

The Abbe Constantin.

BY LUDOVIC HALEVY.

CHAPTER I—(CONTINUED)

But among the tombs there was one which, more often than the others, had his visits and his prayers. It was the tomb of his old friend, Doctor Reynaud, who died in his arms in 1871, and under what circumstances! The doctor was like Bernard—he never went to mass, and he never went to confession, but he was so good, so charitable, so compassionate for all who were suffering! This was the great subject of the cure's meditation, his great anxiety. His friend Reynaud, where was he? Then he recalled the noble life of the country doctor, all courage and self-denial, he recalled his death, above all things his death! and he said to himself—

"In paradise! he must be in paradise! The good God may perhaps have given him a little purgatory—for form's sake—but he must have taken him out at the end of five minutes."

All these things passed through the cure's mind as he kept on his way towards Souvigny. He was going to the town to see the marchioness' lawyer, to learn the result of the sale, and find out who the new masters of Longueval



were to be; the abbe had still about a quarter of a mile to go before reaching the outskirts of Souvigny; he was walking just outside the park wall of Lavardens, when he heard voices above his head calling:

"Monsieur le Cure! Monsieur le Cure!" At this point a long row of linden trees bordered a terrace, and the abbe raising his head saw Madame de Lavardens and her son Paul.

"Where are you going, Monsieur le Cure?" asked the countess:

"To Souvigny, to the court house, to learn."

"Stay here—M. de Larnac is coming immediately after the sale, to tell me the result."

The Abbe Constantin went up the terrace. Gertrude de Lannilis, countess of Lavardens, had been very unfortunate. At eighteen, she committed a folly, the only one of her life, but irreparable. She married for love, in a transport of enthusiasm and disinterestedness, M. de Lavardens, one of the most fascinating and witty men of the time. He did not love her, and married her only from necessity—he had spent the last penny of his patrimony, and for three or four years had kept himself up in the world by all sorts of expedients. Mademoiselle de Lannilis knew all that, and did not deceive herself; but she said to herself, "I love him so much that he must at last love me."

From this came all her troubles. Her life would have been tolerable, if she had not loved her husband so much; but she loved him too much. She succeeded only in wearying him with her importunities and her tenderness. He resumed and continued his former

life, which was very dissolute. Fifteen years passed thus in a long martyrdom, which Madame de Lavardens bore with every appearance of passive resignation which was not, however, in her heart. Nothing could distract her, nor cure her of the love which tortured her.

M. de Lavardens died in 1869, he left a son fourteen years old, who already began to show all the characteristics and faults of his father. Without being seriously endangered, Madame de Lavardens' fortune was found to be somewhat undermined and reduced. Madame de Lavardens sold her house in Paris, retired to the country, lived with very great system and economy, devoting herself entirely to the education of her son.

But even there, vexation and sorrow waited her. Paul de Lavardens was intelligent, amiable, and good, but rebelled absolutely against all restraint, and all labor. He drove to despair three or four tutors, who tried to put something serious into his head. He presented himself at St. Cyr, was not admitted, and then began to squander in Paris two or three hundred thousand francs, as fast and as foolishly as possible.

That done, he enlisted in the first regiment of the light infantry, just ordered to Africa, had an opportunity to make his *debut* as one of a little expedition into Sahara, conducted himself with bravery, very soon was made quarter-master, and at the end of three years was appointed sub-lieutenant. Then he lived the brilliant and miserable life of an idler. But he spent only three or four months in Paris. His mother made him an allowance of thirty thousand francs, and declared that so long as she lived, he should not have a cent more until he was married. He knew his mother, and knew that she always kept her word in serious matters. So wishing to make a good figure in Paris, and lead a merry life there, he spent his thirty thousand francs between the months of March and May; and then quietly turned himself out to grass, as it were, at Lavardens, hunting, fishing, and riding with the officers of the artillery regiment stationed at Souvigny.

As soon as the cure came up to Madame de Lavardens:

"I can," said she, "tell you the names of the purchasers of Longueval, without waiting for M. de Larnac. I am perfectly at ease about it, and do not doubt the success of our combination. So that we should not get into a foolish quarrel, we, that is my neighbor M. de Larnac, M. Gallard, a prominent banker in Paris, and I, have made an agreement. M. de Larnac will have La Mionne; M. Gallard the chateau and Blanche Couronne; and I, La Rozerie. I know, Monsieur le Cure, that you are anxious about your poor people. Take courage, These Gallards are very rich, and they will give you plenty of money."

