

2 THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE. CHAPTER XL. DISCOVERIES.

"Where is Gabriel, dear mother?" inquired he. "How is he? As you have seen him, tell us all about him." "I have seen Gabriel," said Frances, drying her tears, "he is confined at home. His superiors have rigorously forbidden his going out. Luckily, they did not prevent his receiving me, for his words and counsels have opened my eyes to many things. It is from him that I learned how guilty I had been to you, my poor husband."

"How so?" asked Dagobert. "Why, you know that if I caused you so much grief, it was not from wickedness. When I saw you in such despair, I suffered almost as much myself; but I durst not tell you so, for fear of breaking my oath. I had resolved to keep it, believing that it was my duty. And yet something told me that it could not be my duty to cause you so much pain. 'Alas, my God! enlighten me!' I exclaimed in my prison, as I knelt down and prayed, in spite of the mockeries of the other women. 'Why should a just and pious work, commanded by my confessor, the most respectable of men, overwhelm me and mine with so much misery? Have mercy on me, my God, and teach me if I have done wrong without knowing it! As I prayed with fervour, God heard me, and inspired me with the idea of applying to Gabriel. 'I thank Thee, Father! I will obey!' said I within myself. 'Gabriel is like my own child; but he is also a priest, a martyr—almost a saint. If any one in the world imitates the charity of our blessed Saviour, it is surely he. When I leave this prison, I will go and consult him, and he will clear up my doubts.'"

"You are right, dear mother," cried Agricola; "it was a thought from heaven. Gabriel is an angel of purity, courage, nobleness—the type of the true and good priest!" "Ah, poor wife!" said Dagobert, with bitterness; "if you had never had any confessor but Gabriel!" "I thought of it before he went on his journey," said Frances, with simplicity. "I should have liked to confess to the dear boy—but I fancied Abbe Dubois would be offended, and that Gabriel would be too indulgent with regard to my sins."

"Your sins, poor dear mother?" said Agricola. "As if you ever committed any!" "And what did Gabriel tell you?" asked the soldier. "Alas, my dear! had I but had such an interview with him soon! What I told him of Abbe Dubois roused his suspicions, and he questioned me, dear child, as to many things of which he had never spoken to me before. Then I opened to him my whole heart, and he did the same to me, and we both made sad discoveries with regard to persons whom we had always thought very respectable, and who yet had deceived each of us, unknown to the other."

"How so?" "Why, they used to tell him, under the seal of secrecy, things that were supposed to come from me; and they used to tell me, under the same seal of secrecy, things that were supposed to come from him. Thus, he confessed to me that he did not feel at first any vocation for the priesthood; but they told him that I should not believe myself safe in this world or the next if he did not take orders, because I felt persuaded that I could best serve the Lord by giving Him so good a servant; and that yet I had never dared to ask Gabriel himself to give me this proof of his attachment, though I had taken him from the street, a deserted orphan, and brought him up as my own. The poor dear child, thinking he could please me, sacrificed himself. He entered the seminary."

"Horrible," said Agricola; "'tis an infamous snare, and, for the priests who were guilty of it, a sacrilegious lie!" "During all that time," resumed Frances, "they were using very different language to me. I was told that Gabriel felt his vocation, but that he durst not avow it to me, for fear of my being jealous on account of Agricola, who, being brought up as a workman, would not enjoy the same advantages as those which the priesthood would secure to Gabriel. So when he asked my permission to enter the seminary—dear child! he entered it with regret, but he thought he was making me so happy!—instead of discouraging this idea, I did all in my power to persuade him to follow it, assuring him that he could not do better, and that it would occasion me great joy. You understand, I exaggerated, for fear he should think me jealous on account of Agricola."

"What an odious machination!" said Agricola,

in amazement. "They were speculating in this unworthy manner upon your mutual devotion. Thus Gabriel saw the expression of your dearest wish in the almost forced encouragement given to his resolution."

"Little by little, however, as Gabriel has the best heart in the world, the vocation really came to him. That was natural enough—he was born to console those who suffer, and devote himself for the unfortunate. He would never have spoken to me of the past, had it not been for this morning's interview. But then I beheld him, who is usually so mild and gentle, become indignant, exasperated, against M. Rodin and another person whom he accuses. He had serious complaints against them already, but these discoveries, he says, will make up the measure."

At these words of Frances, Dagobert pressed his hand to his forehead, as if to recall something to his memory. For some minutes he had listened with surprise, and almost terror, to the account of these secret plots, conducted with such deep and crafty dissimulation.

Frances continued: "When at last I acknowledged to Gabriel, that, by the advice of Abbe Dubois, my confessor, I had delivered to a stranger the children confided to my husband—General Simon's daughters—the dear boy blamed me, though with great regret, not for having wished to instruct the poor orphans in the truths of our holy religion, but for having acted without the consent of my husband, who alone was answerable before God and man for the charge entrusted to him. Gabriel severely censured Abbe Dubois' conduct, who had given me, he said, bad and perfidious counsels; and then, with the sweetness of an angel, the dear boy consoled me, and exhorted me to come and tell you all. My poor husband! he would fain have accompanied me, for I had scarcely courage to come hither, so strongly did I feel the wrong I had done you; but, unfortunately, Gabriel is confined at the seminary by strict order of his superiors; he could not come with me, and—"

Here Dagobert, who seemed much agitated, abruptly interrupted his wife.

"One word, Frances," said he; "for in truth, in the midst of so many cares, and black, diabolical plots, one loses one's memory, and the head begins to wander. Didst not tell me, the day the children disappeared, that Gabriel, when taken in by you, had round his neck a bronze medal, and in his pocket a book filled with papers in a foreign language?"

"Yes, my dear." "And this medal and these papers were afterwards delivered to your confessor?" "Yes, my dear." "And Gabriel never spoke of them since?" "Never."

Agricola, hearing this from his mother, looked at her with surprise, and exclaimed: "Then Gabriel has the same interest as the daughters of General Simon, or Mlle. de Cardoville, to be in the Rue Saint-Francois to-morrow?"

"Certainly," said Dagobert. "And now do you remember what he said to us, just after my arrival—that, in a few days, he would need our support in a serious matter?"

"Yes, father." "And he is kept a prisoner at his seminary! And he tells your mother that he has to complain of his superiors! and he asked us for our support with so sad and grave an air, that I said to him—"

"He would speak so, if about to engage in a deadly duel," interrupted Agricola. "True, father! and yet you, who are a good judge of valour, acknowledged that Gabriel's courage was equal to yours. For him so to fear his superiors, the danger must be great indeed."

"Now that I have heard your mother, I understand it all," said Dagobert. "Gabriel is like Rose and Blanche, like Mlle. de Cardoville, like your mother, like all of us perhaps—the victim of a secret conspiracy of wicked priests. Now that I know their dark machinations, their infernal perseverance, I see," added the soldier, in a whisper, "that it requires strength to struggle against them. I had not the least idea of their power."

"You are right, father; for those who are hypocritical and wicked do as much harm as those who are good and charitable, like Gabriel, do good. There is no more implacable enemy than a bad priest."

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