

## THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUK.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## THE ACCUSER.

Baleinier, disconcerted for a moment by the unexpected presence of a magistrate, and by Rodin's inexplicable attitude, soon recovered his presence of mind, and addressing his colleague of the longer robe, said to him; "If I made signs to you, sir, it was that, while I wished to respect the silence which this gentleman"—glancing at the magistrate—"has preserved since his entrance, I desired to express my surprise at the unexpected honor of this visit."

"It is to the lady that I will explain the reason for my silence, and beg her to excuse it," replied the magistrate, as he made a half-bow to Adrienne, whom he thus continued to address: "I have just received so serious a declaration with regard to you, madame, that I could not forbear looking at you for a moment in silence, to see if I could read in your countenance or in your attitude, the truth or falsehood of the accusation that has been placed in my hands; and I have every reason to believe that it is but too well founded."

"May I at length be informed, sir," said Dr. Baleinier, in a polite but firm tone, "to whom I have the honor of speaking?"

"Sir, I am judge d'instruction, and I have come to inform myself as to a fact which has been pointed out to me—"

"Will you do me the honor to explain yourself, sir?" said the doctor, bowing.

"Sir," resumed the magistrate, M. de Gernande, a man of about fifty years of age, full of firmness and straightforwardness, and knowing how to unite the austere duties of his position with benevolent politeness, "you are accused of having committed—a very great error, not to use a harsher expression. As for the nature of that error, I prefer believing, sir, that you (a first rate man of science) may have been deceived in the calculation of a medical case, rather than suspect you of having forgotten all that is sacred in the exercise of a profession that is almost a priesthood."

"When you specify the facts, sir," answered the Jesuit of the short robe, with a degree of haughtiness, "it will be easy for me to prove that my reputation as a man of science is no less from reproach, than my conscience as a man of honor."

"Madame," said M. de Gernande, addressing Adrienne, "is it true that you were conveyed to this house by stratagem?"

"Sir," cried M. Baleinier, "permit me to observe, that the manner in which you open this question is an insult to me."

"Sir, it is to the lady that I have the honor of addressing myself," replied M. de Gernande, sternly; "and I am the sole judge of the propriety of my questions."

Adrienne was about to answer affirmatively to the magistrate, when an expressive look from Dr. Baleinier reminded her that she would perhaps expose Dagobert and his son to cruel dangers. It was no base and vulgar feeling of vengeance by which Adrienne was animated, but a legitimate indignation, inspired by odious hypocrisy. She would have thought it cowardly not to unmask the criminals; but wishing to avoid compromising others, she said to the magistrate, with an accent full of mildness and dignity: "Permit me, sir, in my turn, rather to ask you a question."

"Speak, madame."

"Will the answer I make be considered a formal accusation?"

"I have come hither, madame, to ascertain the truth, and no consideration should induce you to dissemble it."

"So be it, sir," resumed Adrienne; "but suppose, having just causes of complaint, I lay them before you, in order to be allowed to leave this house, shall I afterwards be at liberty not to press the accusations I have made?"

"You may abandon proceedings, madame, but the law will take up your cause in the name of society, if its rights have been injured in your person."

"Shall I then not be allowed to pardon? Should I not be sufficiently avenged by a contemptuous forgetfulness of the wrongs I have suffered?"

"Personally, madame, you may forgive and forget; but I have the honor to repeat to you, that society cannot show the same indulgence, if it should turn out that you have been the victim of a criminal machination—and I have every reason to fear it is so. The manner in which you express yourself, the generosity of your sentiments, the calmness and dignity of your attitude, convince me that I have been well informed."

"I hope, sir," said Dr. Baleinier, recovering his coolness, "that you will at least communicate the declaration that has been made to you."

"It has been declared to me, sir," said the magistrate, in a stern voice, "that Mdlle. de Cardoville was brought here by stratagem."

"By stratagem?"—"Yes, sir."

"It is true. The lady was brought here by stratagem," answered the Jesuit of the short robe, after a moment's silence.

