ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE GALLEY SLAVE'S RING; OR, THE FAMILY OF LEBRENN

Эжен Сю

The Galley Slave's Ring; or, The Family of Lebrenn

Сю Э. Ж.

The Galley Slave's Ring; or, The Family of Lebrenn / Э. Ж. Сю — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Eugène Sue
The Galley Slave's Ring; or, The Family of Lebrenn A Tale of The French Revolution of 1848

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

With this story, *The Galley Slave's Ring; or, The Family of Lebrenn*, closes the series of the nineteen historic novels comprised in Eugene Sue's monumental work *The Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages*.

They who have read the preceding eighteen stories will agree that from the moment they began the first volume of the series, *The Gold Sickle; or, Hena the Virgin of the Isle of Sen*, down to the eighteenth, *The Sword of Honor; or, The Foundation of the French Republic*, they enjoyed a matchless promenade as they followed Sue through the Ages of History, from the time of the invasion of Gaul by Julius Caesar, shortly before Christ, down to the great epoch marked by the French Revolution. Nor will their expectations concerning this closing story be disappointed.

The Galley Slave's Ring; or, The Family of Lebrenn is staged on the Age that witnessed the downfall of Louis Philippe – the last of the Bourbon line – and the aspirations that raised the Second Republic. While several of the figures are historic, in this story historic characters step forth less pronouncedly than historic principles. In this story are found the Principles, the old and the newest, that have since occupied the stage of man's history, and the clash of which, down to our own days, occupies man's attention.

Inestimable as the previous stories are to the understanding of the Age of the present story, the present story, enlivened with the vein of romance, is inestimable to the understanding of our own Age.

DANIEL DE LEON.

Milford, Conn., February, 1911.

CHAPTER I.
GILDAS AND JEANIKE

On February 23, 1848, the epoch when, for several days previous, all France, and especially Paris, was profoundly stirred by the question of the *reform* banquets, there was to be seen on St. Denis Street, a short distance from the boulevard, a rather large shop surmounted by the sign

LEBRENN, LINEN DRAPER

THE SWORD OF BRENNUS

In fact, a picture, pretty well drawn and painted, represented the well known historic incident of Brennus, the chief of the Gallic army, throwing with savage and haughty mien his sword into one of the scales of the balance that held the ransom of Rome, vanquished by our Gallic ancestors, about two thousand and odd years ago.

At first, the people of the St. Denis quarter derived a good deal of fun from the bellicose sign of the linen draper. In course of time they forgot all about the seemingly incongruous sign in the recognition of the fact that Monsieur Marik Lebrenn was a most admirable man – a good husband, a conscientious father of his family, and a merchant who sold at reasonable prices excellent merchandise, among other things superb Brittany linen, imported from his native province. The worthy tradesman paid his bills regularly; was accommodating and affable towards everybody; and filled, to the great satisfaction of his "dear comrades," the function of captain in the company of grenadiers of his battalion in the National Guard. All told, he was held in general esteem by the people of his quarter, among whom he was justified to consider himself as a *notable*.

On the rather chilly morning of February 23, the shutters of the linen draper's shop were as usual removed by the shop-lad, assisted by a female servant, both of whom were Bretons like their master, Monsieur Lebrenn, who was in the habit of taking all his attendants, clerks as well as domestic servitors, from his own country.

The maid, a fresh and comely lass of twenty years, was named Jeanike. The lad who tended the shop was called Gildas Pakou. He was a robust youngster from the region of Vannes, whose open countenance bore the impress of wonderment, seeing he was only two days in Paris. He spoke French quite passably; but in his conversations with Jeanike, his "country-woman," he preferred the idiom of lower Brittany, the old Gallic tongue that our ancestors spoke before the conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar.[1]

Gildas Pakou seemed preoccupied, although busy carrying to the interior of the shop the shutters that he removed from the outside. He even paused for a moment in the middle of the shop, and, leaning both his arms and his chin upon the edge of one of the boards that he had unfastened, seemed profoundly steeped in thought.

"What are you brooding over, Gildas?" inquired Jeanike.

[1] "If the Gallic tongue has been in some part preserved by the bards, and by bards in possession of the druidic traditions, that could only have taken place in Armorica, that province which for so many centuries formed an independent state, and which, in spite of its annexation to France, has remained Gallic in physiognomy, in costume, and in language, down to our own day." – Ampere, *History of Literature*.

"Lassy," he answered in his Breton tongue, and with a distant and almost comical look, "do you remember the song of our country – Genevieve and Rustefan?"[2]

"Sure! I was sung to sleep in my cradle with it. It starts this way:

"When little John led his sheep out to pasture,
He then little thought that a priest he would be."

"Well, Jeanike, I am like little John. When I was at Vannes I little dreamed of what I was to see in Paris."

"And what do you find so startling in Paris, Gildas?"

"Everything, Jeanike."

"Indeed!"

"And a good many other things, besides!"

"That's a good many."

"Now listen. Mother said to me: 'Gildas, Monsieur Lebrenn, our countryman, to whom I sell the linen that we weave in the evenings, takes you as an assistant in his shop. His is a home of the good God. You, who are neither bold nor venturesome, will find yourself there as comfortable as here in our little town. St. Denis Street in Paris, where your employer lives, is a street inhabited only by honest and peaceful merchants.' Well, now, Jeanike, no later than yesterday evening, the second day after my arrival, did you not hear cries of: 'Close the shops! Close the shops!' And did you not thereupon see the night-patrols, and hear the drums and the hurried steps of large numbers of men who came and went tumultuously? There were among them some whose faces were frightful to behold, with their long beards. I positively dreamed of them, Jeanike! I did!"

"Poor Gildas!"

"And if that were only all!"

"What! Is there still more? Have you, perchance, anything to blame our master for?"

"Him? He is the best man in all the world. I'm quite sure of that. Mother told me so."

"Or Madam Lebrenn?"

"The dear, good woman! She reminds me of my own mother with her sweet temper."

"Or mademoiselle?"

"Oh! As to her, Jeanike, we may say of her in the words of the Song of the Poor:[3]

"Your mistress is handsome and brimful of kindness;
As lovely her face, yet her deeds with it vie,
And her looks and her kindness have won all our hearts."

"Oh, Gildas! How I do love to hear those songs of our country. That particular one seems to have been composed expressly for Mademoiselle Velleda, and I – "

"Tush, Jeanike!" exclaimed the shop-assistant, breaking in upon his companion. "You asked me what there is to astonish me. Tell me, do you think that mademoiselle's name is a Christian woman's name? *Velleda!* What can that mean?"

"What do I know! I suppose 'tis a fancy of monsieur and madam's."

"And their son, who went back yesterday to his business college."

"Well?"

---

[2] Villemarqué, in his excellent *Popular Songs of Brittany*, assigns this ballad, which is still heard among the strolling ballad-singers of that province, to the Fourteenth or Fifteenth Century.

[3] *Sounn ann dud Laour* (The Song of the Poor), Villemarqué, *Popular Songs of Brittany*.

"What another devil's own name is that which he also has? One ever seems to be about to swear when pronouncing it. Just pronounce that name, Jeanike. Come, pronounce it."

"It is very simple. The name of our master's son is Sacrovir."

"Ha! ha! I knew it would be so. You did look as if you were swearing – Sacr-r-r-rovir."

"Not at all! I did not roll the r's like you."

"They roll of themselves, my lassy. But, after all, do you call that a name?"

"That also is a fancy of monsieur and madam's."

"Very well, and what about the green door?"

"The green door?"

"Yes, in the rear of the room. Yesterday, at broad noon, I saw our master go in with a light in his hand."

"Quite natural, seeing the shutters are always kept closed – "

"And you find that natural, do you, Jeanike? And why should the shutters always be kept closed?"

"How do I know! It may be another – "

"Notion of monsieur and madam's, are you going to tell me?"

"Sure!"

"And what is kept in that apartment where it is night in broad day?"

"How do I know, Gildas! Only madam and monsieur ever go in there; never their children."

"And nothing of all that seems to you at all surprising, Jeanike!"

"No, because I have become accustomed to it. You will presently feel about it as I do."

The girl stopped short, and after casting a furtive look in the direction of the street, she said to her companion:

"Did you see that?"

"What?"

"The dragoon."

"A dragoon, Jeanike!"

