

THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE.

CHAPTER LXVII. (CONTINUED.)

THE LUNCHEON.

"And it is only thus, madam," resumed the cardinal, this time allowing himself to be tempted by the crawfish's tails, "it is only thus that charity has any meaning. I care little that the irreligious should feel hunger, but with the pious it is different;" and the prelate gaily swallowed a mouthful. "Moreover," resumed he, "it is well known with what ardent zeal you pursue the impious and those who are rebels against the authority of our holy father."

Your Eminence may feel convinced that I am Roman in heart and soul; I see no difference between a Gallican and a Turk," said the princess bravely.

"The princess is right," said the Belgian bishop, "I will go farther, and assert that a Gallican should be more odious to the church than a pagan."

This little episcopal jest made them all laugh. After which Father d'Aigrigny resumed seriously, addressing the cardinal: "Unfortunately, as I was about to observe to your Eminence with regard to the Abbe Gabriel, unless they are very narrowly watched, the lower clergy have a tendency to become infected with dissenting views, and with ideas of rebellion against what they call the despotism of the bishops."

"This young man must be a Catholic Luther!" said the bishop. And walking on tip-toe, he went to pour himself out a glorious glass of Maderia, in which he soaked some sweet cake, made in the form of a crozier.

Led by his example, the cardinal, under pretence of warming his feet by drawing still closer to the fire, helped himself to an excellent glass of old Malaga, which he swallowed by mouthfuls, with an air of profound meditation; after which he resumed: "So this Abbe Gabriel starts as a reformer. He must be an ambitious man. Is he dangerous?"

"By our advice his superiors have judged him to be so. They have ordered him to come hither. He will soon be here, and I will tell your Eminence why I have sent him. But first, I have a note on the dangerous tendencies of the Abbe Gabriel. Certain questions were addressed to him, with regard to some of his acts, and it was in consequence of his answers that his superiors recalled him."

So saying, Father d'Aigrigny took from his pocket-book a piece of paper which he read to those in the room. (The closing sentence of his answer to one of the questions was):

"I closed his eyes with respect, I buried him, I prayed for him; and, though he died in the Protestant faith, I thought him worthy of a place in consecrated ground."

"Worse and worse!" said the cardinal. "This tolerance is monstrous. It is a horrible attack on that maxim of Catholicism: 'Out of the pale of the church there is no salvation.'"

"And all this is the more serious, my lord," resumed Father d'Aigrigny, "because the mildness, charity, and Christian devotion of Abbe Gabriel have excited, not only in his parish, but in all the surrounding districts, the greatest enthusiasm. The priests of the neighboring parishes have yielded to the general impulse, and it must be confessed that but for his moderation a wide-spread schism would have commenced."

"But what do you hope will result from bringing him here?" said the prelate.

"The position of Abbe Gabriel is complicated; first of all, he is the heir of the Rennemont family."

But has he not ceded his rights?" asked the cardinal.

"Yes, my lord; and this cession, which was at first informal, has lately with his free consent, been made perfectly regular in law; for he had sworn, happen what might, to renounce his part of the inheritance in favor of the Society of Jesus. Nevertheless, his Reverence Father Rodin thinks, that if your Eminence, after explaining to Abbe Gabriel that he was about to be recalled by his superiors, were to propose to him some eminent position at Rome, he might be induced to leave France, and we might succeed in arousing within him those sentiments of ambition which are doubtless only sleeping for the present; your Eminence having observed, very judiciously, that every reformer must be ambitious."

"I approve of this idea," said the cardinal, after a moment's reflection; "with his merit and power of acting on other men, Abbe Gabriel may rise very high, if he is docile; and if he should not be so, it is better for the safety of the church that he should be at Rome than here—for you know, my good father, we have securities that are unfortunately wanting in France."

After some moments of silence, the cardinal

said suddenly to Father d'Aigrigny: "As we were talking of Father Rodin, tell me frankly what you think of him."

