

THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PIERRE SIMON.

Marshall Pierre Simon, Duke de Ligny, was a man of tall stature, plainly dressed in a blue frock-coat, buttoned up to the throat, with a red ribbon tied to the button-hole. You could not have wished to see a more frank, honest and chivalrous cast of countenance than the marshal's. He had broad forehead, an aquiline nose, a well formed chin, and a complexion bronzed by exposure to the Indian sun. His hair cut very short, was inclined to grey about the temples; but his eyebrows were still as black as his large, hanging moustache. His walk was free and bold, and his decided movements showed his military impetuosity. A man of the people, a man of war and action, the frank cordiality of his address invited friendliness and sympathy. As enlightened as he was intrepid, as generous as he was sincere, his manly, plebeian pride was the most remarkable part of his character. As others are proud of their high birth, so was he of his obscure origin, because it was ennobled by the qualities of his father, the rigid republican, the intelligent and laborious artisan, who, for the space of forty years, had been the example and the glory of his fellow-workmen. In accepting with gratitude the aristocratic title which the Emperor had bestowed upon him, Pierre Simon acted with that delicacy which receives from a friendly hand a perfectly useless gift, and estimates it according to the intention of the giver. The religious veneration of Pierre Simon for the Emperor had never been blind, in proportion as his devotion and love for his idol were instructive and necessary, his admiration was serious, and founded upon reason. Far from resembling those swashbucklers who love fighting for its own sake, Marshal Simon not only admired his hero as the greatest captain in the world, but he admired him, above all, because he knew that the Emperor had only accepted war in the hope of one day being able to dictate universal peace; for if peace obtained by glory and strength is great, fruitful and magnificent, peace yielded by weakness and cowardice is sterile, disastrous, and dishonoring. The son of a workman, Pierre Simon still further admired the Emperor, because the imperial garb had always known how to make that popular heart beat nobly, and remembering the people, from the masses of whom he first arose, had invited them fraternally to share in regal and aristocratic pomp.

When Marshal Simon entered the room, his countenance was much agitated. At sight of Dagobert, a flash of joy illumined his features; he rushed towards the soldier, extending his arms, and exclaimed, "My friend! my old friend!"

Dagobert answered this affectionate salute with silent emotion. Then the marshal, disengaging himself from his arms, and fixing his moist eyes upon him, said to him in so agitated a voice that his lips trembled, "Well, didst arrive in time for the 13th of February?"

"Yes, general; but everything is postponed for four months."

"And—my wife?—my child?" At this question Dagobert shuddered, hung down his head, and was silent.

"They are not, then, here?" asked Simon, with more surprise than uneasiness. "They told me they were not at your house, but that I should find you here—and I came immediately. Are they not with you?"

"General," said Dagobert, becoming deadly pale; "general—" Drying the drops of cold sweat that stood upon his forehead, he was unable to articulate a word, for his voice was checked in his parched throat.

"You frighten me!" exclaimed Pierre Simon, becoming pale as the soldier, and seizing him by the arm.

At this Adrienne advanced, with a countenance full of grief and sympathy; seeing the cruel embarrassment of Dagobert, she wished to come to his assistance, and she said to Pierre Simon, in a mild but agitated voice, "Marshal, I am Mdlle. de Cardoville—a relation of your dear children."

Pierre Simon turned round suddenly, as much struck with the dazzling beauty of Adrienne as with the words she had just pronounced. He stammered out in his surprise, "You, madame—a relation—of my children!"

He laid a stress on the last words, and looked at Dagobert in a kind of stupor.