"Yes; and I beg you go out and see if he is coming back – towards the shop. I shall tell you more about it later. Go, quick! quick!"

"The dragoon has not come back," answered the lad, naïvely. "But what can you have in common with the dragoon, Jeanike?"

"Nothing at all, thank God; but they have their barracks near by."

"A bad neighborhood for young girls, close to these men with helmets and sabers," remarked Gildas sententiously. "A bad neighborhood. That reminds me of the song, The Demand:

"In my dove-cote a little dove
Once had I,
When low the sparrow hawk swooped down
Upon her like a gust of wind;
He frightened my wee dove away
And now none
Knows what has become of her.[4]

"Do you understand, Jeanike? The doves are young girls; the sparrow-hawk – "

"Is the dragoon. You are speaking more wisely than you know, Gildas."

"What, Jeanike! Can you have realized that the neighborhood of sparrow-hawks – that is, dragoons – is unwholesome for you?"

[4] *Popular Songs of Brittany*, Villemarqué.

"I was not thinking of myself."

"Of whom, then?"

"Tush, Gildas! You are a loyal fellow. I must ask your advice. This is what has happened: Four days ago, mademoiselle, who usually stays in the rear of the shop, was at the desk in the absence of madam. I happened to look out on the street, when I saw a military man stop before our windows."

"A dragoon? A sparrow-hawk of a dragoon? Was it, Jeanike?"

"Yes; but he was not a soldier; he wore large gold epaulettes, and a cockade on his hat. He must have been at least a colonel. He stopped before the shop, and looked in."

The conversation of the two Breton country folks was interrupted by the brusque entrance of a man of about forty years, clad in a cutaway coat and trousers of black velvet, the usual railway employees' garb. His energetic face was partially covered with a thick brown beard. He seemed uneasy, and stepped into the shop precipitately, saying to Jeanike:

"Where is your master, my child? I must see him immediately. Pray, go and tell him that Dupont wants him. Remember my name well – Dupont."

"Monsieur Lebrenn went out this morning at daybreak, monsieur," answered Jeanike. "He has not yet come back."

"A thousand devils! Can he have gone there?" the new arrival muttered to himself.

He was about to leave the shop as precipitately as he had stepped in when a new thought struck him, and turning back to Jeanike he said:

"My child, tell Monsieur Lebrenn, the moment he comes back, that Dupont has arrived."

"Yes, monsieur."

"And that if he – Monsieur Lebrenn," added Dupont, hesitating like one hunting for a word; and then having found it, he proceeded saying: "Say to your master that, if he did not go this morning to inspect his *supply of grain*– you catch those words: *his supply of grain*– he should not go there before seeing Dupont. Can you remember that, my child?"

"Yes, monsieur. But if you would like to leave a note for Monsieur Lebrenn – "

"Not at all!" answered Dupont impatiently. "That's unnecessary – only tell him – "

"Not to go and inspect his supply of grain before seeing Monsieur Dupont," Jeanike completed the sentence. "Is that it, monsieur?"

"Exactly," the latter answered. "Good-bye, my child." So saying, he went away in hot haste.

"Well, now, Monsieur Lebrenn, it seems, is also a groceryman," observed Gildas in amazement to his companion. "He seems to keep supplies of grain in store."

"That's the first I heard of it."

"And that man! He looked very much disconcerted. Did you notice him? Oh, Jeanike! There is no doubt about it, this is a puzzling sort of a house."

"You have just landed from the country. Everything surprises you. But let me finish my story about the dragoon."

"The story of that sparrow-hawk with gold epaulettes and a cockade in his hat, who stopped to look at you through the show-window, Jeanike?"

"It was not me he looked at."

"Whom, then?"

"Mademoiselle Velleda."

"Indeed?"

"Mademoiselle was busy sewing. She did not notice that the military man was devouring her with his eyes. And I felt so ashamed for her sake that I did not dare notify her that she was being glowered at."

"Oh, Jeanike, that reminds me of a song that – "

"Let me first come to the end of my story, Gildas. You may then sing your song to me, if you like. The military man – "

"The sparrow-hawk – "

"Be it so – stood there glowering at mademoiselle with both his eyes aflame."

"With his two sparrow-hawk eyes, Jeanike!"

"But let me finish. Presently mademoiselle noticed the attention that she was the object of. She colored like a ripe cherry, told me to watch the shop, and withdrew to the room in the rear. And that's not yet all. The next day, at the same hour, the colonel turned up again, but this time in civilian dress, and there he planted himself again at the window. Madam happened to be in the shop, and he did not stay long. Day before yesterday he turned up again without being able to see mademoiselle. Finally, yesterday, Madam Lebrenn being in the shop, he stepped in and asked her – his language was very polite – whether she could furnish him with a certain grade of linen. Madam said she could, and it was agreed that the colonel would come back to-day to close the bargain with Monsieur Lebrenn."

"And do you believe, Jeanike, that madam was aware that the military man had come several times before, and peeped through the window?"

"I don't know, Gildas; and I am not sure whether I should notify madam. A minute ago I begged you to look and see if the dragoon did not come back. I feared he was charged to spy upon us. Fortunately it was not so. Would you advise me to notify madam, or to say nothing? To speak may alarm her; to keep silent may, perhaps, be wrong. What is your opinion?"

"It is my opinion that you should notify madam. She may become justly suspicious of that big order for linen. Hem! – hem!"

"I shall follow your advice, Gildas."

"And you will be wise if you do! Oh, my dear lassy, these men with helmets – "

"Well, now, I am ready. Let's have your song."

"It is an awful story, Jeanike! Mother told it to me a hundred times in the evenings, just as my grandmother had told it to her, and just as my grandmother's grandmother – "

"Come, Gildas," broke in Jeanike, laughing. "If you keep up at that rate from grandmother to grandmother, you are bound to go back to our mother Eve."

"Sure! Do our countrypeople not transmit from generation to generation narratives that go back to – "

"A thousand and fifteen hundred years, and even further back, like the stories of Myrdin and of The Baron of Jauioz, with which I have been rocked to sleep in my cradle. I am well aware of it, Gildas."

"Well, Jeanike, the song that I have in mind is about people who wear helmets, and prowl around young girls. It is a frightful story. It is called The Three Red Monks," said Gildas, looking formidable; – "The Three Red Monks; or, The Sire of Plouernel."

"What's that?" asked Jeanike interestedly, being struck by the name. "The Sire of – "

"The Sire of Plouernel."

"Singular!"

"Singular what?"

"I've heard Monsieur Lebrenn mention that name, more than once."

"The name of the Sire of Plouernel? On what occasion?"

"I'll tell you later. First of all, let's have the song of the Three Red Monks. It will interest me doubly."

"You must know, first of all, my lassy, that the red monks were Templars, and wore a sword and helmet, just like that sparrow-hawk of a dragoon."

"Very well, now go on. Madam may come down any moment, and monsieur is due here now."

"Listen attentively, Jeanike."

And Gildas commenced the following recitative. It was not sung, exactly, but was chanted like a psalm in a grave and melancholic voice:

"At every limb I shudder,
I shudder at the sorrows that afflict our people.
I shudder at the thought of the event that took place,
That has just taken place in the town of Kemper,
That took place at Kemper just a year ago.

"Katelik walked her way as she counted her beads,
When three monks in red, all three Templars were they,
And armed at all points, joined Katelik; three monks,
Astride of their huge barbed steeds,
Barbed from mane down to hoofs.

"'Come with us, you pretty young maid;
Come to the convent with us.
Neither gold will you want for,
Nor eke silver coin.'
'May it please, Sires, your graces,
Not I will join you in your ride,'
Said young Katelik. 'I fear your swords,
That hang by your sides.
No, Sires,
I shall not, nor can I go with you.
Too wicked the tales that one hears about you.'

"'Come with us, come to the convent, young maid.
Feel not alarmed about us.'
'No, I shall not proceed to the convent.
Seven young maids of the fields
Once went there, 'tis said;
Seven handsome maids, ripe for their nuptials they were.
Yet they never came out from the convent again.'

"'If seven young maids,' cried up Gonthram of Plouernel,
One of the three monks in red,
'If seven young maids went in,
You, pretty maid, the eighth will be.'
With this she was seized,
And pulled up on horseback;
With this the three rode to the convent in hot haste,
The maid laid across the saddle,
And gagged to smother her cries."

