

THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE.

CHAPTER LI.—CONTINUED.

"Mademoiselle," said Agricola, "I have come to keep my promise, if your mother has no objection."

"Certainly, M. Agricola, answered the mother of the young girl, cordially. "She would not go over the Common Dwelling house with her father, her brother, or me, because she wished to have that pleasure with you today. It is quite right that you, who can talk so well, should do the honors of the house to the new-comer. She has been waiting for you an hour, and with such impatience!"

"Pray excuse me, mademoiselle," said Agricola, gaily, "in thinking of the pleasure of seeing you, I forgot the hour. That is my only excuse."

"Oh, mother!" said the young girl, in a tone of mild reproach, and becoming red as a cherry, "why did you say that?"

"Is it true, yes or no? I do not blame you for it; on the contrary. Go with M. Agricola, child, and he will tell you, better than I can, what all the workmen of the factory owe to M. Hardy."

"M. Agricola," said Angela, tying the ribbons of her pretty cap, "what a pity that your good little adopted sister is not with us!"

"Mother Bunch?—yes, you are right, mademoiselle; but that is only a pleasure put off, and the visit she paid us yesterday will not be the last."

Having embraced her mother, the girl took Agricola's arm, and they went out together.

"Dear me, Agricola!" said Angela, "if you knew how much I was surprised on entering this new house, after being accustomed to see so much misery amongst the poor workmen in our country, and in which I too have had my share, whilst here everybody seems happy and contented. It is really like fairy-land; I think I am in a dream, and when I ask my mother the explanation of these wonders, she tells me, 'M. Agricola will explain it all to you.'"

"Do you know why I am so happy to undertake that delightful task, mademoiselle?" said Agricola, with an accent at once grave and tender. "Nothing could be more in season."

"Why so, M. Agricola?"—"Because, to show you this house, to make you acquainted with all the resources of our association, is to be able to say to you: 'Here, the workman, sure of the future, is not like so many of his poor brothers, obliged to renounce the sweetest want of the heart—the desire of choosing a companion for life—in the fear of uniting misery to misery.'"

Angela cast down her eyes, and blushed.

"Here the workman may safely yield to the hope of knowing the sweet joys of a family, sure of not having his heart torn hereafter by the sight of the horrible privations of those who are dear to him; here, thanks to order and industry, and the wise employment of the strength of all, men, women and children live happy and contented. In a word, to explain all this to you, mademoiselle," added Agricola, smiling with a still more tender air, "is to prove, that here we can do nothing more reasonable than love, nothing wiser than marry."

"M. Agricola," answered Angela, in a slightly agitated voice, and blushing still more as she spoke, "suppose we were to begin our walk."

"Directly, mademoiselle," replied the smith, pleased at the trouble he had excited in that ingenuous soul. "But, come; we are near the dormitory of the little girls. The chirping birds have long left their nests. Let us go there."

"Willingly, M. Agricola."

The young smith and Angela soon entered a spacious dormitory, resembling that of a first-rate boarding school. The little iron bedsteads were arranged in symmetrical order; at each end were the beds of the two mothers of families, who took the superintendence by turns.

"Dear me! how well it is arranged, M. Agricola; and how neat and clean! Who is it that takes such good care of it?"

"The children themselves; we have no servants here. There is an extraordinary emulation between these urchins—as to who shall make her bed most neatly, and it amuses them quite as much as making a bed for their dolls. Little girls, you know, delight in playing at keeping house. Well, they play at it in good earnest, and the house is admirably kept in consequence."

"Oh! I understand. They turn to account their natural taste for all such kinds of amusement."

"That is the whole secret. You will see them everywhere usefully occupied, and delighted at the importance of the employments given them."

"Oh, M. Agricola!" said Angela, timidly, "only compare these fine dormitories, so warm and healthy, with the horrible icy garrets, where

children are heaped pell-mell on a wretched straw-mattress, shivering with cold, as is the case with almost all the workmen's families in our country!"

"And in Paris, mademoiselle, it is even worse."

"Oh! how kind, generous, and rich must M. Hardy be, to spend so much money in doing good!"

"I am going to astonish you, mademoiselle!" said Agricola, with a smile, "to astonish you so much, that perhaps you will not believe me."

"Why so, M. Agricola?"—"There is not certainly in the world a man with a better and more generous heart than M. Hardy; he does good for its own sake, and without thinking of his personal interest. And yet, Mdle. Angela, were he the most selfish and avaricious of men, he would still find it greatly to his advantage to be as comfortable as we are."

"Is it possible, M. Agricola? You tell me so, and I believe it; but if good can so easily be done, if there is even an advantage in doing it, why is it not more commonly attempted?"—"Ah! mademoiselle, it requires three gifts very rarely met with in the same person—knowledge, power and will."

"Alas! yes. Those who have the knowledge, have not the power."

"And those who have the power, have neither the knowledge nor the will."

"But how does M. Hardy find any advantage in the good he does for you?"

"I will explain that presently, mademoiselle."

"Oh! what a nice, sweet smell of fruit!" said Angela, suddenly.—"Our common fruit-store is close at hand. I wager we shall find there some of the little birds from the dormitory—now occupied in picking and stealing, but hard at work."

