Secret of the Plundered Safe

By EMILE GABORIAU

CHAPTER X.

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:

"So these are your friends?"

"Yes," said Prosper, with bitterness. "You heard him offer me half of his fortune?"

"That was very stingy on his part; why did he not offer the whole? Offers cost nothing, although I have no doubt that this sweet youth would cheerfully give ten thousand francs to put the ocean between you and him."

"For what reason?"

"Who knows? Perhaps for the same reason that he has not set foot in his uncle's house for a month."

"But that is the truth, monsieur, I am sure of it."

"Naturally," said M. Verduret, with a provoking smile. "But," he continued, with a serious air, "we have devoted enough time to this Adonis. Now, be good enough to change your dress, and we will go and call on M. Fauvel. It is necessary; so come on. You must have confidence, put on a brave face."

Prosper had hardly passed into his bedroom when the bell rang again. M. Verduret opened the door. It was the porter, who handed him a thick letter, and said:

"This letter was left this morning for M. Bertomy. I was so hurried when he came that I forgot to hand it to him. It is a very odd-looking letter, is it not, master?"

It was, indeed, a most peculiar missive. The address was not written, but formed of printed letters, carefully cut from a book, and pasted on the envelope. M. Verduret went into the next room and closed the door behind him.

"Here is a letter for you," said M. Verduret.

Prosper at once tore open the envelope. Some bank notes dropped out; he counted them; there were ten. His face turned purple. The letter, like the address, was composed of printed words cut out and pasted on a sheet of paper. It was short but explicit:

"My Dear Prosper—A friend, who knows the horror of your situation, sends this. There is one heart, be assured, that shares your sufferings. Go away; leave France; you are young; the future is before you. Go, and may this money bring you happiness!"

"Everybody wishes me to go away," cried Prosper; "then there must be a conspiracy against me."

"Now," said M. Verduret, "we must take advantage of this evidence, gained by the imprudence of our enemies, without delay. We will begin with the porter."

He opened the door and called out. The porter entered, looking very much surprised at the authority exercised over his lodger by this stranger.

"Who gave you this letter?" said M. Verduret.

"A messenger, who said he was paid for bringing it. He is the errand runner who stands at the corner of the Rue Pigalle."

"Go and bring him here."

After the porter had gone M. Verduret read the letter over several times, scanning the sentences and weighing every word.

"Evidently this letter was composed by a woman," he finally said. "Never would one man doing another a service, and sending him money, use the word 'happiness.' Now let us see if we can discover whence the printed words were taken to compose this letter."

He approached the window and began to study the pasted words with all the scrupulous attention which an antiquarian would devote to an old palimsest.

"Small type," said he, "very slender and clear; the paper is thin and glossy. I have it!" he cried; "now I have it. These words are all cut from a prayer book. We will look, at least, and then we shall be certain."

He moistened one of the words pasted on the paper with his tongue, and when it was sufficiently softened he detached it with a pin. On the other side of this word was printed a devout Latin word, Deus.

"Ah, ha," he said, with a little laugh of satisfaction, "I knew it. But what has become of the mutilated prayer book. Can it have been burned? No, because a heavy bound book is not easily burned. It is thrown in some corner."

M. Verduret was interrupted by the porter, who returned with the messenger.

"Ah, here you are," he said, encouragingly. Then he showed the envelope of the letter and said:

"Do you remember bringing this letter here this morning?"

"Perfectly, monsieur. I took particular notice of the directions; we don't often see anything like it."

"Who told you to bring it, a gentleman or a lady?"

"Neither, monsieur; it was a porter. I have never seen him before."

"Very well; I will give you ten francs a day if you will walk about the streets and look for the porter who brought this letter. Every evening at eight o'clock come to the Archangel, on the Quay Saint Michel, give me a report of your search and receive your pay. Ask for M. Verduret. If you find the man I will give you fifty francs. Don't lose a minute. Start off!"

"Monsieur," said Prosper, when the porter had left the room, "do you still think you see a woman's hand in this affair?"