"Yes, marshal—your children," hastily replied Adrienne; "and the love of those charming twin sisters—"

"Twin sisters!" cried Pierre Simon, interrupting Mdlle. de Cardoville, with an outburst of joy

impossible to describe. "Two daughters instead of one! Oh! what happiness for their mother! Pardon me, madame, for being so impolite," he continued; "and so little grateful for what you tell me. But you will understand it; I have been seventeen years without seeing my wife; I come, and I find three loved beings, instead of two. Thanks, madame: would I could express all the gratitude I owe you! You are our relation: this is no doubt your house; my wife and children are with you. Is it so? You think that my sudden appearance might be prejudicial to them? I will wait—but, madame, you, that I am certain are good as fair—pity my impatience—will make haste to prepare them to receive me—"

More and more agitated, Dagobert avoided the marshal's gaze, and trembled like a leaf. Adrienne cast down her eyes without answering. Her heart sunk within her, at thought of dealing the terrible blow to Marshal Simon.

The latter, astonished at this silence, looking at Adrienne, then at the soldier, became first uneasy, and at last alarmed. "Dagobert!" he exclaimed, "something is concealed from me!"—"General!" stammered the soldier, "I assure you—I—I—"

"Madame!" cried Pierre Simon, "I conjure you, in pity, speak to me frankly!—my anxiety is horrible. My first fears return upon me. What is it? Are my wife and daughters ill? Are they in danger? Oh! speak! speak!"

"Your daughters, marshal," said Adrienne, "have been rather unwell, since their long journey—but they are in no danger—"

"Oh! heaven! it is my wife!"

"Have courage, sir!" said Mdlle. de Cardoville, sadly. "Alas! you must seek consolation in the affection of the two angels that remain to you."

"General!" said Dagobert, in a firm, grave tone, "I returned from Siberia—alone with your two daughters."

"And their mother! their mother!" cried Simon, in a voice of despair.

"I set out with the two orphans the day after her death," said the soldier.

"Dead?" exclaimed Pierre Simon, overwhelmed by the stroke; "dead?" A mournful silence was the only answer. The marshal staggered beneath this unexpected shock, leaned on the back of a chair for support, and then, sinking into the seat, concealed his face in his hands. For some minutes nothing was heard but stifled sobs, for not only had Pierre Simon idolized his wife, but by one of those singular compromises, that a man long cruelly tried sometimes makes with destiny, Pierre Simon, with the fatalism of loving souls, thought he had a right to reckon upon happiness after so many years of suffering, and had not for a moment doubted that he should find his wife and child—a double consolation reserved to him after going through so much. Very different from certain people, whom the habit of misfortune renders less exacting, Simon had reckoned upon happiness as complete as had been his misery. His wife and child were the sole, indispensable conditions of this felicity, and had the mother survived her daughters, she would have no more replaced them in his eyes than they did her. Weakness or avarice of the heart, so it was; we insist upon this singularity, because the consequences of these incessant and painful regrets exercised a great influence on the future life of Marshal Simon. Adrienne and Dagobert had respected the overwhelming grief of this unfortunate man. When he had given a free course to his tears, he raised his manly countenance, now of marble paleness, drew his hand across his blood-shot eyes, rose, and said to Adrienne, "Pardon me, madame; I could not conquer my first emotion. Permit me to retire. I have cruel details to ask my worthy friend who only quitted my wife at the last moment. Have the kindness to let me see my children—my poor orphans!" And the marshal's voice again broke.

"Marshal," said Mdlle. de Cardoville, "just now we were expecting your dear children; unfortunately, we have been deceived in our hopes." Pierre Simon first looked at Adrienne without answering, as if he had not heard or understood.—"But console yourself," resumed the young girl; "we have yet no reason to despair."

"To despair?" repeated the marshal, mechanically, looking by turns at Mdlle. de Cardoville and Dagobert; "to despair?—of what, in heaven's name?"

"Of seeing your children, marshal," said Adrienne; "the presence of their father will facilitate the search."

"The search!" cried Pierre Simon. "Then, my daughters are not here?"

"No, sir," said Adrienne, at length; "they have been taken from the affectionate care of the excellent man who brought them from Russia, to be removed to a convent."

"Wretch!" cried Pierre Simon, advancing towards Dagobert, with a menacing and terrible aspect; "you shall answer to me for all!"

"Oh, sir, do not blame him!" cried Mdlle. de Cardoville.

