THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE.

CHAPTER XLV.—Continued.

"Like you, I think it very fearful, Agricola," said the girl; "and it is so serious, that M. Hardy alone can take a proper decision on the subject. As for what happened this morning to the young lady, it appears to me, that, immediately on M. Hardy's return, you should ask for an interview with him, and, however delicate such a communication my be, tell him all that has passed."

"There is the difficulty. Shall I not seem as if wishing to pry into his secrets?"

"If the young lady had not been followed, I should have shared your scruples. But she was watched, and is evidently in danger. It is therefore, in my opinion, your duty to warn M. Hardy. Suppose (which is not improbable) that the lady is married; would it not be better, for a thousand reasons, that M. Hardy should know all?"

"You are right, my good sister; I will follow your advice. M. Hardy shall know everything. But now that we have spoken of others. I have to speak of myself—yes, of myself—for it concerns a matter, on which may depend the happiness of my whole life," added the smith, in a tone of seriousness, which struck his hearer. "You know," proceeded Agricola, after a moment's silence, "that, from my childhood, I have never concealed anything from you—that I have told you everything—absolutely everything?"

"I know it, Agricola, I know it," said the hunchback, stretching out her white and slender hand to the smith, who grasped it cordially, and thus continued: "When I say everything, I am not quite exact—for I have always concealed from you my little love-affairs—because, though we may tell almost anything to a sister, there are some things of which we ought not to speak to a good and virtuous girl, such as you are."

"I thank you, Agricola. I had remarked this reserve on your part," observed the other, casting down her eyes, and heroically repressing the grief she felt; "I thank you."

"But for the very reason, that I made it a duty never to speak to you of such love affairs, I said to myself, if ever it should happen that I have a serious passion—such a love as makes one think of marriage—oh! then, just as we tell our sister even before our father and mother, my good sister shall be the first to be informed of it."——"You are very kind, Agricola."

"Well then! the serious passion has come at last. I am over head and ears in love, and I think of marriage."

At these words of Agricola, poor Mother Bunch felt herself for an instant paralyzed. It seemed as if all her blood was suddenly frozen in her veins. For some seconds, she thought she was going to die. Her heart ceased to beat; she felt it, not breaking, but melting away to nothing. Then, the first blasting emotion over, like those martyrs who found, in the very excitement of pain, the terrible power to smile in the midst of tortures, the unfortunate girl found, in the fear of betraying the secret of her fatal ridiculous love, almost incredible energy. She raised her head, looked at the smith calmly, almost serenely, and said to him in a firm voice: "Ah! so, you truly love?"

"That is to say, my good sister, that, for the last four days, I scarcely live at all—or live only upon this passion."

"It is only since four days that you have been in love?"

"Not more—but time has nothing to do with it."

"And is she very pretty?"——"Dark hair—the figure of a nymph—fair as a lily—blue eyes, as large as that—and as mild, as good as your own."

"You flatter me, Agricola."——"No, no, it is Angela that I flatter—for that's her name. What a pretty one! Is it not, my good Mother Bunch?

"A charming name," said the poor girl, contrasting bitterly that graceful appellation with her own nickname, which the thoughtless Agricola applied to her without thinking of it. Then she resumed, with fearful calmness: "Angela? yes, it a charming name!"

"Well, then! imagine to yourself, that this name is not only suited to her face, but to her heart to be almost equal to yours."

"She has my eyes—she has my heart," said Mother Bunch, smiling. "It is singular, how like we are."

Agricola did not perceive the irony of despair contained in these words. He resumed, with a tenderness as sincere as it was inexorable: "Do you think, my good girl, that I could ever have fallen seriously in love with anyone, who had not in character, heart, and mind, much of you?"

"Come, brother," said the girl, smiling—yes, the unfortunate creature had the strength to smile; "come, brother, you are in a gallant vein today. Where did you make the acquaintance of this beautiful young person?"

