POOR DOCUMENT

THE FLOWER GIRLS

—OF—

Marseilles!

(Continued.)

Monsieur, my sacred character prohibits me from interfering in this deplorable and scandulous affair. The enemies of the church too often accuse the priests of going out of their sacristies. I can only ask God to pardon your brother.

Marius, in consternation, had also arisen. He realized that he had been tricked by Donadei. He strove to keep an unmoved countenance.

'I thank you,' answered he. 'Prayers are very sweet alms for the unfortunate. Ask God that men may do us justice.'

He went towards the door, followed by the Abbe Chastanier, who walked with bowed head. Donadei had affected not to see the old priest.

Upon the threshold, the handsome abbe, recovering all his graceful levity, retained Marius an instant.

'You are employed by M. Martelly, I believe,' said he.

'Yes, Monsieur,' replied the young man, in astonishment.

'He is a man of high honor, but I know he is not one of our friends. Nevertheless, I cherish the most profound esteem for him. His sister, Mademoiselle Claire, whom I have the honor of directing, is one of our best parishioners.'

And as Marius stared at him, finding nothing to say in reply, Donadei added, coloring slightly:

'She is a charming person and of exemplary piety.'

He bowed with exquisite politeness and gently closed the door. The Abbe Chastanier and Marius, standing alone upon the sidewalk, glanced at each other, and the young man could not avoid shrugging his shoulders. The old priest was confused to see a minister of God play comedy thus. He turned towards his companion and said, hesitatingly:

'My friend, we must not blame God if his ministers are not always what they should be. The young man from whom we have just parted is guilty only of ambition.'

He went on thus, excusing Donadei. Marius looked at him, touched by his goodness, and, despite himself, he compared this poor and modest old man with the powerful and graceful abbe whose smiles were the law of the diocese. Then he thought that the church loved not her sons with an equal love and that, like all mothers, she spoiled the rosy faces and tricky hearts, and neglected the tender and humble souls who devoted themselves in the shade.

The two visitors were departing, when a carriage stopped before the close and discreet little house. Marius saw M. de Cazalis descend from this carriage; the deputy hastily entered the Abbe Donadei's dwelling.

'Look, father,' cried the young man; I am certain that the sacred character of that priest will not prohibit him from working to secure the vengeance of M. de Cazalis.'

He was tempted to return to that house, in which God was made to play so miserable a role. But he calmed himself; he thanked the Abbe Chastanier and went his way, saying mentally with despair that the last door of safety, that of which the high clergy held the key, had been shut in his face.

The next day, M. Martelly informed him of an attempt he had made with the leading notary of Marseilles, M. Douglas, a pious man, who, in less than eight years, had become a veritable power through his rich clientele and his liberal alms. The name of this notary was loved and respected. People spoke with admiration of the virtues of this upright toiler, who lived frugally; they had unbounded confidence in his honesty and in the activity of his intelligence.

M. Martelly had availed himself of his assistance to invest certain funds. He hoped that, if Douglas would lend his support to Marius, the latter would have a portion of the clergy on his side. He went to the house of the notary and asked his aid. Douglas, who seemed greatly preoccupied, stammered out an evasive answer, saying that he was overburdened with business and that he could not struggle against M. de Cazalis.

'I did not insist,' said M. Martelly to Marius; 'I imagined that your adversary had been before you. I am astonished, however, that M. Douglas, a man of probity, should allow his hands to be tied. Now, my poor friend, I am sure that the game is entirely up.'

Marius had no longer the smallest hope. For a month he scoured Marseilles striving to win to his cause a few influential men. Everywhere he was received cold, with satirical politeness. M. Martelly was equally unsuccessful. The deputy had rallied all the nobility and the high clergy around him. The citizens, the commercial, laughed in their sleeves, without taking any action, having an atrocious fear of compromising themselves. As to the masses they lampooned M. de Cazalis and his niece, not being able otherwise to serve Philippe Cayol.

Time sped on; the preparations for the criminal trial were progressing rapidly. As on the first day, Marius stood alone to defend his brother against M. de Cazalis' hatred and Blanche's complaisant lies. He had constantly beside him M. Martelly, who declared himself powerless, and Fine, whose fiery talk had gained for Philippe the ardent sympathy of the girls of the people.

One morning, Marius learned that his brother and the gardener Ayasse had been indicted, the first as guilty of abduction and the second as accomplice in the crime. Madame Cayol had been released, the proofs against her not being sufficient to hold her for trial.

Marius hastened to embrace his mother. The poor woman had suffered greatly during her imprisonment; her wavering health was greatly impaired. A few days after her discharge from prison, she gently expired in the arms of her son, who swore amid his sobs to avenge her death.

