

THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE.

CHAPTER XXXV.
SYMPATHY.

If it had been possible for Mdlle. de Cardoville to harbor any suspicion of the sincerity of Rodin's devotion, it must have given way before this reasoning, unfortunately so simple and undeniable. How could she suppose the faintest complicity between the Abbe d'Aigrigny and his secretary, when it was the latter who completely unveiled the machinations of his master, and exposed them to the tribunals? when in this, Rodin went even further than Mdlle. de Cardoville would herself have gone? Of what secret design could she suspect the Jesuit? At worst, of a desire to earn by his services the profitable patronage of the young lady. And then, had he not just now protested against this supposition, by declaring his devotion, not to Mdlle. de Cardoville—not to the fair, rich, noble lady—but to the high-souled and generous girl? Finally, as Rodin had said himself, could any but a miserable wretch fail to be interested in Adrienne's fate. A strange mixture of curiosity, surprise, and interest, was joined with Mdlle. de Cardoville's feelings of gratitude towards Rodin. Yet, as she recognized the superior mind under that humble exterior, she was suddenly struck with a grave suspicion. "Sir," said she to Rodin, "I always confess to the persons I esteem the doubts they may have inspired, so that they may justify themselves, and excuse me, if I am wrong."

Rodin looked at Mdlle. de Cardoville with surprise, as if mentally calculating the suspicions that she might entertain, and replied, after a moment's silence: "You are perhaps thinking of my journey to Cardoville, of my base proposals to your good and worthy bailiff? Oh! if you—"

"No, no, sir," said Adrienne, interrupting him; "you made that confession spontaneously, and I quite understand, that, blinded with regard to M. d'Aigrigny, you passively executed instructions repugnant to your delicacy. But how comes it, that, with your incontestable merits, you have so long occupied so mean a position in his service?"

"It is true," said Rodin, with a smile; "that must impress you unfavorably, my dear young lady; for a man of any capacity, who remains long in an inferior condition, has evidently some radical vice, some bad or base passion—"

"It is generally true, sir."

"And personally true—with regard to myself."

"What, sir! do you make this avowal?"

"Alas! I confess that I have a bad passion, to which, for forty years, I have sacrificed all chances of attaining to a better position."

"And this passion, sir?"

"Since I must make the unpleasant avowal, this passion is indolence—yes, indolence—the horror of all activity of mind, of all moral responsibility, of taking the lead in anything. With the twelve hundred francs that Abbe d'Aigrigny gave me, I was the happiest man in the world; I trusted in the nobleness of his views; his thoughts became mine, his wishes mine. My work once finished, returned to my poor little chamber, I lighted my fire, I dined on vegetables—then, taking up some book of philosophy, little known, and dreaming over it, I gave free course to my imagination, which, restrained all the day long, carried me through numberless theories to a delicious Utopia. Then, from the eminences of my intelligence, lifted up, Lord knows whither, by the audacity of my thoughts, I seemed to look down upon my masters, and upon the great men of the earth. This fever lasted for three or four hours, after which I had a good sleep; and, the next morning, I went lightly to my work, secure of my daily bread, without cares for the future, living content with little, waiting with impatience for the delights of my solitary evening, and saying to myself as I went on writing like a stupid machine: "And yet—and yet—if I chose!"

"Doubtless, you could, like others, surer than others, have reached a higher position," said Adrienne, greatly struck with Rodin's practical philosophy.

"Yes, I think I could have done so; but for what purpose?—You see, my dear young lady, what often renders people of some merit puzzles to the vulgar, is that they are frequently content to say: "If I chose!"

"But sir, without attaching much importance to the luxuries of life, there is a certain degree of comfort, which age renders almost indispensable, and which you seem to have utterly renounced."

"Undeceive yourself, if you please, my dear young lady," said Rodin, with a playful smile. "I am a true Sybarite; I require absolutely warm clothes, a good stove, a soft mattress, a good piece of bread, a fresh radish, flavored with good cheap salt, and some good, clear water: and, notwithstanding this complication of wants, twelve

hundred francs have always more than sufficed, for I have been able to make some little savings."