"She is only the sister of one of my mates. Her mother is the head laundress in our common dwelling, and as she was in want of assistance, and we always take in preference the relations of members of the association, Mrs. Bertin (that's the mother's name) sent for her daughter from Lille, where she had been stopping with one of her aunts, and, for the last five days, she has been in the laundry. The first evening I saw her, I passed three hours, after work was over, in talking with her, and her mother and brother; and the next day, I felt that my heart was gone: the day after that, the feeling was only stronger—and now I am quite mad about her, and resolved on marriage—according as you shall decide. Do not be surprised at this; everything depends upon you. I shall only ask my father and mother's leave, after I have yours."

"I do not understand you, Agricola."——"You know the utter confidence I have in the incredible instinct of your heart. Many times, you have said to me: 'Agricola, love this person, love that person, have confidence in that other'—and never yet were you deceived. Well! you must now render me the same service. You will ask permission of Mdlle. de Cardoville to absent yourself; I will take you to the factory: I have spoken of you to Mrs. Bertin and her daughter, as of a beloved sister; and, according to your impression at sight of Angela, I will declare myself or not. This may be childishness, or superstition, on my part; but I am so made."

"Be it so," answered Mother Bunch, with heroic courage; "I will see Mdlle. Angela; I will tell you what I think of her—and that, mind you, sincerely."

"I know it. When will you come?"——

"I must ask Mdlle. de Cardoville what day she can spare me. I will let you know."

"Thanks, my good sister!" said Agricola, warmly; then he added, with a smile: "Bring your best judgment with you—your full dress judgment."

"Do not make a jest of it brother," said Mother Bunch, in a mild, sad voice; "it is a serious matter, for it concerns the happiness of your whole life."

At this moment, a modest knock was heard at the door. "Come in," said Mother Bunch. Florine appeared.

"My mistress begs that you will come to her, if you are not engaged," said Florine to Mother Bunch.

The latter rose, and, addressing the smith, said to him: "Please wait a moment, Agricola. I will ask Mdlle. de Cardoville what day I can dispose of, and I will come to tell you." So saying, the girl went out, leaving Agricola with Florine.

"I should have much wished to pay my respects to Mdlle. de Cardoville," said Agricola; "but I feared to intrude."

"My lady is not quite well, sir," said Florine, "and receives no one today, I am sure, that as soon as is better, she will be quite pleased to see you."

Here Mother Bunch returned, and said to Agricola: "If you can come for me tomorrow, about three o'clock, so as not to lose the whole day, we will go to the factory, and you can bring me back in the evening."

"Then, at three o'clock tomorrow, my good sister."——"At three, tomorrow, Agricola."

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The evening of that same day, when all was quiet in the hotel, Mother Bunch, who had remained till ten o'clock with Mdlle. de Cardoville, re-entered her bedchamber, locked the door after her, and finding herself at length free and unrestrained, threw herself on her knees before a chair, and burst into tears. She wept long—very long. When her tears at length ceased to flow, she dried her eyes, approached the writing-desk, drew out one of the boxes from the pigeon-hole, and, taking from this hiding-place the manuscript which Florine had so rapidly glanced over the evening before, she wrote in it during a portion of the night.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MOTHER BUNCH'S DIARY.

We have said that the hunchback wrote during a portion of the night, in the book discovered the previous evening by Florine, who had not ventured to take it away, until she had informed the persons who employed her of its contents, and until she had received their final orders on the subject. Let us explain the existence of this manuscript, before opening it to the reader. The day on which Mother Bunch first became aware of her love for Agricola, the first word of this manuscript had been written. Endowed with an essentially trusting character, yet always feeling herself restrained by the dread of ridicule—a dread which, in its painful exaggeration, was the workgirl's only weakness—to whom could the unfortunate creature have confided the secret of that fatal passion, if not to paper—that mute confidant of timid and suffering souls, that patient friend, silent friend, silent and cold, who, if it makes no reply to heartrending complaints, at least always listens, and never forgets?