"Opening the door, Agricola led Angela into a large room, furnished with shelves, on which the winter-fruits were arranged in order. A number of children, from seven to eight years old, neatly and warmly clad, and glowing with health, exerted themselves cheerfully, under the superintendence of a woman, in separating and sorting the spoiled fruit."

"You see," said Agricola, wherever it is possible, we make use of the children. These occupations are amusements for them, answering to the need of movement and activity natural to their age; and, in this way, we can employ the grown girls and the women to much better advantage."

"True, M. Agricola; how well it is arranged."

"And if you saw what services the urchins in the kitchen render! Directed by one or two women, they do the work of eight or ten servants."—"In fact, said Angela, smiling, "at their age, we like so much to play at cooking dinner. They must be delighted."

"And, in the same way, under pretext of playing at gardening, they weed the ground, gather the fruit and vegetables, water the flowers, roll the paths, and so on. In a word, this army of infant-workers, who generally remain till ten or twelve years of age without being of any service, are here very useful. Except three hours of school, which is quite sufficient for them, from the age of six or seven their recreations are turned to good account, and the dear little creatures, by the saving of full-grown arms which they effect, actually gain more than they cost; and then, mademoiselle, do you not think there is something in the presence of childhood thus mixed up with every labor—something mild, pure, almost sacred, which has its influence on our words and actions, and imposes a salutary reserve? The coarsest man will respect the presence of children."

"The more one reflects, the more one sees that everything here is really designed for the happiness of all!" said Angela, in admiration.

"It has not been done without trouble. It was necessary to conquer prejudices, and break through customs. But see, Mdle. Angela! here we are at the kitchen," added the smith, smiling; "is it not as imposing as that of a barrack or a public school?"

Indeed, the culinary department of the Common Dwelling-house was immense. All its utensils were bright and clean; and thanks to the marvelous and economical inventions of modern science (which are always beyond the reach of the poorer classes, to whom they are most necessary, because they can only be practised on a large scale), not only the fire on the hearth, and in the stoves, was fed with half the quantity of fuel that would have been consumed by each family individually, but the excess of the caloric sufficed, with the aid of well-constructed tubes, to spread a mild and equal warmth through all parts of the house. And here also children, under the direction of two women, rendered numerous services. Nothing could be more comic than the serious manner in which they performed their culinary functions; it was the same with the assistance they gave the bakehouse, where, at an extraordinary saving in the price (for they bought flour wholesale), they made an excellent

household bread, composed of pure wheat and rye, so preferable to that whiter bread, which too often owes its apparent qualities to some deleterious substance.

"Good-day, Dame Bertrand," said Agricola, gaily, to a worthy matron, who was gravely contemplating the slow evolution of several spits, worthy of Gamache's Wedding, so heavily were they laden with pieces of beef, mutton, and veal, which began to assume a fine golden brown color of the most attractive kind; "good-day, Dame Bertrand. According to the rule, I do not pass the threshold of the kitchen. I only wish it to be admired by this young lady, who is a new-comer amongst us."

"Admire, my lad, pray admire—and above all take notice, how good these brats are, and how well they work!" So saying, the matron pointed with the long ladle, which served her as a sceptre, to some fifteen children of both sexes, seated round a table, and deeply absorbed in the exercise of their functions, which consisted in peeling potatoes and picking herbs.

"We are, I see, to have a downright Belshazzar's feast, Dame Bertrand?" said Agricola, laughing.

"Faith! a feast like we have always, my lad. Here is our bill of fare for today. A good vegetable soup, roast beef with potatoes, salad, fruit, cheese; and for extras, it being Sunday, some currant tarts made by Mother Denis at the bakehouse, where the oven is heating now."

"What you tell me, Dame Bertrand, gives me a furious appetite," said Agricola, gaily. "One soon knows when it is your turn in the kitchen," added he, with a flattering air—"Get along, do!" said the female Soyer on service, merrily.

"What astonishes me so much, M. Agricola," said Angela, as they continued their walk, "is the comparison of the insufficient, unwholesome food of the workmen in our country, with that which is provided here."

"And yet we do not spend more than twenty-five sous a day, for much better food than we should get for three francs in Paris."

"But really it is hard to believe, M. Agricola. How is it possible?"

"It is thanks to the magic wand of M. Hardy. I will explain it all presently."

"Oh! how impatient I am to see M. Hardy!"

"You will soon see him—perhaps today; for he is expected every moment. But here is the refectory, which you do not yet know, as your family, like many others, prefer dining at home. See what a fine room, looking out on the garden, just opposite the fountain!"

It was indeed a vast hall, built in the form of a gallery, with ten windows opening on the garden. Tables, covered with shining oil-cloth, were ranged along the walls, so that, in winter, this apartment served in the evening, after work, as a place of meeting for those who preferred to pass an hour together, instead of remaining alone or with their families. Then, in this large hall, well warmed and brilliantly lighted with gas, some read, some played cards, some talked, and some occupied themselves with easy work.

