

The Abbe Constantin.

BY LUDOVIC HALEVY.

CHAPTER III.—(CONTINUED.)

"I spent all my time in the offices of New York lawyers; but none of them would take charge of my interests. Everywhere the same response: 'Your case is very doubtful; opponents are very rich and formidable, money is needed; money to carry on the suit, and you have none. You have had an offer of ten thousand dollars, besides having all your debts paid, accept it, sell your suit.' But I could always hear my father's last words, and I would not consent. Poverty might, however, have soon constrained me, when, one day, I solicited an interview with one of my father's friends, Mr. William Scott, a banker in New York. He was not alone; a young man was sitting in his office near her desk. 'You can talk freely,' said he, 'this is my son, Richard Scott. I looked at the young man, and he looked at me, and then we recognized each other. 'Suzie!' 'Richard!' He held out his hand to me. He was twenty-three and I was eighteen, as I have told you. We had played together very often when we were children. Then we were great friends. Seven or eight years before, he went to finish his education in France and in England. His father made me sit down, and asked me what brought me to him. I told him. He listened and replied, 'You will need twenty or thirty thousand dollars. No one will lend you such a sum on the uncertain chances of a complicated lawsuit. It would be folly. If you are in need, if you want assistance—' 'That is not what Miss Percival asks,' said Richard, warmly. 'I know it; but what she asks of me is impossible.' He rose to the door. Then I broke down for the first time since my father's death. I had been strong until then, but I felt my courage exhausted. I could bear no more, and I burst into tears. At length I recovered myself and went away. An hour afterward, Richard Scott came to see me. 'Suzie,' said he, 'promise to accept what I am going to offer you; promise me.' I promised him. 'Well,' said he, 'I will put the necessary sum at your disposal, on the single condition that my father shall know nothing of it.' 'But you must know about my claim, so that you will understand what it is, what it is worth.' 'I do not know the first word about your claim, and I do not wish to know. What would be the merit of assisting you, if I were sure of getting my money back? Besides, you have promised to accept it. It is done. There is no going back.' It was offered to me with such simplicity, such openness of heart, that I accepted. Three months afterward, we gained our case. The property became indisputable ours, and we were offered five millions for it. I went to consult Richard. 'Refuse and wait,' said he, 'if they offer you such a sum, it is because the land is worth double.' But I must pay you back your money.' 'Oh! that will do later, there is no haste; I am doing well for the present, my credit is in no danger.' 'But I want to pay you immediately; I have such a horror of debt! Perhaps there will be a way without selling the property. Richard, will you be my husband?' 'Yes, Monsieur le Cure; yes, monsieur,' said Mrs. Scott, laughing. 'It was I who threw myself like that at my husband's head. It was I who asked for his hand. That you can tell to all the world, and you will only tell the truth. Besides, I was obliged to make this offer. Never, oh! I am as sure of it as I am of my life, he would never have spoken. I had become too rich. And, as he loved me, and not my money, my money frightened him a little. That is the history of my marriage. As to the history of our fortune, that can be told in a few words. There was, in-

deed, millions in these tracts of land in Colorado; they were found to contain very rich silver mines, and from these mines we receive every year a fabulous income.

"But we are all agreed, my husband, my sister and I, to give a large share of this income to the poor; you see, Monsieur le Cure, it is because we have known such bitter days. Bettina can remember when she was our little house-keeper in that fifth story room, in New York. It is for that reason, you will always find us ready to help those who, as we have been, are struggling amidst the misfortunes and hardships of life. And now, Monsieur Jean, will you pardon this long discourse, and give me a little of that tempting cream?"

The cream was Pauline's composition of eggs and milk—and while Jean hastened to serve Madame Scott, she continued:

"I have not yet told you all. You must know how these extravagant stories were started. When we first came to Paris, a year ago, we felt it our duty to give a certain sum of money to the poor. Who told of it? Not we, certainly; but the fact was published in one of the newspapers, with the amount. Directly two young reporters came running to Mr. Scott, to ask him a whole catalogue of questions about his past. They wanted to write about us in the papers—a . . . how do you say that?—a sketch of our lives. Mr. Scott is sometimes a little hasty. He was that day; and he dismissed these gentlemen, very abruptly, without telling them anything. Then, not knowing our true history, they invented an imaginary one. The first one said, that I had begged in the snow, in New York; and the second, the next day, to make his article still more sensational, made me jump through the paper balloons in a circus at Philadelphia. You have some very droll journals in France, and we also—in America."

Now, for the last five minutes Pauline had been making the most frantic signals to the cure, who so completely failed to understand them, that at last the poor woman summoned all her courage:

"Monsieur le Cure, it is a quarter after seven."

"A quarter after seven! Oh! ladies, I beg you to excuse me. I have a service this evening; it is the month of Mary."

"The month of Mary—and is the service to be soon?"

"Yes, immediately."

"And at exactly what time is our train to Paris?"

"At half-past nine," replied Jean, "and you need only fifteen or twenty minutes to reach the station."

"Then Suzie, we could go to church."

