

FILE NO. 113

Emile Gaboriau.

His hopes were not concealed. If the judge was not absolutely and fully convinced he admired the ingenuity of the whole proceeding and complimented the proud jockey upon his brilliancy.

He began at once to write out one of those terrible decisions of "Not proven," which restores liberty, but not honor, to the accused man; which says that he is not guilty, but does not say he is innocent;

CHAPTER VIII.

Proper had been languishing in his lone cell for nine days, when on Thursday morning the jailer came to inform him of the judge's decision. He was conducted before the officer who had searched him when he was arrested; he was shown the contents of his pockets, his watch, penknife, and several articles of jewelry were restored to him;

He was next led across a dark passage, and almost pushed through a door, which was abruptly shut upon him.

He found himself on the quay; he was alone; he was free, but only acquittal after due trial would restore him to his former position among men.

A decision of "Not proven" had left him covered with suspicion. The torments inflicted by public opinion are more fearful than those suffered in a prison cell.

At the moment of his restoration to liberty Proper suffered from the horror of his situation; he could not repress a cry of rage and despair.

"I am innocent! God knows I am innocent!" he cried out. "And I will not die before I shall make that plain, and punish the real culprits!"

Often, day and night, had Proper repeated these words, as he walked his cell. With a heart filled with a bitter, determined thirst for vengeance, which gives a man the force and patience to destroy or wear out all obstacles in his way, he would say:

"Oh! why am I not at liberty? I am happy, caged up; but let me once be free!"

Now he was free, and for the first time he saw the difficulties of the task before him. For each crime, justice requires a criminal; he could not establish his own innocence without producing the guilty man; how find the thief so as to hand him over to the law?

Discouraged, but not despondent, he turned in the direction of his apartments—of Gipsy.

He had never loved the poor girl; at times he had hated her, but at this moment he thought of her with infinite tenderness. He felt that she loved him truly, and would entertain no doubts of his innocence. He saw that woman remain faithful in his fortune, although her fidelity may not always be relied upon in prosperity.

Having arrived at the Rue Chaptal, in front of his own house, he hesitated to cross the threshold. He experienced the timidity of an honest man who is suspected of a crime, he feared to meet a familiar face. However, as he could not remain all day on the pavement he went in.

The janitor uttered a joyful exclamation on seeing him.

"I am delighted to see you again," he said. "I felt that you would come back as white as snow. When I read in the newspapers that you were accused of robbery I said to every one, 'He is innocent!'"

The sincere but perhaps awkward congratulations of this man made a painful impression on Proper. He wished to put a stop to any explanations.

"That you are one of his best friends," tells me to place implicit confidence in you, and to set on your advice."

"I am going to do it," he said. "I am going to find out the wretch who has caused my ruin, and hand him over to justice to revenge myself."

"None, and yet I shall succeed, for a man who devotes his whole life to the accomplishment of a task cannot fail."

"Well, what then?" said the Red Whisker; "you do not say just now that the sacrifice of your life is made? The skillful swimmer thrown into the river by malefactors is careful not to rise to the surface immediately; on the contrary, he plunges beneath, and remains there as long as his breath holds out. He comes up again at a great distance, and lands out of sight; then, when he is supposed to be dead, lo! forever to the contrary, he rises up and has his vengeance. You have an enemy? Some petty imprudence will betray him. But, while he sees you standing by on the watch he will not open his guard."

"I will follow your advice, monsieur."

"I was sure you would, my dear friend. Let us reflect upon the course you should pursue. And remember that you will need every cent of the proceeds of the sale. Have you any ready money? No, but you must have some. Knowing that you will need it at once I brought an upholsterer here; and he will give twelve thousand francs for everything except the pictures."

"Well," said he, "it is rather hard, I admit, but it is a necessity. Now listen. You have a friend, M. de Lagors? Who is this fellow?"

"M. de Lagors, monsieur," said Prosper, haughtily, "is M. Fauvel's nephew; a wealthy young man, handsome, intelligent, cultivated, and the best friend I have."

"Humph," said M. Verduret, "I shall be delighted to make the acquaintance of one so dearly loved by so many charming qualities. I must let you know that I wrote him a note in your name asking that he would be here directly."

"What! do you suppose...?"

"Oh, I suppose nothing! Only I must see this young man. Also, I have arranged and will submit to you a little plan of conversation."

"A ring at the front door interrupted M. Verduret. "Adieu to my plan; here he is! Remember, Prosper," said M. Verduret, in a warning tone, "not one word to this man about your plans, or about me. Pretend to be discouraged, helpless, and undecided with regard to do."

