistress may have the most baneful influence on the persons who serve them, or who come to work in their houses. Now, it is to offer a mutual guarantee to good masters and honest servants, that we have founded this institution."

"Oh, madame!" cried Mother Bunch, with simplicity; "such designs merit the thanks and blessings of every one."

"And blessings do not fail us, my dear daughter, because we perform our promises. Thus, an interesting workwoman—such as you, for example—is placed with persons that we suppose irreproachable. Should she, however, perceive, on the part of her employers, or on that of the persons who frequent the house, any irregularity of morals, any tendency to what would offend her modesty, or shock her religious principles, she should immediately give us a detailed account of the circumstances that have caused her alarm. Nothing can be more proper—don't you think so?"

"Yes, mother," answered Mother Bunch, timidly, for she began to find this provision somewhat singular.

"Then," resumed the superior, "if the case appears a serious one, we exhort our befriended one to observe what passes more attentively, so as to convince herself whether she had really reason to be alarmed. She makes a new report to us, and should it confirm our first fears, faithful to our pious guardianship, we withdraw her instantly from the house. Moreover, as the majority of our young people, notwithstanding their innocence and virtue, have not always sufficient experience to distinguish what may be injurious to their soul's health, we think it greatly to their interest that they should confide to us once a week, as a child would to her mother, either in person or by letter, whatever has chanced to occur in the house in which we have placed them. Then we can judge for them, whether to withdraw

them or not. We have already about a hundred persons, companions to ladies, young women in shops, servants, and needlewomen by the day, whom we have placed in a great number of families, and, for the interest of all, we have every reason to congratulate ourselves on this mode of proceeding. You understand me, do you not, my dear daughter?"

"Yes-yes, mother," said the sempstress, more and more embarrassed. She had too much uprightness and sagacity not to perceive that this plan of mutually insuring the morality of masters and servants resembled a vast spy system, brought home to the domestic hearth, and carried on by the members of the institution almost without their knowledge, for it would have been difficult to disguise more skillfully the employment for which they were trained.

"If I have entered into these long details my dear daughter," resumed Mother Sainte-Perpetue, taking the hearer's silence for consent, "it is that you may not suppose yourself obliged to remain in the house in question, if, against our expectation, you should not find there holy and pious examples. I believe Mme. de Bremont's house to be a pure and godly place; only I have heard (though I will not believe it) that Mme. de Bremont's daughter, Mme. de Noisy, who has lately come to reside with her, is not so exemplary in her conduct as could be desired, that she does not fulfil regularly her religious duties, and that, during the absence of her husband, who is now in America, she receives visits, unfortunately too frequent, from one M. Hardy, a rich manufacturer."

At the name of Agricola's master, Mother Bunch could not suppress a movement of surprise, and also blushed slightly. The superior naturally mistook this surprise and confusion for a proof of the modest susceptibility of the young sempstress, and added: "I have told you all this, my dear daughter, that you might be on your guard. I have even mentioned reports that I believe to be completely erroneous, for the daughter of Mme. de Bremont has always had such good examples before her that she cannot have so forgotten them. But, being in the house from morning to night, you will be able, better than any one, to discover if these reports have any foundation in truth. Should it unfortunately so turn out, my dear daughter, you would come and confide to me all the circumstances that have led you to such a conclusion; and, should I then agree in your opinion, I would withdraw you instantly from the house—for the piety of the mother would not compensate sufficiently for the deplorable example of the daughter's conduct. For, as soon as you form part of the institution, I am responsible for your salvation, and, in case your delicacy should oblige you to leave Mme. de Bremont's, as you might be some time without employment, the institution will allow you, if satisfied with your zeal and conduct, one franc a day till we could find you another place. You see, my dear daughter, that you have everything to gain with us. It is therefore agreed that the day after to-morrow you go to Mme. de Bremont's." Mother Bunch found herself in a very hard position. Sometimes she thought that her first suspicions were confirmed, and, notwithstanding her timidity, her pride felt hurt at the supposition, that, because they knew her poor, they should believe her capable of selling herself as a spy for the sake of high wages. Sometimes, on the contrary, her natural delicacy revolted at the idea that a woman of the age and condition of the superior could descend to make a proposition so disgraceful both to the accepter and the proposer, and she reproached herself with her first doubts and asked herself if the superior had not wished to try her, before employing her, to see if her probity would enable her to resist a comparatively brilliant offer. Mother Bunch was naturally so inclined to think well of every one, that she made up her mind to this last conclusion, saying to herself, that if, after all, she were deceived, it would be the least offensive mode of refusing these unworthy offers. With a movement, exempt from all haughtiness, but expressive of natural dignity, the young workman raised her head, which she had hitherto held humbly cast down, looked the superior full in the face, that the latter might read in her countenance the sincerity of her words, and said to her in a slightly agitated voice, forgetting this time to call her "mother": "Ah, madame! I cannot blame you for exposing me to such a trial. You see that I am very poor, and I have yet done nothing to command your confidence. But, believe me, poor as I am, I would never stoop to so despicable an action as that which you have thought fit to propose to me, no doubt to assure yourself, by my refusal, that I am worthy of your kindness. No, no, madame—I could never bring myself to be a spy at any price."

She pronounced these last words with so much animation that her cheeks became slightly flushed. The superior had too much tact and experience not to perceive the sincerity of the words. Thinking herself lucky that the young girl should put this construction upon the affair, she smiled upon her affectionately, and stretched out her arms to her, saying: "It is well, my dear daughter. Come and embrace me!"

"Mother—I am really confused—with so much kindness—"

"No—you deserve it—your words are so full of truth and honesty. Only be persuaded that I have not put you to any trial, because there is no resemblance between the act of a spy and the marks of filial confidence that we require of our members for the sake of watching over their morals. But certain persons—I see you are of the number, my dear daughter—have such fixed principles, and so mature a

judgment, that they can do without our advice and guardianship, and can appreciate themselves whatever might be dangerous to their salvation. I will therefore leave the entire responsibility to yourself, and only ask you for such communications as you may think proper to make."

"Oh, madame! how good you are!" said poor Mother Bunch, for she was not aware of the thousand devices of the monastic spirit, and thought herself already sure of gaining just wages honorably.

"It is not goodness—but justice!" answered Mother Sainte-Perpetue, whose tone was becoming more and more affectionate. "Too much tenderness cannot be shown to pious young women like you, whom poverty has only purified because they have always faithfully observed the divine laws."

"Mother—"

"One last question, my child! how many times a month do you approach the Lord's table?"

"Madame," replied the hunchback, "I have not taken the sacrament since my first communion, eight years ago. I am hardly able, by working every day, and all day long, to earn my bread. I have no time—"

"Gracious heaven!" cried the superior, interrupting, and clasping her hands with all the signs of painful astonishment. "Is it possible? you do not practise?"

"Alas, madame! I tell you that I have no time," answered Mother Bunch, looking disconcertedly at Mother Saint-Perpetue.

"I am grieved, my dear daughter," said the latter sorrowfully, after a moment's silence, "but I told you that, as we place our friends in none but pious houses, so we are asked to recommend none but pious persons, who practise their religious duties. It is one of the indispensable conditions of our institution. It will, therefore, to my great regret, be impossible for me to employ you as I had hoped. If, hereafter, you should renounce your present indifference to those duties, we will then see."

"Madame," said Mother Bunch, her heart swollen with tears, for she was thus forced to abandon a cheering hope, "I beg pardon for having detained you so long—for nothing."

"It is I, my dear daughter, who regret not to be able to attach you to the institution; but I am not altogether hopeless, that a person, already so worthy of interest, will one day deserve by her piety the lasting support of religious people. Adieu, my dear daughter! go in peace, and may God be merciful to you, until the day that you return with your whole heart to Him!"

So saying, the superior rose, and conducted her visitor to the door, with all the forms of the most maternal kindness. At the moment she crossed the threshold, she said to her: "Follow the passage, go down a few steps, and knock at the second door on the right hand. It is the press-room, and there you will find Florine. She will show you the way out. Adieu, my dear daughter!"

As soon as Mother Bunch had left the presence of the superior, her tears, until now restrained, gushed forth abundantly. Not wishing to appear before Florine and the nuns in this state, she stopped a moment at one of the windows to dry her eyes. As she looked mechanically towards the windows of the next house, where she fancied she had seen Adrienne de Cardoville, she beheld the latter come from a door in the building, and advance rapidly towards the open paling that separated the two gardens. At the same instant, and to her great astonishment, Mother Bunch saw one of the two sisters whose disappearance had caused the despair of Dagobert, with pale and dejected countenance, approach the fence that separated her from Mdlle. de Cardoville, trembling with fear and anxiety, as though she dreaded to be discovered.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOTHER BUNCH AND MDLLE. DE CARDOVILLE.

Agitated, attentive, uneasy, leaning from one of the convent-windows, the work-girl followed with her eyes the movements of Mdlle. de Cardoville and Rose Simon, whom she so little expected to find together in such a place. The orphan, approaching close to the fence, which separated the nunnery-garden from that of Dr. Baleinier's asylum, spoke a few words to Adrienne, whose features at once expressed astonishment, indignation, and pity. At this juncture, a nun came running, and looking right

and left, as though anxiously seeking for some one; then, perceiving Rose, who timidly pressed close to the paling, she seized her by the arm, and seemed to scold her severely, and notwithstanding some energetic words addressed to her by Mdlle. de Cardoville, she hastily carried off the orphan, who with weeping eyes, turned several times to look back at Adrienne; whilst the latter, after showing the interest she took in her by expressive gestures, turned away suddenly, as if to conceal her tears.

The passage in which the witness stood, during this touching scene, was situated on the first story. The thought immediately occurred to the sempstress, to go down to the ground-floor, and try to get into the garden, so that she might have an opportunity of speaking to the fair girl with the golden hair, and ascertaining if it were really Mdlle. de Cardoville, to whom; if she found her in a lucid interval, she might say that Agricola had things of the greatest importance to communicate, but that he did not know how to inform her of them. The day was advancing, the sun was on its decline, and fearing that Florine would be tired of waiting for her, Mother Bunch made haste to act; with a light step, listening anxiously as she went, she reached the end of the passage, where three or four stairs led down to the landing-place of the press room, and then formed a spiral descent to the ground-floor. Hearing voices in the pressroom, the sempstress hastened down the stairs, and found herself in a long passage, in the centre of which was a glass door, opening on that part of the garden reserved for the superior. A path, bordered by a high box-hedge, sheltered her from the gaze of curious eyes, and she crept along it, till she reached the open paling; which, at this spot, separated the convent-garden from that of Dr. Baleinier's asylum. She saw Mdlle. de Cardoville a few steps from her, seated, and with her arm resting upon a rustic bench. The firmness of Adrienne's character had for a moment been shaken by fatigue, astonishment, fright, despair, on the terrible night when she had been taken to the asylum by Dr. Baleinier; and the latter, taking a diabolical advantage of her weakness and despondency, had succeeded for a moment in making her doubt of her own sanity. But the calm, which necessarily follows the most painful and violent emotions, combined with the reflection and reasoning of a clear and subtle intellect, soon convinced Adrienne of the groundlessness of the fears inspired by the crafty doctor. She no longer believed that it could even be a mistake on the part of the man of science. She saw clearly in the conduct of this man, in which detestable hypocrisy was united with rare audacity, and both served by a skill no less remarkable, that M. Baleinier was, in fact, the blind instrument of the Princess de Saint-Dizier. From that moment, she remained silent and calm, but full of dignity; not a complaint, not a reproach was allowed to pass her lips. She waited. Yet, though they left her at liberty to walk about (carefully depriving her of all means of communicating with any one beyond the walls), Adrienne's situation was harsh and painful, particularly for her, who so loved to be surrounded by pleasant and harmonious objects. She felt, however, that this situation could not last long. She did not thoroughly understand the penetration and action of the laws; but her good sense taught her, that a confinement of a few days under the plea of some appearances of insanity, more or less plausible in themselves, might be attempted, and even executed with impunity; but that it could not be prolonged beyond certain limits, because, after all, a young lady of her rank in society could not disappear suddenly from the world, without inquiries being made on the subject—and the pretence of a sudden attack of madness would lead to a serious investigation. Whether true or false, this conviction had restored Adrienne to her accustomed elasticity and energy of character. And yet she sometimes in vain asked herself the cause of this attempt on her liberty. She knew too well the Princess de Saint-Dizier, to believe her capable of acting in this way, without a certain end in view, and merely for the purpose of inflicting a momentary pang. In this, Mdlle. de Cardoville was not deceived: Father d'Aigrigny and the princess were both persuaded, that Adrienne, better informed than she wished to acknowledge, knew how important it was for her to find herself in the house in the Rue Saint-Francois on the 13th of February, and was determined to maintain her rights. In shutting up Adrienne as mad, it was intended to strike a fatal blow at her future prospects; but this last precaution was useless, for Adrienne, though upon the true scent of the family-secret they lead wished to conceal from her, had not yet entirely penetrated its meaning, for want of certain documents, which had been lost or hidden.