"You confess it, then?" said M. de Gernande. "Certainly I do, sir. I admit that I had recourse to means which we are unfortunately too often obliged to employ, when persons who most need our assistance are unconscious of their own sad state."

"But, sir," replied the magistrate, "it has also been declared to me, that Mdlle. de Cardoville never required such aid."

"That, sir, is a question of medical jurisprudence, which has to be examined and discussed," said M. Baleinier, recovering his assurance.

"It will, indeed, sir, be seriously discussed; for you are accused of confining Mdlle. de Cardoville, while in the full possession of all her faculties."

"And may I ask you for what purpose?" said M. Baleinier, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, and in a tone of irony. "What interest had I to commit such a crime, even admitting that my reputation did not place me above so odious and absurd a charge?"

"Yes are said to have acted, sir, in furtherance of a family plot, devised against Mdlle. de Cardoville for a pecuniary motive."

"And who has dared, sir, to make so calumnious a charge?" cried Dr. Baleinier, with indignant warmth. "Who has had the audacity to accuse a respectable, and I dare to say, respected man, of having been the accomplice in such infamy?"

"I," said Rodin, coldly.

"You cried Dr. Baleinier, falling back two steps, as if thunderstruck.

"You, I accuse you," repeated Rodin, in a clear sharp voice.

"Yes, it was this gentleman who came to me this morning, with ample proofs, to demand my interference in favor of Mdlle. de Cardoville," said the magistrate, drawing back a little, to give Adrienne the opportunity of seeing her defender.

Throughout this scene, Rodin's name had not hitherto been mentioned. Mdlle. de Cardoville had often heard speak of the Abbe d'Aigrigny's secretary in no very favorable terms; but, never having seen him, she did not know that her liberator was this very Jesuit. She therefore looked towards him, with a glance in which were mingled curiosity, interest, surprise and gratitude.

Rodin's cadaverous countenance, his repulsive ugliness, his sordid dress, would a few days before have occasioned Adrienne a perhaps invincible feeling of disgust. But the young lady, remembering how the sempstress, poor, feeble, deformed and dressed almost in rags, was endowed, notwithstanding her wretched exterior, with one of the noblest and most admirable hearts, recalled this recollection in favor of the Jesuit. She forgot that he was ugly and sordid, only to remember that he was old, that he seemed poor, and that he had come to her assistance. Dr. Baleinier, notwithstanding his craft, notwithstanding his audacious hypocrisy, in spite even of his presence of mind, could not conceal how much he was disturbed by Rodin's denunciation. His head became troubled as he remembered how, on the first day of Adrienne's confinement in this house, the implacable appeal of Rodin, through the hole in the door, had prevented him (Baleinier) from yielding to emotions of pity, inspired by the despair of this unfortunate young girl, driven almost to doubt of her own reason. And yet was this very Rodin, so cruel, so inexorable, the devoted agent of Father d'Aigrigny, who denounced him (Baleinier), and brought a magistrate to set Adrienne at liberty—when, only the day before, Father d'Aigrigny had ordered an increase of severity towards her!

The lay Jesuit felt persuaded that Rodin was betraying Father d'Aigrigny in the most shameful manner, and that Mdlle. de Cardoville's friends had bribed and bought over this scoundrelly secretary. Exasperated by what he considered a monstrous piece of treachery, the doctor exclaimed, in a voice broken with rage: "And it is you, sir, that have the impudence to accuse me—you, who only a few days ago—"

Then, reflecting that the retort upon Rodin would be self-accusation, he appeared to give way to an excess of emotion, and resumed with bitterness: "Ah, sir, you are the last person that I should have thought capable of this odious denunciation. It is shameful!"

"And who had a better right than I to denounce this infamy?" answered Rodin in a rude, overbearing tone. "Was I not in position to learn—unfortunately, too late—the nature of the conspiracy of which Mdlle. de Cardoville and others have been the victims? Then, what was my duty as an honest man? Why, to inform the magistrate, to prove what I set forth, and to

accompany him hither. That is what I have done."