"More than ever, and a pious woman, too, who has two prayer books, since she could cut up one to write to you. Are you ready to go to M. Fauvel's? Yes? Come on, then; we have certainly earned our breakfast to-day."

CHAPTER XI.

The visit to M. Fauvel was very stiff and formal. Only a few words were exchanged between the banker and M. Verduret, who was introduced as a relative of Prosper, and then they left the office.

"I hope you are satisfied, monsieur," Prosper said, in a gloomy tone, when they reached the street, "you exacted this painful step, and I could only acquiesce. Have I gained anything by adding this humiliation to the others which I have suffered?"

"You have not, but I have," replied M. Verduret, "I could find no way of gaining access to M. Fauvel, save through you; and now I have found out what I wanted to know. I am convinced that M. Fauvel has nothing to do with the robbery."

Prosper and his companion had stopped to talk more at their ease near the corner of the Rue Lafitte. M. Verduret seemed to be anxious, and was constantly looking around as if he expected some one. He soon uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. At the other end of the vacant space he saw Cavaillon, who was bareheaded and running. He was so excited that he did not even stop to shake hands with Prosper, but darted up to M. Verduret and said:

"They have gone, monsieur. They went about a quarter of an hour ago."

"Then we have not an instant to lose," and he handed Cavaillon a note he had written some hours before at Prosper's house.

"Here, send him this, and then return at once to your desk; you might be missed. It was very rash in you to come out without your hat."

Cavaillon ran off as quickly as he had come. Prosper was stupefied.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You know Cavaillon?"

"So it seems," answered M. Verduret, with a smile; "but we have no time to talk; come on, hurry!" And he set the example by striding rapidly toward the Rue Lafayette. He suddenly stopped before a door bearing the number 81.

"We are going in here," he said to Prosper; "come."

They went up the steps, and stopped on the second floor, before a door over which was a large sign, "Fashionable Dressmaker." A handsome bellrope hung on the wall, but M. Verduret did not touch it. He tapped with the knuckles in a peculiar way, and the door instantly opened as if some one had been watching for his signal on the other side. The door was opened by a neatly dressed woman of about forty. She quietly ushered M. Verduret and Prosper into a neat dining room with several doors opening into it. M. Verduret asked, in a low tone, pointing to one of the doors:

"In there?"

"No," said the woman, in the same tone, "over there, in the little parlor."

M. Verduret opened the door pointed out, and pushed Prosper into the little parlor, whispering as he did so:

"Go in, and keep your presence of mind."

But this injunction was useless. The instant he cast his eyes around the room into which he had so unceremoniously been pushed without any warning, Prosper exclaimed, in a startled voice:

"Madeleine!"

It was indeed M. Fauvel's niece, looking more beautiful than ever. Standing in the middle of the room, near a table covered with silks and satins, she was arranging a skirt of red velvet embroidered in gold. At sight of Prosper all the blood rushed to her face, and her beautiful eyes half closed, as if she were about to faint. She recovered from her momentary weakness, and the soft expression of her eyes changed to one of haughty resentment. In an offended tone she said:

"You promised me upon your honor, monsieur, that you would never again seek my presence. Is this the way you keep your word?"

"I did promise, mademoiselle, but so many things have happened since that terrible day that I think I am excusable in forgetting, for one hour, an oath torn from me in a moment of blind weakness. It is to chance, at least to another will than my own, that I am indebted for the happiness of once more finding myself near you. Alas! the instant I saw you my heart bounded with joy. I did not think—no, I could not think—that you would prove more pitiless than strangers have been, and cast me off when I am so miserable and heartbroken."

"You know me well enough, Prosper, to be sure that no blow can strike you without reaching me at the same time. You suffer, I suffer with you; I pity you as a sister would pity a beloved brother."

"A sister!" said Prosper, bitterly. "Yes, that was the word you used the day you banished me from your presence. A sister! Then why during three years did you delude me with vain hopes? Was I a brother to you the day when, at the foot of the altar, we swore to love each other forever, and you fastened around my neck a holy relic, and said, 'Wear this always for my sake, never part from it, and it will bring you good fortune'?"