Whatever had been the motives for the odious conduct of Mdlle. de Cardoville's enemies, she was not the less disgusted at it. No one could be more free from hatred or revenge, than was this generous young girl, but when she thought of all the sufferings which the Princess de Saint Dizier, Abbe d'Aigrigny, and Dr. Baleinier had occasioned her, she promised herself, not reprisals, but a striking reparation. If it were refused her, she was resolved to combat—without truce or rest—this combination of craft, hypocrisy, and cruelty, not from resentment for what she had endured, but to preserve from the same torments other innocent victims, who might not, like her, be able to struggle and defend themselves. Adrienne, still under the painful impression which had been caused by her interview with Rose Simon, was leaning against one of the sides of the rustic bench on which she was seated, and held her left hand over her eyes. She had laid down her bonnet beside her, and the inclined position of her head brought the long golden curls over her fair, shining cheeks. In this recumbent attitude, so full of careless grace, the charming proportions of her figure were seen to advantage beneath a watered green dress, while a broad collar, fastened with a rose-colored satin bow, and fine lace cuffs, prevented too strong a contrast between the hue of her dress and the dazzling whiteness of the swan-like neck

and Raphaellesque hands, imperceptibly veined with tiny azure lines. Over the high and well-formed instep, were crossed the delicate strings of a little, black satin shoe—for Dr. Baleinier had allowed her to dress herself with her usual taste, and elegance of costume was not with Adrienne a mark of coquetry, but of duty towards herself, because she had been made so beautiful. At sight of this young lady, whose dress and appearance she admired in all simplicity, without any envious or bitter comparison with her own poor clothes and deformity of person, Mother Bunch said immediately to herself, with the good sense and sagacity peculiar to her, that it was strange a mad woman should dress so sanely and gracefully. It was therefore with a mixture of surprise and emotion that she approached the fence which separated her from Adrienne—reflecting, however, that the unfortunate girl might still be insane, and that this might turn out to be merely a lucid interval. And now, with a timid voice, but loud enough to be heard, Mother Bunch, in order to assure herself of Adrienne's identity, said, whilst her heart beat fast: "Mdlle. de Cardoville!"

"Who calls me?" said Adrienne. On hastily raising her head, and perceiving the hunchback, she could not suppress a slight cry of surprise, almost fright. For indeed this poor creature, pale, deformed, miserably clad, thus appearing suddenly before her, must have inspired Mdlle. de Cardoville, so passionately fond of grace and beauty, with a feeling of repugnance, if not of terror—and these two sentiments were both visible in her expressive countenance.

The other did not perceive the impression she had made. Motionless, with her eyes fixed, and her hands clasped in a sort of adoring admiration, she gazed on the dazzling beauty of Adrienne, whom she had only half seen through the grated window. All that Agricola had told her of the charms of his protectress, appeared to her a thousand times below the reality; and never, even in her secret poetic visions, had she dreamed of such rare perfection. Thus, by a singular contrast, a feeling of mutual surprise came over these two girls—extreme types of deformity and beauty, wealth and wretchedness. After rendering, as it were, this involuntary homage to Adrienne, Mother Bunch advanced another step towards the fence.

"What do you want?" cried Mdlle. de Cardoville, rising with a sentiment of repugnance, which could not escape the work-girl's notice; accordingly, she held down her head timidly, and said in a soft voice: "I beg your pardon, madame, to appear so suddenly before you. But moments are precious, I come from Agricola."

As she pronounced these words, the sempstress raised her eyes anxiously, fearing that Mdlle. de Cardoville might have forgotten the name of the workman. But, to her great surprise and joy, the fears of Adrienne seemed to diminish at the name of Agricola, and approaching the fence, she looked at the speaker with benevolent curiosity.

"You come from M. Agricola Baudoin?" said she. "Who are you?"

"His adopted sister, madame—a poor needlewoman, who lives in the same house."

Adrienne appeared to collect her thoughts, and said, smiling kindly, after a moment's silence: "It was you then, who persuaded M. Agricola to apply to me to procure him bail?"

"Oh, madame, do you remember—"

"I never forget anything that is generous and noble. M. Agricola was much affected when he spoke of your devotion. I remember it well; it would be strange if I did not. But how came you here, in this convent?"

"They told me that I should perhaps be able to get some occupation here, as I am out of work. Unfortunately, I have been refused by the lady superior."

"And how did you recognize me?"

"By your great beauty, madame, of which Agricola had told me."

"Or rather by this," said Adrienne, smiling as she lifted, with the tips of her rosy fingers, one end of a long, silky ringlet of golden hair.

"You must pardon Agricola, madame," said the sewing girl, with one of those half smiles, which rarely settled on her lips: "he is a poet, and omitted no single perfection in the respectful and admiring description which he gave of his protectress."

"And what induced you to come and speak to me?"

"The hope of being useful to you, madame. You received Agricola with so much goodness, that I have ventured to go shares in his gratitude."

"You may well venture to do so, my dear girl," said Adrienne, with ineffable grace; "until now, unfortunately, I have only been able to serve your adopted brother by intention."

As they exchanged these words, Adrienne and Mother Bunch looked at each other with increasing surprise. The latter was, first of all, astonished that a person who passed for mad should express herself as Adrienne did; next, she was amazed at the ease and freedom with which she herself answered the questions of Mdlle. de Cardoville—not knowing that the latter was endowed with the precious privilege of lofty and benevolent natures, to draw out from those who approached her whatever sympathized with herself. On her side, Mdlle. de Cardoville was deeply moved and astonished to hear this young, low-born girl, dressed almost like a beggar, express herself in terms selected with so much propriety. The more she looked at her, the more the feeling of repugnance she at first experienced wore off, and was at length converted into quite the opposite sentiment. With that rapid and minute power of observation natural to women, she remarked beneath the black crape of Mother Bunch's cap, the smoothness and brilliancy of the fair, chestnut hair. She remarked, too, the whiteness of the long, thin hand, though it displayed itself at the end of a patched and tattered sleeve—an infallible proof that care, and cleanliness, and self-respect were at least struggling against symptoms of fearful distress. Adrienne discovered, also, in the pale and melancholy features, in the expression of the blue eyes, at once intelligent, mild and timid, a soft and modest dignity, which made one forget the deformed figure. Adrienne loved physical beauty, and admired it passionately, but she had too superior a mind, too noble a soul, too sensitive a heart, not to know how to appreciate moral beauty, even when it beamed from a humble and suffering countenance. Only, this kind of appreciation was new to Mdlle. de Cardoville; until now, her large fortune and elegant habits had kept her at a distance from persons of Mother Bunch's class. After a short silence, during which the fair patrician and the poor work-girl had closely examined each other, Adrienne said to the other: "It is easy, I think, to explain the cause of our mutual astonishment. You have, no doubt, discovered that I speak pretty reasonably for a mad woman—if they have told you I am one. And I," added Mdlle. de Cardoville, in a tone of respectful commiseration, "find that the delicacy of your language and manners so singularly contrast with the position in which you appear to be, that my surprise must be even greater than yours."

"Ah, madame!" cried Mother Bunch, with a welling forth of such deep and sincere joy that the tears started to her eyes; "is it true?—they have deceived me—you are not mad! Just now, when I beheld you so kind and beautiful, when I heard the sweet tone of your voice, I could not believe that such a misfortune had happened to you. But, alas! how is it then, madame, that you are in this place?"

"Poor child!" said Adrienne, touched by the affectionate interest of this excellent creature; "and how is it that you, with such a heart and head, should be in such distress? But be satisfied! I shall not always be here—and that will suffice to tell you, that we shall both resume the place which becomes us. Believe me, I shall never forget how, in spite of the painful ideas which must needs occupy your mind, on seeing yourself deprived of work—your only resource—you have still thought of coming to me, and of trying to serve me. You may, indeed, be eminently useful to me, and I am delighted at it, for then I shall owe you much—and you shall see how I will take advantage of my gratitude!" said Adrienne, with a sweet smile. "But," resumed she, "before talking of myself, let us think of others. Is your adopted brother still in prison?"

"By this time, madame, I hope he has obtained his freedom; thanks to the generosity of one of his comrades. His father went yesterday to offer bail for him, and they promised that he should be released to-day. But, from his prison, he wrote to me, that he had something of importance to reveal to you."

"To me?"

"Yes, madame. Should Agricola be released immediately by what means can he communicate with you?"

"He has secrets to tell me!" resumed Mdlle. de Cardoville, with an air of thoughtful surprise. "I seek in vain to imagine what they can be; but so long as I am confined in this house, and secluded from every one, M. Agricola must not think of addressing himself directly or indirectly to me. He must wait till I am at liberty; but that is not all, he must deliver from that convent two poor children, who are much more to be pitied than I am. The daughters of Marshal Simon are detained there against their will."

"You know their name, madame?"

"When M. Agricola informed me of their arrival in Paris, he told me they were fifteen years old, and that they resembled each other exactly—so that, the day before yesterday, when I took my accustomed walk, and observed two poor little weeping faces come close to the windows of their separate cells, one on the ground floor, the other on the first story, a secret presentiment told me that I saw in them the orphans of whom M. Agricola had spoken, and in whom I already took a lively interest, as being my

relations."

"They are your relations, madame, then?"

"Yes, certainly. So, not being able to do more, I tried to express by signs how much I felt for them. Their tears, and the sadness of their charming faces, sufficiently told me that they were prisoners in the convent, as I am myself in this house."

"Oh! I understand, madame—the victim of the animosity of your family?"

"Whatever may be my fate, I am much less to be pitied than these two children, whose despair is really alarming. Their separation is what chiefly oppresses them. By some words that one of them just now said to me, I see that they are, like me, the victims of an odious machination. But thanks to you, it will be possible to save them: Since I have been in this house I have had no communication with any one; they have not allowed me pen or paper, so it is impossible to write. Now listen to me attentively, and we shall be able to defeat an odious persecution."

"Oh, speak! speak, madame!"

"The soldier, who brought these orphans to France, the father of M. Agricola, is still in town?"

"Yes, madame. Oh! if you only knew his fury, his despair, when, on his return home, he no longer found the children that a dying mother had confided to him!"

"He must take care not to act with the least violence. It would ruin all. Take this ring," said Adrienne, drawing it from her finger, "and give it to him. He must go instantly—are you sure that you can remember a name and address?"

"Oh! yes, madame. Be satisfied on that point. Agricola only mentioned your name once, and I have not forgotten it. There is a memory of the heart."

"I perceive it, my dear girl. Remember, then, the name of the Count de Montbron."

"The Count de Montbron—I shall not forget."

"He is one of my good old friends, and lives on the Place Vendome, No. 7."

"Place Vendome, No. 7—I shall remember."

"M. Agricola's father must go to him this evening, and, if he is not at home, wait for his coming in. He must ask to speak to him, as if from me, and send him this ring as a proof of what he says. Once with him, he must tell him all—the abduction of the girls, the name of the convent where they are confined, and my own detention as a lunatic in the asylum of Dr. Baleinier. Truth has an accent of its own, which M. de Montbron will recognize. He is a man of much experience and judgment, and possessed of great influence. He will immediately take the necessary steps, and to-morrow, or the day after, these poor orphans and myself will be restored to liberty—all thanks to you! But moments are precious; we might be discovered; make haste, dear child!"

At the moment of drawing back, Adrienne said to Mother Bunch, with so sweet a smile and affectionate a tone, that it was impossible not to believe her sincere: "M. Agricola told me that I had a heart like yours. I now understand how honorable, how flattering those words were for me. Pray, give me your hand!" added Mdlle. de Cardoville, whose eyes were filling with tears; and, passing her beautiful hand through an opening in the fence, she offered it to the other. The words and the gesture of the fair patrician were full of so much real cordiality, that the sempstress, with no false shame, placed tremblingly her own poor thin hand in Adrienne's, while the latter, with a feeling of pious respect, lifted it spontaneously to her lips, and said: "Since I cannot embrace you as my sister, let me at least kiss this hand, ennobled by labor!"

Suddenly, footsteps were heard in the garden of Dr. Baleinier; Adrienne withdrew abruptly, and disappeared behind some trees, saying: "Courage, memory, and hope!"

All this had passed so rapidly that the young workwoman had no time to speak or move; tears, sweet tears, flowed abundantly down her pale cheeks. For a young lady, like Adrienne de Cardoville, to treat her as a sister, to kiss her hand, to tell her that she was proud to resemble her in heart—her, a poor creature, vegetating in the lowest abyss of misery—was to show a spirit of fraternal equality, divine, as the gospel words.

There are words and impressions which make a noble soul forget years of suffering, and which, as by a sudden flash, reveal to it something of its own worth and grandeur. Thus it was with the hunchback. Thanks to this generous speech, she was for a moment conscious of her own value. And though this feeling was rapid as it was ineffable, she clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven with an expression of fervent gratitude; for, if the poor sempstress did not practise, to use the jargon of ultramontane cant, no one was more richly endowed with that deep religious sentiment, which is to mere dogmas what the immensity of the starry heaven is to the vaulted roof of a church.

Five minutes after quitting Mdlle. de Cardoville, Mother Bunch, having left the garden without being perceived, reascended to the first story, and knocked gently at the door of the press-room. A sister came to open the door to her.

"Is not Mdlle. Florine, with whom I came, still here, sister?" asked the needlewoman.

"She could not wait for you any longer. No doubt, you have come from our mother the superior?"

"Yes, yes, sister," answered the sempstress, casting down her eyes; "would you have the goodness to show me the way out?"

"Come with me."

The sewing-girl followed the nun, trembling at every step lest she should meet the superior, who would naturally have inquired the cause of her long stay in the convent.

At length the inner gate closed upon Mother Bunch. Passing rapidly across the vast court-yard and approaching the porter's lodge, to ask him to let her out, she heard these words pronounced in a gruff voice: "It seems, old Jerome, that we are to be doubly on our guard to-night. Well, I shall put two extra balls in my gun. The superior says we are to make two rounds instead of one."

"I want no gun, Nicholas," said the other voice; "I have my sharp scythe, a true gardener's weapon—and none the worse for that."

Feeling an involuntary uneasiness at these words, which she had heard by mere chance, Mother Bunch approached the porter's lodge, and asked him to open the outer gate.

"Where do you come from?" challenged the porter, leaning half way out of his lodge, with a double-barrelled gun, which he was occupied in loading, in his hand, and at the same time examining the sempstress with a suspicious air.

