

THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SUSPICIONS.

Mdlle de Cardoville spang hastily to meet the visitor, and said to her, in a voice of emotion, as she extended her arms towards her: "Come—come—there is no grating to separate us now!"

On this allusion, which reminded her how her poor laborious hand had been respectfully kissed by the fair and rich patrician, the young work-woman felt a sentiment of gratitude, which was at once ineffable and proud. But, as she hesitated to respond to the cordial reception, Adrienne embraced her touching affection. When Mother Bunch found herself clasped in the fair arms of Mdlle. de Cardoville, when she felt the fresh and rosy lips of the young lady fraternally pressed to her own pale and sickly cheek, she burst into tears without being able to utter a word. Rodin, retired in a corner of the chamber, looked on this scene with secret uneasiness. Informed of the refusal, so full of dignity, which Mother Bunch had opposed to the perfidious temptations of the superior of St. Mary's Convent, and knowing the deep devotion of this generous creature for Agricola—a devotion which for some days she had so bravely extended to Mdlle. de Cardoville—the jesuit did not like to see the latter thus laboring to increase that affection. He thought, wisely, that one should never despise friend or enemy, however small they may appear. Now, devotion to Mdlle. de Cardoville constituted an enemy in his eyes; and we know, moreover, that Rodin combined in his character rare firmness, with a certain degree of superstitious weakness, and he now felt uneasy at the singular impression of fear which Mother Bunch inspired in him. He determined to recollect this presentiment.

Delicate natures sometimes display in the smallest things the most charming instincts of grace and goodness. Thus, when the sewing-girl was shedding abundant and sweet tears of gratitude, Adrienne took a richly embroidered handkerchief, and dried the pale and melancholy face. This action, so simple and spontaneous, spared the work-girl one humiliation; for, alas! humiliation and suffering are the two gulfs, along the edge of which misfortune continually passes. Therefore, the least kindness is in general a double benefit to the unfortunate. Perhaps the reader may smile in disdain at the puerile circumstance we mention. But poor Mother Bunch, not venturing to take from her pocket her old ragged handkerchief, would long have remained blinded by her tears, if Mdlle. de Cardoville had not come to her aid.

"Oh! you are so good—so nobly charitable lady!" was all that the sempstress could say, in a tone of deep emotion; for she was still more touched by the attention of the young lady, than she would perhaps have been by a service rendered.

"Look there, sir," said Adrienne to Rodin, who drew near hastily. "Yes," added the young patrician, "I have indeed discovered a treasure. Look at her, sir; and love her as I love her, honor as I honor. She has one of those hearts for which we are seeking."

"And which, thank heaven, we are still able to find, my dear young lady!" said Rodin, as he bowed to the needlewoman.

The latter raised her eyes slowly, and looked at the jesuit. At sight of that cadaverous countenance, which was smiling benignantly upon her, the young girl started. It was strange! she had never seen this man, and yet she felt instantly the same fear and repulsion that he had felt with regard to her. Generally timid and confused, the work-girl could not withdraw her eyes from Rodin's; her heart beat violently, as at the coming of some great danger, and, as the excellent creature feared only for those she loved, she approached Adrienne involuntarily, keeping her eyes fixed on Rodin. The jesuit was too good a physiognomist not to perceive the formidable impression he had made, and he felt an increase of his instinctive aversion for the sempstress. Instead of casting down his eyes, he appeared to examine her with such sustained attention, that Mdlle. de Cardoville was astonished at it.

"I beg your pardon, my dear girl," said Rodin, as if recalling his recollections, and addressing himself to Mother Bunch, "I beg your pardon—but I think—if I am not deceived—did you not go a few days since to St. Mary's Convent, hard by?"

"Yes, sir."

"No doubt, it was you. Where then was my head?" cried Rodin. "It was you—I should have guessed it sooner."

"Of what do you speak, sir?" asked Adrienne.

