

THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE.

CHAPTER XI.—CONTINUED.

DISCOVERIES.

'I know it, and that's what frightens me; for my poor children in their hands. But is all lost? Shall I bring myself to give them up without an effort? Oh, no, no! I will not show any weakness—and yet, since mother told us of these plots I do not know how it is—but I seem less strong, less resolute. What is [passing around me appears so terrible. The spiriting away of these children is no longer an isolated fact—it is one of the ramifications of a vast conspiracy, which surrounds and threatens us all. It seems to me as if we walk together in the darkness, in the midst of serpents, in the midst of snares that we can neither see nor struggle against. Well! I'll speak out! I have never feared death—I am not a coward—and yet I confess—yes, I confess it—these black robes frighten me—'

Dagobert pronounced these words in so sincere a tone, that his son started, for he shared the same impression. And it was quite natural. Frank, energetic, resolute characters, accustomed to act and fight in the light of day, never feel but one fear—and that is, to be ensnared and struck in the dark by enemies that escape their grasp. Thus, Dagobert had encountered death twenty times; and yet, on hearing his wife's simple revelation of this dark tissue of lies, and treachery and crime, the soldier felt a vague sense of fear; and, tho' nothing was changed in the conditions of his nocturnal enterprise against the convent, it now appeared to him in a darker and more dangerous light.

The silence, which had reigned for some moments, was interrupted by Mother Bunch's return. The latter, knowing that the interview between Dagobert, his wife, and Agricola, ought not to have any importunate witness, knocked lightly at the door, and remained in the passage with Father Lorient.

'Can we come in, Madame Frances?' asked the seamstress. 'Here is Father Lorient, bringing some wood.'

'Yes, yes; come in, my good girl,' said Agricola, whilst his father wiped the cold sweat from his forehead.

The door opened, and the worthy dyer appeared with his hands and arms of an amaranthine color; on one side he carried a basket of wood, and on the other some live coal in a shovel.

'Good evening to the company,' said Daddy Lorient. 'Thank you for having thought of me, Madame Frances. You know that my shop and everything in it are at your service. Neighbors should help one another; that's my motto! You were kind enough, I should think, to my late wife!'

Then, placing the wood in a corner, and giving the shovel to Agricola, the worthy dyer, guessing from the sorrowful appearance of the different actors in this scene, that it would be impolite to prolong his visit, added: 'You don't want anything else, Madame Frances?'

'No, thank you, Father Lorient.'

'Then, good evening to the company!' said the dyer, and addressing Mother Bunch, he added: 'Don't forget the letter to M. Dagobert. I dursn't touch it for fear of leaving the marks of my four fingers and thumb in amaranthine! But, good evening to the company!' and Father Lorient went out.

'M. Dagobert, here is a letter, said Mother Bunch. She set herself to light the fire in the stove, while Agricola drew his mother's arm-chair to the hearth.

'See what it is my boy,' said Dagobert to his son; 'my head is so heavy that I cannot see clear.' Agricola took the letter which contained only a few lines, and read it before looking at the signature:

'At Sea, December 25th, 1831.

'I avail myself of a few minutes' communication with a ship bound direct for Europe, to write to you, my old comrade, a few hasty lines, which will probably reach you by way of Havre, before the arrival of my last letters from India. You must by this time be in Paris, with my wife and child—tell them—'

'I am unable to say more—the boat is departing. Only one word I will soon be in France. Do not forget the 13th of February; the future of my wife and child depends upon it.'

'Adieu, my friend! Believe in my eternal gratitude. SIMON.'

'Agricola—quick! look to your father!' cried the hunchback.

From the first words of this letter, which present circumstances made so cruelly applicable, Dagobert had become deadly pale. Emotion, fatigue, exhaustion, joined to this last blow, made him stagger.

His son hastened to him and supported him in his arms. But soon the momentary weakness passed away, and Dagobert, drawing his hand across his brow, raised his tall figure to its full height. Then, whilst his eye sparkled his rough countenance took an expression of determined resolution, and he exclaimed, in wild excitement: 'No, no! I will not be a traitor; I will not be a coward. The black robes shall not frighten me; and this night Rose and Blanch Simon shall be free!'

