

## The Abbe Constantin.

BY LUDOVIC HALEVY.

CHAPTER I.—(CONTINUED.)

The Abbe Constantin prepared to go back to Longueval, but Paul, seeing him about to start, said:

"Oh! no, no, Monsieur l'Abbe, you must not walk all the way to Longueval a second time in the heat. Let me drive you back. I am sorry to see you so troubled. I will try to divert you. Oh! in spite of your being such a saint, I make you laugh sometimes with my foolishness."

Half an hour afterwards, both the cure and Paul were rolling along, side by side, towards the village. Paul talked, talked, talked! His mother was no longer there to quiet him, and keep him in check. His delight was brimming over.

"Now, you see, Monsieur l'Abbe, you are wrong in taking things so seriously. There, look at my little mare, how she trots! how she steps out! You do not know her. Do you know what I paid for her? Four hundred francs. I discovered her, a fortnight ago, in the shafts of a gardener's cart. When she is in training once, she will make twelve miles an hour, and one has their hands full with her all the time. Look, look how she pulls! how she pulls! Go on! tot! tot! tot! You are not in a hurry are you, Monsieur l'Abbe? Will you drive through the woods? It will do you good to take the air. If you knew, Monsieur l'Abbe, how fond I am of you, and how much I respect you. I hope I have not said too many foolish things before you just now. I should be so sorry."

"No, my child, I have not heard anything."

"Then we will take the longest way round."

After turning to the left, into the forest, Paul went back to his first sentence:

"I tell you, Monsieur l'Abbe, that you are wrong in taking things so seriously. Do you want me to tell you what I think? What has just happened is very fortunate."

"Very fortunate?"

"Yes; very fortunate. I would rather have the Scotts at Longueval, than the Gallards. Have you not just heard M. de Larnac criticise them for spending their money foolishly. It is never foolish to spend money. What is foolish is, to keep it. Your poor people, for I am very sure that it is especially of your poor people that you are thinking, well this has been a good day for your poor people. At least that is my opinion. Religion? Yes, religion. They will not go to mass. That will trouble you, it is quite natural; but they will send you money, plenty of money, and you will take it, and you will be perfectly right. You see you cannot say no. There will be a shower of gold all over the country. A stir! a commotion! coaches and four-powdered postilions, hunting, fireworks. And here, in this wood, in this very drive where we are, I shall, perhaps, before long, find Paris again. I may see again the two equestriennes, and the two little grooms that I told you about just now. If you knew how handsome they are on horseback—the two sisters. One morning, in Paris, I followed them the whole way around the Bois de Boulogne. I can see them yet. They wore high-crowned grey hats, little black veils, and two long riding habits, with just a single seam down the back; and a woman must be extremely well made, to wear such a riding habit as that! Because you see Monsieur l'Abbe, that with a habit cut like that, there is no deception possible."

The cure for some time had paid no attention to Paul's discourse. They were driving through a long, straight avenue. At the farther end of it the cure saw a horseman coming at a gallop.

"Look," said he to Paul, "look! you have better eyes than I; is not that Jean, yonder?"

"Why, yes, it is Jean, I know his grey mare." Paul was fond of horses, and he always looked at the horse, before he looked at the rider. It was, indeed, Jean; and perceiving the cure and Paul at a distance, he waved his cap which bore two gold bands.

Jean was a lieutenant in a regiment of artillery in garrison at Souvigny.

In a few minutes he rode up to the little carriage, and addressing the cure:

"I have just been at your house, godfather, and Pauline told me that you had gone to Souvigny to the sale. Well, who has bought the chateau?"

"An American, Madame Scott."

"And Blanche Ouronne?"

"The same Madame Scott."

"And La Rozeraine?"

"Still, Madame Scott."

"And the forest, always, Madame Scott?"

"You are right," replied Paul, "and I know her—Madame Scott—and there will be entertainments at Longueval. I will introduce you. Only, Monsieur l'Abbe, is troubled because she is an American and a Protestant."

"Ah! that is true, my poor godfather. But we will talk about all that to-morrow. I am coming to dine with you. I have given Pauline notice. I have not time to stop now. I am on duty, and I must be at quarters at three o'clock. *Au revoir*, Paul. Till to-morrow, godfather."

The lieutenant resumed his gallop. Paul started up his little horse.

"What a good fellow Jean is," said Paul.

"Oh! yes."

"There is no one in the world better than Jean."

"No, no better."

The cure turned round to look after Jean, who was already disappearing in the depths of the forest.

"Oh! yes, there is you, Monsieur l'Abbe."

"No, not I, not I."

"Oh well, will you let me tell you, Monsieur l'Abbe, that there is no one in the world better than you two, you and Jean!"

"Now that is the truth. Oh wait, here is a good place to trot. I have been letting Niniche walk. I have named her Niniche."

Paul just touched Niniche with the tip of the whip, and as she started off at a rapid pace, he delightedly cried:

"Just look how she lifts her feet, Monsieur l'Abbe, look now, how she lifts her feet! and so regular! Just like a perfect machine! Lean over and see!"