"Oh! you are right, my dear young lady," said

Rodin, pointing to the hunchback. "She has indeed a noble heart, such as we seek. If you knew with what dignity, with what courage this poor girl, who was out of work—and, for her, to want work is to want everything—if you knew, I say, with what dignity she rejected the shameful wages, that the superior of the convent was unprincipled enough to offer, on condition of her acting as a spy in a family where it was proposed to place her."

"Oh, that is infamous!" cried Mdlle. de Cardoville, with disgust. "Such a proposal to this poor girl—to her!"

"Madame," said Mother Bunch, bitterly, "I had no work, was poor, they did not know me—and they thought they might propose anything to the likes of me."

"And I tell you," said Rodin, "that it was a double baseness on the part of the superior, to offer such temptation to misery, and it was doubly noble in you to refuse."

"Sir," said the sewing-girl, with modest embarrassment.

"Oh! I am not to be intimidated," resumed Rodin. "Praise or blame, I speak out roughly what I think. Ask this dear young lady," he added, with a glance at Adrienne. "I tell you plainly, that I think as well of you as she does herself."

"Believe me, dear," said Adrienne, "there are some sorts of praise which honor, recompense, and encourage; and M. Rodin's is of the number. I know it—yes, I know it."

"Nay, my dear young lady, you must not ascribe to me all the honor of the judgment."

"How so, sir?"

"Is not this dear girl the adopted sister of Agricola Baudoin, the gallant workman, the energetic and popular poet? Is not the affection of such a man the best of guarantees, and does it not enable us to judge, as it were, by the label?" added Rodin, with a smile.

"You are right, sir," said Adrienne; "for, before knowing this dear girl, I began to feel deeply interested in her, from the day that her adopted brother spoke to me about her. He expressed himself with so much warmth, so much enthusiasm, that I at once conceived an esteem for the person capable of inspiring so noble an attachment."

These words of Adrienne, joined to another circumstance, had such an effect upon their hearer, that her pale face became crimson. The unfortunate hunchback loved Agricola, with a love as passionate as it was secret and painful; the most indirect allusion to this fatal sentiment occasioned her the most cruel embarrassment. Now, the moment Mdlle. de Cardoville spoke of Agricola's attachment for Mother Bunch, the latter had encountered Rodin's observing and penetrating look fixed upon her. Alone with Adrienne, the sempstress would have felt only a momentary confusion on hearing the name of the smith; but unfortunately she fancied that the jesuit, who already filled her with involuntary fear, had seen into her heart, and read the secrets of that fatal love, of which she was the victim. Thence the deep blushes of the poor girl, and the embarrassment so painfully visible, that Adrienne was struck with it.

A subtle and prompt mind, like Rodin's on perceiving the smallest effect, immediately seeks the cause. Proceeding by comparison, the jesuit saw on one side a deformed, but intelligent young girl, capable of passionate devotion; on the other, a young workman, handsome, bold, frank, and full of talent. "Brought up together, sympathising with each other on many points, there must be some fraternal affection between them," said he to himself; "but fraternal affection does not blush, and the hunchback blushed and grew troubled beneath my look; does she, then, love Agricola?"

Once on the scent of this discovery, Rodin wished to pursue the investigation. Remarking the surprise the visible uneasiness that Mother Bunch had caused in Adrienne, he said to the latter, with a smile, locking significantly at the needlewoman: "You see, my dear young lady, how she blushes. The good girl is troubled by what we said about the attachment of this gallant workman."

The needlewoman hung down her head, overcome with confusion. After the pause of a second, during which Rodin preserved silence, so as to give time for his cruel remark to pierce the heart of the victim, the savage resumed: "Look at the dear girl! how embarrassed she appears!"

Again, after another silence, perceiving that Mother Bunch from crimson had become deadly pale, and was trembling in all her limbs, the jesuit feared he had gone too far, whilst Adrienne said to her friend, with anxiety: "Why, dear child, are you so agitated?"

"Oh! it is clear enough," resumed Rodin, with an air of perfect simplicity; for, having discovered what he wished to know, he now chose to appear unconscious. "It is quite clear and plain. This

good girl has the modesty of a kind and tender sister for a brother. When you praise him, she fancies that she is herself praised."

