

The Abbe Constantin.

BY LUDOVIC HALEVY.

CHAPTER I.—(CONTINUED.)

That night the village was taken, and the next day the body of Doctor Reynaud was deposited in the cemetery at Villorsevel. Two months afterwards, the Abbe Constantin brought his friend's coffin to Longueval, and, following the coffin, as it was borne out of the church, walked an orphan. Jean had lost his mother, too. When the news of her husband's death came, she remained for twenty-four hours prostrated, crushed—without a word, without a tear. Then fever set in, then delirium, and then, at the end of a fortnight, death.

Jean was alone in the world. He was fourteen years old.

There remained of this family, in which, for a century, every one had been good and honest, only a child kneeling by a grave, who promised to be, what his grandfather and his father had been, honest and good. There are such families in France, and many, many more than one ventures to say. Our poor country is cruelly misrepresented, in many things, by certain writers who draw startling, exaggerated pictures of it. It is the true that the history of good people is often either monotonous or sorrowful. This story is a proof of it.

Jean's grief was the grief a man. For a long time he was sad, for a long time silent. The evening after his father's burial, the Abbe Constantin took him home with him to the parsonage. The day had been rainy and cold. Jean was sitting by the fire; the priest was reading his breviary. Old Pauline went in and out. An hour passed in silence, when Jean, suddenly looking up, said:

"Godfather, has my father left me any money?"

This was such a strange question, that the abbe, amazed, thought he could not have heard aright.

"You ask me if your father—"

"I ask you, godfather, if my father left me any money?"

"Yes, he must have left you money."

"A good deal, did he not? I have often heard people say that my father was rich. Tell me, as nearly as you can, how much must he have left me."

"But I do not know. You ask me about things—"

The poor priest was distressed. Such a question at such a moment! He believed that he knew Jean's heart; and in that heart, there should be no place for such thoughts.

"I beg of you, godfather, to tell me," continued Jean gently. "I will explain to you, afterward, why I ask you this."

"Ah! Well! Your father was said to have two or three hundred thousand francs."

"And is that much money?"

"Yes, that is large sum of money."

"And all that money is mine?"

"Yes, all that money is yours."

"Ah! So much the better; because on the day when my father was killed, over there, the Prussians on the very same day, killed the son of a poor woman at Longueval—mother Clement—you know her. They also killed Rosalie's brother, whom I used to play with when I was little. Well, since I am rich, and they are poor, I want to divide the money my father has left me with mother Clement and Rosalie."

On hearing these words, the cure rose, took Jean's two hands, and drawing him close, folded him in his arms. The white head rested upon the blonde head. Two big tears broke from the old priest's eyes, rolled slowly down his cheeks, and crept away into the wrinkles of his face.

The cure, however, was obliged to explain to Jean, that, although he was the heir to his father's property, still, he could not dispose of it as he pleased.

There must be a family council—a guardian.

"You, doubtless, godfather?"

"No, not I, my child; a priest has no right to hold a guardianship. I think, Monsieur Lenient, the notary at Souvigny, who was one of your father's best friends, will be chosen. You can talk with him—you can tell him what you wish to do."

Monsieur Lenient was, indeed, selected by the family council to assume the duties of a guardian. Jean's entreaties were so urgent, and so touching, that the notary consented to deduct from the income the sum of twenty-four hundred francs, to be divided between Mother Clement and little Rosalie, every year until Jean was of age.

At this juncture, Madame Lavardens acted very generously. She went to see the Abbe Constantin.

"Give Jean to me," said she, "give him entirely me, until he has completed his studies. I will bring him back to you every year for his vacation. It is not a favor I am doing you. It is a favor that I ask of you. I can desire nothing more fortunate for my son. Paul desires to enter St. Cyr, to be a soldier. I can find the necessary masters and appliances only in Paris. I will take the two children there; they will be brought up together, under my eyes, like brothers. I will make no difference between them, I assure you."

