

Cardan, the Galley-Slave.

CHAPTER II.

To carry on his enterprise successfully, Cardan was in want of a larger sum of money than he had stolen from Madame de Mellan's secretary; besides, that money was nearly all spent. This obstacle was very soon overcome. The bankers of Marseilles are not so suspicious as their brethren of Paris; they are too negligent, and too easily part with their double Napoleons and Spanish piastres to a skillful knave.

The accomplice chosen by Cardan was called Valentin Progrehe. He retained only his first name when he became the valet of Cardan, who now transformed himself into M. Albert Kerbriant. The mission entrusted to Progrehe was of a very delicate nature, notwithstanding the luminous instructions with which he was favored by his master.

He was to repair to the residence of Madame de Mellan and examine the ground, in order that the drama might begin without peril to its author. Progrehe, dressed like the confidential servant of a good family, set out for Toulon, and on arriving in that city he took a little boat, and landed close to the house of Madame de Mellan about sunset. He played his part admirably; he announced to the two ladies that M. Albert de Kerbriant had arrived at Nantz by a merchant-ship, which had sailed from the Cape of Good Hope; that the fatigue of the voyage had compelled him to send in his resignation sooner than he could have wished, and that he had come back from the Indies as a passenger, independent of his services, and willing to fix his abode at the choice of the ladies De Mellan.

During this conversation Progrehe remained standing on the terrace, ready, in case of the slightest appearance of mistrust on the part of the ladies, to spring over it, and flee into the open country. This precaution was unnecessary; Madame de Mellan was a good and unsuspecting woman, who had passed all her life in a patriarchal habitation in the Savannas of the New World. She gave implicit credence to the story told by the pretended servant of her future son-in-law, and in the intoxication of her joy she embraced her daughter, who was much agitated at the idea of so sudden a marriage.

The next day, at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, a great noise of wheels and the cracking of a position's whip announced the arrival of a post-chaise. "It is M. de Kerbriant, my master!" said Progrehe. "I know his chaise." A young man, dressed in black, and of very distinguished appearance, leaped lightly upon the terrace, and, as if suffocated by tears of joy, kissed the hand of Madame de Mellan.

Cardan was so wonderfully disguised that Progrehe was for a moment alarmed, for he did not know him.

The escaped galley-slave bowed to Mademoiselle Anna, and addressed her in this phrase, prepared fourteen leagues off.

"I bless the memory of your father, that generous man who fixed me for a son-in-law; for I must assure you, Mademoiselle, that my voyage round the world has not given me an opportunity of seeing any lady whom I should so gladly choose as a bride!"

These words were followed by the long silence which always succeeds profound emotion; but, when a reasonable space had been allowed to silence and melancholy recollections, the conversation insensibly assumed a lively air, especially at supper. Cardan showed an exquisite taste in talking with the ladies on other subjects rather than his marriage. He described the voyage, having traced the route upon a map, mixing his recital with the technical phrases of the sea, which he had also studied for the purpose, and at the conclusion of his narrative he assumed a melancholy tone and attitude and said:

"I have traversed some thousand leagues, I have visited all the quarters of the globe, and I have acquired the experience of age, which such a journey gives even to a young man, and I have found that happiness, if it exists at all, can only be secured in the fulfilment of domestic duties, in a circle of relations and friends isolated from the world."

Madame de Mellan pressed the hand of Cardan, signifying by her mute action what she felt at hearing such noble sentiments fall from the lips of her son-in-law.

By a transition, very skillfully managed, Cardan induced his future mother-in-law to make a determination which was very important to him. He spoke of some pretended quarrel which he had had at Nantz with some young officers, formerly his comrades, who had reproached him with what they called his desertion of the service in such terms as to provoke an affair of honor.

"I do not fear an encounter of this kind," he added, "and they know it; but it would be a grievous affair to cross words with old friends, because they see my retirement in so unjust a light. I would rather give them leisure to understand me better. When our commander, who knows me well, comes back to a French port, he will plead my cause better than I can myself. I have, therefore, resolved not to show myself in Toulon, and there-

by I shall avoid disagreements which might have very serious and unpleasant results. If my mother-in-law will consent to the plan, I propose that we should make some little excursion into the country, or to Italy, or Spain, if she prefers it; and when we come back to France, my conduct will have been already justified by my fellow officers, who will, in the meantime, have returned from India, and my unjust friends will be prepared to apologize." All this was said in so simple and natural a manner that it might have deceived the most suspicious. The good and simple Madame de Mellan was so much alarmed, especially on her daughter's account, that she was the first to propose leaving the neighborhood of a city where her son-in-law was exposed to the risk of challenges which he could not refuse. Her retirement in the country did not seem a sufficient safeguard against her maternal alarms, since all the villas in the vicinity were inhabited by the families of naval officers, who interchanged visits on the fine summer evenings. Cardan did not exhibit any eagerness to quit the vicinity of Toulon, but this well-acted coolness redoubled the fears of Madame de Mellan, who felt herself obliged to urge her future son-in-law immediately to commence his journey. Drawing the galley-slave aside, therefore, she said to him, while pointing to Anna:

"That poor child is very timid. We must travel some time together. We shall be old friends at a month's end. Are not both you and I independent of the world? You can marry my daughter in Spain or Italy as well as in France, or anywhere else. Let us begin by setting our minds at ease, and set out on our travels immediately."

Cardan bowed with the air of a man who has only to submit, and replied: "I will not refuse the first request of my mother-in-law: it shall be as you wish, Madame."