"I come from speaking to the superior," answered Mother Bunch timidly.

"Is that true?" said Nicholas roughly. "You look like a sanctified scarecrow. Never mind. Make haste and cut!"

The gate opened, and Mother Bunch went out. Hardly had she gone a few steps in the sweet, when, to her great surprise, she saw the dog Spoil sport run up to her, and his master, Dagobert, a little way behind him, arriving also with precipitation. She was hastening to meet the soldier, when a full, sonorous voice exclaimed from a little distance: "Oh my good sister!" which caused the girl to turn round. From the opposite side to that whence Dagobert was coming, she saw Agricola hurrying towards the spot.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ENCOUNTERS.

At the sight of Dagobert and Agricola, Mother Bunch remained motionless with surprise, a few steps from the convent-gate. The soldier had not yet perceived the sempstress. He advanced rapidly, following the dog, who though lean, half-starved, rough-coated, and dirty, seemed to frisk with pleasure, as he turned his intelligent face towards his master, to whom he had gone back, after caressing Mother Bunch.

"Yes, yes; I understand you, old fellow!" said the soldier, with emotion. "You are more faithful than I was; you did not leave the dear children for a minute. Yes, you followed them, and watched day and

night, without food, at the door of the house to which they were taken—and, at length, weary of waiting to see them come forth, ran home to fetch me. Yes; whilst I was giving way to despair, like a furious madman, you were doing what I ought to have done—discovering their retreat. What does it all prove? Why, that beasts are better than men—which is well known. Well, at length I shall see them again. When I think that tomorrow is the 13th, and that without you, my did Spoil-sport, all would be lost—it makes me shudder. But I say, shall we soon be there? What a deserted quarter! and night coming on!"

Dagobert had held this discourse to Spoil-sport, as he walked along following the good dog, who kept on at a rapid pace. Suddenly, seeing the faithful animal start aside with a bound, he raised his eyes, and perceived the dog frisking about the hunchback and Agricola, who had just met at a little distance from the convent-gate.

"Mother Bunch?" exclaimed both father and son, as they approached the young workwoman, and looked at her with extreme surprise.

"There is good hope, M. Dagobert," said she with inexpressible joy. "Rose and Blanche are found!" Then, turning towards the smith, she added, "There is good hope, Agricola: Mdlle. de Cardoville is not mad. I have just seen her."

"She is not mad? what happiness!" exclaimed the smith.

"The children!" cried Dagobert, trembling with emotion, as he took the work-girl's hands in his own. "You have seen them?"

"Yes; just now—very sad—very unhappy—but I was not able to speak to them."

"Oh!" said Dagobert, stopping as if suffocated by the news, and pressing his hands on his bosom; "I never thought that my old heart could beat so!—And yet, thanks to my dog, I almost expected what has taken place. Anyhow, I am quite dizzy with joy."

"Well, father, it's a good day," said Agricola, looking gratefully at the girl.

"Kiss me, my dear child!" added the soldier, as he pressed Mother Bunch affectionately in his arms; then, full of impatience, he added: "Come, let us go and fetch the children."

"Ah, my good sister!" said Agricola, deeply moved; "you will restore peace, perhaps life, to my father—and Mdlle. de Cardoville—but how do you know?"

"A mere chance. And how did you come here?"

"Spoil-sport stops and barks," cried Dagobert, who had already made several steps in advance.

Indeed the dog, who was as impatient as his master to see the orphans, and far better informed as to the place of their retreat, had posted himself at the convent gate, and was beginning to bark, to attract the attention of Dagobert. Understanding his dog, the latter said to the hunchback, as he pointed in that direction with his finger: "The children are there?"

"Yes, M. Dagobert."

"I was sure of it. Good dog!—Oh, yes! beasts are better than men—except you, my dear girl, who are better than either man or beast. But my poor children! I shall see them, I shall have them once more!"

So saying, Dagobert, in spite of his age, began to run very fast towards Spoil-sport. "Agricola," cried Mother Bunch, "prevent thy father from knocking at that door. He would ruin all."

In two strides, the smith had reached his father, just as the latter was raising his hand to the knocker. "Stop, father!" cried the smith, as he seized Dagobert by the arm.

"What the devil is it now?"

"Mother Bunch says that to knock would ruin all."

"How so?"

"She will explain it to you." Although not so nimble as Agricola, Mother Bunch soon came up, and said to the soldier: "M. Dagobert, do not let us remain before this gate. They might open it, and see us; and that would excite suspicion. Let us rather go away—"

"Suspicion!" cried the veteran, much surprised, but without moving from the gate; "what suspicion?"

"I conjure you, do not remain there!" said Mother Bunch, with so much earnestness, that Agricola

joined her, and said to his father: "Since sister rashes it, father, she has some reason for it. The Boulevard de l'Hopital is a few steps from here; nobody passes that way; we can talk there without being interrupted."

"Devil take me if I understand a word of all this!" cried Dagobert, without moving from his post. "The children are here, and I will fetch them away with me. It is an affair of ten minutes."

"Do not think that, M. Dagobert," said Mother Bunch. "It is much more difficult than you imagine. But come! come!—I can hear them talk in the court-yard."

In fact, the sound of voices was now distinctly audible. "Come father!" said Agricola, forcing away the soldier, almost in spite of himself. Spoil-sport, who appeared much astonished at these hesitations, barked two or three times without quitting his post, as if to protest against this humiliating retreat; but, being called by Dagobert, he hastened to rejoin the main body.

It was now about five o'clock in the evening. A high wind swept thick masses of grayish, rainy cloud rapidly across the sky. The Boulevard de l'Hopital, which bordered on this portion of the convent-garden, was, as we before said, almost deserted. Dagobert, Agricola, and the serving girl could hold a private conference in this solitary place.

The soldier did not disguise the extreme impatience that these delays occasioned in him. Hardly had they turned the corner of the street, when he said to Mother Bunch: "Come, my child, explain yourself. I am upon hot coals."

"The house in which the daughters of Marshal Simon are confined is a convent, M. Dagobert."

"A convent!" cried the soldier: "I might have suspected it." Then he added: "Well, what then? I will fetch them from a convent as soon as from any other place. Once is not always."

"But, M. Dagobert, they are confined against their will and against yours. They will not give them up."

"They will not give them up? Zounds! we will see about that." And he made a step towards the street.

"Father," said Agricola, holding him back, "one moment's patience; let us hear all."

"I will hear nothing. What! the children are there—two steps from me—I know it—and I shall not have them, either by fair means or foul? Oh! that would indeed be curious. Let me go."

"Listen to me, I beseech you, M. Dagobert," said Mother Bunch, taking his hand: "there is another way to deliver these poor children. And that without violence—for violence, as Mdlle. de Cardoville told me, would ruin all."

"If there is any other way—quick—let me know it!"

"Here is a ring of Mdlle. de Cardoville's."

"And who is this Mdlle. de Cardoville?"

"Father," said Agricola, "it is the generous young lady, who offered to be my bail, and to whom I have very important matters to communicate."

"Good, good," replied Dagobert; "we will talk of that presently. Well, my dear girl—this ring?"

"You must take it directly, M. Dagobert, to the Count de Montbron, No. 7, Place Vendome. He appears to be a person of influence, and is a friend of Mdlle. de Cardoville's. This ring will prove that you come on her behalf, and you will tell him, that she is confined as a lunatic in the asylum next door to this convent, in which the daughters of Marshal Simon are detained against their will."

"Well, well—what next?"

"Then the Count de Montbron will take the proper steps with persons in authority, to restore both Mdlle. de Cardoville and the daughters of Marshal Simon to liberty—and perhaps, to-morrow, or the day after—"

"To-morrow or the day after!" cried Dagobert; "perhaps?—It is to-day, on the instant, that I must have them. The day after to-morrow would be of much use! Thanks, my good girl, but keep your ring: I will manage my own business. Wait for me here, my boy."

"What are you going to do, father?" cried Agricola, still holding back the soldier. "It is a convent, remember."

"You are only a raw recruit; I have my theory of convents at my fingers' end. In Spain, I have put it in practice a hundred times. Here is what will happen. I knock; a portress opens the door to me; she asks me what I want, but I make no answer; she tries to stop me, but I pass on; once in the convent, I walk over it from top to bottom, calling my children with all my might."

"But, M. Dagobert, the nuns?" said Mother Bunch, still trying to detain the soldier.

"The nuns run after me, screaming like so many magpies. I know them. At Seville I fetched out an Andalusian girl, whom they were trying to keep by force. Well, I walk about the convent calling for Rose and Blanche. They hear me, and answer. If they are shut in, I take the first piece of furniture that comes to hand, and break open the door."

"But, M. Dagobert—the nuns—the nuns?"

"The nuns, with all their squalling, will not prevent my breaking open the door, seizing my children in my arms, and carrying them off. Should the outer door be shut, there will be a second smash—that's all. So," added Dagobert, disengaging himself from the grasp, "wait for me here. In ten minutes I shall be back again. Go and get a hackney-coach ready, my boy."

More calm than Dagobert, and, above all, better informed as to the provisions of the Penal Code, Agricola was alarmed at the consequences that might attend the veteran's strange mode of proceeding. So, throwing himself before him, he exclaimed: "One word more, I entreat you."

"Zounds! make haste!"

"If you attempt to enter the convent by force, you will ruin all."

"How so?"

"First of all, M. Dagobert," said Mother Bunch, "there are men in the convent. As I came out just now, I saw the porter loading his gun, and heard the gardener talking of his sharp scythe, and the rounds he was to make at night."

"Much I care for a porter's gun and a gardener's scythe!"

"Well, father; but listen to me a moment, I conjure you. Suppose you knock, and the door is opened—the porter will ask you what you want."

"I tell him that I wish to speak to the superior, and so walk into the convent."

"But, M. Dagobert," said Mother Bunch, "when once you have crossed the court-yard, you reach a second door, with a wicket. A nun comes to it, to see who rings, and does not open the door till she knows the object of the visit."

"I will tell her that I wish to see the lady superior."

"Then, father, as you are not known in the convent, they will go and inform the superior."

"Well, what then?"

"She will come down."

"What next?"

"She will ask you what you want, M. Dagobert."

"What I want?—the devil! my children!"

"One minute's patience, father. You cannot doubt, from the precautions they have taken, that they wish to detain these young ladies against their will, and against yours."

"Doubt! I am sure of it. To come to that point, they began by turning the head of my poor wife."

"Then, father, the superior will reply to you that she does not know what you mean, and that the young ladies are not in the convent."

"And I will reply to her, that they are in the convent witness—Mother Bunch and Spoil-sport."

"The superior will answer, that she does not know you; that she has no explanations to give you; and will close the wicket."

"Then I break it open—since one must come to that in the end—so leave me alone, I tell you! 'sblood! leave me alone!"

"And, on this noise and violence, the porter will run and fetch the guard, and they will begin by arresting you."

"And what will become of your poor children, then, M. Dagobert?" said Mother Bunch.

Agricola's father had too much good sense not to feel the truth of these observations of the girl and his son; but he knew also, that, cost what it might, the orphans must be delivered before the morrow. The alternative was terrible—so terrible, that, pressing his two hands to his burning forehead, Dagobert sunk back upon a stone bench, as if struck down by the inexorable fatality of the dilemma.

Agricola and the workwoman, deeply moved by this mute despair, exchanged a sad look. The smith, seating himself beside the soldier, said to him: "Do not be down-hearted, father. Remember what's been told you. By going with this ring of Mdlle. de Cardoville's to the influential gentleman she named, the young ladies may be free by to-morrow, or, at worst, by the day after."

"Blood and thunder! you want to drive me mad!" exclaimed Dagobert, starting up from the bench, and looking at Mother Bunch and his son with so savage an expression that Agricola and the sempstress drew back, with an air of surprise and uneasiness.

"Pardon me, my children!" said Dagobert, recovering himself after a long silence. "I am wrong to get in a passion, for we do not understand one another. What you say is true; and yet I am right to speak as I do. Listen to me. You are an honest man, Agricola; you an honest girl; what I tell you is meant for you alone. I have brought these children from the depths of Siberia—do you know why? That they may be to-morrow morning in the Rue Saint-Francois. If they are not there, I have failed to execute the last wish of their dying mother."

"No. 3, Rue Saint Francois?" cried Agricola, interrupting his father.

"Yes; how do you know the number?" said Dagobert.

"Is not the date inscribed on a bronze medal?"

"Yes," replied Dagobert, more and more surprised; "who told you?"

"One instant, father!" exclaimed Agricola; "let me reflect. I think I guess it. Did you not tell me, my good sister, that Mdlle. de Cardoville was not mad?"

"Not mad. They detain her in this asylum to prevent her communicating with any one. She believes herself, like the daughters of Marshal Simon, the victim of an odious machination."

"No doubt of it," cried the smith. "I understand all now, Mdlle. de Cardoville has the same interest as the orphans to appear to-morrow at the Rue Saint-Francois. But she does not perhaps know it."

"How so?"

"One word more, my good girl. Did Mdlle. de Cardoville tell you that she had a powerful motive to obtain her freedom by to-morrow?"

"No; for when she gave me this ring for the Count de Montbron, she said to me: 'By this means both I and Marshal Simon's daughters will be at liberty either to-morrow or the day after—'"

"But explain yourself, then," said Dagobert to his son, with impatience.

"Just now," replied the smith, "when you came to seek me in prison, I told you, father, that I had a sacred duty to perform, and that I would rejoin you at home."

"Yes; and I went, on my side, to take some measures, of which I will speak to you presently."

