

THE WANDERING JEW.

BY HENRIE M. W.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE TRYING-PLACE OF THE WOLVES.

It was a Sunday morning—the very day on which Mdlle. de Cardoville had received Rodin's letter with regard to Mother Bunch's disappearance. Two men were talking together, seated at a table in one of the public-houses in the village of Villiers, situated at no great distance from M. Hardy's factory. The village was for the most part inhabited by quarrymen and stonemasons, employed in working the neighboring quarries. Nothing can be ruder and more laborious, and at the same time less adequately paid, than the work of this class of people. Therefore, as Agricola had told Mother Bunch, they drew painful comparisons between their conditions, almost always miserable, and the comfort and comparative ease, enjoyed by M. Hardy's workmen, thanks to his generous and intelligent management, and to the principles of association and community, which he had put in practice among them. Misery and ignorance are always the cause of great evils. Misery is easily excited to anger, and ignorance soon yields to perfidious counsels. For a long time, the happiness of M. Hardy's workmen had been naturally envied, but not with a jealousy amounting to hatred. As soon, however, as the secret enemies of the manufacturer, uniting with his rival Baron Tripeaud, had an interest in changing this peaceful state of things—it changed accordingly.

With diabolical skill and perseverance, they succeeded in kindling the most evil passions. By means of chosen emissaries, they applied to those quarrymen and stonemasons of the neighborhood, whose bad conduct had aggravated their misery. Notorious for their turbulence, audacity, and energy, these men might exercise a dangerous influence on the majority of their companions, who were peaceful, laborious and honest, but easily intimidated by violence. These turbulent leaders, previously embittered by misfortune, were soon impressed with an exaggerated idea of the happiness of M. Hardy's workmen, and excited to a jealous hatred of them. They went still further; the incendiary sermons of an abbe, a member of the Jesuits, who had come expressly from Paris to preach during Lent against M. Hardy, acted powerfully on the minds of the women, who filled the church, whilst their husbands were haunting the taverns. Profiting by the growing fear, which the approach of the Cholera then inspired, the preacher struck with terror these weak and credulous imaginations by pointing to M. Hardy's factory as a centre of corruption and damnation, capable of drawing down the vengeance of Heaven, and bringing the fatal scourge upon the country. Thus the men, already inflamed with envy, were still more excited by the incessant urgency of their wives, who, maddened by the abbe's sermons, poured their curses on that band of atheists, who might bring down so many misfortunes upon them and their children. Some bad characters, belonging to the factory of Baron Tripeaud, and paid by him (for it was a great interest the honorable manufacturer had in the ruin of M. Hardy), came to augment the general irritation, and to complete it by raising one of those alarming union-questions, which in our day have unfortunately caused so much bloodshed. Many of M. Hardy's workmen, before they entered his employ, had belonged to a society or union, called the Devourers; while many of the stonemasons in the neighboring quarries belonged to a society called the Wolves. Now, for a long time, an implacable rivalry had existed between the Wolves and Devourers, and brought about many sanguinary struggles, which are the more to be deplored, as, in some respects, the idea of these unions is excellent, being founded on the fruitful and mighty principle of association. But unfortunately, instead of embracing all trades in one fraternal communion, these unions break up the working-class into distinct and hostile societies, whose rivalry often leads to bloody collisions.* For the last week, the Wolves, excited by so many different importunities, burned to discover an occasion or a pretext to come to blows with the Devourers; but the latter, not frequenting the public-houses, and hardly leaving the factory during the week, had hitherto rendered such a meeting impossible, and the Wolves had been forced to wait for the Sunday with ferocious impatience.

*Let it be noted, to the working man's credit, that such outrageous scenes become more and more rare as he is enlightened to the full consciousness of his worth. Such better tendencies are to be attributed to the just influence of an excellent tract on trades' unions, written by M. Agricola Perdignier, and published in 1841, Paris. This author, a joiner, founded at his own expense and established in the Faubourg St. An-

toine, where some forty or fifty of his trade lodged, and were given, after the day's work, a course of geometry, etc., applied to wood-carving. We went to one of the lectures, and found as much clearness in the professor's attention and intelligence in their scanty wages to sleep, perhaps, four in a room. M. Perdignier informed us that study and instruction are such powerful ameliorators, that, during six years, he had only one of his lodgers to expel. "In a few days," he remarked, "the bad eggs find out this is no place for them to addle sound ones!" We are happy to here render public homage to a learned and upright man, devoted to his fellow-workmen.]

Moreover, a great number of the quarrymen and stonemasons, being peaceable and hard-working people, had refused, though Wolves themselves, to join this hostile manifestation against the Devourers of M. Hardy's factory; the leaders had been obliged to recruit their forces from the vagabonds and idlers of the barriers, whom the attraction of tumult and disorder had enlisted under the flag of the warlike Wolves. Such then was the dull fermentation, which agitated the little village of Villiers, whilst the two men of whom we have spoken were at table in the public-house.