"That is not all," said Agricola to the young girl; "I am sure you will like this apartment still better when I tell you, that on Thursdays and Sundays we make a ball-room of it, and on Tuesdays and Saturdays a concert-room."

"Really!"

"Yes," continued the smith proudly, "we have amongst us musicians, quite capable of tempting us to dance. Moreover, twice a week, nearly all of us sing in chorus—men, women and children. Unfortunately, this week, some disputes that have arisen in the factory have prevented our concerts."

"So many voices! that must be superb."

"It is very fine, I assure you. M. Hardy has always encouraged this amusement amongst us, which has, he says—and he is right—so powerful an effect on the mind and the manners. One winter, he sent for two pupils of the celebrated Wilhelm, and since then, our school has made great progress. I assure you, Mdle. Angela, that, without flattering ourselves, there is something truly exciting in the sound of two hundred voices, singing in chorus some hymn to Labor or Freedom. You shall hear it, and you will, I think, acknowledge that there is something great and elevating in the heart of man, in this fraternal harmony of voices, blending in one grave, sonorous, imposing sound."

"Oh! I believe it. But what happiness to inhabit here. It is a life of joy; for labor mixed with recreation, becomes itself a pleasure."

"Alas! here, as everywhere, there are tears and sorrows," replied Agricola, sadly. "Do you see that isolated building, in a very exposed situation?"

"Yes; what is it?"—"That is our hospital for the sick. Happily, thanks to our healthy mode of life, it is not often full; an annual subscription enables us to have a good doctor. Moreover, a mutual benefit society is arranged in such a manner amongst us, that any one of us,

in case of illness, receives two thirds of what he would have gained in health."

"How well it is all managed! And there, M. Agricola, on the other side of the grass-plot"

"That is the wash-house, with water laid on, cold and hot; and under yonder shed is the drying-place; further on, you see the stables, and the lofts and granaries for the provender of the factory horses."

"But M. Agricola, will you tell me the secret of all these wonders?"

"In ten minutes, you shall understand it all, mademoiselle."

Unfortunately, Angela's curiosity was for a while disappointed. The girl was now standing with Agricola close to the iron gate, which shut in the garden from the broad avenue that separated the factory from the Common Dwelling-house. Suddenly, the wind brought from the distance the sound of trumpets and military music; then was heard the gallop of two horses, approaching rapidly, and soon after a general officer made his appearance, mounted on a fine black charger, with a long flowing tail and crimson housings; he wore cavalry boots and white breeches, after the fashion of the empire; his uniform glittered with gold embroidery, the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor was passed over his right epaulet, with its four silver stars, and his hat had a broad gold border, and was crowned with a white plume, the distinctive sign reserved for the marshals of France. No warrior could have had a more martial and chivalrous air, or have sat more proudly on his war-horse. At the moment Marshal Simon (for it was he) arrived opposite the place where Angela and Agricola were standing, he drew up his horse suddenly, sprang lightly to the ground, and threw the golden reins to a servant in livery, who followed also on horseback.

"Where shall I wait for your grace?" asked the groom—"At the end of the avenue," said the marshal.

And, uncovering his head respectfully, he advanced hastily with his hat in his hand, to meet a person whom Angela and Agricola had not previously perceived. This person soon appeared at a turn of the avenue; he was an old man, with an energetic, intelligent countenance. He wore a very neat blouse, and a cloth cap over his long, white hair. With his hands in his pockets, he was quietly smoking an old meerschaum pipe.

"Good morning, father," said the marshal, respectfully, as he affectionately embraced the old workman, who, having tenderly returned the pressure, said to him: "Put on your hat, my boy. But how gay we are!" added he, with a smile.

"I have just been to a review, father, close by; and I took the opportunity to call on you as soon as possible."

"But shall I then not see my grand-daughters today, as I do every Sunday?"

"They are coming in a carriage, father and Dagobert accompanies them."

"But what is the matter? you appear full of thought."

"Indeed, father," said the marshal, with a somewhat agitated air, "I have serious things to talk about."

"Come in, then," said the old man, with some anxiety. The marshal and his father disappeared at the turn of the avenue.

Angela had been struck with amazement at seeing this brilliant General, who was entitled "your grace," salute an old workman in a blouse as his father; and, looking at Agricola with a confused air, she said to him: "What, M. Agricola! this old workman—"

"Is the father of Marshal Duke de Ligny—the friend—yes, I may say the friend," added Agricola, with emotion, "of my father, who for twenty years served under him in war."

"To be placed so high, and yet be so respectful and tender to his father!" said Angela. "The marshal must have a very noble heart; but why does he let his father remain a workman?"

"Because Father Simon will not quit his trade and the factory for anything in the world. He was born a workman, and he will die a workman, though he is the father of a duke and marshal of France."

CHAPTER LI.

THE SECRET.

When the very natural astonishment which the arrival of Marshal Simon had caused in Angela had passed away, Agricola said to her with a smile: "I do not wish to take advantage of this circumstance, Mdle. Angela, to spare you the account of the secret, by which all the wonders of our Common Dwelling-house are brought to pass."

"Oh! I should not have let you forget your promise, M. Agricola," answered Angela, "what you have already told me interests me too much for that."