"I ran instantly to the house in the Rue de Babylone, not knowing that Mdlle. de Cardoville was mad, or passed for mad. A servant, who opened the door to me, informed me that the young lady had been seized with a sudden attack of madness. You may conceive, father, what a blow that was to me! I asked where she was: they answered, that they did not know. I asked if I could speak to any of the family; as my jacket did not inspire any great confidence, they replied that none of her family were at present there. I was in despair, but an idea occurred to me. I said to myself: 'If she is mad, her family physician must know where they have taken her; if she is in a state to hear me, he will take me to her; if not, I will speak to her doctor, as I would to her relations. A doctor is often a friend.' I asked the servant,

therefore, to give me the doctor's address. I obtained it without difficulty—Dr. Baleinier, No. 12, Rue Taranne. I ran thither, but he had gone out; they told me that I should find him about five o'clock at his asylum, which is next door to the convent. That is how we have met."

"But the medal—the medal?" said Dagobert, impatiently; "where did you see it?"

"It is with regard to this and other things that I wished to make important communications to Mdlle. de Cardoville."

"And what are these communications?"

"The fact is, father, I had gone to her the day of your departure, to beg her to get me bail. I was followed; and when she learned this from her waiting-woman, she concealed me in a hiding-place. It was a sort of little vaulted room, in which no light was admitted, except through a tunnel, made like a chimney; yet in a few minutes, I could see pretty clearly. Having nothing better to do, I looked all about me and saw that the walls were covered with wainscoting. The entrance to this room was composed of a sliding panel, moving by means of weights and wheels admirably contrived. As these concern my trade, I was interested in them, so I examined the springs, spite of my emotion, with curiosity, and understood the nature of their play; but there was one brass knob, of which I could not discover the use. It was in vain to pull and move it from right to left, none of the springs were touched. I said to myself: 'This knob, no doubt, belongs to another piece of mechanism'—and the idea occurred to me, instead of drawing it towards me, to push it with force. Directly after, I heard a grating sound, and perceived, just above the entrance to the hiding-place, one of the panels, about two feet square, fly open like the door of a secretary. As I had, no doubt, pushed the spring rather too hard, a bronze medal and chain fell out with a shock."

"And you saw the address—Rue Saint-Francois?" cried Dagobert.

"Yes, father; and with this medal, a sealed letter fell to the ground. On picking it up, I saw that it was addressed, in large letters: 'For Mdlle. de Cardoville. To be opened by her the moment it is delivered.' Under these words, I saw the initials 'R.' and 'C.,' accompanied by a flourish, and this date: 'Paris, November the 13th, 1830.' On the other side of the envelope I perceived two seals, with the letters 'R.' and 'C.,' surmounted by a coronet."

"And the seals were unbroken?" asked Mother Bunch.

"Perfectly whole."

"No doubt, then, Mdlle. de Cardoville was ignorant of the existence of these papers," said the sempstress.

"That was my first idea, since she was recommended to open the letter immediately, and, notwithstanding this recommendation, which bore date two years back, the seals remained untouched."

"It is evident," said Dagobert. "What did you do?"

"I replaced the whole where it was before, promising myself to inform Mdlle. de Cardoville of it. But, a few minutes after, they entered my hiding-place, which had been discovered, and I did not see her again. I was only able to whisper a few words of doubtful meaning to one of her waiting-women, on the subject of what I had found, hoping thereby to arouse the attention of her mistress; and, as soon as I was able to write to you, my good sister, I begged you to go and call upon Mdlle. de Cardoville."

"But this medal," said Dagobert, "is exactly like that possessed by the daughter of Marshal Simon. How can you account for that?"

"Nothing so plain, father. Mdlle. de Cardoville is their relation. I remember now, that she told me so."

"A relation of Rose and Blanche?"

"Yes," added Mother Bunch; "she told that also to me just now."

"Well, then," resumed Dagobert, looking anxiously at his son, "do you now understand why I must have my children this very day? Do you now understand, as their poor mother told me on her death-bed, that one day's delay might ruin all? Do you now see that I cannot be satisfied with a perhaps to-morrow, when I have come all the way from Siberia, only, that those children might be to-morrow in the Rue Saint-Francois? Do you at last perceive that I must have them this night, even if I have to set fire to the convent?"

"But, father, if you employ violence—"

"Zounds! do you know what the commissary of police answered me this morning, when I went to renew my charge against your mother's confessor? He said to me that there was no proof, and that they could do nothing."

"But now there is proof, father, for at least we know where the young girls are. With that certainty we shall be strong. The law is more powerful than all the superiors of convents in the world."

"And the Count de Montbron, to whom Mdlle. de Cardoville begs you to apply," said Mother Bunch, "is a man of influence. Tell him the reasons that make it so important for these young ladies, as well as Mdlle. de Cardoville, to be at liberty this evening and he will certainly hasten the course of justice, and to-night your children will be restored to you."

"Sister is in the right, father. Go to the Count. Meanwhile, I will run to the commissary, and tell him that we now know where the young girls are confined. Do you go home, and wait for us, my good girl. We will meet at our own house!"

Dagobert had remained plunged in thought; suddenly, he said to Agricola: "Be it so. I will follow your counsel. But suppose the commissary says to you: 'We cannot act before to-morrow'—suppose the Count de Montbron says to me the same thing—do not think I shall stand with my arms folded until the morning."

"But, father—"

"It is enough," resumed the soldier in an abrupt voice: "I have made up my mind. Run to the commissary, my boy; wait for us at home, my good girl; I will go to the Count. Give me the ring. Now for the address!"

"The Count de Montbron, No. 7, Place Vendome," said she; "you come on behalf of Mdlle. de Cardoville."

"I have a good memory," answered the soldier. "We will meet as soon as possible in the Rue Brise-Miche."

"Yes, father; have good courage. You will see that the law protects and defends honest people."

"So much the better," said the soldier; "because, otherwise, honest people would be obliged to protect and defend themselves. Farewell, my children! we will meet soon in the Rue Brise-Miche."

When Dagobert, Agricola, and Mother Bunch separated, it was already dark night.

CHAPTER X.

THE MEETING.

It is eight o'clock in the evening, the rain dashes against the windows of Frances Baudoin's apartment in the Rue Brise-Miche, while violent squalls of wind shake the badly dosed doors and casements. The disorder and confusion of this humble abode, usually kept with so much care and neatness, bore testimony to the serious nature of the sad events which had thus disturbed existences hitherto peaceful in their obscurity.

The paved floor was soiled with mud, and a thick layer of dust covered the furniture, once so bright and clean. Since Frances was taken away by the commissary, the bed had not been made; at night Dagobert had thrown himself upon it for a few hours in his clothes, when, worn out with fatigue, and crushed by despair, he had returned from new and vain attempts to discover Rose and Blanche's prison-house. Upon the drawers stood a bottle, a glass, and some fragments of dry bread, proving the frugality of the soldier, whose means of subsistence were reduced to the money lent by the pawnbroker upon the things pledged by Mother Bunch, after the arrest of Frances.

By the faint glimmer of a candle, placed upon the little stove, now cold as marble, for the stock of wood had long been exhausted, one might have seen the hunchback sleeping upon a chair, her head resting on her bosom, her hands concealed beneath her cotton apron, and her feet resting on the lowest rung of the chair; from time to time, she shivered in her damp, chill garments.

After that long day of fatigue and diverse emotions, the poor creature had eaten nothing. Had she even thought of it, she would have been at a loss for bread. Waiting for the return of Dagobert and Agricola, she had sunk into an agitated sleep—very different, alas! from calm and refreshing slumber. From time to time, she half opened her eyes uneasily, and looked around her. Then, again, overcome by irresistible heaviness, her head fell upon her bosom.

After some minutes of silence, only interrupted by the noise of the wind, a slow and heavy step was heard on the landing-place. The door opened, and Dagobert entered, followed by Spoil-sport.

Waking with a start, Mother Bunch raised her head hastily, sprang from her chair, and, advancing rapidly to meet Agricola's father, said to him: "Well, M. Dagobert! have you good news? Have you—"

She could not continue, she was so struck with the gloomy expression of the soldier's features. Absorbed in his reflections, he did not at first appear to perceive the speaker, but threw himself despondingly on a chair, rested his elbows upon the table, and hid his face in his hands. After a long meditation, he rose, and said in a low voice: "It must—yes, it must be done!"

Taking a few steps up and down the room, Dagobert looked around him, as if in search of something. At length, after about a minute's examination, he perceived near the stove, a bar of iron, perhaps two feet long, serving to lift the covers, when too hot for the fingers. Taking this in his hand, he looked at it closely, poised it to judge of its weight, and then laid it down upon the drawers with an air of satisfaction. Surprised at the long silence of Dagobert, the needlewoman followed his movements with timid and uneasy curiosity. But soon her surprise gave way to fright, when she saw the soldier take down his knapsack, place it upon a chair, open it, and draw from it a pair of pocket-pistols, the locks of which he tried with the utmost caution.

Seized with terror, the sempstress could not forbear exclaiming: "Good gracious, M. Dagobert! what are you going to do?"

The soldier looked at her as if he only now perceived her for the first time, and said to her in a cordial, but abrupt voice: "Good-evening, my good girl! What is the time?"

"Eight o'clock has just struck at Saint-Mery's, M. Dagobert."

"Eight o'clock," said the soldier, speaking to himself; "only eight!"

Placing the pistols by the side of the iron bar, he appeared again to reflect, while he cast his eyes around him.

"M. Dagobert," ventured the girl, "you have not, then, good news?"

"No."

That single word was uttered by the soldier in so sharp a tone, that, not daring to question him further, Mother Bunch sat down in silence. Spoil sport came to lean his head on the knees of the girl, and followed the movements of Dagobert with as much curiosity as herself.

After remaining for some moments pensive and silent, the soldier approached the bed, took a sheet from it, appeared to measure its length, and then said, turning towards Mother Bunch: "The scissors!"

"But, M. Dagobert—"

"Come, my good girl! the scissors!" replied Dagobert, in a kind tone, but one that commanded obedience. The sempstress took the scissors from Frances' work-basket, and presented them to the soldier.

"Now, hold the other end of the sheet, my girl, and draw it out tight."

In a few minutes, Dagobert had cut the sheet into four strips, which he twisted in the fashion of cords, fastening them here and there with bits of tape, so as to preserve the twist, and tying them strongly together, so as to make a rope of about twenty feet long. This, however, did not suffice him, for he said to himself: "Now I must have a hook."

Again he looked around him, and Mother Bunch, more and more frightened, for she now no longer doubted Dagobert's designs, said to him timidly: "M. Dagobert, Agricola has not yet come in. It may be some good news that makes him so late."

"Yes," said the soldier, bitterly, as he continued to cast round his eyes in search of something he wanted; "good news like mine! But I must have a strong iron hook."

Still looking about, he found one of the coarse, gray sacks, that Frances was accustomed to make. He took it, opened it, and said to the work girl: "Put me the iron bar and the cord into this bag, my girl. It will be easier to carry."

"Heavens!" cried she, obeying his directions; "you will not go without seeing Agricola, M. Dagobert? He may perhaps have some good news to tell you."

"Be satisfied! I shall wait for my boy. I need not start before ten o'clock—so I have time."

"Alas, M. Dagobert! have you lost all hope?"

"On the contrary. I have good hope—but in myself."

So saying, Dagobert twisted the upper end of the sack, for the purpose of closing it, and placed it on the drawers, by the side of his pistols.

"At all events, you will wait for Agricola, M. Dagobert?"

"Yes, if he arrives before ten o'clock."

"Alas; you have then quite made up your mind?"

"Quite. And yet, if I were weak enough to believe in bad omens—"

"Sometimes, M. Dagobert, omens do not deceive one," said the girl, hoping to induce the soldier to abandon his dangerous resolution.

"Yes," resumed Dagobert; "old women say so—and, although I am not an old woman, what I saw just now weighed heavily on my heart. After all, I may have taken a feeling of anger for a presentiment."

"What have you seen?"

"I will tell it you, my good girl; it may help to pass the time, which appears long enough." Then, interrupting himself, he exclaimed: "Was it the half hour that just struck?"

"Yes, M. Dagobert; it is half-past eight."

"Still an hour and a half," said Dagobert, in a hollow voice. "This," he added, "is what I saw. As I came along the street, my notice was attracted by a large red placard, at the head of which was a black panther devouring a white horse. That sight gave me a turn, for you must know, my good girl, that a black panther destroyed a poor old white horse that I had, Spoil-sport's companion, whose name was Jovial."

At the sound of this name, once so familiar, Spoil-sport, who was crouching at the workwoman's feet, raised his head hastily, and looked at Dagobert.

"You see that beasts have memory—he recollects," said the soldier, sighing himself at the remembrance. Then, addressing his dog he added: "Dost remember Jovial?"

On hearing this name a second time pronounced by his master, in a voice of emotion, Spoil-sport gave a low whine, as if to indicate that he had not forgotten his old travelling companion.

"It was, indeed, a melancholy incident, M. Dagobert," said Mother Bunch, "to find upon this placard a panther devouring a horse."

"That is nothing to what's to come; you shall hear the rest. I drew near the bill, and read in it, that one Morok, just arrived from Germany, is about to exhibit in a theatre different wild beasts that he tamed, among others a splendid lion, a tiger, and a black Java panther named Death."

"What an awful name!" said the hearer.

"You will think it more awful, my child, when I tell you, that this is the very panther which strangled my horse at Leipsic, four months ago."

"Good Heaven! you are right, M. Dagobert," said the girl, "it is awful."

"Wait a little," said Dagobert, whose countenance was growing more and more gloomy, "that is not all. It was by means of this very Morok, the owner of the panther, that I and my poor children were imprisoned in Leipsic."

"And this wicked man is in Paris, and wishes you evil?" said Mother Bunch. "Oh! you are right, M.

