

THE ROMANCE OF A JESUIT.

From the French of De Bouigny d'Hagerno.

CHAPTER I.

Some forty or fifty years ago a celebrated financier of the day, Monsieur Durand, inhabited a luxurious residence in the Chaussee d'Antin, at Paris. He was a man of note and had risen to fill a high post in the Foreign Office, being looked on as second to none in financial talent and to but few in the amount of fortune he had amassed honourably. This fortune he was spending freely, for he lived in a princely style; his entertainments and equipages rivalled those of the recognized millionaires of the land. In earlier life he had married a lovely and charming Parisian lady, and when after some few years of married life she was taken from him, his grief had been so deep that, for a time, he had lived in retirement, though eventually he had plunged deeper than ever into the whirlpool of fashionable Parisian life. His wife had left him two children, a son and a daughter, and at the time our story opens, the son Charles had just finished the second year of his legal studies, whilst the daughter, who was younger, already gave promise of having inherited her mother's virtues and charms.

One evening, or rather morning, in the month of August, at a somewhat advanced hour, Mons. Durand arriving at his own house enquired for his son, and learning that Charles had gone to Versailles to spend two or three days with some friends named Meynaudier, expressed his intention of sitting up some little time longer to work and dismissed his attendant for the night.

On finding himself alone he sought amongst his correspondence for a certain letter which he had learned from his banker, Mons. Lerouttier, had been despatched to his house by that gentleman, and tearing it open with feverish impatience commenced its perusal. What he read in that letter was by no means unexpected, terrible though was the state of things therein. He found himself face to face with ruin and even dishonour; for not only had he lavishly spent his own means but he had considerably impaired his late wife's fortune, which he had been bound to hand intact to her children. On his son's coming of age he had, under various pretexts, put off the day of settlement with him, and now the small remnant of fortune he still possessed was insufficient to meet the just claims even of his children. One means of momentarily averting the impending exposure was open to him. He had that evening received a cipher despatch for the Government, and by delaying the delivery to the chief of the Department for a few hours he might realize large profits by investing at a low figure in the money market. But when the despatch should be delivered, as delivered it must be, and the fact of his profitable transactions at the "Bourse" became known, the blackest dishonour would be added to his ruin, for it was doubtful whether ruin could be even thus evaded, since no profits could replace the sum he had already subtracted. Summoning to his aid all the courage he possessed, he approached his desk, and, after having counted what ready money he had there, he remained long examining various papers. He did not seem to find any relief from their perusal however, and no way presented itself to him of escaping from utter ruin. But one dire alternative seemed open to him and terrible thoughts surged through his brain. He had long possessed the means of ridding himself of life, for in a cabinet at hand he had locked away a precious phial containing a potent subtle poison, a poison which acted painlessly but surely, and now, at this crisis of his affairs, death seemed preferable to ruin and dishonour. Taking the phial into his hand he once more reflected on what awaited him. A few drops of that liquid would give him death, forgetfulness, an end to the painful struggles of life. His life had been one of pleasure, but now the dream was over and eternal night was to be the end. He would escape the shame and torture of his errors being revealed, he would calmly sleep for ever. But was there no waking from the mysterious sleep of death? Was there naught but annihilation beyond the tomb? Was it true that there was another life? If there really was a God, surely some part of our being must survive, and when freed from our earthly body appear before a Sovereign Judge to answer for our actions during life! But away with such thoughts, it was too late to turn back! There must now be

no hesitation, no weakness; the die was cast and death was the only resource to deliver him from a future he had not the courage to face. However, before drinking of the cup of death he would write to his son and put his papers in order. Returning to his desk Mons. Durand examined anew the papers there contained. Many letters he threw into the fire, but selecting certain papers he placed them in a drawer together with the bank notes, the telegraphic despatch and Lerouttier's letter, and after locking the drawer he carefully put the key beneath the pillow of his bed.

Then, after extinguishing his lamps and lighting his night lights he uncorked the phial of poison, swallowed its contents, and throwing the empty bottle into the fire sought his bed, where in a few moments he was calmly sleeping.

The next morning on Mons. Durand's valet perceiving that the hour had long passed when his master was accustomed to rise, he decided on awakening him. Receiving no answer to his repeated calls he forced open the door of the room and found his master stretched across the bed and apparently lifeless. In all haste he called assistance and at once summoned a doctor, who arrived without delay. After making a careful examination of the unconscious patient and questioning the servants, who could give no information, the medical man himself administered a spoonful of a potion which he had sent for and he had the satisfaction of seeing Mons. Durand open his eyes a few instants afterwards. That gentleman stated that he only remembered having gone to bed in perfect health and falling asleep immediately afterwards, and that he had only just then awoke from that sleep. After making some further enquiries the doctor wrote a prescription and giving minute instructions about the treatment of the sick man, took his leave, promising to return shortly.

As soon as the doctor had left Mons. Durand despatched a servant to fetch Mons. Lerouttier to his bedside. This Mons. Lerouttier was a banker. He had been a college companion of Durand's and was believed now to be a very rich man. The friendship had continued between these two financiers and it was to Lerouttier that Durand always confided his business matters. On the banker entering the room his friend stretched out his hand and thanked him for so promptly acceding to his request, and, at the same time, he desired the sick-nurse at his bedside to leave them alone together. The nurse rose to obey him, but remembering the strict injunctions given by the doctor, hesitated to leave her master unattended. However, on Lerouttier promising to call her or to administer the necessary remedy should any change occur in the sick man, she told the banker to drop into some tisané exactly two drops of the medicine contained in a little phial. After warning him to be careful not to give more or less than two drops since the medicine was a powerful poison, and might cause some catastrophe, she left the room and the two friends remained alone.

Durand then confided to his friend that he was dying of poison administered by himself, that he had dissipated his whole fortune except some 200,000 francs which were in the banker's hands, and some 30,000 francs in notes which had been recently sent him by his notary in payment of the last remnant of his property. He then related that he had the previous evening received a cipher despatch, the effect of which would be to cause a sudden great rise in public securities, and that he had withheld delivering the despatch with the intention of investing the 30,000 francs and realizing a large profit. What he had himself thought of doing he now asked his friend to do for him in the interests of his children, and he pointed out that the delay in the delivery of the despatch would be easily accounted for by his death, since he felt his death to be certain. He then drew a key from beneath his pillow and begged his friend to take the money from the drawer in which he had himself placed it. On the banker complying with his request he recommended his children's interests to the care of his friend, declining to have them sent for, though his friend had proposed that he should see them once more before dying.

Suddenly the sick man's face became convulsed, and writhing in agony he called out to his friend to give him the drops prescribed for him. At that moment a terrible temptation assailed Lerouttier; beside him in the still open drawer, from which he had taken the bank-notes, he beheld his own