When her heart was overflowing with emotion, sometimes mild and sad, sometimes harsh and bitter, the poor workgirl, finding a melancholy charm in these dumb and solitary outpourings of the soul, now clothed in the form of simple and touching poetry, and now in unaffected prose, had accustomed herself by degress not to confine her confidences to what immediately related to Agricola, for though he might be mixed up with all her thoughts, other reflections, which the sight of beauty, of happy love, of maternity, of wealth, of misfortune, called up within her, were so impressed with the influence of her unfortunate personal position, that she would not even have dared to communicate them to him. Such, then, was this journal of a poor daughter of the people, weak, deformed and miserable, but endowed with an angelic soul, and a fine intellect, improved by reading, meditation and solitude; pages quite unknown, which yet contained many deep and striking views, both as regards men and things, taken from the peculiar standpoint in which fate had placed this unfortunate creature. The following lines, here and there abruptly interrupted or stained with tears, according to the current of her various emotions, on hearing of Agricola's deep love for Angela, formed the last pages of this journal:—

"Friday, March 3rd, 1832.

"I spent the night without any painful dreams. This morning, I rose with no sorrowful presentiment. I was calm and tranquil when Agricola came. He did not appear to me agitated. He was simple and affectionate as he always is. He spoke to me of events relating to M. Hardy, and then, without transition, without hesitation, he said to me: 'The last four days I have been desperately in love. The sentiment is so serious, that I think of marriage. I have come to consult you about it.' That was how this overwhelming revelation was made to me—naturally and cordially—I on one side of the hearth, and Agricola on the other, as if we had talked of indifferent things. And yet no more is needed to break one's heart. Some one enters, embraces you like a brother, sits down, talks—and then——Oh, merciful heaven! my head wanders.

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"I feel calmer now. Courage, my poor heart, courage!—Should a day of misfortune again overwhelm me, I will read these lines written under the impression of the most cruel grief I can ever feel, and I will say to myself: 'What is the present woe compared to that past?' My grief is indeed cruel! it is illegitimate, ridiculous, shameful; I should not dare to confess it, even to the most indulgent of mothers. Alas! there are some fearful sorrows, which yet rightly make men shrug their shoulders in pity or contempt. Alas! these are forbidden misfortunes. Agricola has asked me to go tomorrow, to see this young girl to whom he is so passionately attached, and whom he will marry, if the instinct of my heart should approve the marriage. This thought is the most painful of all those which have tortured me, since he so pitilessly announced this love. Pitilessly? No, Agricola—no, my brother—forgive me this unjust cry of pain! Is it that you know, can even suspect, that I love y u better than you can ever love, this charming creature?

"'Dark-haired—the figure of a nymph—fair as a lily—with blue eyes—as large as that—and almost as mild as your own.'

"That is the portrait he drew of her. Poor Agricola! how would he have suffered, had he known that every one of his words was tearing my heart! Never did I so strongly feel the deep commiseration and tender pity, inspired by a good, affectionate being, who, in the sincereity of his ignorance, gives you your death-wound with a smile. We do not blame him—no—we pity him to the full extent of the grief that he would feel on learning the pain he had caused us. It is strange! but never did Agricola appear to me more handsome than this morning. His manly countenance was slightly agitated, as he spoke of the uneasiness of that pretty young lady. As I listened to him describing the agony of a woman who runs the risk of ruin for the man she loves, I felt my heart beat violently, my hands were burning, a soft langor floated over me——Ridiculous folly! As if I had any right to feel thus!

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"I remember that, while he spoke, I cast a rapid glance at the glass. I felt proud that I was so well dressed; he had not even remarked it; but no matter—it seemed to me that my cap became me, that my hair shone finely, my gaze beamed mild——I found Agricola so handsome, that I almost began to think myself less ugly—no doubt, to excuse myself in my own eyes for daring to love him. After all, what happened today would have happened one day or another! Yes, that is consoling—like the thoughts that death is nothing, because it must come at last—to those who are in love with life! I have been always preserved from suicide—the last resource of the unfortunate, who prefer trusting in God to remaining among his creatures—by the sense of duty. One must not only think of self. And I reflected also—'God is good—always good—since the most wretched beings find opportunities for love and devotion.'—How is it that I, so weak and poor, have always found means to be helpful and useful to some one?