Madeleine attempted to interrupt him by a supplicating gesture; he would not heed it, but continued, with increased bitterness:

"One month after that happy day—a year ago—you gave me back my promise, told me to consider myself free from my engagement, and never to come near you again. If I could have discovered in what way I have offended you! But no, you refused to explain. You told me that an invincible obstacle had arisen between us and I believed you, fool that I was! The obstacle was your own heart, Madeleine. I have always worn the medal, but it has not brought me happiness or good fortune."

CHAPTER XII.

As white and motionless as a statue, Madeleine stood with bowed head before the storm of passionate reproach.

"Prosper, my brother, my friend, if you only knew——"

"I know but one thing, Madeleine, and that is that you no longer love me, and that I love you more madly than ever. Oh, Madeleine, heaven only knows how I love you!"

He was silent. He hoped for an answer. None came. But suddenly the silence was broken by a stifled sob. It was Madeleine's maid, who, seated in a corner, was weeping bitterly. He turned in surprise, and looked at the weeping woman; this neatly dressed waiting maid was Nina Gypsy.

Prosper was so startled that he became perfectly dumb. He stood there with ashy lips, and a chilly sensation creeping through his veins. Meanwhile Madeleine had succeeded in recovering her usual calmness. Slowly and almost unconsciously she had put on her bonnet and shawl, lying on the sofa. Then she approached Prosper and said:

"I wish to tell you that I have forgotten nothing. But, oh! let not this knowledge give you any hope, the future is blank for us; but if you love me you will live. You will not, I know, add to my already heavy burden of sorrow, the agony of mourning your death. For my sake live; live the life of a good man, and perhaps the day will come when I can justify myself in your eyes. And now, oh, my brother, oh, my only friend, adieu! adieu!"

She pressed a kiss upon his brow, and rushed from the room, followed by Nina Gypsy. Prosper was alone. He seemed to be awaking from a troubled dream. He tried to think over what had just happened, and asked himself if he were losing his mind, or whether he had really spoken to Madeleine, and seen Gypsy? He was obliged to attribute all this to the mysterious power of the strange man whom he had seen for the first time that very morning, and who had entered the little parlor.

"I thank you for your past services, monsieur," said Prosper to him, "and decline them for the future, as I have no need of them. If I attempted to defend my honor and my life it was because I hoped that Madeleine would be restored to me. I have been convinced to-day that all is at an end between us; retire from the struggle, and care not what becomes of me now."

Prosper was so decided that M. Verduret seemed alarmed.

"You must be mad," he finally said.

"No, unfortunately I am not. Madeleine has ceased to love me, and of what importance is anything else?"

"Do you suspect nothing? you did not see what was hidden beneath her words? Perhaps it was not a delicate thing to do, but as long as the object is good we need not look too closely at the means. I listened, and I am glad that I did, because now I can say to you, 'Take courage, Prosper; Madeleine loves you; she has never ceased to love you.'"

Like a man who, feeling himself at the point of death, puts faith in the doctor's promises, Prosper saw a ray of hope in M. Verduret's positive assertions.

"Oh," he murmured, suddenly calmed, "if I could only believe——"

"Believe me. I am not mistaken. Ah, you have not guessed, as I did, the sufferings of this generous girl, struggling between her love and what she believes to be her duty. Did not your heart bound at her words of farewell? She is not free. In recalling her promise to you she obeyed a superior, irresistible will. She sacrificed herself, for whom? We shall soon know, and the secret of her self-sacrifice will reveal to us the secret of the plot of which you are the victim."

(To be continued.)

ORTHOGRAPHY IS FAULTY.

Old-Fashioned Spelling Bees Would Be a Good Thing.

There is much complaint that the rising generation can't spell, says the Albany Argus. True, there was complaint that some of the forefathers could not spell. George Washington, Andrew Jackson and other men eminent in our history conducted a spelling-as-you-please. Ancient men of letters were poor spellers, in many instances. Still, the average has gone downhill, it appears. Perhaps the memory of the tingling cheeks, and the ready birch in the teacher's hand, which accompanied a "spell-down," makes us children of an older growth think that we learned to spell better than do these youngsters, nowadays. Usually, with the old methods, it did not pay to miss the same word twice.

