

THE ROMANCE OF A JESUIT.

From the French of De Beugny d'Hagerne.

CHAPTER II.

At the time we commence our story Charles Durand was twenty two years of age. He was tall, well formed and good-looking, whilst there was a something in his appearance denoting great energy of character.

His mother, a sweet, gentle creature, had, during his early years, given him good Christian training, and had striven to implant in him those principles of faith and charity which had been the guide and consolation of her own life. But when his college career commenced he soon lost sight of his mother's teaching. Little by little his intelligence became obscured by doubts as to the Faith, and lending too willing an ear to his father's sneers and scepticism, he had even before leaving college, declared himself an enemy of all superstition, in other words, of all religion.

At the close of his most successful college career he had commenced studying for the law, and his two first examinations had passed off so satisfactorily that a brilliant future seemed to await him.

During his career of business and of pleasure, his father had made many acquaintances, and with these he associated freely, but there were only two among the number with whom he was on terms of intimate friendship. Both of them were friends of his youth. The one was Lerouttier, the banker, whose acquaintance we have already made, the other, a Mons. Meynaudier, a rich man who was a representative in the Chamber of Deputies, who, though he had rooms in Paris, resided at Versailles the greater portion of the year. This Mons. Meynaudier had two children, a son and a daughter. Anatole, the son, was about the same age as Charles, and the two young men were frequent companions. Mons. Meynaudier encouraged Charles' visits to his house, for he thought that his example might be of use to his own son, who was sadly deficient in ambition and in habits of application, perhaps too, the suitability of the rich Mons. Durand's son as a match for his own daughter Elise, was another reason for the frequent invitations he extended to the young law student. Charles was, therefore, on an intimate footing in the Meynaudier family, and the fair Elise, a charming young girl of eighteen or so, seemed to be by no means indifferent to his attentions.

It was during one of his frequent visits to Versailles that Charles, whilst walking in the garden with his friend Anatole, broached the subject of his attachment to Elise, and whilst enquiring as to his chances of success with the lady and her father, the two young men perceived Mons. Meynaudier approaching them hurriedly. Both of them saw by his manner that he had something of consequence to communicate to them and, feeling alarmed, commenced questioning him. He replied that Charles' father was ailing and had sent for his son, that, in fact, the family carriage was awaiting Charles to bring him quickly to Paris. Hastily entering the carriage Charles drove away as quickly as the now tired horses could bear him, his mind filled with apprehension. From the coachman he learnt that his father was seriously ill, but the man took care not to communicate the news of Mons. Durand's death too abruptly to the son. Arriving at his home in Paris, he sprang up the stairs to his father's room and there his worst fears were confirmed, for he beheld that father's body stretched lifeless on the bed.

As we have already seen, the poor young man had no belief in religion, and therefore, instead of at once kneeling to pray for the dead man's soul, he threw himself into an arm chair and wept violently. After this first outburst of grief he recalled to mind that various duties devolved upon him, and after having caused the official seals to be placed upon the drawers, etc., he entrusted the arrangements for the funeral to Mons. Lerouttier, and he himself sought his young sister to lead her to her dead father's side.

The funeral took place after the customary period had elapsed, and in due time, and in the presence of the proper witnesses the seals were removed, and an examination made of the various drawers and receptacles, commencing with the

desk that stood in Mons. Durand's own room. In one drawer there was a little gold and a few notes, the whole amounting to some 8,000 francs, and a letter addressed "To my son" with "Private" written in large letters. In other parts of the desk were found old letters, various papers of no consequence, but no trace of a will, and, what seemed more extraordinary, no title deeds, nor vouchers, nor documents of any kind, not even any bank-books.

In vain was the search pursued in various parts of the house—absolutely nothing could be found!

As soon as Charles was alone he opened his father's letter and read as follows:

"MY DEAR SON, I am dying by poison. Accuse no one of the crime, for I myself am deliberately taking away my own life. I have been improvident and culpable; I have been led away by my love of luxurious living; my whole fortune has been swallowed up, and your mother's fortune has been tampered with. I tried to make an effort to stop my downward course, but found the effort too much for me. Were I to live on, the little still remaining to you would follow the rest, and hence my determination of putting an end to my life. There is still about 200,000 francs remaining to you and I have placed it in Lerouttier's hands at your disposal. You can safely rely on him; he has been my friend from childhood, and, if I had followed his advice, I should not be now under the necessity of resorting to suicide in order to hand you some small remnant of your fortune.

"I entrust your sister to you. Take good care of her, for she has no one but you. Adieu! The folly of my own conduct precludes my offering you any other advice as to yours, but I beg of you to avoid the extravagance and mismanagement which has ruined your father.

"Adieu! My final arrangements are made and in a few hours, all will be over with me.

Your loving father,

A. DURAND."

The statement contained in this letter completely puzzled Charles. He had previously had a settlement of accounts with Lerouttier, and by that gentleman's showing, so far from there being any balance in his hands there was a deficit of some few thousand francs, all claim to which, however, he waived in favour of his friend's young daughter, Marguerite. In support of his statement he had produced a packet of papers which had ever semblance of being carefully kept accounts, receipts and releases. How reconcile all this with his father's statement? and certainly that statement must be correct since his father made it in the very presence of death, when no man can tell a lie.

To add to his difficulties the tradesmen's bills began to be presented and clamour for payment, to be heard. The servants, too, presented their just claims for arrears in wages.

He seemed on the verge of despair! What could he do in his terrible position? After long pacing the room with a feverish stride and fruitlessly endeavouring to find some way out of his apparently hopeless predicament, he went to his sister's room and found her kneeling, weeping and praying before an ivory statue of the Blessed Virgin which had been given her by her mother. As yet she had been kept in ignorance of the dreadful manner of her father's death, but now Charles revealed all to her and together they took counsel as to how they could best weather the storm of misfortune that had swept from them the whole of their worldly fortune.

Marguerite showed the greatest courage and strength of mind and of judgement. In company with her brother she sought afresh in every corner where papers might have been found, but she was no more successful than he had been.

Frightful suspicions, amounting to a conviction, now assailed Charles, and he hurried off to the banker's to demand more explicit information with regard to his late father's affairs. With great difficulty he at length gained admission to Lerouttier's presence and the interview was stormy and painful. Charles pointed out the terrible discrepancy between the statement given by his dead father and that made by the banker himself. In vain did the latter strive to exculpate himself. Charles pointed out to him that if ordinary