"Your Eminence knows his capacity," said Father d'Aigrigny, with a constrained and suspicious air; "our reverend Father-General—"

"Commissioned him to take your place," said the cardinal; "I know that. He told me so at Rome. But what do you think of the character of Father Rodin? Can one have full confidence in him?"

"He has so complete, so original, so secret, and so impenetrable a mind," said Father d'Aigrigny with hesitation, "that it is difficult to form any certain judgment with respect to him."

"Do you think him ambitious?" said the cardinal, after another moment's pause. "Do you not suppose him capable of having other views than those of the greater glory of his order? Come, I have reasons for speaking thus," added the prelate, with emphasis.

"Why," resumed Father d'Aigrigny, not without suspicion, for the game is played cautiously between people of the same craft, "what should your Eminence think of him, either from your own observation, or from the report of the Father-General?"

"I think—that if his apparent devotion to his Order really concealed some after-thought—it would be well to discover it—for, with the influence that he has obtained at Rome (as I have found out), he might one day, and that shortly, become very formidable."

"Well!" cried Father d'Aigrigny, impelled by his jealousy of Rodin; "I am, in this respect, of the same opinion as your Eminence; for I have sometimes perceived in him flashes of ambition that were as alarming as they were extraordinary—and since I must tell all to your Eminence—"

"Father d'Aigrigny was unable to continue; at this moment Mrs. Grivois, who had been knocking at the door, half-opened it, and made a sign to her mistress. The princess answered by bowing her head, and Mrs. Grivois again withdrew. A second afterward Rodin entered the room."

At sight of Rodin, the two prelates and Father d'Aigrigny rose spontaneously, so much were they overawed by the real superiority of this man; their faces, just before contracted with suspicion and jealousy, suddenly brightened up, and seemed to smile on the reverend father with affectionate deference. The princess advanced some steps to meet him.

Rodin, badly dressed as ever, leaving on the soft carpet the muddy track of his clumsy shoes, put his umbrella into one corner, and advanced towards the table—not with his accustomed humility, but with slow step, uplifted head, and steady glance; not only did he feel himself in the midst of his partisans, but he knew he could rule them all by the power of his intellect.

"We were speaking of your reverence, my dear, good father," said the cardinal, with charming affability.

"Ah!" said Rodin, looking fixedly at the prelate; "and what were you saying?"

"Why," replied the Belgian bishop, wiping his forehead, "all the good that can be said of your reverence."

"Will you not take something, my good father?" said the princess to Rodin, as she pointed to the splendid sideboard.

"Thank you, madam, I have eaten my radish already this morning."

"My secretary, Abbe Berlini, who was present at your repast, was, indeed, much astonished at your reverence's frugality," said the prelate; "it is worthy of an anchorite."

"Suppose we talk of business," said Rodin, abruptly, like a man accustomed to lead and control the discussion.

"We shall always be most happy to hear you," said the prelate. "Your reverence yourself fixed today to talk over this great Rennemont affair. It is of such importance, that it was partly the cause of my journey to France; for to support the interests of the glorious Company of Jesus, with which I have the honor of being associated, is to support the interests of Rome itself, and I promised the reverend Father-General that I would place myself entirely at your orders."

"I can only repeat what his Eminence has just said," added the bishop. "We set out from Rome together, and our ideas are just the same."

"Certainly," said Rodin, addressing the cardinal, "your Eminence may serve our cause, and that materially. I will tell you how presently."

Then, addressing the princess, he continued: "I have desired Dr. Baleinier to come here, madam, for it will be well to inform him of certain things."

"He will be admitted as usual," said the princess.

Rodin gulped down a glass of claret and sherry, wiped his mouth on the back of his dirty hand, then launched into a lengthy description of the difference in methods employed by Father d'Aigrigny and himself in the Rennemont case.

"Conquered, as well as the others, by Rodin's diabolical assurance, and brought back to a kind of fearful admiration, Father d'Aigrigny said to him: "I confess I was wrong in doubting the judgment of your reverence. Deceived by the appearance of the means employed, I could not judge of their connection, and above all of their results. I now see, that, thanks to you success is no longer doubtful."