"Oh, the poor dear girl!" exclaimed Jeanike, clasping her hands. "And what is to become of her in that convent of the red monks?"

"You will learn presently, my lassy," answered Gildas with a sigh; and he proceeded with his recitation:

"Seven months later, or eight,
Or perhaps even more,

Great was the dilemma of the monks in their Abbey,
'What, brothers,' they said,
'Shall with this girl now be done?'
'Let us bury her, to-night let us bury her,
At the foot of the main altar.
None of her folks will there seek to find her.'"

"Great God!" cried Jeanike. "They must have killed her, those bandit monks, and were in a hurry to rid themselves of the body."

"I tell you once more, my lassy, these people with helmets and swords are always up to some mischief or other," remarked Gildas dogmatically; and he proceeded:

"Lo, toward night-fall the vault of heaven is rent.
Rain, wind, hail; thunder the most frightful cracks the air.
A poor knight, his clothes drenched with rain,
Looks about for asylum,
Arrives at the church-door of the Abbey.
He peeps through the key-hole.
He sees a small taper burning;
He sees monks digging at the foot of the altar;
He sees the young girl lying prostrate,
Her little bare feet tied together;
He hears her, desolate, moaning, lamenting,
Begging for mercy.

"'Oh, Sires,' she cried, 'for our dear Lord's sake,
Let me live.
I shall wander about in the dark by night;
By day I shall hide.'
The taper went out.
But the knight, he budged not away from the door,
And he heard the voice of the young girl
Imploring from the depth of the grave,
And praying:
'Pray give me some oil, and baptismal
For the babe I carry with me!'

"The knight, he galloped away to Kemper,
To the Count-Bishop's palace he rode in full haste.
'Sire Bishop of Cornouailles, wake up!
Wake up quick!' cried the knight,
As he battered at the gate.
'You lie snugly in your bed,
Stretched out cosily upon soft down;
But a young girl there is who is now groaning
At the bottom of a pit of hard earth,
And is praying for some oil,
And baptismal for the babe that is with her;
Extreme unction she prays for herself.'

"By orders the Count-Bishop hastened to issue in advance,
The grave at the foot of the altar was dug open; and,
Just as the Bishop arrived, the poor young girl
Was drawn up from the depths of her grave.
She was drawn up, her babe sound asleep on her breast.
Her teeth had torn the flesh on her arms,
Her nails had torn the flesh on her breast,
On her white breast down to her heart.

"And the Bishop,
When this sight he saw,
Fell down on both knees, and wept by the grave.
Three days and three nights he spent there in prayer.
At the end of the third day,
All the red monks standing round,
The babe of the dead girl stirred by the light of the tapers,
It opened its eyes,
It rose,
It walked,
It walked straight to the three monks in red,
And it spoke, and said:
'It is he —
Gonthram of Plouernel."[5]

"Well, now, my lassy," asked Gildas as he shook his head warningly, "is not that a terrible story? Did I not tell you that those helmet-wearers were ever prowling around young girls like so many ravishing sparrow-hawks? But Jeanike, what are you pondering? You do not answer me. You seem steeped in revery."

"It is, indeed, quite extraordinary, Gildas. Was that bandit of a red monk named the Sire of Plouernel?"

"Yes."

"Often have I heard Monsieur Lebrenn mention the name of that family as if he had some cause of complaint against them, and say, whenever he referred to some wicked man: He must be a son of Plouernel!' as one would say: 'He must be a son of the devil!'"

"That is a puzzle – a puzzling house this is," remarked Gildas meditatively, and even in a tone of uneasiness. "To think of Monsieur Lebrenn having complaint against the family of a red monk, who has been dead eight or nine hundred years. All the same, Jeanike, I hope the story may stand you in good stead."

"Go to, Gildas!" exclaimed Jeanike, laughing. "Do you imagine there are any red monks in St. Denis Street, and that they carry off young girls in omnibuses?"

As Jeanike was saying this, a valet in morning livery stepped into the shop and asked for Monsieur Lebrenn.

"He is not in," said Gildas.

"Then, my good lad," answered the valet, "you will please tell your master that the colonel expects to see him this morning, before noon, to settle with him a matter about some linen that he

[5] Villemarqué traces this chant, still very popular in Brittany, back to the Eleventh or Twelfth Century; hence for seven or eight hundred years it has been passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation.

spoke about with your mistress yesterday. Here is my master's address," added the valet, placing a visiting card upon the counter. "Above all be certain to urge your master to be punctual. The colonel does not like to be kept waiting."

The valet left. Gildas took up the card mechanically, read it and cried out, turning pale:

"By St. Anne of Auray! It is incredible – "

"What is it, Gildas?"

"Read, Jeanike!"

And with a trembling hand he reached out the card to the young girl who read:

COUNT GONTHRAM OF PLOUERNEL

Colonel of Dragoons

18 Paradis-Poissonniere Street.

"A puzzling, a fear-inspiring house this is!" Gildas repeated several times, raising his hands to heaven, while Jeanike herself looked as astonished and almost as frightened as the young shop-assistant.

CHAPTER II.
GEORGE DUCHENE

While the events narrated in the preceding chapter were happening in the shop of Monsieur Lebrenn the linendraper, another scene was taking place at almost the same hour on the fifth story of an old house, opposite the one which the Breton merchant occupied.

I shall take my reader into a modest little room that is fitted out with extreme neatness; an iron bedstead, a wardrobe, two chairs and a table above which stood a shelf filled with books – such was its furniture. At the head of the bed hung from the wall a species of trophy, consisting of a military cap and two light infantry under-officer's epaulettes, above which, spread in a black frame, was an honorable discharge from service. In a corner of the chamber, and disposed upon a board, were several carpenter's tools.

Upon the bed lay a freshly furbished carbine, and upon a little table a little heap of balls, a gunpowder pouch, and a mold to prepare cartridges in, a number of which had already been gotten ready.

The tenant of the apartment, a young man of about twenty-six, with a virile and handsome face, and wearing a mechanic's blouse, was already up. With his elbows leaning on the sill of his attic window, he seemed to be looking intently at the house of Monsieur Lebrenn, especially at one of the four windows, between two of which the famous sign of *The Sword of Brennus* was fastened.

That one particular window, furnished with very white curtains closely drawn together, presented nothing remarkable to the sight, except for a wooden box, painted green and daintily wrought with ovolos and other carvings, that filled the full width of the outer sill and contained several winter heliotropes besides some crocuses in full bloom.

The features of the tenant of the attic as he contemplated the window in question, bore an expression of such profound melancholy that it was almost painful to behold. After a while a tear, that fell from the young man's eyes, rolled down upon his brown moustache.

The sound of a clock that struck half past six drew George Duchene – that was the young man's name – from his revery. He passed his hand over his moist eyes, and left the window murmuring bitterly:

"Bah! To-day, or to-morrow, a bullet through my breast will deliver me from this insane love. Thanks to God, there will soon be a serious engagement. My death will at least serve the cause of freedom."

George remained pensive for a while, and then added:

"But grandfather – I forgot him!"

He then proceeded to a corner of the room where stood a little stove half filled with burning coals, and which he had been using to found his bullets. He placed on the fire a small earthen dish filled with milk, crumbled into it some slices of white bread, and in a few minutes had ready for use a toothsome bowl of milk soup that the expertest housekeeper might have been jealous of.

After concealing the carbine and munitions of war under his mattress, George took up the bowl, opened a door that was cut in the board partition of his apartment, and passed into a contiguous room, where a man of advanced age and with a kind and venerable face framed in long white hair, lay on a much better bed than George's. The old man seemed exceedingly weak; his thin and wrinkled hands were agitated by a continuous tremor.

"Good morning, grandfather," said George, tenderly embracing the old man. "Did you rest well during the night?"

"Quite well, my boy."

"Here is your milk soup. I'm afraid I kept you waiting."

"Not at all. It is only just day. I heard you rise and open your window – about an hour ago."

"That's so, grandfather. I felt my head heavy – I wanted to breathe the early air."

"I also heard you during the night walk up and down your room."

"Poor grandfather! Did I keep you awake?"

"No, I was not sleepy. But, George, be frank with me. There's something troubling you."

"Me? Nothing at all."

