

The Abbe Constantin.

BY LUDOVIC HALEVY.

(CHAPTER V. CONTINUED.)

Mr. Scott allowed himself to be persuaded; and at the beginning of January, 1880, Suzie wrote the following letter to her friend, Katie Norton, who had lived in Paris for some years.

"Victory! It is decided! Richard has consented. I shall arrive in April, and become French again. You have offered to take charge of all the preparations for our establishment in Paris. I am horribly inconsiderate—I accept.

"I would like to be able to enjoy Paris as soon as I get there, and not lose my first month chasing after upholsterers, carriage makers and horse dealers. I would like to find at the station, when I get off the train, my carriage, my coachman, and my horses. I would like to dine with myself, at my own house. Either rent or buy a house, engage servants, choose the carriages, the horses, the liveries. I leave it all to you. Only let the liveries be blue, that is all. This line is added at Bettina's request, who is looking over my shoulder as I write you.

"We shall bring with us to France only seven persons. Richard will bring his valet; Bettina and I and our maids, two governesses for the children, and two boys, Toby and Bobby—our little grooms. They ride so well. Two perfect little loves; the same height, the same figures, almost the same faces; we would never find, in Paris, grooms better matched.

"Every thing else, servants and furniture, we leave in New York. No, not everything. I forgot to mention four little ponies, four little jewels—black as ink, with white feet, all around—all four of them; we did not have the heart to leave them. We drive them in a phaeton, and both Bettina and I can drive four-in-hand very well. Can women drive four-in-hand early in the morning, in the Bois, without too much scandal? They can here.

"Above all, my dear Katie, do not count the cost. Spend money foolishly, like a spendthrift. That is all I ask of you."

The same day that Mrs. Norton received this late letter, the news came out of the failure of a certain Garneville, a large speculator, who had overreached himself. He had prepared for a fall, when he should have been ready for a rise. This Garneville had taken possession of a house only six weeks before, newly built, and with no other fault than a too glaring magnificence.

Mrs. Norton took a lease of it, at a hundred thousand francs a year, with the privilege of buying the house and furniture, at two millions, during the first year. A fashionable upholsterer was engaged to correct and modify the excessive luxury of the gaudy staring furniture. That done, Mrs. Scott's friend was so fortunate as to put her hand, the very first thing, on two of those eminent artists, without whom no large house can be properly established, or carried on.

In the first place a first-class *chef de cuisine* who had just left an old family in the Faubourg Saint Germain—to his great regret—for his sentiments were aristocratic. It was very painful for him to go into the service of foreigners.

"Never," said he to Mrs. Norton, "never would I have left the service of Madame la Baronne, if she had kept up her household on the same footing; but Madame la Baronne has four children—two sons who are spendthrifts, and two daughters who will soon be the proper age to marry. They must have marriage portions. So, Madame la Baronne is obliged to retrench a little, and the establishment is no longer extensive enough for me." This distinguished artist had conditions to make, which, though extravagant,

did not frighten Mrs. Norton, who knew she was negotiating with a man of unquestionable merit; but, before deciding, asked permission to telegraph to New York. He wished to make some inquiries. The reply was favorable. He accepted.

The other great artist, who had been in charge of some of the leading racing stables, was of unusual talent, and was about to retire on the fortune he had made. He consented, however, to organize Mrs. Scott's stables. It was understood that he was to have *carte blanche* in the purchase of horses, was not to wear livery, was to select the coachman, grooms and hostlers; that there was never to be less than fifteen horses in the stables, that no bargain was to be made with a carriage maker, or saddler, except through him, and that he was to mount the box only in the morning, in ordinary dress, to give lessons in driving to the ladies and children, if it were necessary.

The *chef* took possession of his ranges, and the head groom of his stables. All the rest was only a question of money, and Mrs. Norton used to the utmost the full powers given her. She carried out the instructions she had received. In the short period of two months she performed real miracles, so that the Scott establishment was absolutely complete, and absolutely faultless.

