

A YOUTHFUL REMORSE.

From the French of Jean Sigaux.

BY THEOPHIL D'ARMI.

III.

The next and the following days George remained sombre, cast down by an overpowering sadness; and his forgetful companions racked their brains to find out the cause.

When Mr. Rondelet called on his son in the parlor on the second Sunday, he was astonished at the change that had come over him during the week: frightened to see his George timid, shamefaced, almost trembling at his approach.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing."

Indeed nothing was the matter with George, except the urgent need of tears and acknowledgment. He had promised himself to make a clean breast of everything; but his courage failed. When, ready to commence his confession, his eyes met those of his father as timid and restless as his own; when he saw the little threadbare vest, the trousers too short to conceal the tops of the coarse shoes, the hands cramped in the black gloves, the broad-brimmed hat, still surrounded with crape, moving from one hand to the other, the words ready to escape sank in his throat and he suffered intensely. He felt, in a confused way, that such an avowal would be more painful to his father than to him. He could scarcely answer the father he had denied when he asked about his studies, exercises, and diversions.

"Come, come, George," said his father, on leaving; "you must do yourself justice. Look at all your comrades. How happy they look; how proud they are to be at Stanislas! You must be like them;" and he went away quite elated to see his son in the midst of so much fashion.

"Ah, this time it was your father; I saw him kiss you," said De Ruber, who left the parlor at the same time as George.

"Yes, it was my father. What then?"

"What then? Oh, nothing," said the other, as he went his way.

"Could I have been a greater fool?" thought George.

Weeks passed away, and George returned gradually to his natural good-humor. The remembrance of what he called his crime abided with him, and from time to time made him feel its sting, although it left him many intervals of respite. He had resumed his work with ardor, with passion. He was cited as a boy with a future, and Mr. Rondelet, enchanted, read in all eyes the triumph of his son.

"Your father is proud of you, George. You can proclaim it on the house-tops."

This was the favorite expression of the old man. George began to think himself less guilty. Then, when he met a new scholar, he took pains to say, in the way of penance:

"You know my father is not noble like yours. He's a hosier in the Rue Saint-Denis. I was born in a shop."

The astonished pupil would exclaim:

"I didn't ask you. What's that to me?"

"I know-- I know," George would reply in confusion; "but I tell you all the same."

His gaiety returned. But not a day passed when he did not suffer to some extent from the sting of his remorse.

"What must I do to forgive myself?" was his inward query.

IV.

When his studies were finished and he had received his Bachelor's diploma, George had taken up his quarters in the little apartment on the fourth floor, between Mr. Rondelet, who seemed to grow still shorter since he was no longer stationed behind the counter, and old Annette, who taxed her ingenuity every morning to find some new dish, better yet than that of the day before, for her son.

The hosier was not deceived in his calculations. George had preserved after leaving Stanislas' fine and advantageous friendships, in the intimacy of which his natural elegance was still more refined. These friendships, far from causing him to take on airs, seemed to render the humble, paternal lodging dearer every day. He did not hesitate to take the Sallastas and the De Rubers into the little dining-room, where,

when the meal was over, Mr. Rondelet, with his elbows on the table-cloth, was smoking his pipe at leisure.

The old man, at the mention of these superb names, which sounded strangely between the poor walls, would exchange winks with Annette, a mute language in which the surprise and pride of these good people were mingled.

The long walks with George on the boulevard were not less pleasing to Mr. Rondelet.

"Why under the sun do you take me there?" he sometimes exclaimed. "You're not ashamed, then, to display your patent-leather boots by the side of my coarse, thick soles, and your nice-fitting suit by the side of my poor clothing. On my word one would say that you're proud of me."

"Proud of you?" Well, I am!" returned George, in a tone too grave and serious to escape the attention of his father.

It was there, always there, striking him with his fangs in the midst of his pleasures, his work, his success, and the legitimate pride which his success occasioned. More than ever, he felt that his father's forgiveness was the only balm which could heal that still open wound.

Forgiveness? Certainly his father would forgive him. But the confession, so long delayed, would it not be unending sorrow and suspicion cast into the confiding heart of the old man? Yes, the avowal once made, and they would both be sufferers.

"What are you thinking of?"

"Nothing, Father. Oh, yes! I'm thinking that the Polytechnic examination comes in a week."

"My good boy," replied the father, "I'm thinking of it more than you are."

V.

George, as we have seen, had passed the terrible examination as brilliantly as possible.

The uniform, the fine uniform had been bought, and Mr. Rondelet from that day knew no equal. He, so timid in bearing and so plain in his dress, learned to walk with his head high, his look bold, his shoulders thrown back, in a black frock-coat which he had made to measure, and which he buttoned proudly around him.

He had kept up a liking for a game of dominos with four, and had been accustomed to go every day to play at a little *café* in the neighborhood, where old companions gathered, retired shopkeepers and petty employes of the city.

His visits grew less frequent; he no longer touched the dominos, and on entering, confined himself to waving a condescending salute to his old partners.

"What the matter with Mr. Rondelet, lately?" they asked.

"What's the matter? His son is a Polytechnician, and he despises us."

"Let him remain at home, then," they wound up; "he has beaten our ears enough about his son, this phoenix, which, they say, makes all heads turn about as it passes."

Another odd thing. While the little old man was thus turning into the precise and fashionable gentleman, by an opposite process the elegant young man seemed turning back to the hosier's son. Under pretext of needed economy he had dismissed his tailor, and it was he now who took it into his head to don the cheap, ready-made suits of the shopmen.

As soon as Mr. Rondelet perceived this fancy he wished to cut it short; but George was inflexible, and urged strong reasons to excuse his sudden liking for simple clothing and low-priced materials.

"It isn't common-sense," cried the excited old man, "for a big, well-made fellow like you, who has been accustomed to shine in spick-and-span clothing, to dress now like a tip-staff's helper. Why this change? What would the Duke of Sallasta and Monsieur De Ruber think if they should see you? Have you taken a vow of humility?"

Annette herself did not hesitate to take George roundly to task for his seeming pleasure in descending in his manners and deportment to the level of petty employes. It was not worth having a brilliant uniform to exchange it on vacation days for a common coat, which gave him the appearance of a primary teacher.

She was indignant; and Mr. Rondelet's displeasure kept pace with the indignation of the old servant. Ah! The members of the old domino circle would be well avenged. Mr. Bouloron especially, a fellow-tradesman in hosiery, peevish