"General," said Dagobert, in a tone of mournful resignation, "I merit your anger. It is my fault. Forced to absent myself from Paris, I entrusted the children to my wife; her confessor turned her head, and persuaded her that your daughters would be better in a convent than at our house. She believed him, and let them be conveyed there. Now, they say at the convent, that they do not know where they are. This is the truth; do what you will with me; I have only to silently endure."

"This is infamous!" cried Pierre Simon, pointing to Dagobert, with a gesture of despairing indignation. "In whom can a man confide, if he has deceived me? Oh, my God!"

"Stay, marshal! do not blame him," repeated Mdlle. de Cardoville; "do not think so! He has risked life and honor to rescue your children from the convent. He is not the only one who has failed in this attempt. Just now, a magistrate—despite his character, authority—was not more successful. His firmness towards the superior, his minute search of the convent, were all in vain. Up to this time, it has been impossible to find these unfortunate children."

"But where's this convent!" cried Marshal Simon, raising his head, his face all pale and agitated with grief and rage. "Where is it? Do these vermin know what a father is, deprived of his children?" At the moment when Marshal Simon, turning towards Dagobert, pronounced these words, Rodin, holding Rose and Blanche by the hand, appeared at the open door of the chamber. On hearing the marshal's exclamation, he started with surprise, and a flash of diabolical joy lit up his grim countenance—for he had not expected to meet Pierre Simon so opportunely.

Mdlle. de Cardoville was the first to perceive the presence of Rodin. She exclaimed, as she hastened towards him: "Oh! I was not deceived. He is still our providence."

"My poor children!" said Rodin, in a low voice, to the young girls, as he pointed to Pierre Simon, "this is your father!"

"Sir!" cried Adrienne, following close upon Rose and Blanche. "Your children are here!"

As Simon turned round abruptly, his two daughters threw themselves into his arms. Here was a long silence, broken only by sobs, and kisses, and exclamations of joy.

"Come forward, at least, and enjoy the good you have done!" said Mdlle. de Cardoville, drying her eyes, and turning towards Rodin, who, leaning against the door, seemed to contemplate this scene with deep emotion.

Dagobert, at sight of Rodin bringing back the children, was at first struck with stupor, and unable to move a step; but, hearing the words of Adrienne, and yielding to a burst of almost insane gratitude, he threw himself on his knees before the jesuit, joined his hands together, and exclaimed in a broken voice: "You have saved me, by bringing these children."

"Oh, bless you, sir!" said Mother Bunch, yielding to the general current.

"My good friends, this is too much," said Rodin, as if his emotions were beyond his strength; "this is really too much for me. Excuse me to the marshal, and tell him that I am repaid by the sight of his happiness."

"Pray, sir," said Adrienne, "let the marshal at least have the opportunity to see and know you."

"Oh, remain! you that have saved us all!" cried Dagobert, trying to stop Rodin.

"Providence, you know, my dear young lady, does not trouble itself about the good that is done, but the good that remains to do," said Rodin, with an accent of playful kindness. "Must I not think of Prince Djalma? My task is not finished, and moments are precious. Come," he added, disengaging himself gently from Dagobert's hold, "come—the day has been as good a one as I had hoped. The Abbe d'Aigrigny is unmasked; you are free, my dear young lady; you have recovered your cross, my brave soldier; Mother Bunch is sure of a protectress; the marshal has found his children. I have my share in all these joys; it is a full share—my heart is satisfied. Adieu, my friends, till we meet again."

So saying, Rodin waved his hand affectionately to Adrienne, Dagobert, and the hunchback, and withdrew, waving his hand with a look of delight on Marshal Simon, who, seated between his daughters, held them in his arms, and covered them with tears and kisses, remaining quite indifferent to all that was passing around him.

An hour after this scene, Mdlle. de Cardoville and the sempstress, Marshal Simon, his two daughters, and Dagobert quitted Dr. Baleinier's asylum.