"We will go to church," replied Madame Scott, "but before we part, Monsieur le Cure, I have a favor to ask of you. I want to have you dine with me, without fail, the first time that I dine at my new home at Longueval, and you, too, Monsieur—all all alone, just we four, like to-day. Oh! do not refuse; the invitation is heartily given."

"And heartily accepted, Madame," replied Jean.

"I will write to let you know the day. I will come as soon as possible. You call that *hanging the crane* do you not? Well! we will *hang the crane*, we four."

Pauline had carried Miss Percival off into a corner of the room, and was talking very earnestly. Their conversation ended with these words:

"You will be there?" said Bettina.

"Yes, I will be there."

"And you will tell me just the right moment?"

"I will tell you, but take care, here comes Monsieur le Cure, and he must not suspect anything."

The two sisters, the cure and Jean came out of the house. They went

through the cemetery to the church. The evening was delightful. Slowly and silently all four walked through the little pathway, in the last rays of the setting sun. They approached the monument at Dr. Roynaud's grave, which, though simple, was, by its proportions, conspicuous among the other tombstones. Mrs. Scott and Bettina stopped, their attention drawn by this inscription which it bore:

"HERE LIES THE BODY OF

"DOCTOR MARCEL REYNAUD,"

"Surgeon-Major of the regiment drafted at Souvigny, killed on the 8th of January, 1871, at the battle of Villerssexel."

"PRAY FOR HIM."

When they had finished reading it, the cure, pointing to Jean, said simply: "It was his father!"

The two women drew near the tombstone and stood with bowed heads, affected, pensive, in meditation. Then, turning around, they both at the same moment held out their hand to the young officer and went on towards the church. Jean's father had had their first prayer at Longueval.

The cure went to put on his surplice and stole—Jean conducted Mrs. Scott to the first pew, which for two centuries had been reserved for the owners of Longueval.

Pauline had preceded them. She was waiting for Miss Percival, in the shadow of a column in the church. She led Bettina up the steep narrow staircase, into the gallery and seated her at the harmonium.

The old cure came out of the sacristy, preceded by two choristers, and just as he knelt down on the steps of the altar:

"This is the moment, mademoiselle," said Pauline whose heart was beating with eagerness. "Poor dear man, how happy he will be!"

When he heard the organ's strain raise softly, like a murmur on the air, and swelling, fill the little church, the Abbe Constantine was touched with such tender emotion so that the tears came to his eyes. It was the first time he had wept since that day when Jean told him he wanted to share all he had with the mothers and sisters of those who fell at his father's side, under the German bullets.

That tears might come again to the old priest's eyes, it was necessary that a little American girl should cross the sea, and come to play one of Chopin's Reveries in the church at Longueval.

CHAPTER IV.

The next morning at half past five, as the bugle sounded through the quarters Jean mounted, and took command of his section.

At the end of May all the recruits in the army are trained, and ready to take part in the general drill. Almost every day they execute different manoeuvres with the field batteries.

Jean loved his profession; he was accustomed to superintend with the greatest care the caparison and harness of the horse, and the equipment, and bearing of his men; but this morning he gave very little attention to these details of the service.

A problem troubled him, perplexed him, left him undecided, and this problem was one of those whose solution is not given in the Polytechnic School. Jean could not find the exact answer to this question:

"Which of the two is the the prettier?"

On drill, during the first part of the manoeuvres each battery works independently, under the Captain's order—but he often puts one of his lieutenants in his place, so that he may be accustomed to the command of six pieces. That very morning it so happened, that from the beginning of the manoeuvres, the command was given to Jean. To the captain's great surprise, who considered his first lieutenant a very well-trained, competent, skilful officer, everything went wrong. Jean ordered two or three false movements—and

neither keeping up nor correcting the distances, the horses several times came in contact. The Captain was obliged to interfere. He gave Jean a slight reprimand which ended in these words:

"I cannot understand it. What is the matter with you this morning? It is the first time this ever happened."

And it is also the first time that Jean ever saw on parade, anything besides guns and drums, anything besides soldiers and leaders. In the clouds of dust raised by the carriage wheels and the the horses' feet, Jean saw, not the second mounted battery of the 9th Artillery, but the distinct image of two Americans with dark eyes under golden hair. And at the very moment when he was receiving the merited rebuke of his captain, Jean was saying to himself:

"Madame Scott is the prettier."

The drill is divided every morning by a little rest of ten minutes. The officers get together and chat. Jean stayed by himself, alone with his memories of the day before. His thoughts returned, persistently, to the parsonage at Longueval. Yes, Mrs. Scott was the more charming of the two. Miss Percival was only a child. He saw again Mrs. Scott at the cure's little table. He heard again her story, told with such frankness and so naively. The slightly foreign tone of her peculiar, penetrating voice still charmed his ears—he was again in the church. She was there, in front of him, bending over her *prie-dieu*, her pretty head in her two little hands. Then the organ began to sound, and in the shadows at a distance Jean could see Bettina's elegant, refined profile.

TO BE CONTINUED.



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