"For several months you have looked depressed; you have grown pale; you have changed so much as not to be recognizable. You are no longer as light of heart as you were when you returned from your regiment."

"I assure you, grandfather – "

"You assure me – you assure me! I know perfectly well what I see. As far as that is concerned I can not be deceived. I have a mother's eyes – come, now – "

"That's true," replied George smiling. "I think it is *grandmother* I should call you – because you are good, tender and uneasy about me, like a true grandma. But believe me, you alarm yourself unnecessarily. Here, hold your spoon; wait a minute till I place the table on your bed. You will be more at ease."

George took from a corner a pretty little shining walnut table of the shape of the trays used by patients for eating on in their beds. After placing upon it the bowl of soup, he gently pushed it in front of the old man.

"There is none like you, my boy, for such thoughtfulness," observed the grandfather.

"It would have been a devilish thing, grandfather, if, with all my carpenter's skill, I had failed to put together this little table that is so handy for you."

"Oh! You have an answer for everything – I know that," observed the old man, smiling.

And with a shaky hand he began his meal. So tremulous were his motions that several times the spoon struck against his teeth.

"Oh, my poor boy!" exclaimed the old man sadly. "Just see how my hands tremble. It seems to me they grow worse every day."

"Nonsense, grandfather! To me, on the contrary, your hands seem to be growing steadier – "

"Oh, no! 'Tis all over – all over. There is no remedy can bring me help in my infirmity."

"Why, do you prefer me to take your hopeless view of the case – "

"That's just what I should have done since this affliction began. And, yet, I can not accustom myself to the idea of being an invalid, and a burden to others unto the end of my life."

"Grandfather! Grandfather! If you talk that way we shall have to fall out."

"I wonder what made me commit the stupidity of taking to the trade of gilder of metals. At the end of twenty years, often before that, one-half of those artisans shake like myself; but, differently from myself, they have no grandchildren who spoil them – "

"Grandfather!"

"Yes, you spoil me; I repeat it – you spoil me – "

"Let it be so! Now, then, I shall give you tit for tat; it is the only way to spike your guns, as we were taught in the regiment. Well, I knew a fine man; his name was father Morin; he was a widower with a daughter of about eighteen. The worthy man married his daughter to a gallant young fellow, but over-much given to resent wrong, and one day he received an ugly blow in a fight, so ugly that two years after his marriage he died, leaving his young wife with a boy in her arms."

"George! George!"

"The poor young mother nursed her child. Her husband's death was such a shock to her that she followed him shortly after – and her little boy remained upon the hands of his grandfather."

"Good God, George! How merciless you are! What is the sense in ever coming back to all that?"

"He loved the boy so much that he would not part with him. During the day, when he had to work in the shop, a good neighbor kept the urchin with her. But, the instant the grandfather returned

home, he had but one thought on his mind, but one cry on his lips – 'My little George.' He looked after him as lovingly as the best and tenderest of mothers. He ruined himself getting pretty clothes and pretty hats for the chap. He rigged the little fellow up to his own taste, and the grandfather was very proud of his grandchild. And so it came about that all the people in the neighborhood, who loved the worthy man greatly, began to call him the *nurse-father*."

"But, George!"

"In that way he brought up the boy, cared for him night and day, attended to all his needs, sent him to school, then to his apprenticeship, until – "

"So much the worse!" cried out the old man, unable any longer to contain himself. "Seeing we are to tell the truth to each other, I shall have my turn, and we shall see! First of all, you were the son of my daughter Georgiana, whom I doted upon. I only did my duty – take that, to begin with – "

"Neither have I done any more than my duty."

"You? Don't tell me that!" cried the old man, vehemently brandishing his spoon. "You! This is what you did: Good luck saved you from drawing the lot of going into the army – "

"Grandfather! Take care!"

"Oh, you can not frighten me!"

"You will upset your bowl of soup if you go on in that way."

"I 'go on'! The devil take it! Do you think I have no blood left in my veins? Yes, answer, you who are always speaking of other people! When my infirmity began, what is it that you did, unhappy boy? You went in search of a merchant of men."

"Grandfather, your soup will grow cold; for heaven's sake take it while it is warm."

"Ta, ta, ta! You want to shut my mouth. I am not your dupe. Yes! And what did you say to the merchant of men? 'My grandfather is ailing; he can hardly any longer earn his living; I am his only support; I may fail him, either through sickness, or through lack of work; he is old; secure to him a little life annuity, and I shall sell myself to you.' And you did it!" cried the old man with tears in his eyes, and raising his spoon to the ceiling with such vehemence that, if George had not quickly seized the table it would have tumbled down to the floor with the bowl of soup and all.

The young man exclaimed:

"'Sdeath, grandfather! Keep quiet! You are carrying on like the devil in a sacristy. You will upset everything."

"I don't care! It will not keep me from telling you why and how it came about that you became a soldier, and how you sold yourself for me – to a merchant of men – "

"All that talk is a pretext to keep you from eating your soup. I see, you think it is not well made."

"Just listen to him! I, find his soup bad! Well, well!" exclaimed the old man in pitiful accents, "That devil of a boy has made up his mind to break my heart!"

Father Morin furiously dipped his spoon into the bowl, and precipitately carrying it to his mouth said while eating: "You see – you see – how bad I find your soup – see-see – Oh! it is bad – see – see – Oh, I don't like it at all!"

"For heaven's sake, now you are going too fast," cried George, holding back his grandfather's arm. "You will choke yourself."

"That's also your fault! To tell me I find your soup bad, while it tastes delicious!" complained the old man, moderating his pace and smacking his lips with great gusto. "It is the gods' own nectar!"

"Without vainglory," replied George, smiling, "I enjoyed a great reputation in the regiment for my leek soup. Good, I shall now fill your pipe."

George then leaned over to the old man and said to him as he patted him on the back:

"That's right – my good old grandfather loves to pull at his little pipe in his bed, do you not?"

"What shall I say, George? You turn me into a Pacha; aye, a Pacha!" answered the old man, while his grandson went for the pipe that lay on a table, filled it with tobacco, lighted it, and presented

it to old father Morin. The old man was thereupon propped up well in his bed, and began to smoke his delicious pipe.

George sat down at the foot of the bed, and said:

"What do you propose to do to-day?"

"I shall take my little stroll on the boulevard, where, if the weather is good, I shall sit down for a while on a bench."

"Hem! Grandfather, I think you would better postpone your promenade. You must have noticed yesterday how large the crowds were that gathered at several places. They almost came to blows with the municipalists and city sergeants. It may be even worse to-day."

"I know it, my boy. Are you taking a hand in these tussles? I know full well how tempting it is to do so when one's rights are invaded. It is unworthy of the government to forbid the banquets. But I shall feel very uneasy on your score."

"You need not feel uneasy about me, grandfather. There is nothing to fear, as far as I am concerned. But take my advice. Do not go out to-day."

"Very well, my boy, I shall stay indoors. I shall entertain myself a little reading your books, and shall look at the passers-by from the window, smoking my pipe the while."

"Poor grandfather," observed George with a smile. "From our high floor you see hardly more than moving hats."

"That's all one. It will be enough to entertain me. Besides, I can look at the opposite houses. Our neighbors often sit at their windows. But – hold! It strikes me now – by the way of the houses on the other side of the street, there is a thing I have meant to ask you, and always forgot. Tell me what that sign means which I see before the linendraper's house. What is the meaning of that helmeted warrior throwing his sword into the scales? You who did the carpentering work in the shop, when it was recently renovated, you should know the why and wherefore of its sign."

"I did not know it either until my master detailed me to work in Monsieur Lebrenn's shop."

"All over the quarter people speak of him as a straight-forward man. All the same, what devil of a notion is that of choosing such a looking sign —*The Sword of Brennus!* If he were an armorer, the thing might pass. True enough, there are scales in the picture, and scales suggest commerce – but why does the warrior with his helmet on and the air of an Artaban throw his sword into the scale?"

"I'll tell you. But really, I feel bashful, at my age, to presume to hold a lecture to you."

"Why bashful? Why that? Instead of going out on Sundays for a walk where people congregate near the fortifications, you read, you learn, you instruct yourself. You may well hold a lecture to your grandfather – there is no harm in that!"