Dagobert; you must take care of yourself; it is a bad omen."

"For him, if I catch him," said Dagobert, in a hollow tone. "We have old accounts to settle."

"M. Dagobert," cried Mother Bunch, listening; "some one is running up the stairs. It is Agricola's footsteps. I am sure he has good news."

"That will just do," said the soldier, hastily, without answering. "Agricola is a smith. He will be able to find me the iron hook."

A few moments after, Agricola entered the room; but, alas! the sempstress perceived at the first glance, in the dejected countenance of the workman, the ruin of her cherished hopes.

"Well!" said Dagobert to his son, in a tone which clearly announced the little faith he attached to the steps taken by Agricola; "well, what news?"

"Father, it is enough to drive one mad—to make one dash one's brains out against the wall!" cried the smith in a rage.

Dagobert turned towards Mother Bunch, and said: "You see, my poor child—I was sure of it."

"Well, father," cried Agricola; "have you seen the Court de Montbron?"

"The Count de Montbron set out for Lorraine three days ago. That is my good news," continued the soldier, with bitter irony; "let us have yours—I long to know all. I need to know, if, on appealing to the laws, which, as you told me, protect and defend honest people, it ever happens that the rogues get the best of it. I want to know this, and then I want an iron hook—so I count upon you for both."

"What do you mean, father?"

"First, tell me what you have done. We have time. It is not much more than half-past eight. On leaving me, where did you go first?"

"To the commissary, who had already received your depositions."

"What did he say to you?"

"After having very kindly listened to all I had to state, he answered, that these young girls were placed in a respectable house, a convent—so that there did not appear any urgent necessity for their immediate removal—and besides, he could not take upon himself to violate the sanctity of a religious dwelling upon your simple testimony; to-morrow, he will make his report to the proper authorities, and steps will be taken accordingly."

"Yes, yes—plenty of put offs," said the soldier.

"'But, sir,' answered I to him," resumed Agricola, "'it is now, this very night, that you ought to act, for if these young girls should not be present to-morrow morning in the Rue Saint Francois, their interests may suffer incalculable damage. 'I am very sorry for it,' replied he, 'but I cannot, upon your simple declaration, or that of your father, who—like yourself—is no relation or connection of these young persons, act in direct opposition to forms, which could not be set aside, even on the demand of a family. The law has its delays and its formalities, to which we are obliged to submit.'"

"Certainly!" said Dagobert. "We must submit to them, at the risk of becoming cowardly, ungrateful traitors!"

"Didst speak also of Mdlle. de Cardoville to him?" asked the work-girl.

"Yes—but he: answered me on this subject in much the same manner: 'It was very serious; there was no proof in support of my deposition. A third party had told me that Mdlle. de Cardoville affirms she was not mad; but all mad people pretend to be sane. He could not, therefore, upon my sole testimony, take upon himself to enter the house of a respectable physician. But he would report upon it, and the law would have its course—'"

"When I wished to act just now for myself," said Dagobert, "did I not foresee all this? And yet I was weak enough to listen to you."

"But, father, what you wished to attempt was impossible, and you agreed that it would expose you to far too dangerous consequences."

"So," resumed the soldier, without answering his son, "they told you in plain terms, that we must not

think of obtaining legally the release of Rose and Blanche this evening or even to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, father. In the eyes of the law, there is no special urgency. The question may not be decided for two or three days."

"That is all I wished to know," said Dagobert, rising and walking up and down the room.

"And yet," resumed his son, "I did not consider myself beaten. In despair, but believing that justice could not remain deaf to such equitable claims, I ran to the Palais de Justice, hoping to find there a judge, a magistrate who would receive my complaint, and act upon it."

"Well?" said the soldier, stopping him.

"I was told that the courts shut every day at five o'clock, and do not open again til ten in the morning. Thinking of your despair, and of the position of poor Mdlle. de Cardoville, I determined to make one more attempt. I entered a guard-house of troops of the line, commanded by a lieutenant. I told him all. He saw that I was so much moved, and I spoke with such warmth and conviction, that he became interested. —'Lieutenant,' said I to him, 'grant me one favor; let a petty officer and two soldiers go to the convent to obtain a legal entrance. Let them ask to see the daughters of Marshal Simon, and learn whether it is their choice to remain, or return to my father, who brought them from Russia. You will then see if they are not detained against their will—'"

"And what answer did he give you, Agricola?" asked Mother Bunch, while Dagobert shrugged his shoulders, and continued to walk up and down.

"'My good fellow,' said he, 'what you ask me is impossible. I understand your motives, but I cannot take upon myself so serious a measure. I should be broke were I to enter a convent by force.—'Then, sir, what am I to do? It is enough to turn one's head.'—'Faith, I don't know,' said the lieutenant; 'it will be safest, I think, to wait.'—Then, believing I had done all that was possible, father, I resolved to come back, in the hope that you might have been more fortunate than I—but, alas! I was deceived!"

So saying, the smith sank upon a chair, for he was worn out with anxiety and fatigue. There was a moment of profound silence after these words of Agricola, which destroyed the last hopes of the three, mute and crushed beneath the strokes of inexorable fatality.

A new incident came to deepen the sad and painful character of this scene.

CHAPTER XI.

DISCOVERIES.

The door which Agricola had not thought of fastening opened, as it were, timidly, and Frances Baudoin, Dagobert's wife, pale, sinking, hardly able to support herself, appeared on the threshold.

The soldier, Agricola, and Mother Bunch, were plunged in such deep dejection, that neither of them at first perceived the entrance. Frances advanced two steps into the room, fell upon her knees, clasped her hands together, and said in a weak and humble voice; "My poor husband—pardon!"

At these words, Agricola and the work-girl—whose backs were towards the door—turned round suddenly, and Dagobert hastily raised his head.

"My mother!" cried Agricola, running to Frances.

"My wife!" cried Dagobert, as he also rose, and advanced to meet the unfortunate woman.

"On your knees, dear mother!" said Agricola, stooping down to embrace her affectionately. "Get up, I entreat you!"

"No, my child," said Frances, in her mild, firm accents, "I will not rise, till your father has forgiven me. I have wronged him much—now I know it."

"Forgive you, my poor wife?" said the soldier, as he drew near with emotion. "Have I ever accused you, except in my first transport of despair? No, no; it was the bad priests that I accused, and there I was right. Well! I have you again," added he, assisting his son to raise Frances; "one grief the less. They

have then restored you to liberty? Yesterday, I could not even learn in what prison they had put you. I have so many cares that I could not think of you only. But come, dear wife: sit down!"

"How feeble you are, dear mother!—how cold—how pale!" said Agricola with anguish, his eyes filling with tears.

"Why did you not let us know?" added he. "We would have gone to fetch you. But how you tremble! Your hands are frozen!" continued the smith, as he knelt down before Frances. Then, turning towards Mother Bunch: "Pray, make a little fire directly."

"I thought of it, as soon as your father came in, Agricola, but there is no wood nor charcoal left."

"Then pray borrow some of Father Lorient, my dear sister. He is too good a fellow to refuse. My poor mother trembles so—she might fall ill."

Hardly had he said the words, than Mother Bunch went out. The smith rose from the ground, took the blanket from the bed, and carefully wrapped it about the knees and feet of his mother. Then, again kneeling down, he said to her: "Your hands, dear mother!" and, taking those feeble palms in his own, he tried to warm them with his breath.

Nothing could be more touching than this picture: the robust young man, with his energetic and resolute countenance, expressing by his looks the greatest tenderness, and paying the most delicate attentions to his poor, pale, trembling old mother.

Dagobert, kind-hearted as his son, went to fetch a pillow, and brought it to his wife, saying: "Lean forward a little, and I will put this pillow behind you; you will be more comfortable and warmer."

"How you both spoil me!" said Frances, trying to smile. "And you to be so kind, after all the ill I have done!" added she to Dagobert, as, disengaging one of her hands from those of her son, she took the soldier's hand and pressed it to her tearful eyes. "In prison," said she in a low voice, "I had time to repent."

Agricola's heart was near breaking at the thought that his pious and good mother, with her angelic purity, should for a moment have been confined in prison with so many miserable creatures. He would have made some attempt to console her on the subject of the painful past, but he feared to give a new shock to Dagobert, and was silent.

"Where is Gabriel, dear mother?" inquired he. "How is he? As you have seen him, tell us all about him."

"I have seen Gabriel," said Frances, drying her tears; "he is confined at home. His superiors have rigorously forbidden his going out. Luckily, they did not prevent his receiving me, for his words and counsels have opened my eyes to many things. It is from him that I learned how guilty I had been to you, my poor husband."

"How so?" asked Dagobert.

"Why, you know that if I caused you so much grief, it was not from wickedness. When I saw you in such despair, I suffered almost as much myself; but I durst not tell you so, for fear of breaking my oath. I had resolved to keep it, believing that I did well, believing that it was my duty. And yet something told me that it could not be my duty to cause you so much pain. 'Alas, my God! enlighten me!' I exclaimed in my prison, as I knelt down and prayed, in spite of the mockeries of the other women. 'Why should a just and pious work, commanded by my confessor, the most respectable of men, overwhelm me and mine with so much misery? 'Have mercy on me, my God, and teach me if I have done wrong without knowing it!' As I prayed with fervor, God heard me, and inspired me with the idea of applying to Gabriel. 'I thank Thee, Father! I will obey!' said I within myself. 'Gabriel is like my own child; but he is also a priest, a martyr—almost a saint. If any one in the world imitates the charity of our blessed Saviour, it is surely he. When I leave this prison, I will go and consult him and he will clear up my doubts.'"

"You are right, dear mother," cried Agricola; "it was a thought from heaven. Gabriel is an angel of purity, courage, nobleness—the type of the true and good priest!"

"Ah, poor wife!" said Dagobert, with bitterness; "if you had never had any confessor but Gabriel!"

"I thought of it before he went on his journey," said Frances, with simplicity. "I should have liked to confess to the dear boy—but I fancied Abbe Dubois would be offended, and that Gabriel would be too indulgent with regard to my sins.

"Your sins, poor dear mother?" said Agricola. "As if you ever committed any!"

"And what did Gabriel tell you?" asked the soldier.

"Alas, my dear! had I but had such an interview with him sooner! What I told him of Abbe Dubois roused his suspicions, and he questioned me, dear child, as to many things of which he had never spoken to me before. Then I opened to him my whole heart, and he did the same to me, and we both made sad discoveries with regard to persons whom we had always thought very respectable, and who yet had deceived each of us, unknown to the other."

"How so?"

"Why, they used to tell him, under the seal of secrecy, things that were supposed to come from me; and they used to tell me, under the same seal of secrecy, things that were supposed to come from him. Thus, he confessed to me, that he did not feel at first any vocation for the priesthood; but they told him that I should not believe myself safe in this world or in the next, if he did not take orders, because I felt persuaded that I could best serve the Lord by giving Him so good a servant; and that yet I had never dared to ask Gabriel himself to give me this proof of his attachment, though I had taken him from the street, a deserted orphan, and brought him up as my own son, at the cost of labor and privations. Then, how could it be otherwise? The poor dear child, thinking he could please me, sacrificed himself. He entered the seminary."

"Horrible," said Agricola; "'tis an infamous snare, and, for the priests who were guilty of it, a sacrilegious lie!"

"During all that time," resumed Frances, "they were holding very different language to me. I was told that Gabriel felt his vocation, but that he durst not avow it to me, for fear of my being jealous on account of Agricola, who, being brought up as a workman, would not enjoy the same advantages as those which the priesthood would secure to Gabriel. So when he asked my permission to enter the seminary dear child! he entered it with regret, but he thought he was making me so happy!—instead of discouraging this idea, I did all in my power to persuade him to follow it, assuring him that he could not do better, and that it would occasion me great joy. You understand, I exaggerated, for fear he should think me jealous on account of Agricola."

"What an odious machination!" said Agricola, in amazement. "They were speculating in this unworthy manner upon your mutual devotion. Thus Gabriel saw the expression of your dearest wish in the almost forced encouragement given to his resolution."

"Little by little, however, as Gabriel has the best heart in the world, the vocation really came to him. That was natural enough—he was born to console those who suffer, and devote himself for the unfortunate. He would never have spoken to me of the past, had it not been for this morning's interview. But then I beheld him, who is usually so mild and gentle, become indignant, exasperated, against M. Rodin and another person whom he accuses. He had serious complaints against them already, but these discoveries, he says, will make up the measure."

At these words of Frances, Dagobert pressed his hand to his forehead, as if to recall something to his memory. For some minutes he had listened with surprise, and almost terror, to the account of these secret plots, conducted with such deep and crafty dissimulation.

Frances continued: "When at last I acknowledged to Gabriel, that by the advice of Abbe Dubois, my confessor, I had delivered to a stranger the children confined to my husband—General Simon's daughters—the dear boy blamed me, though with great regret, not for having wished to instruct the poor orphans in the truths of our holy religion, but for having acted without the consent of my husband, who alone was answerable before God and man for the charge entrusted to him. Gabriel severely censured Abbe Dubois' conduct, who had given me, he said, bad and perfidious counsels; and then, with the sweetness of an angel, the dear boy consoled me, and exhorted me to come and tell you all. My poor husband! he would fain have accompanied me, for I had scarcely courage to come hither, so strongly did I feel the wrong I had done you; but, unfortunately, Gabriel is confined at the seminary by the strict order of his superiors; he could not come with me, and—"

Here Dagobert, who seemed much agitated, abruptly interrupted his wife. "One word, Frances," said he; "for, in truth, in the midst of so many cares, and black, diabolical plots, one loses one's memory, and the head begins to wander. Didst not tell me, the day the children disappeared, that Gabriel, when taken in by you, had round his neck a bronze medal, and in his pocket a book filled with papers in a foreign language?"