The Abbe Constantin to please Paul leaned over a little to see how Niniche lifted her feet. But he was thinking of something else.

CHAPTER II

The lieutenant's name was Jean Reynaud. He was the son of a country doctor, who was sleeping in the cemetery at Longueval. When the Abbe Constantin, in 1846, came to take possession of his parish, a Doctor Reynaud, the grandfather of Jean, was established in a cheerful little home on the Souvigny road, between the two chateaux of Longueval and Lavardens.

Marcel, the son of this Doctor Reynaud, had finished his medical studies at Paris. He was very industrious, and possessed of superior mental ability. He had received the first prize at the competition for fellowships. He decided to remain in Paris and try his fortune, and everything promised a prosperous and brilliant career for him, when, in 1852, he received the news of his father's death, from apoplexy. Marcel hastened to Longueval in the deepest grief. He worshipped his father. He spent a month with his mother, and, at the end of that time, spoke of the necessity of returning to Paris.

"It is true," said she to him, "you must go."

"What! I go? We must go; do you think that I will leave you here all alone? I take you with me." "Go to live in Paris! Leave this place where I was born, where your father lived, where he died? I can never do it, my child, never! Go alone, since your life and all your future are there. I understand you. I know you will not forget me, that you will come often, very often to see me."

"No mother," he replied, "I shall stay here."

He stayed. His hopes, his ambitions, everything vanished, disappeared in a moment.

He saw but one thing—duty, which was, not to abandon his aged, suffering mother. In this duty, simply accepted, and simply performed, he found happiness. And, after all, there is little besides duty in which happiness is found.

Marcel adapted himself to his new life with a good grace, and with all his heart. He went on with his father's life, taking the furrow where his father had left it. He gave himself up entirely to the obscure profession of a country doctor, without regret and without looking back. He lived in the simplest manner possible, and one half of his time he gave to the poor, from whom he would never take a penny. This was his only luxury.

A charming young girl, without fortune, and alone in the world, crossed his path. He married her. This happened in 1855, and the following year brought Doctor Reynaud a great grief and a great joy: the death of his aged mother, and the birth of his son Jean.

At an interval of six weeks, the Abbe Constantin recited the prayers for the dead over the tomb of the grandmother, and was present, as the godfather, at the baptism of the grandson.

Meeting at the bedside of the suffering and the dying, the priest and the physician, alike in heart and feeling, had been attracted and attached to each other. They felt themselves to be of the same family, the same race—the race of the tender, the just, the kind.

Years succeeded years, calm, tranquil, sweet in full satisfaction of labor and duty. Jean was growing up. He took his first lessons in writing of his father, and his first lessons in Latin of the cure.

Jean was industrious and intelligent; he had made such progress that the two masters, especially the cure, found themselves somewhat prelexed after a few years. Their pupil became too advanced for them. It was at this time, just after the death of her husband, that the countess came to permanently reside at Lavardens. She brought a tutor for her son Paul, who was a very attractive but a very idle little fellow. The two children were of the same age, they had known each other from their childhood. Madame de Lavardens was very fond of Doctor Reynaud, and one day she made him this proposition:

"Send Jean to me every morning," said she, "and I will send him back to you every evening. Paul's tutor is a very intellectual young man, and he will make our two children study. You will do me a favor. Jean will set a good example to Paul."

So it was arranged, and the little village-boy did, indeed, set the gentleman excellent examples of industry and application; but these excellent examples were not followed.

War broke out. On the 4th of November, at seven o'clock in the morning, the troops, drafted at Souvigny, assembled on the village square; their chaplain was the Abbe Constantin, their surgeon, Doctor Reynaud. The same thought came into the minds of both at the same time; the priest was sixty-two years old, the physician fifty.

On setting out, the regiment took the road which goes through Longueval and passed in front of the doctor's house. Madame Reynaud and Jean were waiting on the roadside. The child threw himself into his father's arms.

"Take me, papa, take me!"

Madame Reynaud wept. The doctor folded them both in a long embrace, and then went on his way. A hundred feet father on, the road takes an abrupt turn. The doctor turned around and cast a lingering look at his wife and child—the last. He was never to see them again.

On the 8th of January, 1871, the regiment from Souvigny attacked the village of Villorsexel, occupied by the Prussians, who had fortified the walls, and were barricaded in the houses. The cannonading commenced. A soldier in the front ranks received a ball in his chest and fell. There was a moment of hesitation and confusion.

"Forward!" cried the officers.

The men passed over the body of their comrade, and, under a hail-storm of balls, entered the town.

Doctor Reynaud and the Abbe Constantin marched with the troops. They halted when they reached the wounded man. Blood poured in floods from his mouth.

"I can do nothing," said the doctor; "he is dying; he is for you."

The priest knelt down beside the dying man; and the doctor, rising, went on towards the village. He had not taken ten steps, when he stopped, threw up both his arms, and fell to the ground. The priest ran to him. He was dead; killed by a ball through the temple. (TO BE CONTINUED.)



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