The funeral occasioned a popular manifestation. Philippe's mother was taken to the Cimetiere Saint Charles followed by an immense cortege of women of the people, who accused M. de Cazalis in loud tones, of being the cause of her death. But little was wanting to induce these women to rush to the deputy's house and hurl stones at the windows.

On returning from the burial, Marius, in his little apartment on the Rue Sainte felt himself alone in the world and wept bitterly. His tears solaced him; he saw the road he must take, clearly traced before his eyes. The evils which overwhelmed him augmented in him the love of truth and the hatred of injustice. He felt that all the rest of his life must be devoted to a holy work.

There was nothing now for him to do in Marseilles. The scene of the drama had changed. The action was to occur at Aix, according to the variations of the trial. Marius wished to be on the spot to follow different phases of the case and profit by the incidents which might present themselves. He asked M. Martelly for a month's leave-of-absence, which the ship-owner at once granted him.

On the day of his departure he found Fine in the diligence.

'I am going to Aix with you,' said the young girl to him calmly.

'But this is madness!' cried he. 'You are not rich enough to devote yourself thus. And your flowers, who will sell them?'

'Oh! I have put in my place one of my friends, a girl who lives upon the same landing with me on the Place aux OEufs. I said to myself: I can be of use to them so I put on my handsomest dress and here I am!'

'I thank you with all my soul!' said Marius, simply, in a shaking voice.

CHAPTER IX.

M. DE GIROUSSE GOSSIPS.

At Aix, Marius went to the house of Isnard, who dwelt on the Rue d'Italie. mercer had not been disturbed. A prey of such slight value was, doubtless, disdained.

Fine went straight to the dwelling of the jailer of the prison. She was his niece by marriage. She had her plan. She took with her a large bouquet of roses which was received with delight. Her pretty smiles and her caressing vivacity made her in two hours her uncle's spoiled child; the jailer was a widower and had two infant daughters of whom Fine immediately became the little mother.

The trial was not to begin until the commencement of the following week. Marius, his hands tied, no longer daring to take a single step, awaited with anguish the opening of the proceedings. At times he was still mad enough to hope for, to count on, an acquittal.

One evening, while walking upon the Cours, he met M. de Girousse, who had come from Lambesc to be present at Philippe's trial. The old gentleman took his arm, and, without uttering a word, led him to his hotel.

'Now,' said he, shutting himself up with him in a large salon, 'we are alone, my friend. I can be a plebeian at my ease.'

Marius smiled at the rough and peculiar behavior of the comte.

'Well,' continued the latter, 'you do not ask me to serve you, to defend you against the obstinate and vain nobility to whom I belong. Ah! your brother sought for lofty game!'

M. de Girousse strode about the salon. Suddenly he planted himself before Marius.

'Listen to our history,' said he, in an excited voice: 'There are, in this good town, fifty old fellows like myself, who live apart, cloistered in the depths of a past forever dead. We call ourselves the flower of Provence, and here we are, inactive, twirling our thumbs. But we are gentlemen, chivalrous hearts, awaiting with devotion the return of our legitimate princes. Ah! mordieu! we will wait a long while, such a long while that solitude and illness will kill us before the least sign of a legitimate prince appears. If we had good eyes, we would see the march of events. We cry to the facts. 'You shall go no further!' and the facts calmly pass over our bodies and crush us. I am engaged to see us shut up in an infatuation as ridiculous as heroic. To think that we are almost all rich, that we could almost all become intelligent artisans who could toil for the prosperity of the country, and that we prefer to mould in the recess of our hotels like old wrecks of another age!'

He took breath, and then continued, with greater energy:

'And we are all proud of our empty existence. We do not work out of disdain of toil. We have a holy horror of people whose hands are grimy. Ah! your brother has touched one of our daughters! He will be made to see if he is of the same blood as we are. We will unite together and give a lesson to the clowns; we will take from them the desire to be beloved by our children. Some powerful ecclesiastics will second us; they are fatally bound to our cause. This will be a fine campaign for our vanity.'

After an instant's silence, M. de Girousse resumed; jeeringly:

'Our vanity! It has sometimes met with huge impediments. A few years before my birth, a terrible drama was enacted in the hotel which adjoins mine M. d' Entrecasteaux, the President of Parliament assinated his wife there in her bed; he cut her throat with a razor, urged on, they, say, by a passion which he wished to gratify even by the aid of crime. The razor was not found until twenty-five days afterwards, at the extremity of the garden; they found also in the well the victim's jewels, which the murderer had thrown there to make justice believe that the motive of the assassination had been robbery. President d' Eutrecasteaux fled and retired, I believe, to Portugal, where he died miserably. The Parliament condemned him for non-appearance to be broken alive upon the wheel. You see that we also have our scoundrels and that the people have no reason to envy us. This cowardly cruelty on the part of one of our number struck, at the time, a heavy blow on our authority. A novelist might make a stirring romance of that bloody and lugubrious history;