"And she is as modest as she is excellent," added Adrienne, taking both of the girl's hands, "the least praise, either of her adopted brother or of herself, troubles her in this way. But it is mere childishness, and I must scold her for it."

Mdlle. de Cardoville spoke sincerely, for the explanation given by Rodin appeared to her very plausible. Like all other persons who, dreading every moment the discovery of some painful secret have their courage as easily restored as shaken, Mother Bunch persuaded herself (and she needed to do so, to escape dying of shame), that the last words of Rodin were sincere, and that he had no idea of the love she felt for Agricola. So her agony diminished, and she found words to reply to Mdlle. de Cardoville.

"Excuse me, madame," she said timidly, "I am so little accustomed to such kindness as that with which you overwhelm me, that I make a sorry return for all your goodness."

"Kindness, my poor girl?" said Adrienne. "I have done nothing for you yet. But, thank heaven! from this day I shall be able to keep my promise, and reward your devotion to me, your courageous resignation, your sacred love of labor, and the dignity of which you have given so many proofs, under the most cruel privations. In a word, from this day, if you do not object to it, we will part no more."

"Madame, you are too kind," said Mother Bunch, in a trembling voice; "but I—"

"Oh! be satisfied," said Adrienne, anticipating her meaning. "If you accept my offer, I shall know how to reconcile with my desire (not a little selfish) of having you near me, the independence of your character, your habits of labor, your taste for retirement, and your anxiety to devote yourself to those who deserve commiseration; it is, I confess, by affording you the means of satisfying these generous tendencies, that I hope to seduce and keep you by me."

"But what have I done?" asked the other, simply, "to merit any gratitude from you? Did you not begin, on the contrary, by acting so generously to my adopted brother?"

"Oh! I do not speak of gratitude," said Adrienne; "we are quits. I speak of friendship and sincere affection, which I now offer you."

"Friendship to me, madame?"

"Come, come," said Adrienne, with a charming smile, "do not be proud because your position gives you the advantage. I have set my heart on having you for a friend, and you will see that it shall be so. But now that I think of it (a little late, you will say), what good wind brings you hither?"

"This morning, M. Dagobert received a letter, in which he was requested to come to this place, to learn some news that would be of the greatest interest to him. Thinking it concerned Marshal Simon's daughters, he said to me: 'Mother Bunch, you have taken so much interest in those dear children, that you must come with me: you shall witness my joy on finding them, and that will be your reward—'"

Adrienne glanced at Rodin. The latter made an affirmative movement of the head, and answered: "Yes, yes, my dear young lady; it was I who wrote to the brave soldier, but without signing the letter, or giving any explanation. You shall know why."

"Then, my dear girl, why did you come alone?" said Adrienne.

"Alas, madame! on arriving here, it was your kind reception that made me forget my fears."

"What fears?" asked Rodin.

"Knowing that you lived here, madame, I supposed the letter was from you; I told M. Dagobert so, and he thought the same. When we arrived, his impatience was so great, that he asked at the door if the orphans were in this house, and gave their description. They told him no. Then, in spite of my supplications, he insisted on going to the convent to inquire about them."

"What imprudence!" cried Adrienne.

"After what took place the other night, when he broke in," added Rodin, shrugging his shoulders.

"It was in vain to tell him," returned Mother Bunch, "that the letter did not announce positively, that the orphans would be delivered up to him; but that, no doubt, he would gain some information about them. He refused to hear anything, but said to me: 'If I cannot find them, I will rejoin you. But they were at the convent the day before yesterday, and now that all is discovered, they cannot refuse to give them up—'"

"And with such a man there is no disputing!" said Rodin, with a smile.

"I hope they will not recognize him!" said Adrienne, remembering Baleinier's threats.