"But now that you are without employment, how will you manage to live, sir?" said Adrienne more and more interested by the singularities of this man, and wishing to put his disinterestedness to the proof.

"I have laid by a little, which will serve me till I have unravelled the last thread of Father d'Aigrigny's dark designs. I owe myself this reparation, for having been his dupe; three or four days, I hope, will complete the work. After that, I have the certainty of meeting with a situation, in my native province, under a collector of taxes; some time ago, the offer was made me by a friend; but then I would not leave Father d'Aigrigny, notwithstanding the advantages proposed. Fancy, my dear young lady—eight hundred francs, with board and lodging! As I am a little of the roughest, I should have preferred lodging apart; but, as they give me so much, I must submit to this little inconvenience."

Nothing could exceed Rodin's ingenuity, in making these little household confidences (so abominably false) to Mdlle. de Cardoville, who felt her last suspicions give way.

"What, sir?" said she to the Jesuit, with interest; "in three or four days, you mean to quit Paris?"

"I hope to do so, my dear young lady; and that," added he, in a mysterious tone, "and that for many reasons. But what would be very precious to me," he resumed, in a serious voice, as he looked at Adrienne with emotion, "would be to carry with me the conviction, that you did me the justice to believe, that, on merely reading your interview with the Princess de Saint-Dizier, I recognized at once qualities quite unexampled in our day, in a young person of your age and condition."

"Ah, sir!" said Adrienne, with a smile, "do not think yourself obliged to return so soon the sincere praises that I bestowed on your superiority of mind. I should be better pleased with ingratitude."

"Oh, no! I do not flatter you, my dear young lady. Why should I? We may probably never meet again. I do not flatter you; I understand you—that's all—and what will seem strange to you, is, that your appearance completes the idea which I had already formed of you, my dear young lady, in reading your interview with your aunt; and some parts of your character, hitherto obscure to me, are now fully displayed."

"Really, sir, you astonish me more and more."

"I can't help it! I merely describe my impressions. I can now explain perfectly, for example, your passionate love of the beautiful, your eager worship of the refinements of the senses, your ardent aspirations for a better state of things, your courageous contempt of many degrading and servile customs, to which woman is condemned; yes, now I understand the noble pride with which you contemplate the mob of vain, self-sufficient, ridiculous men, who look upon woman as a creature destined for the service, according to the laws made after their own not very handsome image. In the eyes of these hedge-tyrants, woman, a kind of inferior being, to whom a council of cardinals deigned to grant a soul by a majority of two voices, ought to think herself supremely happy in being the servant of these pretty pachas, old at thirty, worn-out, used-up, weary with excesses, wishing only for repose, and seeking, as they say, to make an end of it, which they set about by marrying some poor girl, who is on her side desirous to make a beginning."

Mdlle. de Cardoville would certainly have smiled at these satirical remarks, if she had not been greatly struck by hearing Rodin express in such appropriate terms her own ideas, though it was the first time in her life that she saw this dangerous man. Adrienne forgot, or rather, she was not aware, that she had to deal with a Jesuit of rare intelligence, uniting the information and the mysterious resources of the police-spy with the profound sagacity of the confessor; one of those diabolic priests, who, by the help of a few hints, avowals, letters, reconstruct a character, as Cuvier could reconstruct a body from zoological fragments. Far from interrupting Rodin, Adrienne listened to him with growing curiosity. Sure of the effect he produced, he continued, in a tone of indignation: "And your aunt and the Abbe d'Aigrigny treated you as mad, because you revolted against the yoke of such tyrants! because, hating the shameful vices of slavery, you chose to be independent with the suitable qualities of independence, free with the proud virtues of liberty!"

"But, sir," said Adrienne, more and more surprised, "how can my thoughts be so familiar to you?"

"First, I know you perfectly, thanks to your interview with the Princess de Saint-Dizier; and next, if it should happen that we both pursue the same end, though by different means," resumed

Rodin, artfully, as he looked at Mdlle. de Cardoville with an air of intelligence, "why should not our convictions be the same?"