At this moment a carriage was seen approaching at a distance, in a cloud of dust.

"Here comes M. de Larnac," cried Paul "I know his ponies."

All three came down the terrace in haste, and returned to the chateau. They reached it just as the carriage stopped in front of the steps.

"Well?" asked Madame de Lavardens.

"Well," replied M. de Larnac, "we have nothing."

"What! nothing?" demanded Madame de Lavardens, very pale and very much agitated.

"Nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing; none of us."

And M. de Larnac, jumping out of the carriage, related what had happened at the sale at Souvigny.

"Everything," said he, "went off, at first, as if on wheels. The chateau was awarded to M. Gallard for six hundred thousand and fifty francs. No competitor. An overbid of fifty

francs was enough. On the contrary, there was a battle for Blanche Couronne. The bids rose from five hundred thousand to five hundred and twenty thousand francs, which gave the victory to M. Gallard. A fresh battle, more bitterly disputed for La Rozerie, it was finally awarded to you, madame, for four hundred and fifty five thousand francs; and I secured, without opposition, the forest of La Mionne with an overbid of a hundred francs. Every thing seemed to be ended. People were beginning to stand up in the assemblage, and crowd around our lawyers to learn the names of the purchasers. However, M. Brazier, the judge, who had charge of the sale, called for silence, and the bailiff offered for sale the four lots together at two millions one hundred and fifty or sixty thousand francs, I do not know exactly which. A murmur of incredulity ran round the audience. On all sides you heard: 'No one, go on—there will be no one.' But little Gibert, the lawyer, who was sitting in the front row, and who, until then, had given no signs of life, rose, and said, calmly:

"I have a buyer for the four lots at two millions two hundred thousand francs."

"This was a thunder-clap—a great clamor soon followed a dead silence. The hall was filled with the farmers and growers of the neighborhood. So much money for land—the idea threw them into a respectful stupor. However, M. Gallard nodded to Sandrier, the lawyer, who made his bids. The struggle began between Gibert and Sandrier. They reached two millions five hundred thousand francs. A short moment of hesitation on the part of M. Gallard. He decided. He continued up to three millions. There he stopped, and the estate was awarded to Gibert. Every one rushed for him, they surrounded him, they overwhelmed him. 'The name, the name of the buyer?' 'It is an American,' replied Gibert. 'Madame Scott.'"

"These Scotts," said Madame de Lavardens, addressing M. de Larnac, "do you know anything about them?"

"Yes, madame. I know of them. M. Scott is an American, immensely rich, who established himself in Paris last year. As soon as I heard the name, I knew the victory had never been in doubt. Gallard was beaten in advance. The Scotts began by buying a house in Paris that cost two millions, besides the Park Monceau."

"Yes; Rue Murillo," said Paul. "I went to a ball at their house; it was—"

"Let M. de Larnac speak. You can tell us presently the history of your ball at Madame Scott's."

"Know then, that my Americans are established in Paris, and the shower of gold has commenced," continued M. de Larnac. "True parvenus amuse themselves by foolishly throwing away money. This great fortune is quite new. It is said, that ten years ago Madame Scott was begging in the streets of New York."

"She has begged?"

"So it is said, madame. Then she was married to this Scott, the son of a New York banker—and suddenly a successful law-suit put into their hands not millions, but tens of millions. They have, somewhere in America, a silver mine; an actual, a real mine, a silver mine, in which there is money. Oh! you will see what splendor will shine at Longueval. We will all look like poor people. It is claimed that they have a hundred thousand francs a day to spend."

"Just think what neighbors!" cried Madame de Lavardens. "An adventuress! and still worse—a heretic, Monsieur! Abbe, a Protestant!"

A heretic! a Protestant! Poor cure! that was his first thought when he heard the words: *an American Madame Scott*. The new chatelaine would not go to mass! What did it matter to him if she had begged? What did it

matter to him, her tens of millions and her tens and tens of millions! She was not a Catholic! He would no longer baptize the children born at Longueval, and the chapel of the chateau, where he so often had said mass, would be transformed into a Protestant oratory, in which would be heard the icy eloquence of some Calvinist or Lutheran minister.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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