It was difficult not to accept such a proposition. The old cure would have been glad to keep Jean with him, and the thought of the separation almost broke his heart; but what was for the child's interest? that was to be considered. The rest was nothing. Jean was called.

"My child," said Madame de Lavardens, "will you come and live with me and Paul for a few years? I will take you to Paris."

"You are very kind, madame, but I would so much rather stay here."

He looked at the cure, who turned away.

"Why go away," he continued, "why take us away, Paul and me?"

"Because you can finish your studies, steadily and profitably, only in Paris. Paul will prepare for his examination at St. Cyr. You know that he wants to be a soldier."

"And I, too, madame; I want to be a soldier."

"You a soldier?" said the cure, "but your father never thought of such a thing. Your father often spoke of your future, your career, to me. You were to be a doctor, and like him a country doctor, at Longueval; and like him help the poor, and like him take care of the sick. Jean, my child, remember—"

"I remember; I do remember."

"Well, then, you must do as your father wished. It is your duty, Jean, it is your duty. You must go to Paris. You would like to stay here. Ah! I can understand that; and I, too, would like it very much, but it cannot be. You must go to Paris, to work, to work diligently. That does not trouble me. You are your father's own son. You will be an honest man, and an industrious man. One is rarely the one without being the other. And some day, the poor will find in your father's house, in the very place where he did so much good, another Doctor Reynaud who, too, will help them. And I, if I am still in this world, will be so happy when that day comes—so happy. But I ought not to speak of myself. It is wrong—I am of no importance. You must think of your father. I tell you again, Jean, it was his dearest wish. You cannot have forgotten it."

"No, I have not forgotten it; but if my father sees me and hears me, I am sure he understands me, and forgives me, for it is on his account."

"On his account!"

"Yes; when I heard that he was dead, and when I know how he died, in a moment, without being obliged to reflect, I said to myself that I would be a soldier. Godfather, and you, madame; I entreat you not to prevent me."

The child burst into tears, in an agony of despair. The countess and the abbe quieted him with kind words.

"Yes—yes—it is understood. Everything shall be as you wish; everything that you wish."

They both had the same idea. "Let us leave it to time. Jean is only a child; he will change his mind." In which they both were mistaken. Jean did not change his mind.

In the month of September, 1876, Paul was rejected at St. Cyr; and Jean stood eleventh at the School of Polytechnica. On the day, when the list of successful candidates were published, he wrote to the Abbe Constantin:

"I have passed, and passed too well; for I want to go into the army, and not into the civil service. However, if I keep my rank at the school, it will be good for one of my comrades. He will get my place."

But Jean did better than keep his rank. The final classification made him number seven. But instead of entering the School of Engineers, he entered the School of Practice at Fontainebleau in 1878. He was just twenty-one. He was of age; master of his own fortune, and the first act of his administration was a large, a very large, expenditure. He bought for Mother Clement and for little Rosalie, now grown up, two annuities of fifteen hundred francs each. They cost him seven thousand francs.

Two years later, Jean carried off the first prize at Fontainebleau, which gave him his choice of vacant places. There was one in the regiment stationed at Souvigny, and Souvigny was very near Longueval; Jean asked for the place and obtained it.

This is the way that Jean Reynaud, lieutenant in the 9th Regiment of Artillery, came, in the month of October, 1880, into possession of Dr. Marcel Reynaud's house. This is the way he found himself again in the country where his childhood was spent, and where every one had preserved the memory of his father's life and death. This is the way that the Abbe Constantin was not denied the happiness of seeing his friend's son again. And, if the truth must be told, he no longer regretted that Jean had not been a physician. When the old cure went out of church, after saying Mass, if he saw a cloud of dust blow along the road, if he felt the earth tremble with the roaring of cannon, he stopped and took as much pleasure as a child in seeing the regiment pass.