"Well – the warrior with a helmet, that Brennus, was a Gaul, one of our ancestors, the chieftain of the army which, two thousand years and how much more ago I do not know, marched into Italy to attack Rome in order to punish the city for some act of treachery. The city surrendered to the Gauls and was spared in consideration of a ransom in gold. But, not considering the ransom large enough, Brennus threw his sword into the scale that held the weights."

"In order to secure a larger ransom, the shrewd old fellow! He did the opposite of what the fruit-venders do who help the scales in their interest with their thumbs. I understand that part of it. But there are yet two things I do not understand at all. In the first place you said that that warrior, who lived more than two thousand years ago, was one of our ancestors!"

"Yes, that Brennus and the Gauls of his army belonged to the race from which we descend – almost all of us in this country of France."

"One moment – you say they were Gauls?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"Then we are descendants of the Gallic race?"

"Certainly."

"But we are Frenchmen. How do you account for that, my boy?"

"Simply this way – our country, our mother country, was not always called France."

"Hold on! Hold on! Hold on!" exclaimed the old man, taking the pipe out of his mouth. "How is that? France was not always called France?"

"No, grandfather. During ages immemorial our country was called *Gaul*, and was a republic, as glorious, as powerful, but happier, and twice as large as France during the Empire."

"The devil you say!"

"Unfortunately, about two thousand years ago – "

"Is that all? Two thousand years! How you do fling around the years, my boy!"

"Dissensions broke out in Gaul; the several provinces rose against one another – "

"Ah! That's ever the trouble! That was the very trick of the clergy and the royalists during the Revolution – "

"And so, grandfather, that befell to Gaul, centuries ago, that befell to France in 1814 and 1815."

"A foreign invasion!"

"Exactly. The Romans, once vanquished by Brennus, had in the meantime become powerful. They profited by the divisions among our fathers; and they invaded the land – "

"Exactly as the Cossacks and the Prussians invaded us!"

"Exactly so. But what the Cossack and Prussian Kings, the good friends of the Bourbons, did not dare to do – not that they lacked the wish – the Romans did. Despite a heroic resistance, our ancestors, ever brave as lions, but unfortunately divided, were reduced to slavery, as the Negroes are to-day in some colonies."

"Is such a thing possible!"

"Yes. They wore iron collars, bearing the initials of their masters, when those initials were not branded on their foreheads with a hot iron."

"Our fathers!" cried the old man, joining his hands with pain and indignation. "Our fathers!"

"And when they tried to run away, their masters had their noses and ears cropped, if not their hands and feet."

"Our fathers!"

"Other times their masters would cast them to wild beasts for amusement, or cause them to be put to death under frightful tortures if they refused to cultivate, under the conqueror's lash, the very lands that had belonged to them – "

"But listen," interposed the old man, gathering his recollections; "that puts me in mind of a song of our old friend, the friend of us poor folks – "

"The song of our Beranger, not so, grandfather —*The Gallic Slaves*?"

"Yes, my boy. It begins – let me see – yes – this is it:

"Some ancient Gauls, the wretched slaves,
One night, when all around were sleeping —

And the refrain ran:

"Poor Gauls, 'fore whom the world once trembled,
Let us drink to intoxication!"

Then it was our own fathers, the Gauls, that Beranger was referring to? Alas! Poor fellows, like so many others, no doubt, they took to drunkenness in order to forget their misfortunes."

"Yes, grandfather; but soon they realized that to forget one's sorrows does not deliver one therefrom; that to break the yoke is better."

"Right they were!"

"Accordingly, the Gauls, after innumerable insurrectionary efforts – "

"Well, my boy, meseems the method is not new, but ever is the right one. Ha! Ha!" added the old man, striking the bowl of his pipe with his nail. "Ha! Ha! Do you notice, George, sooner or later, it has to come to a Revolution – so it was in '89 – so it was in 1830 – so it may be to-morrow, perhaps!"

"Poor grandfather!" thought George to himself. "He little knows how near the truth he is."

And he proceeded aloud:

"Right you are! When it comes to the matter of freedom, the people must help themselves, and stick their own fingers into the dish – otherwise there will be only crumbs to pick, and the people will be robbed, as they were robbed eighteen years ago."

"And brazenly were they robbed, my poor boy! I saw it done, myself. I was there."

"Fortunately you know the proverb, grandfather —*The scalded cat*– enough said. The lesson will have been a good one. But to return to our Gauls. They did as you say – resorted to Revolution. She never leaves her children in the lurch. The latter, by dint of perseverance, of energy and of their own blood copiously poured out, succeeded in re-conquering a portion of their former freedom from the mailed hand of the Romans, who, moreover, had not un-christened Gaul, but only called her 'Roman' Gaul."

"Just as we to-day speak of French Algeria, I suppose?"

"Exactly so, grandfather."

"Well, thanks to God, our brave Gauls did, with the help of Insurrection, get back a little into the saddle! That soothes my blood somewhat."

"Oh, grandfather, wait, only wait!"

"Why?"

"What our fathers suffered was as nothing to what they were still to suffer."

"Think of it! And I thought they were out of the woods. What's it that happened to them?"

"Figure to yourself a horde of barbarians, semi-savages, named *Franks*. Thirteen or fourteen hundred years ago they emerged from the recesses of the forests of Germany. Genuine Cossacks they were, in their way. They fell upon the Roman armies. These, enervated by their conquest of Gaul, were rolled in the dust and driven out, and then the Frankish conquerors, in turn, took possession of our poor country. They stripped her even of her name. They called her *France*, after themselves, in token of possession."

"The brigands!" cried the old man. "I like the Romans better, by my faith! At least they left us our name."

"That's so. Besides, the Romans were, at least, the most civilized people then living, except for the barbarity of their system of slavery. They covered Gaul with magnificent structures, and will ye nil ye, they restored to our ancestors a part of their pristine freedom. The Franks, on the contrary, were, as I said, genuine Cossacks. Under their domination the Gauls had to start all over again."

"Good God! Good God!"

"Those hordes of Frankish bandits – "

"Call them Cossacks! Give their true name!"

"They were even worse, if possible, grandfather! Those Frankish bandits, those Cossacks, if you prefer, called their chiefs *Kings*. The kingly leaven perpetuated itself in our country, whence it happens that for so many years we have tasted the sweets of Kings of Frankish origin, whom the royalists call *Kings by divine right*."

"Say by *Cossack right*! A fine present!"

"The chiefs of lower category were called *dukes*, and *counts*. Their seed likewise perpetuated itself upon our soil, whence it happens that for so long a time we have enjoyed the luxury of a nobility of Frankish origin, who treated us as a conquered race."

"What's that you are telling me!" ejaculated the perplexed-looking old man. "If I grasp the meaning of what you say, my boy, the Frankish bandits, those Cossacks, Kings and chieftains, once

masters of Gaul, parceled out among themselves the lands that the Gauls had partly reconquered from the Romans?"

"Yes, grandfather. The Frankish Kings and seigneurs robbed the Gauls of their property, and divided among themselves the soil and the people upon it, just as a domain and its live stock are divided."

"And our fathers, despoiled of their goods by those Cossacks – "

"Our fathers were anew reduced to slavery, as they were under the Romans, and were forced to cultivate for the benefit of the Frankish Kings and seigneurs the land that had belonged to themselves, to them the Gauls since Gaul was Gaul."

"Accordingly, my boy, the Frankish Kings and seigneurs, after having robbed our fathers of their property, started to live on their sweat – "

"Just so, grandfather. They sold them – men, women, children, girls – in open market. If they resisted at work, their masters whipped them as recalcitrant animals are whipped, if they did not kill them in their anger, or out of pure cruelty, as often happened, just as one might kill his dog or horse. The theory was that our fathers and mothers belonged to the Frankish Kings and seigneurs neither more nor less than cattle belong to their owner. All this by virtue of the Frankish conquest of Gaul[6]. This state of things lasted until the revolution of 1789, which you witnessed, grandfather. You will remember the enormous difference there still existed at that time between a nobleman and a workingman, between a seigneur and a peasant."

"'Sdeath! It was the difference between master and slave."

"Or, if you prefer the term, between *Frank* and *Gaul*, grandfather."

"But, my little man, how did it happen that our forefathers the Gauls allowed themselves to be martyrized in that fashion by a handful of Franks – no, Cossacks, I mean, for so many centuries?"