"Yes, my dear."

"And this medal and these papers were afterwards delivered to your confessor?"

"Yes, my dear."

"And Gabriel never spoke of them since?"

"Never."

Agricola, hearing this from his mother, looked at her with surprise, and exclaimed: "Then Gabriel has the same interest as the daughters of General Simon, or Mdlle. de Cardoville, to be in the Rue Saint-Francois to-morrow?"

"Certainly," said Dagobert. "And now do you remember what he said to us, just after my arrival—that, in a few days, he would need our support in a serious matter?"

"Yes, father."

"And he is kept a prisoner at his seminary! And he tells your mother that he has to complain of his superiors! and he asked us for our support with so sad and grave an air, that I said to him—"

"He would speak so, if about to engage in a deadly duel," interrupted Agricola. "True, father! and yet you, who are a good judge of valor, acknowledged that Gabriel's courage was equal to yours. For him so to fear his superiors, the danger must be great indeed."

"Now that I have heard your mother, I understand it all," said Dagobert. "Gabriel is like Rose and Blanche, like Mdlle. de Cardoville, like your mother, like all of us, perhaps—the victim of a secret conspiracy of wicked priests. Now that I know their dark machinations, their infernal perseverance, I see," added the soldier, in a whisper, "that it requires strength to struggle against them. I had not the least idea of their power."

"You are right, father; for those who are hypocritical and wicked do as much harm as those who are good and charitable, like Gabriel, do good. There is no more implacable enemy than a bad priest."

"I know it, and that's what frightens me; for my poor children are in their hands. But is all lost? Shall I bring myself to give them up without an effort? Oh, no, no! I will not show any weakness—and yet, since your mother told us of these diabolical plots, I do not know how it is but I seem less strong, less resolute. What is passing around me appears so terrible. The spiriting away of these children is no longer an isolated fact—it is one of the ramifications of a vast conspiracy, which surrounds and threatens us all. It seems to me as if I and those I love walked together in darkness, in the midst of serpents, in the midst of snares that we can neither see nor struggle against. Well! I'll speak out! I have never feared death—I am not a coward and yet I confess—yes, I confess it—these black robes frighten me—"

Dagobert pronounced these words in so sincere a tone, that his son started, for he shared the same impression. And it was quite natural. Frank, energetic, resolute characters, accustomed to act and fight in the light of day, never feel but one fear—and that is, to be ensnared and struck in the dark by enemies that escape their grasp. Thus, Dagobert had encountered death twenty times; and yet, on hearing his wife's simple revelation of this dark tissue of lies, and treachery, and crime, the soldier felt a vague sense of fear; and, though nothing was changed in the conditions of his nocturnal enterprise against the convent, it now appeared to him in a darker and more dangerous light.

The silence, which had reigned for some moments, was interrupted by Mother Bunch's return. The latter, knowing that the interview between Dagobert, his wife, and Agricola, ought not have any importunate witness, knocked lightly at the door, and remained in the passage with Father Lorient.

"Can we come in, Mme. Frances?" asked the sempstress. "Here is Father Lorient, bringing some wood."

"Yes, yes; come in, my good girl," said Agricola, whilst his father wiped the cold sweat from his forehead.

The door opened, and the worthy dyer appeared, with his hands and arms of an amaranthine color; on one side, he carried a basket of wood, and on the other some live coal in a shovel.

"Good-evening to the company!" said Daddy Lorient. "Thank you for having thought of me, Mme. Frances. You know that my shop and everything in it are at your service. Neighbors should help one another; that's my motto! You were kind enough, I should think, to my late wife!"

Then, placing the wood in a corner, and giving the shovel to Agricola, the worthy dyer, guessing from

the sorrowful appearance of the different actors in this scene, that it would be impolite to prolong his visit, added: "You don't want anything else, Mme. Frances?"

"No, thank you, Father Lorient."

"Then, good-evening to the company!" said the dyer; and, addressing Mother Bunch, he added: "Don't forget the letter for M. Dagobert. I durstn't touch it for fear of leaving the marks of my four fingers and thumb in amaranthine! But, good evening to the company!" and Father Lorient went out.

"M. Dagobert, here is a letter," said Mother Bunch. She set herself to light the fire in the stove, while Agricola drew his mother's arm-chair to the hearth.

"See what it is, my boy," said Dagobert to his son; "my head is so heavy that I cannot see clear." Agricola took the letter, which contained only a few lines, and read it before he looked at the signature.

"At Sea, December 25th, 1831.

"I avail myself of a few minutes' communication with a ship bound direct for Europe, to write to you, my old comrade, a few hasty lines, which will reach you probably by way of Havre, before the arrival of my last letters from India. You must by this time be at Paris, with my wife and child—tell them—I am unable to say more—the boat is departing. Only one word; I shall soon be in France. Do not forget the 13th February; the future of my wife and child depends upon it.

"Adieu, my friend! Believe in my eternal gratitude.

"SIMON."

"Agricola—quick! look to your father!" cried the hunchback.

From the first words of this letter, which present circumstances made so cruelly applicable, Dagobert had become deadly pale. Emotion, fatigue, exhaustion, joined to this last blow, made him stagger.

His son hastened to him, and supported him in his arms. But soon the momentary weakness passed away, and Dagobert, drawing his hand across his brow, raised his tall figure to its full height. Then, whilst his eye sparkled, his rough countenance took an expression of determined resolution, and he exclaimed, in wild excitement: "No, no! I will not be a traitor; I will not be a coward. The black robes shall not frighten me; and, this night, Rose and Blanche Simon shall be free!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE PENAL CODE.

Startled for a moment by the dark and secret machinations of the black robes, as he called them, against the persons he most loved, Dagobert might have hesitated an instant to attempt the deliverance of Rose and Blanche; but his indecision ceased directly on the reading of Marshal Simon's letter, which came so timely to remind him of his sacred duties.

To the soldier's passing dejection had succeeded a resolution full of calm and collected energy.

"Agricola, what o'clock is it?" asked he of his son.

"Just struck nine, father."

"You must make me, directly, an iron hook—strong enough to support my weight, and wide enough to hold on the coping of a wall. This stove will be forge and anvil; you will find a hammer in the house; and, for iron," said the soldier, hesitating, and looking around him, "as for iron—here is some!"

So saying, the soldier took from the hearth a strong pair of tongs, and presented them to his son, adding: "Come, my boy! blow up the fire, blow it to a white heat, and forge me this iron!"

On these words, Frances and Agricola looked at each other with surprise; the smith remained mute and confounded, not knowing the resolution of his father, and the preparations he had already commenced with the needlewoman's aid.

"Don't you hear me, Agricola," repeated Dagobert, still holding the pair of tongs in his hand; "you must make me a hook directly."

"A hook, father?—for what purpose?"

"To tie to the end of a cord that I have here. There must be a loop at one end large enough to fix it securely."

"But this cord—this hook—for what purpose are they?"

"To scale the walls of the convent, if I cannot get in by the door."

"What convent?" asked Frances of her son.

"How, father?" cried the latter, rising abruptly. "You still think of that?"

"Why! what else should I think of?"

"But, father, it is impossible; you will never attempt such an enterprise."

"What is it, my child?" asked Frances, with anxiety. "Where is father going?"

"He is going to break into the convent where Marshal Simon's daughters are confined, and carry them off."

"Great God! my poor husband—a sacrilege!" cried Frances, faithful to her pious traditions, and, clasping her hands together, she endeavored to rise and approach Dagobert.

The soldier, foreseeing that he would have to contend with observations and prayers of all sorts, and resolved not to yield, determined to cut short all useless supplications, which would only make him lose precious time. He said, therefore, with a grave, severe, and almost solemn air, which showed the inflexibility of his determination: "Listen to me, wife—and you also, my son—when, at my age, a man makes up his mind to do anything, he knows the reason why. And when a man has once made up his mind, neither wife nor child can alter it. I have resolved to do my duty; so spare yourselves useless words. It may be your duty to talk to me as you have done; but it is over now, and we will say no more about it. This evening I must be master in my own house."

Timid and alarmed, Frances did not dare to utter a word, but she turned a supplicating glance towards her son.

"Father," said the latter, "one word more—only one."

"Let us hear," replied Dagobert, impatiently.

"I will not combat your resolution; but I will prove to you that you do not know to what you expose yourself."

"I know it all," replied the soldier, in an abrupt tone. "The undertaking is a serious one; but it shall not be said that I neglected any means to accomplish what I promised to do."

"But father, you do not know to what danger you expose yourself," said the smith, much alarmed.

"Talk of danger! talk of the porter's gun and the gardener's scythe!" said Dagobert, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. "Talk of them, and have done with it for, after all, suppose I were to leave my carcass in the convent, would not you remain to your mother? For twenty years, you were accustomed to do without me. It will be all the less trying to you."

"And I, alas! am the cause of these misfortunes!" cried the poor mother.
"Ah! Gabriel had good reason to blame me."

"Mme. Frances, be comforted," whispered the sempstress, who had drawn near to Dagobert's wife. "Agricola will not suffer his father to expose himself thus."

After a moment's hesitation, the smith resumed, in an agitated voice: "I know you too well, father, to think of stopping you by the fear of death."

"Of what danger, then, do you speak?"

"Of a danger from which even you will shrink, brave as you are," said the young man, in a voice of emotion, that forcibly struck his father.

"Agricola," said the soldier, roughly and severely, "that remark is cowardly, you are insulting."

"Father—"

"Cowardly!" resumed the soldier, angrily; "because it is cowardice to wish to frighten a man from his duty—insulting! because you think me capable of being so frightened."

"Oh, M. Dagobert!" exclaimed the sewing-girl, "you do not understand Agricola."

"I understand him too well," answered the soldier harshly.

Painfully affected by the severity of his father, but firm in his resolution, which sprang from love and respect, Agricola resumed, whilst his heart beat violently. "Forgive me, if I disobey you, father; but, were you to hate me for it, I must tell you to what you expose yourself by scaling at night the walls of a convent—"

"My son! do you dare?" cried Dagobert, his countenance inflamed with rage—"Agricola!" exclaimed Frances, in tears. "My husband!"

"M. Dagobert, listen to Agricola!" exclaimed Mother Bunch. "It is only in your interest that he speaks."

"Not one word more!" replied the soldier, stamping his foot with anger.

"I tell you, father," exclaimed the smith, growing fearfully pale as he spoke, "that you risk being sent to the galleys!"

"Unhappy boy!" cried Dagobert, seizing his son by the arm; "could you not keep that from me—rather than expose me to become a traitor and a coward?" And the soldier shuddered, as he repeated: "The galleys!"—and, bending down his head, remained mute, pensive, withered, as it were, by those blasting words.

"Yes, to enter an inhabited place by night, in such a manner, is what the law calls burglary, and punishes with the galleys," cried Agricola, at once grieved and rejoicing at his father's depression of mind—"yes, father, the galleys, if you are taken in the act; and there are ten chances to one that you would be so. Mother Bunch has told you, the convent is guarded. This morning, had you attempted to carry off the two young ladies in broad daylight, you would have been arrested; but, at least, the attempt would have been an open one, with a character of honest audacity about it, that hereafter might have procured your acquittal. But to enter by night, and by scaling the walls—I tell you, the galleys would be the consequence. Now, father, decide. Whatever you do, I will do also—for you shall not go alone. Say but the word, and I will forge the hook for you—I have here hammer and pincers—and in an hour we will set out."

A profound silence followed these words—a silence that was only interrupted by the stifled sobs of Frances, who muttered to herself in despair: "Alas! this is the consequence of listening to Abbe Dubois!"

It was in vain that Mother Bunch tried to console Frances. She was herself alarmed, for the soldier was capable of braving even infamy, and Agricola had determined to share the perils of his father.

In spite of his energetic and resolute character, Dagobert remained for some time in a kind of stupor. According to his military habits, he had looked at this nocturnal enterprise only as a ruse de guerre, authorized by his good cause, and by the inexorable fatality of his position; but the words of his son brought him back to the fearful reality, and left him the choice of a terrible alternative—either to betray the confidence of Marshal Simon, and set at naught the last wishes of the mother of the orphan—or else to expose himself, and above all his son, to lasting disgrace—without even the certainty of delivering the orphans after all.

Drying her eyes, bathed in tears, Frances exclaimed, as if by a sudden inspiration: "Dear me! I have just thought of it. There is perhaps a way of getting these dear children from the convent without violence."

"How so, mother?" said Agricola, hastily.

"It is Abbe Dubois, who had them conveyed thither; but Gabriel supposes, that he probably acted by the advice of M. Rodin.

"And if that were so, mother, it would be in vain to apply to M. Rodin.

We should get nothing from him."

"Not from him—but perhaps from that powerful abbe, who is Gabriel's superior, and has always patronized him since his first entrance at the seminary."

"What abbe, mother?"

"Abbe d'Aigrigny."

"True mother; before being a priest, he was a soldier he may be more accessible than others—and yet —"

"D'Aigrigny!" cried Dagobert, with an expression of hate and horror. "There is then mixed up with these treasons, a man who was a soldier before being a priest, and whose name is D'Aigrigny?"

"Yes, father; the Marquis d'Aigrigny—before the Restoration, in the service of Russia—but, in 1815, the Bourbons gave him a regiment."

"It is he!" said Dagobert, in a hollow voice. "Always the same! like an evil spirit—to the mother, father, children."

"What do you mean, father?"