These men had asked for a private room, that they might be alone. One of them was still young, and pretty well dressed. But the disorder in his clothes, his loose cravat, his shirt spotted with wine, his dishevelled hair, his look of fatigue, his marble complexion, his bloodshot eyes, announced that a night of debauch had preceded this morning; whilst his abrupt and heavy gesture, his hoarse voice, his look, sometimes brilliant, and sometimes stupid, proved that to the last fumes of the intoxication of the night before, were joined the first attacks of a new state of drunkenness. The companion of this man said to him, as he touched his glass with his own: "Your health, my boy!"

"Yours!" answered the young man; though you look to me like the devil."

"I!—the devil?"—"Yes."

"Why?"—"How did you come to know me?"

"Do you repent that you ever knew me?"

"Who told you that I was a prisoner at Sainte-Pelagie?"

"Didn't I take you out of prison?"

"Why did you take me out?"

"Because I have a good heart."

"You are very fond of me, perhaps—just as the butcher likes the ox that he drives to the slaughter-house."

"Are you mad?"

"A man does not pay a hundred thousand francs for another without a motive."

"I have a motive."

"What is it? What do you want to do with me?"

"A jolly companion, that will spend his money like a man, and pass every night like the last. Good wine, good cheer, pretty girls, and gay songs. Is that such a bad trade?"

After he had remained a moment without answering, the young man replied with a gloomy air: "Why, on the eve of my leaving prison, did you attach this condition to my freedom, that I should write to my mistress to tell her that I would never see her again! Why did you exact this letter from me?"

"A sigh! what are you still thinking of her?"

"Always."

"You are wrong. Your mistress is far from Paris by this time. I saw her get into the stage-coach, before I came to take you out of Sainte-Pelagie."

"Yes, I was stifled in that prison. To get out, I would have given my soul to the devil. You thought so, and therefore you came to me; only, instead of my soul, you took Cephyse from me. Poor Bacchanal Queen! And why did you do it? Thousand thunders! Will you tell me?"

"A man as much attached to his mistress as you are is no longer a man. He wants energy, when the occasion requires."

"What occasion?"

"Let us drink!"

"You make me drink too much brandy."

"Bah! look at me!"

"That's what frightens me. It seems something devilish. A bottle of brandy does not even make you wink. You must have a stomach of iron and a head of marble."

"I have long travelled in Russia. There we drink to roast ourselves."

"And here to only warm. So—let's drink—but wine."

"Nonsense! wine is fit for children. Brandy for men like us!"

"Well, then, brandy; but it burns, and sets the head on fire, and then we see all the flames of hell!"

"That's how I like to see you, hang it!"

"But when you told me that I was too much

attached to my mistress, and that I should want energy when the occasion required, of what occasion did you speak?"

"Let us drink!"—"Stop a moment, comrade. I am no more of a fool than others. Your half-words have taught me something."

"Well, what?"—"You know that I have been a workman, that I have many companions, and that, being a good fellow, I am much liked among them. You want me for a catspaw, to cat & other chestnuts?"

"What then?"—"You must be some getter-up of riots—some speculator in revolts."

"What next?"—"You are travelling for some anonymous society, that trades in musket-shots."

"Are you a coward?"—"I burned powder in July, I can tell you—make no mistakes!"

"You would not mind burning some again?"

"Just as well that sort of fireworks as any other. Only I find revolutions more agreeable than useful; all that I got from the barricades of the three days was burnt breeches and a lost jacket. All the cause won by me, with its 'Forward! March!'" says."

"You know many of Hardy's workmen?"

"Oh! that's why you have brought me down here?"

"Yes—you will meet with many of the workmen from the factory."

"Men from Hardy's take part in a row? No, no, they are too well off for that. You have been sold."

"You will see presently."

"I tell you they are too well off. What have they to complain of?"

"What of their brethren—those who have not so good a master, and die of hunger and misery, and call on them for assistance? Do you think they will remain deaf to such a summons? Hardy is only an exception. Let the people but give a good pull all together, and the exception will become the rule, and all the world be happy."

"What you say there is true; but it would be a devil of a pull that would make an honest man out of my old master, Baron Tripeaud, who made me what I am—an out-and-out rip."

"Hardy's workmen are coming; you are their comrade, and have no interest in deceiving them. They will believe you. Join with me in persuading them——" "To what?"

"To leave this factory, in which they grow effeminate and selfish, and forget their brothers."

"But if they leave the factory, how are they to live?"

"We will provide for that—on the great day."

"And what's to be done till then?"

"What you have done last night—drink, laugh, sing, and, by way of work, exercise themselves privately in the use of arms."

"Who will bring these workmen here?"

"Some one has already spoken to them. They have had printed papers, reproaching them with indifference to their brothers. Come, will you support me?"

"I'll support you—the more readily as I cannot very well support myself. I only cared for Cephyse in the world; I know that I am on a bad road; you are pushing me on further; let the ball roll!—Whether we go to the devil one way or the other is not of much consequence. Let's drink!"