"Why is it," the question used to go, "that all the bad spellers become sign painters?" Is it because of the strict union rules, nowadays, that the bad spellers have deserted sign painting and overflowed into the other occupations? Have modern methods of teaching overlooked the desirability of teaching the boys and girls spelling and the three Rs, in order to cram their little heads with ornamental accomplishments?

There has been a widespread belief that the restoration of the old-fashioned spelling-bees, "spell up and spell down," would be a good thing. The Brooklyn Eagle thinks so to such an extent that it has offered prizes, on condition that the public school principals will let their pupils take part in a series of spelling matches. But without success. The principals do not take kindly to the notice. The Eagle says:

"The nub of the matter is just this: The public school children cannot spell. The principals of the high schools know that they cannot spell, as does everybody else who has occasion to receive letters from them. If a series of competitions were held this most troublesome fact of the school situation to those on the inside might be revealed to the great body of parents and taxpayers. Then there might arise such a hue and cry for common sense and the fundamentals of education as would annoy the authorities who now make out our scientific and philosophical course of study, which slights spelling for general information about everybody from Confucius and Buddha down to Admiral Togo. If the school should once begin to make time enough for fundamentals, of which spelling is easily first, there is no telling how many fads and frills would have to be cut out to find the time for essentials."

Righting a Wrong.

"Naw," snapped the marble-hearted female, "I ain't got nothin' cooked fer enny low-down tramp."

"Youse hev got de wrong dope sheet, malam," replied the hungry hobo. "I'm er tramp, all right, all right, but I ain't no low-down one. I'm at de head of me professhun. See?"

A clean and cheerful house makes a happy home.

TO MY MOTHER.

Deal gently with her, Time; these many years
Of life have brought more smiles with them than tears.
Lay not thy hand too harshly on her now,
But trace decline so slowly on her brow
That (like the sunset of the Northern clime,
Where the twilight lingers in the summer time,
And fades at last into the silent night,
Ere one may note the passing of the light),
So may she pass—since 'tis the common lot—
As one who, resting, sleeps and knows it not.

—John Allan Weyth in the Century.

The Intercession of the Child.

"ANY luck, Duke?"

She looked up with a forced smile as her husband entered their—studio, they termed it, but as a matter of fact it was their garret and the only room they had.

He shook his head wearily as he placed the canvases on the table.

"The dealers are full up, and I haven't sold one."

"Never mind," she answered, tenderly—"luck must change soon."

"Heaven only knows that ours has been black enough since we married."

"Dearest," she said, reproachfully, and she gathered closer to her breast the sleeping child, whose face was so dear to her, with the blue eyes of her husband and its halo of fair, curling locks, "there is little Ruth."

Marmaduke Sefton gazed moodily into the fire. His thoughts were far from pleasant ones. Until four years ago he had never known that dread feeling of want. His father, Sir Marmaduke Sefton, a very wealthy man, had completely spoiled him. Not a wish remained unsatisfied, and his allowance was a princely one.

This bringing up had the usual result. Duke made up his mind that he was an artist and nothing would shake him in this connection.

Not even the threat of his father's dire displeasure would persuade him to throw down his brush.

There is no doubt that in time Sir Marmaduke would have relented and have countenanced his son in his artistic ambition, but as luck would have it, Duke went into the country to paint landscapes. There he met Ruth, his wife, the daughter of the vicar, and at once proceeded to make love. A few weeks afterward he proposed to her and was accepted.

Sir Marmaduke did not rage when the engagement was announced to him. He wrote a few lines.

"Marry this girl and I have done with you. Not a sou will you have. The choice remains with you."

Duke did make his choice and married. The inevitable occurred and little Ruth was the crowning blessing to a happy marriage. Not for two years did they begin to feel the pinch of poverty. The ready money which he had and the realization of his jewelry kept them going for that length of time. But the last six months had been a weary fight with starvation.