'And we also know how to cringe,' said M. de Girousse, who had resumed walking. 'For example, when Fouche, the regicide, then Duc d'Orante, was, about 1810, temporarily exiled to our city, all the nobles threw themselves at his feet. I recall an anecdote which shows to what base servility we descended. On the first of January, 1811, a line was formed to offer the former member of the Convention the wish of a happy new year; in the reception salon, they were talking of the extreme cold then prevailing, and one of the visitors expressed fears as to the fate of the olive trees. 'Ah! what do we care about olive trees,' cried one of the noble personages, 'provided that M. the Duc enjoys good health?' See how we are to day, my friend, humble with the powerful haughty with the weak. There are, without doubt, exceptions, but they are rare. You can readily understand that your brother will be convicted. Our pride, which bends before a Fouche, cannot bend before a Cayol. That logical. Good evening.'

The next day, the young man met him again. M. de Girousse, as on the previous evening, led him into his hotel. He held in his hand a journal containing the names of the jurors who were to try Philippe.

He struck the journal forcibly with his finger.

'Here are the men,' cried he, 'who are to be entrusted with your brother's fate. Shall I give you a few histories in regard to them? Those histories are curious and instructive.'

M. de Girousse had seated himself. He ran his eye over the journal, shrugging his shoulders.

'It is,' said he, at last, 'a select jury, an assemblage of rich people whose interest it is to serve the cause of M. de Cazalis. They are all more or less church-wardens, more or less frequenters of the salons of the nobility. Nearly all of them have for friends men who pass their mornings in the churches and squeeze money wrongfully out of their customers the rest of the day.'

Then he named the jurors one by one, and spoke of the society in which they moved with indignant vehemence.

'Humbert, said he,—'the brother of a merchant of Marseilles, of an oil dealer, an honest man held in high consideration whom all the poor devils salute. Twenty years ago, their father was only an humble clerk. To-day, the sons are millionaires, thanks to his shrewd speculations. One year, he sold in advance, at the current price, an enormous quantity of oil. A few weeks afterwards, the cold killed the olive trees and the crop was lost; he was ruined if he did not deceive his customers. But our man preferred deception to poverty. While his brethren in the trade delivered sound merchandise at a loss, he bought all the spoiled oil, all the rancid oil, he could find, and made his promised deliveries. His customers complained and grew angry. The speculator coolly replied that he had strictly kept his promises, and that they could demand nothing further of him. The trick was played. All Marseilles knows this history and has not enough bows for this adroit man.

'Gautier—another merchant of Marseilles. He has a nephew, Paul Bertrand, who tricked on a vast scale. This Bertrand was in partnership with a Sieur Aubert, of New York, who sent him cargoes of merchandise to be sold at Marseilles. They were to divide the profits. Our man made a great deal of money at this business, the more because he took care to cheat his partner in each division. One day, a crisis was reached and losses came. Bertrand continued to accept the merchandise which the ships still brought but refused to pay the drafts Aubert drew upon him, saying that business had proved unfortunate with him and that he was embarrassed. The drafts went back, and returned again with enormous costs added. Then Bertrand calmly declared that he would not pay them, that he was not obliged eternally to remain Aubert's partner and that he owed him nothing. Another sending back of the drafts; new costs, heavy reimbursements for the surprised and indignant New York merchant. The latter, who could sue only by power of attorney, lost the action for damages and interest which he brought against Bertrand! I have been assured that two-thirds of his fortune, twelve hundred thousand francs, were swallowed up in this catastrophe. Bertrand remains the most honest man in the world; he is a member of all the societies and several congregations; he is envied and honored.

'Dutailly—a grain merchant. There happened in the past to one of his sons-in-law, George Fouque, a misadventure, the scandal of which his friends hastened to stifle. Fouque always so managed it as to cause the cargoes, which the ships brought him, to be found damaged. The insurance companies paid, upon the report of an expert. Weary of paying constantly, these companies entrusted the duty of reporting to an honest baker, who speedily received a visit from Fouque. The latter, while chatting about unimportant matters, slipped some gold pieces into his hand. The baker let the pieces fall, and with a kick, sent them into the middle of the apartment. The scene took place in the presence of a number of persons. Fonque has lost nothing of his credit.