"Drink to our next night's fun; the last was only apprenticeship."

"Of what then are you made? I looked at you and never saw you either blush or smile, or change countenance. You are like a man of iron."

"I am not a lad of fifteen. It would take something more to make me laugh. I shall laugh tonight."

"I don't know if it's the brandy; but, devil take me, if you don't frighten me when you say you shall laugh tonight!"

So saying, the young man rose, staggering; he began to be once more intoxicated.

There was a knock at the door. "Come in!" The host made his appearance.

"What's the matter?"—"There's a young man below, who calls himself Olivier. He asks for M. Morok."

"That's right. Let him come up." The host went out.

"It is one of our men, but he is alone," said Morok, whose savage countenance expressed disappointment. "It astonishes me, for I expected a good number. Do you know him?"

"Olivier? Yes—a fair chap, I think."

"We shall see him directly. Here he is." A young man, with an open, bold, intelligent countenance, at this moment entered the room.

"What! old Sleepinbuff!" he exclaimed, at sight of Morok's companion.

"Myself. I have not seen you for an age, Olivier."

"Simple enough, my boy. We do not work at the same place."

"But you are alone!" cried Morok; and pointing to Sleepinbuff, he added: "You may speak

before him—he is one of us. But why are you alone?"

"I come alone, but in the name of my comrades."

"Oh!" said Morok, with a sigh of satisfaction, "they consent."

"They refuse—just as I do!"

"What, the devil! they refuse? Have they no more courage than women?" cried Morok, grinding his teeth with rage—"Hark ye," answered Olivier, coolly. "We have received your letters, and seen your agent. We have had proof that he is really connected with great societies, many members of which are known to us."

"Well! why do you hesitate?"—"First of all, nothing proves that these societies are ready to make a movement."

"I tell you they are."—"He—tells you—they are," said Sleepinbuff, stammering; "and I (hic!) affirm it. Forward! March!"

"That's not enough," replied Olivier. "Besides, we have reflected upon it. For a week the factory was divided. Even yesterday the discussion was too warm to be pleasant. But this morning Father Simon called us to him; we explained ourselves fully before him, and he brought us all to one mind. We mean to wait, and if any disturbance breaks out, we shall see."

"Is that your final word?"

"It is our last word."

"Silence!" cried Sleepinbuff, suddenly, as he listened, balancing himself on his tottering legs. "It is like the noise of a crowd not far off." A dull sound was indeed audible, which became every moment more and more distinct, and at length grew formidable.

"What is that?" said Olivier, in surprise.

"Now," replied Morok, smiling with a sinister air, "I remember the host told me there was a great ferment in the village against the factory. If you and your other comrades had separated from Hardy's other workman, as I hoped, these people who are beginning to howl would have been for you, instead of against you."

"This was a trap, then, set one half of M. Hardy's workmen against the other!" cried Olivier; "you hoped that we should make common cause with these people against the factory, and that——"

The young man had not time to finish. A terrible outburst of shouts, howls and hisses shook the tavern. At the same instant the door was abruptly opened, and the host, pale and trembling, hurried into the chamber, exclaiming: "Gentlemen! do any of you work at M. Hardy's factory?"

"I do," said Olivier.

"Then you are lost. Here are the Wolves in a body, saying there are Devourers here from M. Hardy's, and offering them battle—unless the Devourers will give up the factory, and range themselves on their side."

"It was a trap, there can be no doubt of it!" cried Olivier, looking at Morok and Sleepinbuff, with a threatening air; "if my mates had come, we were all to be let in."

"I lay a trap, Olivier?" stammered Jacques Rennepont. "Never!"

"Battle to the Devourers! or let them join the Wolves!" cried the angry crowd with one voice, as they appeared to invade the house.

"Come!" exclaimed the host. Without giving Olivier time to answer, he seized him by the arm, and opening a window which led to a roof at no very great height from the ground, he said to him: "Make your escape by this window, let yourself slide down, and gain the fields; it is time."

As the young workman hesitated, the host added, with a look of terror: "Alone, against a couple of hundred, what can you do? A minute more and you are lost. Do you not hear them? They have entered the yard; they are coming up."

Indeed, at this moment, the groans, hisses and cheers redoubled in violence; the wooden staircase which led to the first story shook beneath the quick steps of many persons, and the shout arose, loud and piercing: "Battle to the Devourers!"

"Fly, Olivier!" cried Sleepinbuff, almost sobered by the danger.

Hardly had he pronounced the words when the door of the large room, which communicated with the small one in which they were, was burst open with a frightful crash.

"Here they are!" cried the host, clasping his hands in alarm. Then, running to Olivier, he pushed him, as it were, out of the window; for, with one foot on the sill, the workman still hesitated.

The window once closed, the publican returned towards Morok the instant the latter entered the large room, into which the leaders of the Wolves had just forced an entry, whilst their companions were vociferating in the yard and on the staircase. Eight or ten of these madmen, urged by others to take part in these scenes of disorder,