And he disappeared behind a curtain as Prosper ran to open the door.

Proper's portrait of M. de Lagors had become an exaggerated one. So handsome a face and manly figure could belong only to a noble character.

Although Raoul said that he was twenty-four he appeared to be more than twenty. He had a superb figure, well knit and supple; a beautiful white brow, shaded by soft chestnut hair, and soft blue eyes which beamed with frankness.

His first impulse was to throw himself into Prosper's arms.

"My poor, dear friend?" he said, "my poor Prosper?"

But beneath these affectionate demonstrations there was constraint, which, if it escaped the cashier, was noticed by M. Verduret.

"Your letter, my dear Prosper," said Raoul, "made me almost ill. I was so frightened by it. I asked myself if you could have lost your mind. Then I left everything to fly to your assistance, and here I am the next day!"

Proper did not seem to hear him; he was preoccupied about the letter he had not written. What were its contents? Who was this stranger whose assistance he had accepted?

maker, a foreigner who has suddenly appeared to no one knows where, who is making a costume of Catherine de Medici's make of honor; and it is to be a marvel of beauty."

Excessive suffering brings with it a sort of dull insensibility and stupor; and Prosper thought that there was nothing to be inflicted upon him, and he had reached that state of impassibility from which he never expected to be aroused, when this last remark of M. de Lagors made him cry out with pain:

"Madelaine! Oh, Madelaine!"

M. de Lagors, pretending not to have heard him, rose from his chair, and said: "I must leave you now, my dear Prosper; on Saturday I will see these ladies at the ball, and I will bring you news of them. Now, do have courage, and remember that whatever happens, you have a friend in me."

Raoul shook Prosper's hand, closed the door after him and hurried up the street, leaving Prosper standing immovable and overcome by disappointment.

He was aroused from his gloomy reverie by hearing the red-whiskered man say, in a bantering tone, "I am going to the world to say that I am hiding so as to enjoy undisturbed and stolen fortune."

"Well, what then?" said the Red Whisker; "you do not say just now that the sacrifice of your life is made? The skillful swimmer thrown into the river by malefactors is careful not to rise to the surface immediately; on the contrary, he plunges beneath, and remains there as long as his breath holds out. He comes up again at a great distance, and lands out of sight; then, when he is supposed to be dead, lo! forever to the contrary, he rises up and has his vengeance. You have an enemy? Some petty imprudence will betray him. But, while he sees you standing by on the watch he will not open his guard."

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right. I thought of the bank."

If, in the beginning, Prosper had felt some repugnance about entering, in his father's friend, the feeling had now disappeared.

He understood that alone, scarcely master of himself, governed only by the insuperable necessity of this singular case.

Verduret continued talking to himself, as if he had absolutely forgotten Prosper's presence:

"Monsieur Verduret might have spared us both this painful meeting. I have nothing to say to him, and of course he can have nothing to tell me."

"This was a formal dismissal, and M. Verduret, although I thus bowed to M. Fauvel, accompanied by Prosper, who had not opened his lips."

"They had reached the street before Prosper recovered the use of his tongue."

"I hope you are satisfied, monsieur," he said, in a gloomy tone; "you exacted this painful step, and I could only acquiesce. I gave anything by adding this humiliation to the others which I have suffered."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," said Prosper; "no man is mixed up in this affair."

"Naturally," said M. Verduret, with a perturbing smile. "But," he continued, with a serious air, "we have devoted enough time to this. Now be good enough to change your dress, and we will go and call on M. Fauvel."

This proposal seemed to stir up all of Prosper's anger.

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few moments, and... in a tone of forced calmness:

"Ask them to walk in."

If M. Verduret had counted upon witnessing a strange and affecting sight he was not disappointed.

Nothing could be more terrible than the attitude of these two men as they stood confronting each other.

Silent and immovable, they stood glaring at each other with mortal hatred.

M. Verduret curiously watched these two enemies, with the indifference and coolness of a philosopher, who, in the most violent outbreaks of human passion, merely sees subjects for meditation and study.

Finally, the silence becoming more and more threatening, he decided to break it by speaking to the banker:

"I suppose you know, monsieur, that my young relative has just been released from prison."

"Yes," replied M. Fauvel, making an effort to control himself, "yes, for want of sufficient proof."

"Exactly so, monsieur, and this want of proof, as stated in the decision of 'Not proven,' ruins the prospects of my relative, and compels him to leave here at once for America."

M. Fauvel's features relaxed as if he had been relieved of some fearful agony.

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