"The Marquis d'Aigrigny!" replied Dagobert. "Do you know what is this man? Before he was a priest, he was the murderer of Rose and Blanche's mother, because she despised his love. Before he was a priest, he fought against his country, and twice met General Simon face to face in war. Yes; while the general was prisoner at Leipsic, covered with wounds at Waterloo, the turncoat marquis triumphed with the Russians and English!—Under the Bourbons, this same renegade, loaded with honors, found himself once more face to face with the persecuted soldier of the empire. Between them, this time, there was a mortal duel—the marquis was wounded—General Simon was proscribed, condemned, driven into exile. The renegade, you say, has become a priest. Well! I am now certain, that it is he who has carried off Rose and Blanche, in order to wreak on them his hatred of their father and mother. It is the infamous D'Aigrigny, who holds them in his power. It is no longer the fortune of these children that I have to defend; it is their life—do you hear what I say?—their very life?"

"What, father! do you think this man capable—"

"A traitor to his country, who finishes by becoming a mock priest, is capable of anything. I tell you, that, perhaps at this moment he may be killing those children by a slow-fire!" exclaimed the soldier, in a voice of agony. "To separate them from one another was to begin to kill them. Yes!" added Dagobert, with an exasperation impossible to describe; "the daughters of Marshal Simon are in the power of the Marquis d'Aigrigny and his band, and I hesitate to attempt their rescue, for fear of the galleys! The galleys!" added he, with a convulsive burst of laughter; "what do I care for the galleys? Can they send a corpse there? If this last attempt fail, shall I not have the right to blow my brains out?—Put the iron in the fire, my boy—quick! time presses—and strike while the iron's hot!"

"But your son goes with you!" exclaimed Frances, with a cry of maternal despair. Then rising, she threw herself at the feet of Dagobert, and said: "If you are arrested, he will be arrested also."

"To escape the galleys, he will do as I do. I have two pistols."

"And without you—without him," cried the unhappy mother, extending her hands in supplication, "what will become of me?"

"You are right—I was too selfish," said Dagobert. "I will go alone."

"You shall not go alone, father," replied Agricola.

"But your mother?"

"Mother Bunch sees what is passing; she will go to Mr. Hardy, my master, and tell him all. He is the most generous of men, and my mother will have food and shelter for the rest of her days."

"And I am the cause of all!" cried Frances, wringing her hands in despair. "Punish me, oh, heaven! for it is my fault. I gave up those children. I shall be punished by the death of my child!"

"Agricola, you shall not go with me—I forbid it!" said Dagobert, clasping his son closely to his breast.

"What! when I have pointed out the danger, am I to be the first to shrink from it? you cannot think thus lowly of me, father! Have I not also some one to deliver? The good, the generous Mdlle. de

Cardoville, who tried to save me from a prison, is a captive in her turn. I will follow you, father. It is my right, my duty, my determination."

So saying, Agricola put into the heated stove the tongs that were intended to form the hook. "Alas! may heaven have pity upon us!" cried his poor mother, sobbing as she still knelt, whilst the soldier seemed a prey to the most violent internal struggle.

"Do not cry so, dear mother; you will break my heart," said Agricola, as he raised her with the sempstress's help. "Be comforted! I have exaggerated the danger of my father. By acting prudently, we two may succeed in our enterprise; without much risk—eh, father?" added he, with a significant glance at Dagobert. "Once more, be comforted, dear mother. I will answer for everything. We will deliver Marshal Simon's daughters, and Mdlle. de Cardoville too. Sister, give me the hammer and pincers, there in the press."

The sempstress, drying her tears, did as desired, while Agricola, by the help of bellows, revived the fire in which the tongs were heating.

"Here are your tools, Agricola," said the hunchback, in a deeply-agitated voice, as she presented them with trembling hands to the smith, who, with the aid of the pincers, soon drew from the fire the white-hot tongs, and, with vigorous blows of the hammer, formed them into a hook, taking the stove for his anvil.

Dagobert had remained silent and pensive. Suddenly he said to Frances, taking her by the hand: "You know what metal your son is. To prevent his following me would now be impossible. But do not be afraid, dear wife; we shall succeed—at least, I hope so. And if we should not succeed—if Agricola and me should be arrested—well! we are not cowards; we shall not commit suicide; but father and son will go arm in arm to prison, with heads high and proud, look like two brave men who have done their duty. The day of trial must come, and we will explain all, honestly, openly—we will say, that, driven to the last extremity, finding no support, no protection in the law, we were forced to have recourse to violence. So hammer away, my boy!" added Dagobert, addressing his son, pounding the hot iron; "forge, forge, without fear. Honest judges will absolve honest men."

"Yes, father, you are right, be at ease dear mother! The judges will see the difference between rascals who scale walls in order to rob, and an old soldier and his son who, at peril of their liberty, their life, their honor, have sought only to deliver unhappy victims."

"And if this language should not be heard," resumed Dagobert, "so much the worse for them! It will not be your son, or husband, who will be dishonored in the eyes of honest people. If they send us to the galleys, and we have courage to survive—the young and the old convict will wear their chains proudly—and the renegade marquis, the traitor priest, will bear more shame than we. So, forge without fear, my boy! There are things which the galleys themselves cannot disgrace—our good conscience and our honor! But now," he added, "two words with my good Mother Bunch. It grows late, and time presses. On entering the garden, did you remark if the windows of the convent were far from the ground?"

"No, not very far, M. Dagobert—particularly on that side which is opposite to the madhouse, where Mdlle. de Cardoville is confined."

"How did you manage to speak to that young lady?"

"She was on the other side of an open paling, which separates the two gardens."

"Excellent!" said Agricola, as he continued to hammer the iron: "we can easily pass from one garden to the other. The madhouse may perhaps be the readier way out. Unfortunately, you do not know, Mdlle. de Cardoville's chamber."

"Yes, I do," returned the work-girl, recollecting herself. "She is lodged in one of the wings, and there is a shade over her window, painted like canvas, with blue and white stripes."

"Good! I shall not forget that."

"And can you form no guess as to where are the rooms of my poor children?" said Dagobert.

After a moment's reflection, Mother Bunch answered, "They are opposite to the chamber occupied by Mdlle. de Cardoville, for she makes signs to them from her window: and I now remember she told me, that their two rooms are on different stories, one on the ground-floor, and the other up one pair of stairs."

"Are these windows grated?" asked the smith.

"I do not know."

"Never mind, my good girl: with these indications we shall do very well," said Dagobert. "For the rest, I have my plans."

"Some water, my little sister," said Agricola, "that I may cool my iron." Then addressing his father: "Will this hook do?"

"Yes, my boy; as soon as it is cold we will fasten the cord."

For some time, Frances Baudoin had remained upon her knees, praying with fervor. She implored Heaven to have pity on Agricola and Dagobert, who, in their ignorance, were about to commit a great crime; and she entreated that the celestial vengeance might fall upon her only, as she alone had been the cause of the fatal resolution of her son and husband.

Dagobert and Agricola finished their preparations in silence. They were both very pale, and solemnly grave. They felt all the danger of so desperate an enterprise.

The clock at Saint-Mery's struck ten. The sound of the bell was faint, and almost drowned by the lashing of the wind and rain, which had not ceased for a moment.

"Ten o'clock!" said Dagobert, with a start. "There is not a minute to lose. Take the sack, Agricola."

"Yes, father."

As he went to fetch the sack, Agricola approached Mother Bunch, who was hardly able to sustain herself, and said to her in a rapid whisper: "If we are not here to-morrow, take care of my mother. Go to M. Hardy, who will perhaps have returned from his journey. Courage, my sister! embrace me. I leave poor mother to you." The smith, deeply affected, pressed the almost fainting girl in his arms.

"Come, old Spoil-sport," said Dagobert: "you shall be our scout." Approaching his wife, who, just risen from the ground, was clasping her son's head to her bosom, and covering it with tears and kisses, he said to her, with a semblance of calmness and serenity: "Come, my dear wife, be reasonable! Make us a good fire. In two or three hours we will bring home the two poor children, and a fine young lady. Kiss me! that will bring me luck."

Frances threw herself on her husband's neck, without uttering a word. This mute despair, mingled with convulsive sobs, was heart-rending. Dagobert was obliged to tear himself from his wife's arms, and striving to conceal his emotion, he said to his son, in an agitated voice: "Let us go—she unmans me. Take care of her, my good Mother Bunch. Agricola—come!"

The soldier slipped the pistols into the pocket of his great coat, and rushed towards the door, followed by Spoil-sport.

"My son, let me embrace you once more—alas! it is perhaps for the last time!" cried the unfortunate mother, incapable of rising, but stretching out her arms to Agricola. "Forgive me! it is all my fault."

The smith turned back, mingled his tears with those of his mother—for he also wept—and murmured, in a stifled voice: "Adieu, dear mother! Be comforted. We shall soon meet again."

Then, escaping from the embrace, he joined his father upon the stairs.

Frances Baudoin heaved a long sigh, and fell almost lifeless into the needlewoman's arms.

Dagobert and Agricola left the Rue Brise-Miche in the height of the storm, and hastened with great strides towards the Boulevard de l'Hopital, followed by the dog.

CHAPTER XIII.

BURGLARY.

Half-past eleven had just struck, when Dagobert and his son arrived on the Boulevard de l'Hopital.

The wind blew violently, and the rain fell down in torrents, but notwithstanding the thickness of the watery clouds, it was tolerably light, thanks to the late rising of the moon. The tall, dark trees, and the

white walls of the convent garden, were distinguishable in the midst of the pale glimmer. Afar off, a street lamp, acted on by the wind, with its red lights hardly visible through the mist and rain, swung backwards and forwards over the dirty causeway of the solitary boulevard.

At rare intervals, they heard, at a very great distance, the rattle and rumble of a coach, returning home late; then all was again silent.

Since their departure from the Rue Brise-Miche, Dagobert and his son had hardly exchanged a word. The design of these two brave men was noble and generous, and yet, resolute but pensive, they glided through the darkness like bandits, at the hour of nocturnal crimes.

Agricola carried on his shoulders the sack containing the cord, the hook, and the iron bar; Dagobert leaned upon the arm of his son, and Spoil sport followed his master.

"The bench, where we sat down, must be close by," said Dagobert, stopping.

"Yes," said Agricola, looking around; "here it is, father."

"It is oily half-past eleven—we must wait for midnight," resumed Dagobert. "Let us be seated for an instant, to rest ourselves, and decide upon our plan."

After a moment's silence, the soldier took his son's hands between his own, and thus continued: "Agricola, my child—it is yet time. Let me go alone, I entreat you. I shall know very well how to get through the business; but the nearer the moment comes, the more I fear to drag you into this dangerous enterprise."

"And the nearer the moment comes, father, the more I feel I may be of some use; but, be it good or bad, I will share the fortune of your adventure. Our object is praiseworthy; it is a debt of honor that you have to pay, and I will take one half of it. Do not fancy that I will now draw back. And so, dear father, let us think of our plan of action."

"Then you will come?" said Dagobert, stifling a sigh.

"We must do everything," proceeded Agricola, "to secure success. You have already noticed the little garden-door, near the angle of the wall—that is excellent."

"We shall get by that way into the garden, and look immediately for the open paling."

"Yes; for on one side of this paling is the wing inhabited by Mdlle. de Cardoville, and on the other that part of the convent in which the general's daughters are confined."

At this moment, Spoil-sport, who was crouching at Dagobert's feet, rose suddenly, and pricked up his ears, as if to listen.

"One would think that Spoil-sport heard something," said Agricola. They listened—but heard only the wind, sounding through the tall trees of the boulevard.

"Now I think of it, father—when the garden-door is once open, shall we take Spoil-sport with us?"

"Yes; for if there is a watch-dog, he will settle him. And then he will give us notice of the approach of those who go the rounds. Besides, he is so intelligent, so attached to Rose and Blanche, that (who knows?) he may help to discover the place where they are. Twenty times I have seen him find them in the woods, by the most extraordinary instinct."

A slow and solemn knell here rose above the noise of the wind: it was the first stroke of twelve.

That note seemed to echo mournfully through the souls of Agricola and his father. Mute with emotion, they shuddered, and by a spontaneous movement, each grasped the hand of the other. In spite of themselves, their hearts kept time to every stroke of the clock, as each successive vibration was prolonged through the gloomy silence of the night.

At the last stroke, Dagobert said to his son, in a firm voice: "It is midnight. Shake hands, and let us forward!"

The moment was decisive and solemn. "Now, father," said Agricola, "we will act with as much craft and daring as thieves going to pillage a strong box."

So saying, the smith took from the sack the cord and hook; Dagobert armed himself with the iron bar, and both advanced cautiously, following the wall in the direction of the little door, situated not far from the angle formed by the street and the boulevard. They stopped from time to time, to listen attentively,

trying to distinguish those noises which were not caused either by the high wind or the rain.

It continued light enough for them to be able to see surrounding objects, and the smith and the soldier soon gained the little door, which appeared much decayed, and not very strong.

"Good!" said Agricola to his father. "It will yield at one blow."

The smith was about to apply his shoulder vigorously to the door, when Spoil-sport growled hoarsely, and made a "point." Dagobert silenced the dog with a word, and grasping his son's arm, said to him in a whisper: "Do not stir. The dog has scented some one in the garden."

Agricola and his father remained for some minutes motionless, holding their breath and listening. The dog, in obedience to his master, no longer growled, but his uneasiness and agitation were displayed more and more. Yet they heard nothing.

"The dog must have been deceived, father," whispered Agricola.

"I am sure of the contrary. Do not move."

After some seconds of expectation, Spoil-sport crouched down abruptly, and pushed his nose as far as possible under the door, snuffing up the air.

"They are coming," said Dagobert hastily, to his son.

"Let us draw off a little distance," replied Agricola.

"No," said his father; "we must listen. It will be time to retire, if they open the door. Here, Spoil-sport! down!"