And, so, when, at half past four, on the 15th of April, 1880, Mr. Scott, Suzie and Bettina alighted from the Havre express, on the platform of the station at Saint Lazare, they found Mrs. Norton, who said to them:

"Your *calèche* is here, in the court—behind the *calèche* is a landau, for the children; and behind the landau, an omnibus for the servants. The three carriages bear your monogram, are driven by your coachmen, and drawn by your horses. You live at 24 Rue Murillo, and here is the *menu* of your dinner this evening. You invited me two months ago, I have accepted, and even taken the liberty of bringing fifteen people with me. I have provided everything, even the guests. Do not be alarmed! You know them all, they are mutual friends; and from this evening we can judge of the merits of your cook."

Mrs. Norton gave Mrs. Scott a pretty little *carte* with a gold band, on which were these words:

"*Menu du dîner du 15. avril. 1880.*
and below.

Comme à la Parisienne.
"Tristes saumonnées à la russe, etc."
The first Parisian who had the honor and pleasure of doing homage to the beauty of Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival, was a little scullion, about fifteen years old, who, dressed in white, his willow basket on his head, was passing just as Mrs. Scott's coachman was making his way slowly through the crowd of carriages at the station. The little scullion stopped short, on the sidewalk, stood glaring in amazement at the two sisters, and then boldly shouted, full in their faces, the single word.

"Mazette!"
When she saw wrinkles and white hair begin to come, Madame Recamier said to one of her friends:

"Ah! ma chère, there are no more illusions for me. Ever since the day when I saw that the little chimney-sweeps no longer turned in the street to look at me, I knew that it was all over."

The opinion of the little scullions is worth as much in similar cases as the opinion of chimney-sweeps. All was not over for Suzie and Bettina. On the contrary, all was just beginning.

Five minutes later Mrs. Scott's *calèche* was rolling along the Boulevard Haussmann at the slow, measured pace of two admirable horses, Paris numbered two Parisians more. The success of Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival was immediate, decided, and startling. The beauties of Paris are not classified and catalogued like the beauties of London.

They do not have their portraits published in the illustrated journals, and they do not allow their photographs to be on sale at the stationers; there always exist however a little stall of about twenty women who represent the grace, the elegance, and the beauty of Paris—and these women after ten or a dozen years of service pass into the reserve corps, like old generals.

Suzie and Bettina at once took their places on this little stall. It was the affair of twenty-four hours—not even twenty-four hours, for it all was done between eight o'clock in the morning and midnight of the day following their arrival.

Imagine a sort of spectacle in the three acts, the success of which increased with each tableau.

1st. A ride on horseback in the Bois, at ten o'clock in the morning, with the two marvellous grooms imported from America.

2nd. A walk at six o'clock in the *Allées de la Cascais*.

3rd. An appearance in the evening, in Mrs. Norton's box at the Opera.

The two new-comers were immediately noticed and appreciated by the thirty or forty persons who constitute a sort of mysterious tribunal, and render in the name of all Paris, a verdict from which there is no appeal. These thirty or forty people have, from time to time, a fancy for declaring *charming*, some woman who is obviously ugly. That is enough. She is *charming*, dating from that day.

The beauty of the two sisters was beyond dispute. In the morning, their grace, their elegance and air of distinction were admired; in the afternoon, it was declared that they had the free, firm steps of young goddesses; and in the evening there was only one voice as to the ideal perfection of their shoulders. The name was won. All Paris, from that time, saw the two sisters with the eyes of the little scullion on the Rue d'Amsterdam; all Paris repeated his "Mazette!" that is with the changes and variations imposed by the customs of society.

Mrs. Scott's salon immediately took shape. The habitues of three or four great American houses went *en masses* to see the Scotts, who had three hundred at their first Wednesday. Their circle increased very rapidly; there was a little of everything in their list: Americans, Spaniards, Italians, Hungarians, Russians, and even Parisians.