"Oh, grandfather! The Franks possessed the soil which they had stolen; hence they possessed the fullness thereof. Their army, a numerous body, consisted of pitiless recruits from their own country. Besides, almost exhausted by their long struggle against the Romans, a frightful affliction was furthermore in store for our fathers – the priests."

"That's all that was wanting to finish them up!"

"To their eternal shame, the larger portion of the Gallic bishops, immediately upon the Frankish invasion, betrayed their own country, and made common cause with the Frankish Kings and seigneurs, whom they speedily dominated through cunning and flattery, and from whom they wheedled all the lands and money possible. Accordingly, just as with the conquerors themselves, a large number of holy priests held serfs whom they either sold or exploited, and lived amidst shocking debauchery, degrading, tyrannizing and brutifying at their own sweet pleasure the Gallic masses to whom they preached resignation, and respect for, and obedience to the Franks, threatening with the devil and his horns whatever wretched being might attempt a revolt for the independence of his country from the foreign Kings and seigneurs, the only source of whose power and wealth was violence, rapine and murder."[7]

---

[6] It is above all for our brothers of the people that we wrote this history. In a form which we strove to render as fascinating as possible. We hope they have followed the notes, for these are, so to speak, the key of the chronicle, and the proof that under the form of romance one can find the most scrupulous history.

[7] Gregory, Bishop of Tours, says of Clovis, the first Frankish King by Divine right:"Having killed several other Kings besides, and even some of his closest relatives, Clovis extended his power over all the Gauls. Nevertheless, having one day assembled his men, he is reported to have spoken thus of the relatives he had himself caused to be executed and murdered: – 'Woe is me, I am left a wanderer among wanderers, and I have no relatives who, in case of need could come to my assistance.' Not that he was grieved over their death," adds the Bishop of Tours, "but he held this language to discover whether there remained anyone *whom he could still put to death*." – Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, book II, chapter XLII.Still this Gallic bishop slurs over the terrible hypocrisy of the Frankish conqueror, sullied with thefts, murders, incest, and fratricide. He says:"Thus each day God caused the enemies of Clovis to fall into his hands, and extended his kingdom, because he walked with a pure heart before Him, and did what was agreeable in the eyes of God." (book II, chapter XL).On the character of some of the early bishops themselves, Gregory sheds this light:"Salone and Sagitaire, Bishops of Embrun and Gap, once masters of their bishoprics, began to distinguish themselves with a senseless fury by usurpations,

"I see it all! But, my little man, did our forefathers allow themselves to be shorn without kicking – all that time, from the conquest down to the Revolution, when we turned upon those Frankish Kings and seigneurs, and, along with them, their clergy, who stuck to the habit of gathering fat upon their ribs?"

"It is not likely that everything went on without numerous revolts on the part of the serfs against the Kings, the seigneurs and the priests. But, grandfather, I have told you the little that I know, and even that little I learned only while carpentering in the shop of Monsieur Lebrenn, the linendraper opposite us."

"How did it happen, my boy?"

"While I was at work, Monsieur Lebrenn, who is the best man I know, used to chat with me. He would talk about the history of our fathers, of which I knew as little as you. Once my curiosity was pricked – and it was not slight – "

"I can well imagine that."

"I put a thousand questions to Monsieur Lebrenn, all the while hammering and joining. He answered me with truly paternal kindness. In that way I came to know the little that I have told you. But," added George with a sigh that he was unable to suppress, "my job being done, the history lessons were interrupted. Accordingly, I have told you all I know, grandfather."

"So, then, the linendraper who lives opposite is as learned as all that?"

"He is as learned as he is a true patriot. He is an *old Gaul*, as he loves to style himself. And sometimes," added George, unable to avoid blushing slightly, "I heard him say to his daughter, as he proudly embraced her on account of some clever answer or other that she made, 'Oh, as to you – you are a true Gallic girl!'"

At this moment father Morin and George heard someone rapping at the door of the first chamber.

"Walk in!" cried George.

Someone stepped into the front room that connected with the one occupied by the old man.

"Who is there?" George asked.

"I – Lebrenn," answered a voice.

"What! The worthy linendraper that we have been speaking about? The *old Gaul*?" whispered the venerable grandfather. "Go quick and see what he wants, my boy, and shut the door after you."

As much embarrassed as surprised at this visit, George stepped out of his grandfather's room, and found himself facing Marik Lebrenn.

murders, adulteries, and other excesses." (book V, chapter XXI).

CHAPTER III.
MARIK LEBRENN

Marik Lebrenn was a man of about fifty years of age, although looking rather younger. His high stature; his nervy, muscular neck, arms and shoulders; the proud and resolute carriage of his head; his open and strikingly strong countenance; his sea-blue eyes with their firm and penetrating glance; his thick, heavy and light auburn hair, slightly streaked with grey and starting rather low upon a forehead that seemed to partake of the hardness of marble; – all these features betrayed the characteristic type of the Breton race, among which the Gallic tongue and blood have pre-eminently preserved themselves unalloyed down to our own days. Upon the ruddy and thick lips of Monsieur Lebrenn sat a perpetual smile that one time betokened kindheartedness, other times bore the impress of that wit and satire, which our old books term *salty*, when they describe the racy jokes, or the old Gallic character, that ever is inclined to teasing. I shall close the description of the merchant, by clothing him in a large olive overcoat and trousers of a grey material.

Astonished, almost speechless at the unexpected visit, George Duchene waited in silence for Lebrenn to speak. The latter said:

"Monsieur George, about six months ago you were assigned by your employer to attend to some repairs in my shop. I was very much pleased with your intelligence and skill."

"You proved as much to me, monsieur, by your kindness."

"You were entitled to it. I noticed that you were industrious, and anxious to learn. I was aware, besides, as all our neighbors are, of your worthy conduct towards your grandfather, who occupies these lodgings for the last fifteen years."

"Monsieur," remarked George, not a little embarrassed by these praises, "my conduct – "

"Is perfectly simple, is it not? Very well. Your job in my shop kept you three months. Very well pleased with our relations to each other, I said to you, and did so in all frankness: 'Monsieur George, we are neighbors; call and see me, either Sundays, or any other day after your work hours; I shall be pleased, very pleased.'"

"Indeed, monsieur, you said so."

"And yet, Monsieur George, you never set your foot in my house."

"I beg you, monsieur, do not attribute my reserve to either ingratitude or forgetfulness."

"What, then, should I attribute it to?"

"Monsieur – "

"Come, Monsieur George, be frank – you love my daughter."

The young man trembled from head to foot. His color left his cheeks, paleness and blushes alternated with each other. Finally he answered Lebrenn with a tremulous and moved voice:

"It is true, monsieur. I love mademoiselle, your daughter."

"So that, your work in my shop being done, you did not return to my house out of fear that your love might carry you away?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you never mentioned your love to anyone, even to my daughter?"

"Never, monsieur."

"I knew it. But why did you refuse to place confidence in me, Monsieur George?"

"Monsieur," answered the embarrassed young man, "I – did – not dare – "

"Why not! Perchance because I am what is called a *bourgeois*– a rich man compared to you, who live from day to day by the wages that you earn?"

"Yes, monsieur."

After a moment's silence the merchant proceeded:

"Permit me, Monsieur George, to put a question to you. You may answer it, if you think proper."

"I listen, monsieur."

"About fifteen months ago, shortly after your discharge from the army, you expected to marry?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"A young flower girl, an orphan named Josephine Eloi?"

"Yes, monsieur; it is all so."

"Will you tell me the reason why the marriage did not take place?"

The young man colored; an expression of pain contracted his countenance; he hesitated to answer.

Lebrenn watched him attentively. Pained and surprised at George's silence, he could not withhold a bitter and severe cry:

"I see – seduction, then abandonment and oblivion. Your embarrassment proclaims it all but too loudly."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," George quickly answered. "My embarrassment and emotion are caused by cruel recollections. I shall tell you what happened. I never lie – "

"I know you do not, Monsieur George."

"Josephine dwelt in the same house with my employer. In that way I became acquainted with her. She was very pretty, and, although illiterate, highly gifted. I knew she was inured to work and poverty. I believed her wise. A bachelor's life weighed upon me. I also thought of my grandfather. A wife would have assisted me in taking better care of him. I proposed marriage to Josephine. She seemed delighted, and she herself named the date of our wedding. They lied to you, monsieur, who spoke of seduction and abandonment!"