'Delorme—a man who lives in a town near Marseilles. He retired from business long ago. Listen to the details of an infamous action committed by his cousin Mille. Thirty years since, Mille's mother kept a mercer's shop. When the old lady retired, she transferred her stock to one of her clerks, an active and intelligent fellow, whom she regarded almost as a son. The young man, whose name was Michel, soon paid his debt and so increased his trade that he was obliged to take a partner. He chose a Marseilles youth, Jean Martin, who had some money and who seemed to be honorable and industrious. It was a certain fortune which Michel offered his partner. At first, everything went for the best. The profits were augmented yearly, and the two associates put aside a round sum at the close of every twelvemonth. But Jean Martin, greedy of gain and dreaming of a rapid fortune, said to himself at last that he would make twice as much if he were alone. The matter was hard to accomplish; Michel, in short, was his benefactor, and the owner of the house, Mme. Milles's son, was his friend. Should the latter prove to be an honest man, Jean Martin would fail in his shameful project. He called on him, counting upon finding a man of his own stamp, and, found in him the scoundrel he sought. Martin asked for a new lease in his own name, offering a large sum of money, and, as Mille haggled, he doubled, then tripled the amount. Mille, who is a pendant and miser, sold himself for the highest possible price; the bargain was concluded. Then Jean Martin played with Michel the role of a hypocrite; he told him that he wished to dissolve their partnership agreement that he might establish himself further away; he even pointed out to him the shop he had hired. Michel, astonished, but not suspecting the infamous proceeding of which he was to be the victim, informed him that he was at liberty to withdraw, and the agreement was annuled. A short time afterwards, Michel's lease expired, and Jean Martin in his new lease in hand, triumphantly showed his former partner the door. Such crimes escapes human justice, but the cowardly and greedy wretches who commit them are condemned by the tribunal of men of honor. I cannot sufficiently express my contempt for this Mille, who, from infancy had been the friend, the brother, so to speak, of Michael, whom he betrayed in a manner so venal and so base. There are plenty of such foul consciences as his, which bear the weight of an infamous deed lightly. Since we cannot drag into the Cour d'Assises these cunning criminals, who cast their friends upon the sidewalk for a bag of hundred-sou pieces, we should post their names in huge letters at the street corners and each passer should spit upon them. That is the ignoble pillory they deserve. Michael, driven almost wild by this treason, established himself in another locality; but, having no longer any customers, he lost the money he had laboriously amassed by thirty years of toil. He died of paralysis amid atrocious suffering, crying out that Mille and Martin were wretches and traitors, and calling upon his sons for vengeance. To-day, his sons are working, are sweating blood and water to win a position. Mille is allied to the first families of the city; his children are rich; they live luxuriously, surrounded by the devotion and esteem of all.

'Faivre—His mother took for her second husband a Sieur Chabran, a ship owner and note shaver. Under pretext of unfortunate speculations, Chabran wrote one day to his numerous creditors that he was forced to suspend payment. Some consented to give him time. The majority wished to prosecute him. Then Chabran hired two young lads, into whose ears for a week he poured a certain lesson; then, flanked by these two little beings, perfectly drilled, he visited, one after another, all his creditors, bewailing his trouble and demanding pity for his two sons, ragged and without bread. The trick succeeded marvellously. All his creditors tore up their notes. The following day, Chabran was at the Bourse, calmer and more insolent than ever. A broker, who was ignorant of what had taken place, proposed to him to discount two notes, signed by some of the very merchants who, the day before, had given quittance to this wretch. 'I will have nothing to do with people of that class,' he answered, boldly. Now, Chabran has almost given up business; he lives in a splendid hotel, where he gives sumptuous dinners on Sundays.

'Gerominot—the President of a club at which he passes his evenings, and a usurer of the worst kind. He has made, they say, a million francs at that business, which has enabled him to marry his daughter to a shining light of finance. His name is Pertigny, but, since the failure which left in his hands a capital of three hundred thousand francs, he has called himself Felix. This adroit scoundrel made, forty years ago, his first failure, which put him in condition to buy a house. His creditors received fifteen per cent. Ten years, later a second failure permitted him to acquire a superb country mansion. His creditors received ten per cent. Scarcely fifteen years ago he made a third failure for three hundred thousand francs and offered five per cent. The creditors having refused to accept it, he proved to them that all his wife, and did not give them a centime.'

Marius was discouraged; he made a gesture of disgust, as if to interrupt these ignominious revelations.

'You do not believe me, perhaps,' resumed the terrible comte, with a certain hautiness. 'You are a young innocent my friend. I have not finished; I wish you to hear me to the end.'

M. de Girousse jeered with sinister heat. His words, loud and hissing, fell like the crack of a whip upon those whose foul histories he recited. One recognized the disdainful gentleman from the freedom of his speech and the generous impetuosity of his fury.

He named the jurors turn by turn; he scanned their lives and those of their families; he exposed all the shame and wretchedness in them. Very few, indeed did he spare. Then he violently placed himself before Marius and continued, with asperity:

'Did you have the innocence to believe that all those millionaires, all those parvenus, all those powerful people, who domineer over and crush you, were little saints and just men whose lives were without stain?

To be continued.

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