"It is not likely," he said; "they will only refuse him admittance. That will be, I hope, the

worst misfortune that will happen. Besides, the magistrate will soon be here with the girls. I am no longer wanted; other cares require my attention. I must seek out Prince Djalma. Only tell me, my dear young lady, where I shall find you, to keep you informed of my discoveries, and to take measures with regard to the young prince, if my inquiries, as I hope, shall be attended with success."

"You will find me in my new house, Rue d'Anjou, formerly Beaulieu House. But now I think of it," said Adrienne, suddenly, after some moments of reflection, "it would not be prudent or proper, on many accounts, to lodge the Prince Djalma in the pavilion I occupied at Saint-Dizier House. I saw, some time ago, a charming little house, all furnished and ready; it only requires some embellishments, that could be completed in twenty-four hours, to make it a delightful residence. Yes, that will be a thousand times preferable," added Mdlle. de Cardoville, after a new interval of silence; "and I shall thus be able to preserve the strictest incognito."

"What!" cried Rodin, whose projects would be much impeded by this new resolution of the young lady; "you do not wish him to know who you are?"

"I wish Prince Djalma to know absolutely nothing of the anonymous friend who comes to his aid; I desire that my name should not be pronounced before him, and that he should not even know of my existence—at least, for the present. Hereafter—in a month, perhaps—I will see; circumstances will guide me."

"But this incognito," said Rodin, hiding his disappointment, "will be difficult to preserve."

"If the prince had inhabited the lodge, I agree with you; the neighborhood of my aunt would have enlightened him, and this fear is one of the reasons that have induced me to renounce my first project. But the prince will inhabit a distant quarter—the Rue Blanche. Who will inform him of my secret? One of my old friends, M. Norval—you, sir—and this dear girl," pointing to Mother Bunch, "on whose discretion I can depend as on your own, will be my only confidants. My secret will then be quite safe. Besides, we will talk further on this unfortunate young prince."

Rodin, though much vexed at Adrienne's subtle determination with regard to Djalma, put the best face on the matter, and replied: "Your intentions shall be scrupulously fulfilled, my dear young lady; and to-morrow, with your leave, I hope to give you a good account of what you are pleased to call my providential mission."

"To-morrow, then, I shall expect you with impatience," said Adrienne, to Rodin, affectionately. "Permit me always to rely upon you, as from this day you may count upon me. You must be indulgent with me, sir; for I see that I shall yet have many counsels, many services to ask of you—though I already owe you so much."

"You will never owe me enough, my dear young lady, never enough," said Rodin, as he moved discreetly towards the door, after bowing to Adrienne. At the very moment he was going out, he found himself face to face with Dagobert.

"Hollo! at last I have caught one!" shouted the soldier, as he seized the Jesuit by the collar with a vigorous hand.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

EXCUSES.

On seeing Dagobert grasp Rodin so roughly by the collar, Mdlle. de Cardoville exclaimed in terror, as she advanced several steps towards the soldier: "In the name of Heaven, sir! what are you doing?"

"What am I doing?" echoed the soldier, harshly, without relaxing his hold on Rodin, and turning his head towards Adrienne, whom he did not know; "I take this opportunity to squeeze the throat of one of the wretches in the band of that renegade, until he tells me where my poor children are."

"You strangle me," said the Jesuit, in a stifled voice, as he tried to escape from the soldier.

"Where are the orphans, since they are not here, and the convent door has been closed against me?" cried Dagobert, in a voice of thunder.

"Help! help!" gasped Rodin.

"Oh! it is dreadful!" said Adrienne, as pale and trembling, she held up her clasped hands to Dagobert. "Have mercy, sir! listen to me! listen to him!"

"M. Dagobert!" cried Mother Bunch, seizing with her weak hands the soldier's arm, and showing him Adrienne, "this is Mdlle. de Cardoville. What violence in her presence! and then, you are deceived—doubtless!"

At the name of Mdlle. de Cardoville, the benefactress of his son, the soldier turned round suddenly, and loosened his hold on Rodin. The latter, crimson with rage and suffocation, set about adjusting his collar and his cravat.

"I beg your pardon, madame," said Dagobert,