CHAPTER XII.

THE PENAL CODE.

Startled for a moment by the dark and secret machinations of the black robes, as he called them, against the persons he loved, Dagobert might have hesitated an instant to an attempt at the deliverance of Rose and Blanche; but his indecision ceased directly on the reading of Marshal Simon's letter, which came timely to remind him of his sacred duties.

To the soldier's passing dejection had succeeded a resolution full of calm and collected energy.

'Agricola, what o'clock is it?' asked he of his son.

'Just struck nine, father.'

'You must make me, directly, an iron hook—strong enough to support my weight, and wide to hold on the coping of a wall. This stove will be forge and anvil; you will find a hammer in the house; and, as for iron,' said the soldier hesitating, and looking around him, 'as for iron—here is some!'

So saying, the soldier took from the hearth a strong pair of tongs and presented them to his son, adding: 'Come, my boy! blow up the fire, blow it to a white heat, and forge me this iron!'

On these words, Frances and Agricola looked at each other with surprise; the smith remained mute and confounded, not knowing the resolution of his father, and the preparations he had already commenced with the needle-woman's aid.

'Don't you hear me, Agricola,' repeated Dagobert, still holding the pair of tongs in his hand; 'you must make me a hook directly.'

'A hook, father?—for what purpose?'

'To tie to the end of a cord that I have here. There must be a loop at one end large enough to fix it securely.'

'But this cord—this hook—for what purpose are they?'

'To scale the walls of the convent, if I cannot get in by the door.'

'What convent?' asked Frances of her son.

'How father?' cried the latter rising abruptly.

'You still think of that?'

'Why! what else should I think of?'

'But, father, it is impossible; you will never attempt such an enterprise.'

'What is it, my child?' asked Frances, with anxiety. 'Where is father going?'

'He is going to break into the convent where Marshal Simon's daughters are confined, and carry them off.'

'Great God! my poor husband—a sacrilege!' cried Frances, faithful to her pious traditions, and clasping her hands together, she endeavored to rise and approach Dagobert.

The soldier, foreseeing that he would have to contend with observations and prayers of all sorts, and resolved not to yield, determined to cut short all useless supplications, which would only make him lose precious time. He said, therefore, with a grave, severe, and almost solemn air, which showed the inflexibility of his determination: 'Listen to me, wife—and you my son—when, at my age, a man makes up his mind to anything, he knows the reason why. And when a man has once made up his mind, neither his wife nor child can alter it. I have resolved to do my duty; so spare yourselves useless words. It may be your duty to talk to me as you have done; but it is over now, and we will say no more about it. This evening I must be master in my own house.'

Timid and alarmed, Frances did not dare utter a word, but she turned a supplicating glance towards her son.

'Father,' said the latter, 'one word more—only one.'

'Let us hear,' replied Dagobert, impatiently.

'I will not combat your resolution; but I will prove to you that you do not know to what you expose yourself.'

'I know it all,' replied the soldier, in an abrupt tone. 'The undertaking is a serious one; but it shall not be said that I neglected any means to accomplish what I promise to do.'

'But, father, you do not know to what danger you expose yourself,' said the smith, much alarmed.

'Talk of danger! talk of the porter's gun and the gardener's scythe!' said Dagobert, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. 'Talk of them, and have done with it—for, after all, suppose I were to leave my carcass in the convent, would not you remain to your mother? For twenty

years you were accustomed to do without me. It will be all the less trying to you.'

'And I, alas! am the cause of these misfortunes!' cried the poor mother. 'Ah! Gabriel has a good reason to blame me.'

'Madame Frances be comforted,' whispered the sempstress, who had drawn near to Dagobert's

wife. 'Agricola will not suffer his father to expose himself thus.'

After a moment's hesitation, the smith resumed in an agitated voice: 'I know you too well, father, to think of stopping you by the fear of death.'

'Of what danger, then, do you speak?' (To be continued.)

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