"This very day I felt tempted to make an end with life—Agricola and his mother had no longer need of me.—Yes, but the unfortunate creatures whom Mdlle. de Cardoville has commissioned me to watch over?—but my benefactress herself, though she has affectionately reproached me with the tenacity of my suspicions in regard to that man? I am more than ever alarmed for her—I feel that she is more than ever in danger—more than ever, I have faith in the value of my presence near her. Hence, I must live. Live—to go tomorrow to see this girl, whom Agricola passionately loves? Good heaven! why have I always known grief, and never hate? There must be a bitter pleasure in hating. So many people hate!—Perhaps I may hate this girl—Angela, as he called her, when he said, with so much simplicity: 'A charming name, is it not, Mother Bunch?' Compare this name, which recalls an idea so full of grace, with the ironical symbol of my witch's deformity! Poor Agricola! poor brother! goodness is sometimes as blind as malice, I see. Should I hate this young girl?—Why? Did she deprive me of the beauty which charms Agricola? Can I find fault with her for being beautiful? When I was not yet accustomed to the consequences of my ugliness, I asked myself, with bitter curiosity, why the Creator had endowed his creatures so unequally. The habit of pain has allowed me to reflect calmly, and have finished by persuading myself, that to beauty and ugliness are attached the two most noble emotions of the soul—admiration and compassion. Those who are like me admire beautiful persons—such as Angela, such as Agricola—and these in their turn feel a touching pity for such as I am. Sometimes, in spite of one's self, one has very foolish hopes. Because Agricola, from a feeling of propriety, had never spoken to me of his love affairs, I sometimes persuaded myself that he had none—that he loved me, and that the fear of ridicule alone was with him, as with me, an obstacle in the way of confessing it. Yes, I have even made verses on that subject—and those, I think, not the worst I have written.

"Mine is a singular position! If I love, I am ridiculous; if any love me, he is still more ridiculous. How did I come so to forget that, as to have suffered and to suffer what I do?—But blessed be that suffering, since it has not engendered hate—no; for I will not hate this girl—I will perform a sister's part to the last; I will follow the guidance of my heart; I have the in tinct of preserving others—my heart will lead and enlighten me. My only fear is, that I shall burst into tears when I see her, and not be able to conquer my emotion. Oh, then! what a revelation to Agricola—a discovery of the mad love he has inspired!—Oh, never! the day in which he knew that, would be the last of my life. There would then be within me something stronger than duty—the longing to escape from shame—that incurable shame, that burns me like hot iron. No, no; I will be calm. Besides, did I not just now, when with him, bear courageously a terrible trial? I will be calm. My personal feelings must not darken the second-sight, so clear for those I love. Oh! painful, painful task! for the fear of yielding involuntarily to evil sentiments must not render me too indulgent towards this girl. I might compromise Agricola's happiness, since my decision is to guide his choice. Poor creature that I am! How I deceive myself! Agricola asks my advice, because he thinks that I shall not have the melancholy courage to oppose his passion; or else he would say to me: 'No matter—I love; and I brave the future!'

"But then, if my advice, if the instincts of my heart, are not to guide him—if his resolution is taken beforehand—of what use will be tomorrow's painful mission? Of what use? To obey him. Did he not say—'Come!' In thinking of my devotion for him, how many times, in the secret depths of my heart, I have asked myself, if the thought had ever occurred to him to love me otherwise than as a sister; if it had ever struck him, what a devoted wife he would have in me! And why should it have occurred to him? As long as he wished, as long as he may still wish, I have been, and I shall be, as devoted to him, as if I were his wife, sister or mother. Why should he desire what he already possesses?

"Married to him—oh, God!—the dream is mad as ineffable. Are not such thoughts of celestial sweetness—which include all sentiments from