In terminating this episode, a few words by way of moral, with regard to lunatic asylums and convents may not be out of place. We have said

and we repeat, that the laws which apply to the superintendence of lunatic asylums appear to us insufficient. Facts that have recently transpired before the courts, and other facts that have been privately communicated to us, evidently prove this insufficiency. Doubtless, magistrates have full power to visit lunatic asylums. They are even required to make such visits. But we know, from the best authority, that the numerous and pressing occupations of magistrates, whose number is out of proportion with the labor imposed upon them, render these inspections so rare, that they are, so to speak, illusory. It appears, therefore, to us advisable to institute a system of inspections, at least twice a month, specially designed for lunatic asylums, and entrusted to a physician and a magistrate, so that every complaint may be submitted to a double examination. Doubtless, the law is sufficient when its ministers are fully informed; but how many formalities, how many difficulties must be gone through, before they can be so particularly when the unfortunate creature who needs their assistance, already suspected, isolated and imprisoned, has no friend to come forward in defence, and demand, in his or her name, the protection of the authorities! Is it not imperative, therefore, on the civil power, to meet these necessities by a periodical and well-organized system of inspection?

What we here say of lunatic asylums will apply with still greater force to convents for women, seminaries, and houses inhabited by religious bodies. Recent and notorious facts, with which all France has rung, have unfortunately proved that violence, forcible detention, barbarous usage, abduction of minors, and illegal imprisonment, accompanied by torture, are occurrences which, if not frequent, are at least possible in religious houses. It required singular accidents, audacious and cynical brutalities, to bring these detestable actions to public knowledge. How many other victims have been, and perhaps still are, entombed in those large silent mansions, where no profane look may penetrate, and which, through the privileges of the clergy, escape the superintendence of the civil power. Is it not deplorable that these dwellings should not also be subject to periodical inspection, by visitors consisting, if it be desired, of a priest, a magistrate, and some delegate of the municipal authorities? If nothing takes place but what is legal, humane, and charitable, in these establishments, which have all the character, and incur all the responsibility, of public institutions, why this resistance, this furious indignation of the church party, when any mention is made of touching what they call their privileges? There is something higher than the constitution devised at Rome, we mean the law of France—the common law—which grants to all protection, but which, in return, exacts from all respect and obedience.

CHAPTER XL.
THE EAST INDIAN IN PARIS.

Since three days, Mdlle. de Cardoville had left Dr. Baleinier's. The following scene took place in a little dwelling in the Rue Blanche, to which Djalma had been conducted in the name of his unknown protector. Fancy to yourself a pretty, circular apartment, hung with Indian drapery, with purple figures on a grey ground, just relieved by a few threads of gold. The ceiling, towards the centre, is concealed by similar hangings, tied together by a thick, silken cord; the two ends of this cord, unequal in length, terminated, instead of tassels, in two tiny Indian lamps of gold filigree-work, marvellously finished. By one of those ingenious combinations, so common in barbarous countries, these lamps served also to burn perfumes. Plates of blue crystal, let in between the openings of the arabesques, and illuminated by the interior light, shone with so limpid an azure, that the golden lamps seemed starred with transparent sapphires. Light clouds of whitish vapor rose incessantly from these lamps, and spread all around their balmy odor. Daylight was only admitted to this room (it was about two o'clock in the afternoon) through a little greenhouse, on the other side of a door of plate-glass, made to slide into the thickness of the wall, by means of a groove. A Chinese shade was arranged so as to hide or replace this glass at pleasure. Some dwarf palm trees, plantains, and other Indian productions, with thick leaves of a metallic green, arranged in clusters in this conservatory, formed, as it were, the background to two large variegated bushes of exotic flowers, which were separated by a narrow path, paved with yellow and blue Japanese tiles, running to the foot of the glass. The daylight, already much dimmed by the leaves through which it passed, took a hue of singular mildness as it mingled with the azure lustre of the perfumed lamps, and the crimson brightness of the fire in the tall chimney of oriental porphyry. In the semi-obscure of this apartment, impregnated with sweet odors and the aromatic vapor of Persian

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