

THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DEED OF GIFT.

Father d'Aigrigny did not recognize Dagobert, and had never seen Agricola. He could not, therefore, at first explain the kind of angry alarm exhibited by Rodin. But the reverend father understood it all, when he heard Gabriel utter a cry of joy, and rush into the arms of the smith, exclaiming: "My brother! my second father—oh! it is heaven that sends you to me."

Having pressed Gabriel's hand, Dagobert advanced towards Father d'Aigrigny, with a rapid but unsteady step. As he remarked the soldier's threatening countenance, the reverend father, strong in his acquired rights, and feeling that, since noon, he was at home here, drew back a little, and said imperiously to the veteran: "Who are you, sir!—What do you want here?"

Instead of answering, the soldier continued to advance; then, stopping just facing Father d'Aigrigny, he looked at him for a second with such an astounding mixture of curiosity, disdain, aversion and audacity, that the ex-colonel of hussars quailed before the pale face and glowing eye of the veteran. The notary and Samuel, struck with surprise, remained mute spectators of this scene, while Agricola and Gabriel followed with anxiety Dagobert's least movements. As for Rodin, he pretended to be leaning on the casket, in order still to cover it with his body.

Surmounting at length the embarrassment caused by the steadfast look of the soldier, Father d'Aigrigny raised his head, and repeated: "I ask you, sir, who you are, and what you want?"

"Do you not recognize me?" said Dagobert, hardly able to restrain himself.

"No, sir—"

"In truth, returned the soldier, with profound contempt, "you cast down your eyes for shame, when, at Leipzig, you fought for the Russians against the French, and when General Simon, covered with wounds, answered you, renegade that you were, when you asked him for his sword. "I do not surrender to a traitor!"—and dragged himself along to one of the Russian grenadiers, to whom he yielded up his weapon. Well! there was then a wounded soldier by the side of General Simon—I am he."

"In brief, sir, what do you want?" said Father d'Aigrigny, hardly able to control himself.

"I have come to unmask you—you, that are as false and hateful a priest, as Gabriel is admirable and beloved by all."

"Sir!" cried the marquis, becoming livid with rage and emotion.

"I tell you, that you are infamous," resumed the soldier, with still greater force. "To rob Marshal Simon's daughters, and Gabriel, and Mdlle. de Cardoville of their inheritance, you have had recourse to the most shameful means."

"What do you say?" cried Gabriel. "The daughters of Marshal Simon?"

"Are your relations, my dear boy, as is also that worthy Mdlle. de Cardoville, the benefactress of Agricola. Now, this priest," he added, pointing to Father d'Aigrigny, "has had them shut up—the one as mad, in a lunatic asylum—the others in a convent. As for you, my dear boy, I did not hope to find you here, believing that they would have prevented you, like the others, from coming hither this morning. But, thank God, you are here, and I arrive in time. I should have been sooner, but for my wound. I have lost so much blood, that I have done nothing but faint all the morning."

"Truly!" cried Gabriel, with uneasiness. "I had not remarked you arm in a sling. What is the wound?"

At a sign from Agricola, Dagobert answered: "Nothing; the consequence of a fall. But here I am to unveil many infamies."

It is impossible to paint the curiosity, anguish, surprise, or fear, of the different actors in this scene, as they listened to Dagobert's threatening words. But the most overcome was Gabriel. His angelic countenance was distorted, his knees trembled under him. Struck by the communication of Dagobert, which revealed the existence of other heirs, he was unable to speak for some time; at length, he cried out, in a tone of despair: "And it is I—oh, God! I—who am the cause of the spoliation of this family!"

"You, brother?" exclaimed Agricola.

"Did they not wish to rob you also?" added Dagobert.

"The will," cried Gabriel, with increasing agony, "gave the property to those of the heirs that should appear before noon."

"Well?" said Dagobert, alarmed at the emotion of the young priest.

"Twelve o'clock has struck," resumed the latter. "Of all the family, I alone was present.

Do you understand it now? The term is expired. The heirs have been thrust aside by me!"