The dog obeyed, and withdrawing from the door, crouched down at the feet of his master. Some seconds after, they heard a sort of splashing on the damp ground, caused by heavy footsteps in puddles of water, and then the sound of words, which carried away by the wind, did not reach distinctly the ears of the soldier and the smith.

"They are the people of whom Mother Bunch told us, going their round," said Agricola to his father.

"So much the better. There will be an interval before they come round again, and we shall have some two hours before us, without interruption. Our affair is all right now."

By degrees, the sound of the footsteps became less and less distinct, and at last died away altogether.

"Now, quick! we must not lose any time," said Dagobert to his son, after waiting about ten minutes; "they are far enough. Let us try to open the door."

Agricola leaned his powerful shoulder against it, and pushed vigorously; but the door did not give way, notwithstanding its age.

"Confound it!" said Agricola; "there is a bar on the inside. I am sure of it, or these old planks would not have resisted my weight."

"What is to be done?"

"I will scale the wall by means of the cord and hook, and open the door from the other side."

So saying, Agricola took the cord, and after several attempts, succeeded in fixing the hook on the coping of the wall.

"Now, father, give me a leg up; I will help myself up with the cord; once astride on the wall, I can easily turn the hook and get down into the garden."

The soldier leaned against the wall, and joined his two hands, in the hollow of which his son placed one of his feet, then mounting upon the robust shoulders of his father, he was able, by help of the cord, and some irregularities in the wall, to reach the top. Unfortunately, the smith had not perceived that the coping of the wall was strewn with broken bottles, so that he wounded his knees and hands; but, for fear of alarming Dagobert, he repressed every exclamation of pain, and replacing the hook, he glided down the cord to the ground. The door was close by, and he hastened to it; a strong wooden bar had indeed secured it on the inside. This was removed, and the lock was in so bad a state, that it offered no resistance to a violent effort from Agricola.

The door was opened, and Dagobert entered the garden with Spoil-sport.

"Now," said the soldier to his son, "thanks to you, the worst is over. Here is a means of escape for the poor children, and Mdlle. de Cardoville. The thing is now to find them, without accident or delay. Spoil-sport will go before as a scout. Come, my good dog!" added Dagobert, "above all—fair and softly!"

Immediately, the intelligent animal advanced a few steps, sniffing and listening with the care and caution of a hound searching for the game.

By the half-light of the clouded moon, Dagobert and his son perceived round them a V-shaped grove of tall trees, at which several paths met. Uncertain which to choose, Agricola said to his father: "Let us take the path that runs alongside the wall. It will surely lead to some building."

"Right! Let us walk on the strips of grass, instead of through the mud. It will make less noise."

The father and son, preceded by the Siberian dog, kept for some time in a winding path, at no great distance from the wall. They stopped now and then to listen, or to satisfy themselves, before continuing their advance, with regard to the changing aspects of the trees and bushes, which, shaken by the wind, and faintly illumined by the pale light of the moon, often took strange and doubtful forms.

Half-past twelve struck as Agricola and his father reached a large iron gate which shut in that part of the garden reserved for the Superior—the same into which Mother Bunch had intruded herself, after seeing Rose Simon converse with Adrienne de Cardoville.

Through the bars of this gate, Agricola and his father perceived at a little distance an open paling, which joined a half-finished chapel, and beyond it a little square building.

"That is no doubt the building occupied by Mdlle. de Cardoville," said Agricola.

"And the building which contains the chambers of Rose and Blanche, but which we cannot see from here, is no doubt opposite it," said Dagobert. "Poor children! they are there, weeping tears of despair," added he, with profound emotion.

"Provided the gate be but open," said Agricola.

"It will probably be so—being within the walls."

"Let us go on gently."

The gate was only fastened by the catch of the lock. Dagobert was about to open it, when Agricola said to him: "Take care! do not make it creak on its hinges."

"Shall I push it slowly or suddenly?"

"Let me manage it," said Agricola; and he opened the gate so quickly, that it creaked very little; still the noise might have been plainly heard, in the silence of the night, during one of the lulls between the squalls of wind.

Agricola and his father remained motionless for a moment, listening uneasily, before they ventured to pass through the gate. Nothing stirred, however; all remained calm and still. With fresh courage, they entered the reserved garden.

Hardly had the dog arrived on this spot, when he exhibited tokens of extraordinary delight. Picking up his ears, wagging his tail, bounding rather than running, he had soon reached the paling where, in the morning, Rose Simon had for a moment conversed with Mdlle. de Cardoville. He stopped an instant at this place, as if at fault, and turned round and round like a dog seeking the scent.

Dagobert and his son, leaving Spoil-sport to his instinct, followed his least movements with intense interest, hoping everything from his intelligence and his attachment to the orphans.

"It was no doubt near this paling that Rose stood when Mother Bunch saw her," said Dagobert. "Spoil-sport is on her track. Let him alone."

After a few seconds, the dog turned his head towards Dagobert, and started at full trot in the direction of a door on the ground-floor of a building, opposite to that occupied by Adrienne. Arrived at this door, the dog lay down, seemingly waiting for Dagobert.

"No doubt of it! the children are there!" said Dagobert, hastening to rejoin Spoil-sport; "it was by this

door that they took Rose into the house."

"We must see if the windows are grated," said Agricola, following his father.

"Well, old fellow!" whispered the soldier, as he came up to the dog and pointed to the building, "are Rose and Blanche there?"

The dog lifted his head, and answered by a joyful bark. Dagobert had just time to seize the mouth of the animal with his hands.

"He will ruin all!" exclaimed the smith. "They have, perhaps, heard him."

"No," said Dagobert. "But there is no longer any doubt—the children are here."

At this instant, the iron gate, by which the soldier and his son had entered the reserved garden, and which they had left open, fell to with a loud noise.

"They've shut us in," said Agricola, hastily; "and there is no other issue."

For a moment, the father and son looked in dismay at each other; but Agricola instantly resumed: "The gate has perhaps shut of itself. I will make haste to assure myself of this, and to open it again if possible."

"Go quickly; I will examine the windows."

Agricola flew towards the gate, whilst Dagobert, gliding along the wall, soon reached the windows on the ground floor. They were four in number, and two of them were not grated. He looked up at the first story; it was not very far from the ground, and none of the windows had bars. It would then be easy for that one of the two sisters, who inhabited this story, once informed of their presence, to let herself down by means of a sheet, as the orphans had already done to escape from the inn of the White Falcon. But the difficult thing was to know which room she occupied. Dagobert thought they might learn this from the sister on the ground floor; but then there was another difficulty—at which of the four windows should they knock?

Agricola returned precipitately. "It was the wind, no doubt, which shut the gate," said he. "I have opened it again, and made it fast with a stone. But we have no time to lose."

"And how shall we know the windows of the poor children?" said Dagobert, anxiously.

"That is true," said Agricola, with uneasiness. "What is to be done?"

"To call them at hap-hazard," continued Dagobert, "would be to give the alarm."

"Oh, heavens!" cried Agricola, with increasing anguish. "To have arrived here, under their windows, and yet not to know!"

"Time presses," said Dagobert, hastily, interrupting his son; "we must run all risks."

"But how, father?"

"I will call out loud, 'Rose and Blanche'—in their state of despair, I am sure they do not sleep. They will be stirring at my first summons. By means of a sheet, fastened to the window, she who is on the first story will in five minutes be in our arms. As for the one on the ground floor—if her window is not grated, we can have her in a second. If it is, we shall soon loosen one of the bars."

"But, father—this calling out aloud?"

"Will not perhaps be heard."

"But if it is heard—all will be lost."

"Who knows? Before they have time to call the watch, and open several doors, the children may be delivered. Once at the entrance of the boulevard, and we shall be safe."

"It is a dangerous course; but I see no other."

"If there are only two men, I and Spoil-sport will keep them in check, while you will have time to carry off the children."

"Father, there is a better way—a surer one," cried Agricola, suddenly. "From what Mother Bunch told us, Mdlle. de Cardoville has corresponded by signs with Rose and Blanche."

"Yes."

"Hence she knows where they are lodged, as the poor children answered her from their windows."

"You are right. There is only that course to take. But how find her room?"

"Mother Bunch told me there was a shade over the window."

"Quick! we have only to break through a wooden fence. Have you the iron bar?"

"Here it is."

"Then, quick!"

In a few steps, Dagobert and his son had reached the paling. Three planks, torn away by Agricola, opened an easy passage.

"Remain here, father, and keep watch," said he to Dagobert, as he entered Dr. Baleinier's garden.

The indicated window was easily recognized. It was high and broad; a sort of shade surmounted it, for this window had once been a door, since walled in to the third of its height. It was protected by bars of iron, pretty far apart. Since some minutes, the rain had ceased. The moon, breaking through the clouds, shone full upon the building. Agricola, approaching the window, saw that the room was perfectly dark; but light came from a room beyond, through a door left half open. The smith, hoping that Mdlle. de Cardoville might be still awake, tapped lightly at the window. Soon after, the door in the background opened entirely, and Mdlle. de Cardoville, who had not yet gone to bed, came from the other chamber, dressed as she had been at her interview with Mother Bunch. Her charming features were visible by the light of the taper she held in her hand. Their present expression was that of surprise and anxiety. The young girl set down the candlestick on the table, and appeared to listen attentively as she approached the window. Suddenly she started and stopped abruptly. She had just discerned the face of a man, looking at her through the window. Agricola, fearing that Mdlle. de Cardoville would retire in terror to the next room, again tapped on the glass, and running the risk of being heard by others, said in a pretty loud voice: "It is Agricola Baudoin."

These words reached the ears of Adrienne. Instantly remembering her interview with Mother Bunch, she thought that Agricola and Dagobert must have entered the convent for the purpose of carrying off Rose and Blanche. She ran to the window, recognized Agricola in the clear moonlight, and cautiously opened the casement.

"Madame," said the smith, hastily; "there is not an instant to lose. The Count de Montbron is not in Paris. My father and myself have come to deliver you."

"Thanks, thanks, M. Agricola!" said Mdlle. de Cardoville, in a tone expressive of the most touching gratitude; "but think first of the daughters of General Simon."

"We do think of them, madame, I have come to ask you which are their windows."

"One is on the ground floor, the last on the garden-side; the other is exactly over it, on the first story."

"Then they are saved!" cried the smith.

"But let me see!" resumed Adrienne, hastily; "the first story is pretty high. You will find, near the chapel they are building, some long poles belonging to the scaffolding. They may be of use to you."

"They will be as good as a ladder, to reach the upstairs window. But now to think of you madame."

"Think only of the dear orphans. Time presses. Provided they are delivered to-night, it makes little difference to me to remain a day or two longer in this house."

"No, mademoiselle," cried the smith, "it is of the first importance that you should leave this place to-night. Interests are concerned, of which you know nothing. I am now sure of it."

"What do you mean?"

"I have not time to explain myself further; but I conjure you madame, to come. I can wrench out two of these bars; I will fetch a piece of iron."

"It is not necessary. They are satisfied with locking the outer door of this building, which I inhabit alone. You can easily break open the lock."

"And, in ten minutes, we shall be on the boulevard," said the smith. "Make yourself ready, madame; take a shawl, a bonnet, for the night is cold. I will return instantly."

"M. Agricola," said Adrienne, with tears in her eyes, "I know what you risk for my sake. I shall prove to you, I hope, that I have as good a memory as you have. You and your adopted sister are noble and valiant creatures, and I am proud to be indebted to you. But do not return for me till the daughters of Marshal Simon are in safety."

"Thanks to your directions, the thing will be done directly, madame. I fly to rejoin my father, and we will come together to fetch you."

Following the excellent advice of Mdlle. de Cardoville, Agricola took one of the long, strong poles that rested against the wall of the chapel, and, bearing it on his robust shoulders, hastened to rejoin his father. Hardly had Agricola passed the fence, to direct his steps towards the chapel, obscured in shadow, than Mdlle. de Cardoville thought she perceived a human form issue from one of the clumps of trees in the convent-garden, cross the path hastily, and disappear behind a high hedge of box. Alarmed at the sight, Adrienne in vain called to Agricola in a low voice, to bid him beware. He could not hear her; he had already rejoined his father, who, devoured by impatience, went from window to window with ever-increasing anguish.

"We are saved," whispered Agricola. "Those are the windows of the poor children—one on the ground floor, the other on the first story."

"At last!" said Dagobert, with a burst of joy impossible to describe. He ran to examine the windows. "They are not grated!" he exclaimed.

"Let us make sure, that one of them is there," said Agricola; "then, by placing this pole against the wall, I will climb up to the first story, which is not so very high."

"Right, my boy!—once there, tap at the window, and call Rose or Blanche. When she answers, come down. We will rest the pole against the window, and the poor child will slide along it. They are bold and active. Quick, quick! to work!"

"And then we will deliver Mdlle. de Cardoville."

Whilst Agricola placed his pole against the wall, and prepares to mount, Dagobert tapped at the panes of the last window on the ground floor, and said aloud: "It is I—Dagobert."

Rose Simon indeed occupied the chamber. The unhappy child, in despair at being separated from her sister, was a prey to a burning fever, and, unable to sleep, watered her pillow with her tears. At the sound of the tapping on the glass, she started up affrighted, then, hearing the voice of the soldier—that voice so familiar and so dear—she sat up in bed, pressed her hands across her forehead, to assure herself that she was not the plaything of a dream, and, wrapped in her long night-dress, ran to the window with a cry of joy. But suddenly—and before she could open the casement—two reports of fire-arms were heard, accompanied by loud cries of "Help! thieves!"

The orphan stood petrified with terror, her eyes mechanically fixed upon the window, through which she saw confusedly, by the light of the moon, several men engaged in a mortal struggle, whilst the furious barking of Spoil-sport was heard above all the incessant cries of "Help! Help! Thieves! Murder!"

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