When Mrs. Scott related her history to the Abbe Constantin, she did not tell him everything; one never does tell everything. She knew that she was charming, liked to have it acknowledged, and did not hate to be told so. In sort, she was a coquette. Would she have been a Parisian, otherwise. Mr. Scott had full confidence in his wife, and allowed her perfect freedom. He was seldom seen.

He was an honest man, and felt sometimes embarrassed that he had made such a marriage, that he had married so much money. Having a taste for business, he took pleasure in devoting himself entirely to the management of the two enormous fortunes in his hands, in increasing it constantly, and in saying every year to his wife and sister-in-law:

"You are still richer than you were last year."

Not contented with guarding with much interest and skill the investments which he had left in America, he embarked in large enterprises in France, and succeeded in Paris as he had succeeded in New York. In order to make money, the first thing is to have no need of it.

Mrs. Scott was courted, she was courted immensely. . . . She was courted in French, in English, in Spanish, in Italian,—for she knew these four languages,—and this is another advantage which foreigners have over poor Parisians, who generally know only their mother-tongue and have not the resource of international passions.

Mrs. Scott did not drive people out of doors with a stick. She had ten, twenty, thirty adorers at the same time. None of them could boast of any preference whatever: she was the same to all—agreeable, playful, smiling. It was clear that she only amused herself at the game, and never took a serious part in it. She played for the pleasure, the honor, the love of art. Mr. Scott never had the least uneasiness: he was perfectly right in being undisturbed. Moreover, he enjoyed the success of his wife: he was happy in seeing her happy. He loved her very much—a little more than she loved him—she loved him very well, and that explains all. There is a great difference between *well* and *much*, when these two adverbs are placed after the verb: *to love*.

As for Bettina, there was around her a curious chase, a detestable circle! Such a fortune! Such a beauty! Miss Percival arrived in Paris on the 15th of April; a fortnight had not passed before offers of marriage began to rain down. In the course of the first year, Bettina amused herself keeping in this account very exactly—in the course of the first year she might, if she had wished, have married thirty four times—and such a variety of aspirants.

Her hand was asked for a young exile, who, in certain events, might be called to a throne—quite small, it is true, but still a throne.

Her hand was asked for a young duke, who would make a great figure at court when France—and this was inevitable!—should recognize her errors and return to her legitimate rulers.

Her hand was asked for a young prince, who would take his place on the steps of the throne, when France—and this was inevitable!—should reunite the chain of Napoleonic traditions.

Her hand was asked for a young republican member, who had just made a very brilliant *début* at the *Chambre* and for whom the future had brilliant destinies in store, for the Republic was now established in France upon indestructible foundations.

Her hand was asked for a young Spaniard, of the highest rank; and it was intimated to her, that the ceremony would take place in the palace of a queen, who lives not very far from the *Arc de l'Etoile*. . . . Her name is found, too, in the *Almanac Bottin*, for for there are queens whose names are in *Bottin*, who live to-day between a notary and a herborist. It is only the kings of France who no longer live in France.

Her hand was asked for the son of an English peer, and for the son of a member of the House of Lords in Vienna, for the son of a banker in Paris, and the son of a Russian ambassador; for a Hungarian count and for an Italian prince; and also for brave little young men who had nothing, neither, name nor fortune. But Miss Bettina gave them all a turn in the waltz; and believing themselves to be irresistible, they hoped to have made her heart beat.

Nothing to the present had made her little heart beat, and and the reply to all had been the same:

"No! no! Still no! Always no!"

Some days after the performance of Aida, the two sisters had a long conversation on this important, eternal question of marriage. A certain name mentioned by Mrs. Scott, provoked the most distinct and energetic refusal on Miss Percival's part.

And Suzie laughing, said to her sister: "You will, however, be forced to marry at last Bettina. . . ."

"Yes, certainly; but I should be so sorry, Suzie, to marry without love. It seems to me that to make up my mind to do such a thing, there would have to be every chance of dying an old maid; and I am not that yet."

"No, not yet."

"Let us wait then, let us wait!"

"We will wait! But among all these lovers whom you have dragged after