"By you!" said Dagobert, stammering with joy. "By you, my brave boy! then all is well."

"But—"

"All is well," resumed Dagobert, radiant with delight. "You will share with the others—I know you."

"But all this property I have irrevocably made over to another," cried Gabriel, in despair.

"Made over the property!" cried Dagobert, quite petrified. "To whom, then?—to whom?"

"To this gentleman," said Gabriel, pointing to Father d'Aigrigny.

"To him!" exclaimed Dagobert, overwhelmed by the news; "to him—the renegade—who has always been the evil genius of this family!"

"But, brother," cried Agricola, "did you then know your claim to this inheritance?"

"No," answered the young priest, with deep dejection; "no—I only learned it this morning, from Father d'Aigrigny. He told me, that he had only recently been informed of my rights, by family papers long ago found upon me, and sent by our mother to her confessor."

A sudden light seemed to dawn upon the mind of the smith, as he exclaimed: I understand it all now. They discovered in these papers, that you would one day have a chance of becoming rich. Therefore, they interested themselves about you—therefore, they took you into their college, where we could never see you—therefore, they deceived you in your vocation by shameful falsehoods, to force you to become a priest, and to lead you to make this deed of gift. Oh, sir!" resumed Agricola, turning towards Father d'Aigrigny, with indignation, "my father is right—such machinations are indeed infamous!"

During this scene, the reverend father and his socius, were alarmed and shaken in their coolness. Rodin, still leaning upon the casket, had said a few words in a low voice to Father d'Aigrigny. So that when Agricola, carried away by his indignation, reproached the latter with his infamous machinations, he bowed his head humbly, and answered: "We are bound to forgive injuries, and offer them to the Lord as a mark of our humility."

Dagobert, confounded at all he had just heard, felt his reason begin to wander. After so much anxiety, his strength failed beneath this new and terrible blow. Agricola's just and sensible words, in connection with certain passages, of the testament, at once enlightened Gabriel as to the views of Father d'Aigrigny, in taking charge of his education, and leading him to join the Society of Jesus. For the first time in his life, Gabriel was able to take in at a glance all the secret springs of the dark intrigue, of which he had been the victim. Then, indignation and despair surmounting his natural timidity, the missionary, with flashing eye, and cheeks inflamed with noble wrath, exclaimed, as he addressed Father d'Aigrigny: "So, father, when you placed me in one of your colleges, it was not from any feeling of kindness or commiseration, but only in the hope of bringing me one day to renounce in favor of your order my share in this inheritance; and it did not even suffice you to sacrifice me to your cupidity, but I must also be rendered the involuntary instrument of a shameful spoliation! If only I were concerned—if you only coveted my claim to all this wealth, I should not complain. I am the minister of a religion which honors and sanctifies poverty; I have consented to the donation in your favor, and I have not, I could never have any claim upon it. But property is concerned which belongs to poor orphans, brought from a distant exile by my adopted father, and I will not see them wronged. But the benefactress of my adopted brother is concerned, and I will not see her wronged. But the last will of a dying man is concerned, who, in his ardent love of humanity, bequeathed to his descendants an evangelic mission—an admirable mission of progress, love, union, liberty—and I will not see this mission blighted in its bud. No, no; I tell you, that this mission shall be accomplished, though I have to cancel the donation I have made."

On these words, Father d'Aigrigny and Rodin looked at each other with a slight shrug of the shoulders. At a sign from the socius, the reverend father began to speak with immovable calmness, in a slow and sanctified voice, keeping his eyes constantly cast down: "There are many incidents connected with this inheritance of M. de Rennepont, which appear very complicated—many phantoms, which seem unusually menacing—and yet, nothing could be really more simple and natural. Let us proceed in regular order. Let us put aside all these calumnious imputations; we will return to them afterwards. M. Gabriel de Rennepont—and I humbly beg him to contradict me, if I depart in the least instance from the exact truth—M. Gabriel de Rennepont, in acknowledgment of the care formerly bestowed on him by the society to which I have the honor to

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