"I do not understand you, sir. Of what end do you speak?"

"The end pursued incessantly by all lofty, generous, independent spirits—some acting, like you, my dear young lady, from passion, from instinct, without perhaps explaining to themselves the high mission they are called on to fulfill. Thus, for example, when you take pleasure in the most refined delights, when you surround yourself with all that charms the senses, do you think that you only yield to the attraction of the beautiful, to the desire of exquisite enjoyments? No! ah, no! for then you would be incomplete, odiously selfish, a dry egotist, with a fine taste—nothing more—and at your age, it would be hideous, my dear young lady, it would be hideous!"

"And do you really think thus severely of me?" said Adrienne, with uneasiness, so much influence had this man irresistibly attained over her.

"Certainly, I should think thus of you, if you loved luxury for luxury's sake;—but, no—quite another sentiment animates you," resumed the Jesuit. "Let us reason a little. Feeling a passionate desire for all these enjoyments, you know their value and their need more than any one—is it not so?"

"It is so," replied Adrienne, deeply interested.

"Your gratitude and favor are then necessarily acquired by those who, poor, laborious, and unknown, have procured for you these marvels of luxury, which you could not do without?"

"This feeling of gratitude is so strong in me, sir," replied Adrienne, more and more pleased to find herself so well understood, "that I once had inscribed on a masterpiece of goldsmith's work, instead of the name of the seller, that of the poor unknown artist who designed it, and who has since risen to his true place."

"There, you see, I was not deceived," went on Rodin; "the taste for enjoyment renders you grateful to those who procure it for you; and that is not all; here am I, an example, neither better nor worse than my neighbors, but accustomed to privations, which cause me no suffering—so that the privations of others necessarily touch me less nearly than they do you, my dear young lady; for your habits of comfort must needs render you more compassionate towards misfortune. You would yourself suffer too much from poverty, not to pity and succor those who are its victims."

"Really, sir," said Adrienne, who began to feel herself under the fatal charm of Rodin, "the more I listen to you, the more I am convinced that you would defend a thousand times better than I could those ideas for which I was so harshly reproached by Madame de Saint-Dizier and Abbe d'Aigrigny. Oh! speak, speak, sir! I cannot tell you with what happiness, with what pride I listen."

Attentive and moved, her eyes fixed on the Jesuit with as much interest as sympathy and curiosity, Adrienne, by a graceful toss of the head that was habitual to her, threw back her long, golden curls, the better to contemplate Rodin, who thus resumed: "You are astonished, my dear young lady, that you were not understood by your aunt or by Abbe d'Aigrigny! What point of contact had you with these hypocritical, jealous, crafty minds, such as I can judge them to be now? Do you wish a new proof of their hateful blindness? Among what they called your monstrous follies, which was the worst, the most damnable? Why, your resolution to live alone and in your own way, to dispose freely of the present and the future. They declared this to be odious, detestable, immoral. And yet—was this resolution dictated by a mad love of liberty? no!—by a disordered aversion to all restraint? no!—by the desire of singularity?—no!—for then I, too, should have blamed you severely."

"Other reasons have indeed guided me, sir, I assure," said Adrienne eagerly, for she had become very eager for the esteem with which her character might inspire Rodin.

"Oh! I know it well; your motives could only be excellent ones," replied the Jesuit. "Why then did you take this resolution, so much called in question? Was it to brave established etiquette? no! for you respected them until the hate of Mme. de Saint-Dizier forced you to withdraw yourself from her unbearable guardianship. Was it to live alone, to escape the eyes of the world? no! you would be a hundred times more open to observation in this than any other condition. Was it to make a bad use of your liberty? no, ah, no! those who design evil seek for darkness and solitude; while you place yourself right before the jealous and envious eyes of the vulgar crowd. Why then do you take this determination, so courageous and rare, unexampled in a young person of your age? Shall I tell you, my dear young lady? It is, that you wish to prove, by your example, that a woman of pure heart and honest mind, with a firm character and independence of soul, may nobly and proudly throw off the humiliating guardianship that custom has

imposed upon her. Yes, instead of accepting the fate of a revolted slave, a life only destined to hypocrisy or vice, you wish to live freely in presence of all the world, independent, honorable and respected. You wish to have, like man, the exercise of your own free will, the entire responsibility of all your actions, so as to establish the fact, that a woman left completely to herself, may equal man in reason, wisdom, uprightness, and surpass him in delicacy and dignity. That is your design, my dear young lady. It is noble and great. Will your example be imitated? I hope it may; but whether it be so or not, your generous attempt, believe me, will place you in a high and worthy position."