"This is an exaggeration," replied Rodin, with feverish impatience; "all these passions are at work, but the moment is critical. As the alchemist bends over the crucible, which may give him either treasures or sudden death—I alone at this moment—"

Rodin did not finish the sentence. He pressed both his hands to his forehead, with a stifled cry of pain.

"What is the matter?" said Father d'Aigrigny. "For some moments you have been growing fearfully pale."

"I do not know what is the matter," said Rodin, in an altered voice; "my headache increases—I am seized with a sort of giddiness."

"Sit down," said the princess, with interest.

"Take something," said the bishop.

"It will be nothing," said Rodin, with an effort; "I am no milksop, thank heaven!—I had little sleep last night; it is fatigue—nothing more. I was saying, that I alone could direct this affair; but I cannot execute the plan myself. I must keep out of the way, and watch in the shade; I hold the threads, which I alone can manage," added Rodin in a faint voice.

"My good father," said the cardinal uneasily, "I assure you that you are very unwell. Your paleness is becoming livid."

"It is possible," answered Rodin, courageously; "but I am not to be so conquered. To return to our affair—this is the time in which your qualities, Father d'Aigrigny, will turn to good account. I have never denied them, and they may now be of the greatest use. You have the power of charming—grace—eloquence—you must—"

Rodin paused again. A cold sweat poured from his forehead. He felt his legs give way under him, notwithstanding his obstinate energy.

"I confess, I am not well," he said; "yet this morning, I was as well as ever. I shiver. I am icy cold."

"Draw near the fire—it is a sudden indisposition," said the bishop with heroic devotion; "it will not be anything of consequence."

"If you were to take something warm, a cup of tea," said the princess; "Dr. Baleinier will be

here directly—he will reassure us as to this—indisposition."

"It is really inexplicable," said the prelate.

At these words of the cardinal, Rodin, who had advanced with difficulty toward the fire, turned his eyes upon the prelate, and looked at him fixedly in a strange manner, for about a second; then, strong in his unconquerable energy, notwithstanding the change in his features, which were now visibly disfigured, Rodin said, in a broken voice, which he tried to make firm: "The fire has warmed me; it will be nothing. I have no time to coddle myself. It would be a pretty thing to fall ill just as the Rennemont affair can only succeed by my exertions! Let us return to business. I told you, Father d'Aigrigny, that you might serve us a good deal; and you also, princess, who have espoused this cause as if it were your own—"

Rodin again paused. This time he uttered a piercing cry, sank upon a chair placed near him, and, throwing himself back convulsively, he pressed his hands to his chest, and exclaimed: "Oh! what pain!"

Then (dreadful sight!) a cadaverous decomposition, rapid as thought, took place in Rodin's features. His hollow eyes were filled with blood, and seemed to shrink back into their orbits, which formed, as it were, two dark holes, in the centre of which blazed points of fire; nervous convulsions drew the flabby, damp and icy skin tight over the bony prominences of the face, which was becoming rapidly green. From the lips, writhing with pain, issued the struggling breath, mingled with the words: "Oh! I suffer! I burn!"

Then, yielding to a transport of fury, Rodin tore with his nails his naked chest, for he had twisted off the waistcoat, and rent his black and filthy shirt-front, as if the pressure of those garments augmented the violence of the pain under which he was writhing. The bishop, the cardinal, and Father d'Aigrigny, hastily approached Rodin, to try and hold him; he was seized with horrible convulsions; but, suddenly, collecting all his strength, he rose upon his feet stiff as a corpse. Then, with his garments in disorder, his thin, grey hair standing up all around his greenish face, fixing his red and flaming eyes upon the cardinal, he seized him with convulsive grasp, and exclaimed in a terrible voice, half stifled in his throat: "Cardinal Malipieri—this illness is too sudden—they suspect me at Rome—you are of the race of the Borgias—and your secretary was with me this morning! I am poisoned!" muttered Rodin, and sinking back, he fell into the arms of Father d'Aigrigny.

To be Continued.

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