"I believe you," said Lebrenn, cordially extending his hand to the young man. "I am happy to be able to believe you. But how did your marriage fall through?"

"A week before the day for our wedding Josephine disappeared, leaving a letter for me saying that all was broken off. I subsequently learned that, yielding to the evil advice of one of her girl friends, a lost woman, she followed her example. Having lived in misery all her life, enduring grievous privations despite her long hours, twelve and fifteen of work a day, Josephine recoiled before the life that I offered her – a life of toil and poverty like her own."

"And like so many others," interjected Lebrenn, "she succumbed to the temptations of a less toilsome life. Oh! Poverty! Poverty!"

"I have never seen Josephine again, monsieur. She is now, I am told, a coryphee in one of the public dancing halls. She dropped her old name for one that I do not know, coined according to her habit of improvising upon all manner of subjects some of the wildest of songs. In short, she is lost forever. And yet, the girl had excellent qualities of heart. You now understand, monsieur, the cause of the sad emotion that came over me when you mentioned Josephine's name a minute ago."

"Your emotion testifies in favor of your heart, Monsieur George. You have been calumniated. I doubted the truth of what I was told; I am now certain. Let us say no more upon that subject. I now wish to tell you what happened at my house three days ago. I was, in the evening, in my wife's room, together with my daughter. The girl had sat silent and meditative for a while. Suddenly, taking my hand and her mother's, she said to us: 'I have a secret to confide to you. I have long put off speaking, because I have long been reflecting, lest I speak hastily. I love Monsieur George Duchene' – "

"Great God! monsieur," cried George, clasping his hands, and seized with inexpressible ecstasy. "Is it possible! Mademoiselle, your daughter!"

"That was the language of my daughter to us," proceeded Lebrenn with deliberation. "'I am pleased, my child, at your frankness,' I answered her; 'but how came this love about?' 'First, father, through learning of George's conduct towards his grandfather; then through hearing you often praise his character, his industrious habits, and his efforts to cultivate his mind. Finally, he won his way to my heart with his gentle and refined manners, with his frankness, and his conversation, as I heard

him talk with you. I never said to him a word that could make him suspect my sentiments for him. On his part, he never dropped his extreme reserve towards me. I would be happy were he to share the sentiments I entertain for him, and if you, father and mother, think such a marriage proper. If you think otherwise I shall respect your wishes, knowing that you respect my freedom. If I can not marry Monsieur George I shall remain single. You have often told me, father, that I had a will of my own. You will not doubt my resolution. If this marriage be out of the question, you will not find me either sulky or dejected. Your affection will console me. Ever happy, as in the past, I shall ever care for you, for mother and for brother. I have told you the truth. Now, I wish you to decide. I shall wait.'"

George listened to Lebrenn with ever increasing astonishment. He could not believe his own ears. Finally he cried in broken accents:

"Monsieur, is this a dream?"

"Not in the least. My daughter never was more wide awake, I assure you. I know the openness of her nature, also her firmness. Both my wife and I are certain of that – if this union can not be effected, Velleda's affection for us will not change, but neither will she marry anyone else. Now, then, seeing it is quite natural that a young and handsome girl of eighteen should marry, and seeing, furthermore, that Velleda's choice is worthy of herself and us, my wife and I, after mature reflection, might gladly decide to accept you as our son-in-law."

Impossible to describe the look of glad surprise, of intoxication, that was stamped upon George's features at these words of the merchant's. He remained mute, he seemed stupefied.

"Come, Monsieur George," the linendraper proceeded with a smile, "what is there so very extraordinary, so incredible, in what I have been telling you? For three whole months you were at work in my shop. I already knew that, in order to insure your grandfather's existence, you turned soldier. Your rank of under-officer, besides two wounds, proves that you served with honor. During your three months with me I was able – my eyes are sufficiently keen – to gauge your worth in point of heart, intelligence and skill at your trade. Delighted with our acquaintance, I invited you to call upon us. Your reserve in this instance is an additional proof of the delicacy of your character. On top of all that, my daughter loves you and you love her. You are twenty-seven years old, she eighteen. She is a charming being; you a handsome fellow. You are poor; I have enough for two. You are a mechanic, so was my father. What in the devil's name is there to amaze you so much? You look as if you had been treated to a fairy tale."

These kind words failed to put an end to George's stupor. He really believed himself treading on enchanted ground, as the merchant had indicated. With moist eyes and a throbbing heart the young man could barely mutter:

"Oh, monsieur! Excuse my embarrassment – I feel so dazed with joy at all I have heard – at your saying that you consent to my marrying – "

"One moment!" quickly interposed the linendraper. "One moment! Take note that, with all the good opinion I entertain for you, what I said was we *might* decide to accept you as our son-in-law. It was conditional. The conditions were these: first, that you were not guilty of the unworthy act of seduction, that you were charged with – "

"Monsieur, did I not swear to you?"

"You did. I believe you. I mention that first condition simply because I had it on my mind when I came in. As to the second – there is a second – "

"What is it, monsieur?" asked George with inexpressible anxiety, and beginning to apprehend he had too readily indulged in an insensate hope.

"Listen to me, Monsieur George. We have talked very little politics together. During the time that you worked at my place, our conversation always turned upon the history of our forefathers. Nevertheless, I know you entertain very liberal ideas. Let us be short about it – you are a Socialist republican."

"I have heard you say, monsieur, that all opinion, sincerely held, was honorable."

"And I do not take that back. I do not blame you. But between the desire to cause one's opinion to prevail by peaceful means, and schemes to bring about its triumph by violence, by the force of arms – between the two there yawns a deep abyss. Not true, Monsieur George?"

"Yes, monsieur," answered the young man, looking at the linendraper with surprise mingled with uneasiness.

"Now, then, never is an armed demonstration attempted single-handed. Is not that also true, Monsieur George?"

"Monsieur," the young man answered with a feeling of increasing uneasiness, "I do not know – "

"Yes, you are bound to know that people ordinarily associate with others of their own opinion. In short, people affiliate in *secret societies*– and, on the day of battle, turn up boldly upon the street. Is that not true, Monsieur George?"

"I know, monsieur, that the revolution of 1830 was accomplished in that manner," answered George in a high state of anxiety, while his heart felt more and more wrung with pain.

"Certainly," resumed Monsieur Lebrenn, "certainly it was done in that way, and others before it; and still others in the future will take the same course. Nevertheless, as with revolutions, insurrections do not always succeed. Seeing that people who play at that game stake their heads, you will realize, Monsieur George, that my wife and I would be rather disinclined to give our daughter to a man who did not belong to himself; who, at any moment, might take up arms, and march with the secret society that he is a member of at the risk of his life, as behooves a man of honor and conviction. It is all very lofty, very heroic, I admit. The inconvenience lies in that the Chamber of Peers, failing to appreciate that sort of heroism, may send the conspirators to Mt. St. Michel, unless it order their heads cut off. Now, then, I put the question to you as a matter of conscience, Monsieur George, would it not be a sad thing for a young woman to be exposed at any time to see her husband without a head, or consigned to imprisonment for life?"

George, grief-stricken and in consternation, had turned pale. He answered Lebrenn in a depressed voice:

"Monsieur – two words – "

"Allow me, I shall be done in a second," interposed the linendraper; and he proceeded in a grave, almost solemn voice:

"Monsieur George, I place implicit confidence in your word. I have tested you. Swear to me that you do not belong to any secret society. I will believe you, and you shall be my son-in-law – or, rather, my own son," added Lebrenn, reaching out his hand to George, "seeing that since I became acquainted with you and learned to esteem you, I ever felt for you, I repeat it, as much interest as sympathy."

The merchant's praises, together with the cordiality of his manner, intensified the severity of the blow that smote the hopes of George. He, hitherto so determined and energetic, felt himself weakening. He covered his face in his hands, and could not restrain his tears.

Lebrenn contemplated him with commiseration. In a moved voice he addressed the young man:

"I am awaiting your oath, Monsieur George."

The young man turned his head aside to wipe away his tears. He then faced the father of his beloved and said:

"I can not, monsieur, give you the oath that you request."

"Then – your marriage to my daughter – "

"I must renounce it, monsieur," answered George painfully.

"Accordingly, Monsieur George," resumed the merchant, "you admit that you belong to a secret society?"

The young man's silence was his only reply.