In the arrangements that were then made between Cardan and the good widow, it was agreed that Progrehe, the pretended valet, should remain in the country to take care of the luggage and various little domestic affairs, and that a certain sum of money should be left with him for necessary or unforeseen expenses. Before day-break on the morning, Madame de Mellan, her daughter and the convict set out post for Marseilles. In that city, Cardan procured passports for Spain, and a few days afterwards he arrived with the two ladies, his intended victims, at the Hotel of the Asturias, at Barcelona.

The annals of crime offer few examples of a story in which the marvellous takes so large a share; if, however, these events were not extraordinary, they would not be worth relating. About a fortnight after the departure of Madame de Mellan, the young Albert Kerbriant landed upon the Quay of Toulon before the Hotel de Ville, and, without even stopping to change the dress he had worn on his voyage, he hastened to find Madame de Mellan.

At the post-office he was directed to her country-house, and our sailor, mounting the first horse he could procure, set off at a gallop. To return from India with the smiling prospect of a wealthy marriage, to tread your native ground and behold the house inhabited by your unknown betrothed, are events that do not happen every day. The young Albert started at the sight of the vine covered Italian trellis, through the interstices of which he could see floating tresses and clouds of white muslin. There was his future family, his happiness, his fortune, his all. He threw himself from his horse at the entrance of the avenue, and, reaching the terrace in uncontrollable agitation, he murmured his own name and that of Madame de Mellan.

A group of ladies and young people rose in silence at the officer's introductory exclamation, and with amazed looks interrogated the new comer, who was wholly unknown to them.

Startled by this strange reception, Albert thought that he must have mistaken the house, and endeavored to excuse himself, saying:

"Pardon me, ladies, I must have made a mistake, which is not strange, as there are so many villas in this neighborhood without names or numbers. I have taken this for another, though it was very well described to me."

A lady of middle age then said, addressing the sailor:

"Perhaps, sir, you are not mistaken, we have only resided here one week. Madame de Mellan lived in this house before us; the neighbors told us so, and they will doubtless tell you the same."

"Has Madame de Mellan removed to the city, then?" enquired the young man, agitated by a sinister foreboding.

"No, sir," was the reply; "she went away in a post-chaise, with her daughter and her son-in-law."

"Her son-in-law!" exclaimed the sailor, in a tone of astonishment.

"Yes! her son-in-law; that is to say, the young man who is to marry her daughter, Anna."

Albert de Kerbriant summoned up all his fortitude, and, ashamed of making his emotion a spectacle for strangers, he composed his features, his voice and his demeanor, and said:

"Excuse me, Madame, if I enter into details which may appear to you somewhat indiscreet. Will you allow me to ask one question? Have you heard the name of this son-in-law, this young man who is to marry Mademoiselle Anna de Mellan?"

"Oh!" replied the lady, "it is a name well known in this house, the maid-servants have often mentioned it to the neighboring farm-

ers and their wives: it was to M. Albert de Kerbriant that Mademoiselle Anna was betrothed."

"I know it!" said the true Albert. "You see then, sir," said the lady, "that we are well informed. By this time, no doubt, the marriage is celebrated."

"With M. de Kerbriant!" cried the young man, in a voice that started all the witnesses of the scene, though they nodded their heads in the affirmative.

"With M. de Kerbriant!" again repeated the unfortunate Albert in a tone of despair. "That must be impossible: I am Albert de Kerbriant, and I came here to marry Anna de Mellan: there is some terrible mystery. Some miscreant has intercepted my letters, and assumed my name! What a frightful discovery!"

He sank heavily on a bench on the terrace, wiping the cold perspiration from his brow. The excitement of anger presently made him rise proudly; he saw in a moment that all his judgment and determination as an officer, and his coolness as a man, were necessary to discover and chastise an action of such unparalleled atrocity and audacity.

He took leave of the ladies at the country-house, with apologies for having intruded on their solitude, and hastened to collect from the farmers of the neighborhood all possible information as to the day and the hour of Madame de Mellan's departure, and the direction in which they travelled, so that he might not lose a moment in following on the track of the ravisher. At Marseilles he visited all the fratrate hotels, and at the Hotel des Empereurs, the intelligent and active Castel, having heard all about the three travellers, told Albert de Kerbriant that three persons such as he described had passed two days in the house, before they embarked for Barcelona. Castel even named the banker to whom he had taken the false Albert de Kerbriant, who had wished for and procured a letter of credit for fifteen thousand francs, on behalf of his mother-in-law. The young sailor hastened to the house of the banker, where he not only received confirmation of all that he had heard from Castel, but was shown his own signature by the banker, his writing being counterfeited with a dexter and talent for imitation which could only be displayed by the celebrated galley-slave. This was a clue to guide his enquiries; he took post-horses, and in less than five hours he was at Toulon, with the commissary of the galleys, who informed him of the escape of Cardan the forger, and gave him a personal description of the criminal. The same evening Albert set out for Barcelona, furnished with important information, and a letter for the French consul.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Under the Ban.

The action of the Holy See declaring that Catholics cannot join, or retain their membership in, the Oddfellows, Knights of Pythias or Sons of Temperance and remain within the pale of the Church, was not unexpected and, consequently, occasions little surprise.

This decision has been foreshadowed by the advice given by American prelates, who, when recently questioned about the matter, after stating that the subject was under consideration at Rome, counselled Catholics to keep aloof from these organizations, whose character the prelates evidently knew, would fall to commend them to the Holy See.

The matter is now definitely settled and the papal decree will, of course, be dutifully observed by Catholics throughout the world. There are plenty of Catholic organizations, social, beneficial and benevolent, for Catholics to join without exposing their faith to the dangers that always attend membership in secret societies.—Catholic Columbian.

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