"So, sir," said the doctor, addressing the magistrate, "it is not only myself that this man accuses, but he dares also—"

"I accuse the Abbe d'Aigrigny," resumed Rodin, in a still louder and more imperative tone, interrupting the doctor, "I accuse the Princess de Saint Dizier, I accuse you, sir—of having, from a vile motive of self-interest, confined Mdlle. de Cardoville in this house, and the two daughters of Marshal Simon in the neighboring convent. Is that clear?"

"Alas! it is only too true, said Adrienne, hastily. "I have seen those poor children all in tears, making signs of distress to me."

The accusation of Rodin, with regard to the orphans, was a new and fearful blow of Dr. Baleinier. He felt perfectly convinced that the traitor had passed clear over to the enemy's camp. Wishing therefore to put an end to this embarrassing scene, he tried to put a good face on the matter, in spite of his emotion, and said to the magistrate: "I might confine myself, sir, to silence—disdaining to answer such accusations, till a judicial decision had given them some kind of authority. But, strong in a good conscience I address myself to Mdlle. de Cardoville, and I beg her to say if this very morning I did not inform her, that her health would soon be sufficiently restored to allow her to leave this house. I conjure her, in the name of her well-known love of truth, to state if such was not my language, when I was alone with her—"

"Come, sir!" said Rodin, interrupting Baleinier with an insolent air; "suppose that, from pure generosity, this dear young lady were to admit as much—what will it prove in your favor?—why, nothing at all."

"What, sir," cried the doctor, "do you presume—"

"I presume to unmask you, without asking your leave. What have you just told us? Why, that being alone with Mdlle. de Cardoville, you talked to her as if she were really mad. How very conclusive!"

"But, sir—" cried the doctor.

"But, sir," resumed Rodin, without allowing him to continue, "it is evident that, foreseeing the possibility of what has occurred today, and, to provide yourself with a hole to creep out at, you have pretended to believe your own execrable falsehood, in presence of this poor young lady, that you might afterwards call in aid the evidence of your own assumed conviction. Come, sir! such stories will not go down with people of common sense or common humanity."

"Come now, sir!" exclaimed Baleinier, angrily.

"Well, sir," resumed Rodin, in a still louder voice, which completely drowned that of the doctor; "is it true, or is it not, that you have recourse to the evasion of ascribing this odious imprisonment to a scientific error. I affirm that you do so, and that you think yourself safe, because you can now say: 'Thanks to my care, the young lady has recovered her reason. What more would you have?'"

"Yes, I do say that, sir, and I maintain it."

"You maintain a falsehood; for it is proven that the lady never lost her reason for a moment."

"But I, sir, maintain that she did lose it."

"And I, sir, will prove the contrary," said Rodin.

"You? How will you do that?" said the doctor.

"That I shall take care not to tell you at present, as you may well suppose," answered Rodin, with an ironical smile, adding, with indignation; "But, really, sir, you ought to die for shame, to dare to raise such a question in presence of the lady. You should at least have spared her this discussion."—"Sir!"

"Oh, fie, sir! I say, fie! It is odious to maintain this argument before her—odious if you speak truth, doubly odious if you lie," said Rodin, with disgust.

"This violence is inconceivable!" cried the Jesuit of the short robe, exasperated; "and I think the magistrate shows great partiality in allowing such gross calumnies to be heaped upon me!"

"Sir," answered M. de Gernande, severely, "I am entitled not only to hear, but to provoke any contradictory discussion that may enlighten me in the execution of my duty; it results from all this, that, even in your opinion, sir, Mdlle. de Cardoville's health is sufficiently good to allow her to return home immediately."

"At least, I do not see any very serious inconvenience likely to arise from it, sir," said the doctor; "only I maintain that the cure is not so complete as it might have been, and, on this subject, I decline all responsibility for the future."

"You can do so, safely," said Rodin; "it is not likely that the young lady will ever again have recourse to your honest assistance."

"It is useless, therefore, to employ my official authority, to demand the immediate liberation of Mdlle. de Cardoville," said the magistrate.