"Well," said the merchant, heaving a sigh of regret, and rising; "it is all ended – fortunately my daughter is a brave girl."

"I also shall be so, monsieur."

"Monsieur George," continued the merchant, reaching out his hand to the young carpenter, "you are a man of honor. I need not demand of you secrecy concerning this interview. As you may judge, my inclinations were most favorable towards you. It is not my fault if my plans – I shall say more – my wishes, my warm wishes, to see my daughter and you united meet with an insuperable obstacle."

"Never, monsieur, shall I forget the token of esteem with which you have honored me. You act with the wisdom and discretion of a father. I can not – let it cost me what grief it may – but bow respectfully to your decision. I should, I admit it, myself have forestalled this subject with you – I should have loyally apprized you of the sacred engagement that binds me to my party. I am certain I would have made the confession to you, so soon as I had recovered from the intoxication of happiness that your words threw me into. I would have had time to consider the duties imposed upon me by that unexpected happiness – this marriage. Pardon me, monsieur," George proceeded, in a voice that trembled with anguish, "pardon me. I have no longer the right to speak of that beautiful dream. But what I shall ever remember with pride is your having said to me: 'You can be my son.'"

"It is well, Monsieur George; I expected no less from you," said Lebrenn, moving towards the door.

And, giving his hand once more to the young man, he added with emotion:

"Once more, adieu."

"Adieu, monsieur," responded George, taking the outstretched hand of the merchant. But the latter, suddenly throwing his arms around the young artisan, pressed him to his breast, crying in a voice that shook with joy, and with eyes moist with tears:

"Well done, George! Honest man! Loyal heart! I judged you rightly!"

Puzzled at these words, and at the conduct of the linendraper, George looked at him unable to utter a word. The latter whispered to him:

"Six weeks ago —*Lourcine Street*."

A tremor ran over George's frame. In alarm he exclaimed:

"Mercy, monsieur!"

"Number seventeen, fourth floor, in the rear."

"Monsieur, I beg of you!"

"Did not a mechanic named Dupont introduce you blindfolded?"

"Monsieur, I can make no answer."

"Five members of a secret society received you. You took the usual pledge. And you were led out again, still blindfolded. Not so?"

"Monsieur," cried George as stupefied as he was terror-stricken at the revelation, and seeking to regain composure. "I do not understand what you are saying – "

"I was, that evening, the chairman of the committee, my brave George."

"You, monsieur!" cried the young man still hesitating to believe Lebrenn. "You!"

"Yes, I."

And seeing incredulity still depicted on George's countenance, the merchant proceeded:

"Yes, I presided. And here is the proof."

Saying which he whispered a few words in George's ear.

Unable any longer to doubt, the young man cried, looking at the merchant:

"But, monsieur – the oath that you demanded of me a while ago?"

"It was a last test."

"A test?"

"You must pardon me for it, my brave George. A father is mistrustful. Thank heaven you did not belie my expectations. You stood the test gallantly. You preferred the ruin of your dearest hopes

to a lie, notwithstanding you must have felt sure that I relied upon your word with implicit confidence, whatever you may have said."

"Monsieur," replied George with a hesitation that deeply touched the merchant, "can I now – can I this time – can I hope – with certainty? I conjure you, speak! If you only knew what anguish I went through a while ago!"

"Upon my word as an honest man, my dear George, my daughter loves you. My wife and I consent to your marriage. And we look forward to it with delight because we see in it a future of happiness for our child. Is that plain?"

"Oh, monsieur!" cried George pressing with effusion the hand of the merchant, who said:

"As to the exact day of your marriage, my dear George, the events of yesterday – those that are in train to-day – the course that our secret society is to follow – "

"You, monsieur?" cried George with renewed amazement, and unable to avoid interrupting Lebrenn to express his astonishment, for a moment forgotten in his transport of joy; "You, monsieur, are, indeed, a member of our secret society? Indeed, I am dumbfounded!"

"Not bad!" exclaimed the merchant smiling. "Here we have our dear George about to start all over anew with his astonishment. And why, pray, should not I also belong to your secret society? Perchance, because, without being rich, exactly, I enjoy some comfort and have a few duds to sell? What business have I, I suppose you are thinking, with a party, the aim of which is the conquest for the proletariat of political life, through universal suffrage, and of property through the organization of labor? Why, my good George, just because I *have*, it is my duty to assist my brothers to conquer what they *have not*."

"These are generous sentiments, monsieur!" exclaimed George. "Rare, indeed, are the men who, having arrived at comfort, turn around to give a helping hand to their less fortunate brothers."

"No, George; no. That is not so rare. When, perhaps within not many hours, you will see running to arms all the members of our society, one of the chiefs of which I have been for some time, you will find among them merchants, artists, manufacturers, literary people, lawyers, men of learning, physicians, in short —*bourgeois*, most of whom, like myself, live in modest comfort, all of them animated with no higher ambition than the emancipation of their brothers, the common people, and anxious to drop their guns, after the struggle, in order to return to their industrial and peaceful occupations."

"Oh, monsieur, how surprised and happy I am at what you tell me!"

"Still surprised! Poor George! And why so? Because there are *bourgeois*– or, to use the full, big term, *republican Socialist bourgeois*? Come, now, George, speaking seriously, is not the cause of the bourgeois that of the proletariat? Is there any doubt but that I, for instance, yesterday a proletarian, whom good luck has so far favored, might, through some stroke of bad luck, become again a proletarian to-morrow; and, if not I, my son? Am not I – and my case is that of all other small traders – at the mercy of the barons of high finance, of the strong iron safes, just as our forefathers were at the mercy of the barons of the strong forts? Are not the small holders as much enslaved and plundered by the Dukes of Mortgage, by the Marquises of Usury, by the Counts of Speculation? Are we, the merchants, not daily, despite all our probity, despite all our labors, despite all our economy, despite all our intelligence – are not we, despite all that, ever on the brink of ruin through any crisis that may hap to come upon us, whenever, either through the fear, the cupidity or the whim of the satraps, it pleases those autocrats of capital to stop credit and to reject our signature, however honorable the same may be? Would we, were credit, instead of being the monopoly of the few that it is to-day, democratically organized by the state, as it ought to be, – would we be then exposed to ruin by the sudden withdrawal of capital, by usurious extortion, of discount, or as the consequence of a merciless competition? Are not we to-day, we old men, on the eve of finding ourselves in as precarious a position as was that of your grandfather, that brave invalid of toil, who, after thirty years of work and probity, would have died of want but for your devotion to him, my dear George? Have I, already once ruined like

so many other merchants, the certainty that my son will always find the means of earning his daily bread, that he will not be forced to experience, like you, George, like all other proletarians, the trials of being laid-off – that homicidal manoeuvre which causes you to die a little every day for want of sufficient food? And my daughter – but no! I know her too well! She would sooner die! But how many young girls, brought up in comfort, and whose fathers were, like myself, modest merchants, have not been plunged into atrocious misery – and, not infrequently, from such misery hurled into the abyss of vice, like the wretched working girl whom you would have married! No, no, George! The intelligent bourgeois, and they are numerous, do not separate their cause from that of their brothers of the common people. Proletarians and bourgeois have for centuries fought side by side, heart by heart, in order to regain their freedom. Their blood has mingled in order to cement the holy union of the conquered against the conquerors! of the vanquished against the vanquishers! of the weak and the disinherited against force and privilege! How, then, should the interests of the bourgeois and the proletarians not be common? They have ever had the same enemy to contend with. But, enough of politics, George. Let us talk of yourself and my daughter. The commotion in Paris began last evening, it is at its height this morning. Our sections have been notified to hold themselves in readiness. We expect a call to arms from one moment to another. Are you aware of that?"

"Yes, monsieur; I have been notified."

"This evening, or to-night, we shall have to descend into the street. My wife and daughter do not know this. Not that I mistrust them," added the merchant with a smile, "they are true Gallic women, worthy of our mothers, the valiant women, who, with act and voice, encouraged their fathers, brothers, sons and husbands in battle. But you know our by-laws. They impose upon us absolute silence towards outsiders. George, within three days either the throne of Louis Philippe will be overthrown, or our party will have been once more vanquished. But not discouraged. To it belongs the future. At this appeal to arms, you or I, you and I, my friend, may be laid low upon the barricade."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.