

The Abbe's Forgiveness.

At the door of one of the churches of Paris, an old beggar, known by the name of Jacques, came every day for many years to sit on one of the steps and ask for alms. He seemed a miserable old man, and scarcely ever spoke, only bending his head when anything was given to him. A gold cross might be seen on his breast, partly hidden by his tattered garments.

A young clergyman, Abbe de—, celebrated Mass regularly at this church, and never omitted, as he entered, to give some small offering to Jacques.

Belonging to a rich and noble family Monsieur Paulin had consecrated himself to God in the priesthood, and spent all his wealth among the poor. Without knowing him, Jacques grew to love the young priest.

One day Abbe Paulin missed the old beggar from his accustomed place; and as he saw that his absence continued from day to day, he grew uneasy about the old man and made inquiries as to where he lived; and having learned his address, one morning after Mass he turned his steps towards the dwelling of old Jacques. He knocked at the door of an attic on the sixth floor. A feeble voice answered from within, and he entered.

Jacques was lying stretched upon a miserable bed; his face was pale as death, and his eyes were dull and heavy.

"Ah! it is you, Monsieur Abbe," he said to the priest when he saw him. "It is very good of you to come and see a miserable man like me, I do not deserve it."

"What are you talking about, my good Jacques?" said the priest. "Do you not know that the priest is the friend of the unfortunate?" Besides," he added, smiling, "we are old acquaintances."

"Oh! Monsieur, if you knew! you would not speak to me like that. No, no; do not speak to me kindly; I am a miserable sinner."

"Ah! my poor Jacques, if you have done wrong—repent confess. God is infinite goodness; He pardons everything to him who repents."

"Oh! He will never pardon me."

"And why not? Do you repent?"

"Repent! do I repent?" cried out Jacques, raising himself upon his bed and gazing wildly at the priest. "For thirty years I have been repenting. And yet I am cursed—cursed!"

The good priest tried to comfort and encourage him, but in vain. A terrible mystery was hidden in his heart, and despair prevented the guilty man from revealing his crime. At last, conquered by the gentleness and goodness of the Abbe, the miserable Jacques decided to confess, and in a broken voice he told the following story:

"I was steward in a rich and noble family when the revolution of the last century broke out. My master and mistress were goodness itself to me. The Count, the Countess, their two daughters, and their son. I owed everything to them; my position, my education, all the comforts I enjoyed. When the revolution came I betrayed them. They were hidden; I knew where; I denounced them so that I might have their possessions, which were promised to me. They were condemned to death—all except the boy Paulin, who was too young."

A sharp cry came from the lips of the priest, and a cold sweat stood upon his forehead.

"Monsieur Abbe," continued the old beggar, who did not notice the emotion excited by his words, "Monsieur it was horrible! I heard them condemned to death, I saw them all four placed in the military cart, and I saw their four heads fall

beneath the knife. Monster! monster that I am! From that time I have known neither peace nor rest. I weep, I pray for them. I see them always there before me. See they are there beneath that curtain."

And speaking thus, Jacques pointed with his trembling hand to a curtain which covered part of the wall.

"And this crucifix which you see over my bed belongs to the Count, and this gold cross round my neck was the one which the Countess always wore. Oh, what crime! what agony! what repentance! Oh! Monsieur Abbe, have pity upon me! do not repulse me! pray for the most criminal and the most miserable of men!"

The priest was kneeling by the bedside, pale as death. For many minutes he remained motionless. Then rising perfectly calm, he made the sign of the cross, and drawing aside the curtain he saw two pictures.

Old Jacques uttered a cry when he saw them, and threw himself back upon his bed. The priest was weeping.

"Jacques," he said, in a trembling voice, "I am come to bring your pardon from God. I will hear your confession," and sitting by the bedside, he received old Jacques' confession.

When the dying man had ended, the Abbe Paulin said: "God has just forgiven you; but that is not all. Jacques I also—I forgive you for love of Him, for you have killed my father, my mother, and my two sisters!"

An expression of horror passed over the face of the dying man. He opened his lips, murmured some indistinct words, then fell backwards on his bed. The priest approached. The beggar was dead.—*The New World.*

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