

paintings—of what they now are, and what they will become—for here are already many things that speak well for your future excellence—this landscape, for instance, with its fine perspective, and depth and richness of coloring.”

“Pardon me, sir, that is a Domenichino, which I may never hope to equal,” said Pierre, amused by the mistake of so self-sufficient an amateur.

“Ah, true,” he said, mortified to have betrayed any want of discrimination connected with a subject which he professed to know by heart—and raising his glass, he gazed more closely at the painting. “The light here is imperfect or I could not have been deceived, and yet I have heard of imitators, who were almost as successful as their originals. In fact,” (the Count felt impelled to say this, though he had not intended it,) “I have a Magdalen in my possession, which I purchased of Paul Roussard, for a Guido, and now, as perhaps you are aware, there is a rumour bruited about that the painting is the product of your pencil.”

“Of mine!” exclaimed Mignard, the hot blood tingling to the very tips of his fingers, “and did M. Roussard tell you this?”

“He affects to know nothing of the matter, further than that the box containing the picture was brought to him along with other packages invoiced to his care, by the sailors of a Florentine brig, and by them, at his order, conveyed to me, where it was opened in his presence, and for the first time displayed to his view. But there may be some ruse in all this, and since we have come to the point, I wish to hear from your lips the truth.”

“You do me too much honour, Count de Clairville, by the bare expression of a doubt upon the subject,” said the artist with well feigned humility. “I paint like Guido! look again at that St. Cecilia, one of the most elaborate, and highly finished of my paintings, and say if it can bear the slightest comparison with the works of that unrivalled master—or look at this, and this,” and he drew forward several indifferent specimens of his earlier work, “and tell me if the hand which paints thus would presume to cope with, or even at humble distance imitate the perfection of a Guido?”

“Candidly, I should think not,” returned the Count, readily inclined to believe, as we all are, that which he wished; “and I admire your frankness. In promptly disclaiming the honour, which has been so confidently imputed to you, that even I have had my doubts on the subject. But you must see this picture, about which there has been so much dispute; it may afford some hints for your pencil, and it is a peculiar pleasure to me to lend what aids are in my power to the advancement of a promising genius.”

Mignard bowed, though it was with an air of cool contempt, which he could not disguise—but he saw that he was about to gain an important point, and he answered with constrained bienséance,

“I thank you, sir,—I find it ever a pleasure, and certainly an advantage to contemplate fine paintings, of which, if I recollect right, you have many in your collection.”

“True,—and I have often regretted the little circumstance which interrupted our acquaintance, and debarred your visits to my gallery—but that is past, and I trust with you quite forgotten, for, as you know, doubtless, my daughter is on the eve of marriage with the young Baron Desmonville, though,” he added with a bland smile, “had you substantiated your right to this Guido, I cannot say but the Baron’s claim might have been endangered by the promise I once laughingly made you.”

“Not laughingly, sir!” exclaimed the artist, his very lips pale with angry emotion; “and were that painting mine, neither the Baron’s claim, though he were the monarch of this broad and goodly realm, nor that of any living man, should stand in the way of mine! Pardon me, Count De Clairville,” he added, suddenly checking his impetuous words, as a consciousness of their imprudence forced itself upon him. “You have moved me too deeply by alluding to the past.”

“Let us speak of it no more, then,” said the Count, shrinking from the flashing eye of Mignard, while a pang of unwonted self-reproach shot through his callous heart. “Come to me tomorrow, as you were wont to do; you will meet Lebrun and several of the first connoisseurs of Paris at dinner, who are once more to scrutinize the Magdalen, and determine its authenticity.”

The heart of the young artist leaped for joy at these words; he had won his object, for he saw in near view the certain fulfilment of his hopes, and he was to consummate his triumph just where and when he had most wished it should be done, in the house of the Count De Clairville, and in the presence of witnesses, who would appreciate and honour his genius as it merited. But veiling his deep emotion from the eyes of the Count, he yielded a calm assent to his invitation, bade him a courteous farewell, and when the door closed upon him, he threw a glance of self-congratulation round his silent studio, and mechanically taking up his pencil began to work at his Clorinda.

But ere long he cast it from him with a laugh: he had given to the martial maiden the soft and smiling eyes of his Rosalie, and though they looked at him with love, he had the courage to blot them from the canvas; then, thrusting aside his palette, he walked forth to dine with his friend Roussard. He had done for that day with his art.

The morrow, anxiously expected and longed for, came at length, and at the hour appointed, Mignard found himself once again occupying a seat at the table of the Count De Clairville. Rosalie, beautiful and happy, sat beside her father, and he could gaze unchecked upon her loveliness, and read in her soft