Mdlle. de Cardoville's eyes shone with a proud and gentle brightness, her cheeks were slightly colored, her bosom heaved, she raised her charming head with a movement of involuntary pride; at length completely under the charm of that diabolical man, she exclaimed: "But, sir, who are you that can thus know and analyze my most secret thoughts, and read my soul more clearly than myself, so as to give new life and action to those ideas of independence which have long stirred within me? Who are you, that can thus elevate me in my own eyes, for now I am conscious of accomplishing a mission, honorable to myself, and perhaps useful to my sisters immersed in slavery? Once again, sir, who are you?"

"Who am I, madame?" answered Rodin, with a smile of the greatest good-nature; "I have already told you that I am a poor man, who for the last forty years, having served in the day time as a writing machine to record the ideas of others, went home every evening to work out ideas of his own—a good kind of man who, from his garret, watches and even takes some little share in the movement of generous spirits, advancing towards an end that is nearer than is commonly thought. And thus, my dear young lady, as I told you just now, you and I are both tending towards the same objects, though you may do the same without reflection, and merely in obedience to your rare and divine instincts. So continue so to live, fair, free, and happy!—it is your mission—more providential than you may think it. Yes; continue to surround yourself with all the marvels of luxury and art; refine your senses, purify your tastes, by the exquisite choice of your enjoyments; by genius, grace, and purity raise yourself above the stupid and ill-favored mob of men, that will instantly surround you, when they behold you alone and free; they will consider you an easy prey, destined to please their cupidity, their egotism, their folly. Laugh at them, and mock these idiotic and sordid pretensions. Be the queen of your own world, and make yourself respected as a queen. Love—shine—it is your part upon earth. All the flowers, with which you are whelmed in profusion, will one day bear fruit. You think that you have lived only for pleasure; in reality, you will have lived for the noblest aims that could tempt a great and lofty soul. And so—some years hence—we may meet again, perhaps; you, fairer and more favored than ever; I, older and more obscure. But, no matter—a secret voice, I am sure, says to you at this moment, that between us two, however different, there exists an invisible bond, a mysterious communion, which nothing hereafter will ever be able to destroy!"

He uttered these final words in a tone of such profound emotion, that Adrienne started. Rodin had approached without her perceiving it, and without, as it were, walking at all, for he dragged his steps along the floor, with a sort of serpent motion; and he had spoken with so much warmth and enthusiasm, that his pale face had become slightly tinged, and his repulsive ugliness had almost disappeared before the brilliancy of his small sharp eyes, now wide open, and fixed full upon Adrienne. The latter leaned forward, with half-open lips and deep-drawn breath, nor could she take her eyes from the Jesuit's, he had ceased to speak, and yet she was still listening. The feelings of the fair young lady, in presence of this little old man, dirty, ugly and poor, were inexplicable. That comparison so common, and yet so true, of the frightful fascination of the bird by the serpent, might give some idea of the singular impression made upon her. Rodin's tactics were skilful and sure. Until now, Mdlle. de Cardoville had never analyzed her tastes or instincts. She had followed them, because they were inoffensive and charming. How happy and proud she then was sure to be to hear a man of superior mind not only praise these tendencies, for which she had been heretofore so severely blamed, but congratulate her upon them, as upon something great, noble and divine! If Rodin had only addressed himself to Adrienne's self conceit, he would have failed in his perfidious designs, for she had not the least spark of vanity. But he addressed himself to all that was enthusiastic and generous in her heart; that which he appeared to encourage and admire in her was really w