"She is free," said Baleinier, "perfectly free."

"As for the question whether you have imprisoned her on the plea of a supposititious madness, the law will inquire into it, sir, and you will be heard."

"I am quite easy, sir," answered M. Baleinier, trying to look so; "my conscience reproaches me with nothing."

"I hope it may turn out well, sir," said M. de Gernande. "However bad appearances may be, more especially when persons of your station in society are concerned, we should always wish to be convinced of their innocence." Then, turning to Adrienne, he added: "I understand, madame, how painful this scene must be to all your feelings of delicacy and generosity; hereafter, it will depend upon yourself, either to proceed for damages against Mr. Baleinier, or to let the law take its course. One word more. The bold and upright man"—here the magistrate pointed to Rodin—"who has taken up your cause in so frank and disinterested a manner, expressed a belief that you would, perhaps, take charge for the present of Marshal Simon's daughters, whose liberation I am about to demand from the convent where they also are confined by stratagem."

"The fact is, sir," replied Adrienne, "that, as soon as I learned the arrival of Marshal Simon's daughters in Paris, my intention was to offer them apartments in my house. These young ladies are my near relations. It is at once a duty and a pleasure for me to treat them as sisters. I shall, therefore, be doubly grateful to you, sir, if you will trust them to my care."

"I think that I cannot serve them better," answered M. de Gernande. Then, addressing Baleinier, he added, "Will you consent, sir, to my bringing these two ladies hither? I will go and fetch them, while Mdlle. de Cardoville prepares for her departure. They will then be able to leave this house with their relation."

"I entreat the lady to make use of this house as her own, until she leaves it," replied M. Baleinier. "My carriage shall be at her orders to take her home."

"Madame," said the magistrate, approaching Adrienne, "without prejudging the question, which must soon be decided by a court of law, I may at least regret that I was not called in sooner. Your situation must have been a very cruel one."

"There will at least remain to me, sir, from this mournful time," said Adrienne, with graceful dignity, "one precious and touching remembrance—that of the interest which you have shown me. I hope that you will one day permit me to thank you, at my own home, not for the justice you have done me, but for the benevolent and paternal manner in which you have done it. And moreover, sir," added Mdlle. de Cardoville, with a sweet smile, "I should like to prove to you, that what they call my cure is complete."

M. de Gernande bowed respectfully in reply. During the short dialogue of the magistrate with Adrienne, their backs were both turned to Baleinier and Rodin. The latter, profiting by this moment's opportunity, hastily slipped into the doctor's hand a note just written with a pencil in the bottom of his hat. Baleinier looked at Rodin in stupefied amazement. But the latter made a peculiar sign, by raising his thumb to his forehead, and drawing it twice across his brow. Then he remained impassible. This had passed so rapidly, that when M. de Gernande turned round, Rodin was at a distance of several steps from Dr. Baleinier, and looking at Mdlle. de Cardoville with respectful interest.

"Permit me to accompany you, sir," said the doctor, preceding the magistrate, whom Mdlle. de Cardoville saluted with much affability. Then both went out, and Rodin remained alone with the young lady.

After conducting M. de Gernande to the outer door of the house, M. Baleinier made haste to read the pencil-note written by Rodin; it ran as follows: "The magistrate is going to the convent, by way of the street. Run round by the garden, and tell the superior to obey the order I have given with regard to the two young girls. It is of the utmost importance."

The peculiar sign which Rodin had made, and the tenor of this note, proved to Dr. Baleinier, who was passing from surprise to amazement, that the secretary, far from betraying the reverend father, was still acting for the Greater Glory of the Lord. However, whilst he obeyed the orders, M. Baleinier sought in vain to penetrate the motives of Rodin's inexplicable conduct, who had himself informed the authorities of an affair that was to have been hushed up, and that might have the most disastrous consequence for Father d'Aigrigny, Madame de Saint-Dizier, and Baleinier himself. But let us return to Rodin, left alone with Mdlle. de Cardoville.