

"Then, where are they, sir? What have they done with them? The day before yesterday, they were in the convent!" cried Dagobert, overwhelmed by this complete destruction of his hopes.

Hardly had the soldier pronounced these words, when, profiting by the impulse which gathered all the actors in this scene about the magistrate, Rodin withdrew discreetly towards the door, and disappeared without any one perceiving his absence. Whilst the soldier, thus suddenly thrown back to the depths of his despair, looked at M. de Gernande, waiting with anxiety for the answer, Adrienne said to the magistrate: "But, sir, when you applied at the convent, what explanation did the superior give on the subject of these young girls?"

"The lady superior refused to give any explanation, madame. 'You pretend,' said she, 'that the young persons of whom you speak are detained here against their will. Since the law gives you the right of entering this house, make your search.' 'But, madame, please to answer me positively,' said I to the superior; 'do you declare, that you know nothing of the young girls, whom I have come to claim.' 'I have nothing to say on this subject, sir. You assert, that you are authorized to make a search; make it.' Not being able to get any other explanation," continued the magistrate, 'I searched all parts of the convent, and had every door opened—but, unfortunately, I could find not trace of these young ladies.'"

"They must have sent them elsewhere," cried Dagobert; "who knows—perhaps, ill. They will kill them—O God! they will kill them!" cried he, in a heart-rending tone.

"After such a refusal, what is to be done? Pray, sir, give us your advice; you are our providence," said Adrienne, turning to speak to Rodin, who she fancied was behind her. "What is your—"

Then, perceiving that the Jesuit had suddenly disappeared, she said to Mother Bunch, with uneasiness: "Where is M. Rodin?"

"I do not know, madame," answered the girl, looking round her; "he is no longer here."

"It is strange," said Adrienne, "to disappear so abruptly!"

"I told you he was a traitor!" cried Dagobert, stamping with rage; "they are all in a plot together."

"No, no," said Mlle. de Cardioville; "do not think that. But the absence is not the less to be regretted, for, under these difficult circumstances, he might have given us very useful information, thanks to the position he occupied at M. d'Aigrigny's."

"I confess, madame, that I rather reckoned upon it," said M. de Gernande; "and I returned hither, not only to inform you of the fruitless result of my search, but also to seek from the upright and honorable man, who so courageously unveiled these odious machinations, the aid of his counsels in this contingency."

Strangely enough, for the last few moments Dagobert was so completely absorbed in thought, that he paid no attention to the words of the magistrate, however important to him. He did not even perceive the departure of M. de Gernande, who retired after promising Adrienne that he would neglect no means to arrive at the truth, in regard to the disappearance of the orphans. Uneasy at this silence, wishing to quit the house immediately, and induce Dagobert to accompany her, Adrienne, after exchanging a rapid glance with Mother Bunch, was advancing towards the soldier, when hasty steps were heard from without the chamber, and a manly sonorous voice, exclaiming, with impatience, "Where is he—where is he?"

At the sound of his voice, Dagobert seemed to rouse himself with a start, made a sudden bound, and with a loud cry, rushed towards the door. It opened. Marshal Simon appeared on the threshold!

(To be Continued.)

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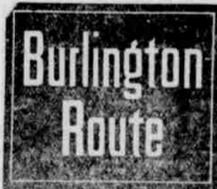
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