But the regiment, for him, was Jean! In the features of this sturdy, robust officer, he could plainly read integrity, courage and goodness.

As soon as Jean saw the cure at a distance, he would put his horse on a gallop, and stop to talk a little with his godfather. Jean's horse always turned his head around to the cure, for he well knew that there was always a lump of sugar for him in the pocket of the old soutane—worn and pieced—his morning soutane. The abbe had a handsome one which he saved to go into company—when he went into company.

When the trumpets of the regiment sounded through the village, every eye was watching for Jean, little Jean. For to the old people of Longueval, he was still little Jean. One old peasant, wrinkled and decrepit, could never break himself of the habit of saluting him as he passed, with a "Good morning, boy!" The boy was six feet tall. And Jean never went through the village without seeing at two windows, the old parchment face of Mother Clement, and Rosalie's smiling features.

The latter had been married the year before. Jean was her witness, and danced merrily the evening of the wedding with the young girls of Longueval.

This was the lieutenant who, on Saturday, the 28th of May, 1881, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, dismounted in front of the parsonage gate. He entered; his horse quietly followed him, and made his own way toward a little shed in the yard. Pauline stood at the kitchen window. Jean went up and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Good day, my good Pauline. How do you do!"

"Very well. I am busy with your dinner. Do you want to know what you are going to have? Potato soup, a leg of mutton, and a dish of eggs, *au lait*."

"Excellent! I like it all; and I am starving."

"And I forgot to mention a salad, which you can help me pick presently. Dinner will be ready at half-past six exactly; because to night, at half-past seven, Monsieur le Cure has his service for the month of Mary."

"Where is my godfather?"

"In the garden; Monsieur le Cure is very sad on account of the sale yesterday."

"Yes; I know, I know."

"It will cheer him up a little to see you. He is always so happy when you are here. Take care, Loulou wants to nibble the rose-bushes. How warm he is, poor Loulou!"

"I came by the longest way, through the wood, and I rode pretty fast."

Jean caught Loulou, who was going toward the rosetrellis, took off his saddle and bridle, fastened him in the little shed, and rubbed him down with a bit of straw in a twinkling.

Then he went into the house, took off his sword and his cap, put on an old five-cent straw hat, and started for the garden to find the cure.

The poor Abbe was, indeed, very sad. He had not closed his eyes all night; he who usually slept so peacefully, so sweetly, the untroubled sleep of a child. His heart was heavy. Longueval in the hands of a foreigner, of a heretic, of an adventurer! Jean repeated what Paul had said the day before:

"You will have money, plenty of money for your poor."

"Money! money! Yes, my poor will lose nothing—perhaps they will gain. But I must go ask for this money, and I shall find in the salon, instead of my dear old friend, this American with red hair—it seems that she has red hair. I shall certainly for my poor people, I shall go; and she will give me money, but she will give me nothing else. The marchioness gave in different way. Her heart and soul were in the giving. We went together, every week, to visit the poor and the sick. She knew all their sufferings, and all their miseries. And when I was confined to my arm chair with the gout, she made the rounds, all alone; and as well, or better than I."

Here, Pauline interrupted the conversation. She carried an immense, china salad bowl, decorated in big, staring, red flowers.

"Here I am," said she, "I am going to pick the salad. Jean, do you want lettuce or endive?"

"Endive," replied Jean gayly, "it is a long time since I have eaten endive."

"Well! you shall have some to night. Here, take the salad bowl."

Pauline began to cut the endive, and Jean stooped down to receive the leaves into the big salad bowl. The cure looked on. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

The great demand for a pleasant safe and reliable antidote for all affections of the throat and lungs is fully met with in Bickel's Anti-Consumptive Syrup. It is a purely Vegetable Compound, and acts promptly and magically in subduing all coughs, colds, bronchitis, inflammation of the lungs, etc. It is so PALATABLE that a child will not refuse it, and is put up at a price that will not exclude the poor from its benefits.