Their "studio" cost them four shillings a week—an attic off the Gray's Inn road—and their food cost them often less. Their thin faces and wearied smiles were speaking evidence of their life. But little Ruth's bonny face bore signs of a mother's love and care.

"There is plenty of lard and potatoes, let us fry them," Ruth said, cheerfully, as she placed the child on her bed.

The next morning they were awakened by the child's chatter. The sun was shining brilliantly through the windows of the roof.

"I will go the rounds again," he said, as he took up his canvases. "I will be back soon with your breakfast, I hope, darling. Good-bye, little one."

There were tears in his eyes as he leaned to kiss his little girl.

His wife stood looking at the open doorway, through which her husband had disappeared. Then, with a sigh, she started cleaning their room.

The little one looked on for a while. In a few moments she grew tired and wandered to the landing head. She walked down a few steps.

Her mother went on with her work, now and then stopping for a moment to dash the streaming tears from her eyes.

Little Ruth reached the street.

"Which way did dad go?" she lisped to herself.

After a moment's hesitation she turned to the left. A hundred yards ahead she reached Theobald's road and toddled along in the direction of Oxford street.

"I find him soon—dad, dear dad. He is crying, poor dad," she murmured.

A sudden run to cross the street, a shriek, the pulling up of horses, and the little one lay motionless in the arms of a kindly policeman. A quarter of an hour afterward she was being atended to by the house surgeon of a neighboring hospital.

"A simple fracture of the arm," he remarked to the nurse. "It was a providential escape."

"What's your name, little one?" he asked.

"Ruth Sefton," she answered, obediently.

"Where do you live?" was his next question.

"Far away, up high," she replied, pointing with her hand to the ceiling.

"What is the name of the street?"

"Ruth doesn't know," she answered decidedly.

"What is your father's name?" asked the nurse at a hazard.

"Marm'duke Sefton," she replied, proudly, and then cried and moaned with the pain.

A few minutes later Sir Marmaduke Sefton was called to the telephone.

"Halloa!"

"What?"

"A child injured? Why do you telephone me? * * * Father's name Marmaduke Sefton? Am I the only one in the world? * * * The name is certainly an uncommon one, as you say."

His stern face softened for a moment.

"Yes, I'll come round," he said, at last.

A quarter of an hour afterward he entered the children's ward. His face turned white as he gazed into the child's blue eyes.

"Private ward, please," he said, curtly, and at the millionaire's word the little one was taken into another room.

While little Ruth slept Sir Marmaduke stayed by her side looking meditatively at her face.

Duke Sefton returned in about an hour to his house. There was a smile on his face as he entered.

"One sovereign. We shall have a bust, darling."

But his wife was lying in a faint on the floor. Quickly he brought water for her, but when she came round she began to shriek, wildly.

"Little Ruth has gone," was all she could say.

Then ensued twenty-four hours of agony to the distracted parents. In the morning a policeman came and told them where the child was.

They rushed round to the hospital, but when they were received with the utmost respect and taken to a private ward they wondered exceedingly.

With a tearful cry Ruth ran to her child and crooned over her. Duke knelt by the other side of the bed.

"Look!" cried little Ruth. "He says that he is your dad. Why don't you kiss him?"

A tall figure stepped from the corner of the room.

"Duke, forgive me," Sir Marmaduke broke in, eagerly, and there was a tone in his voice that made his son wonder.

For a moment there was silence.

"Kiss him, dad," the child cried.

And the two men's hands met in a hearty grasp, while the mother's tears fell over the child's pillow.—Illustrated Bits.

END OF THE STRAW HAT SEASON.

Peregrination Pete—These will come in handy when I go South for the winter.—Cincinnati Post.

JONAH AND THE WHALE.

etails of His Experience from Rabbinical Legends.

When Jonah went to Joppa he found no ship, for the vessel on which he intended taking passage had sailed two days before his arrival; but God caused a contrary wind to arise and the ship was driven back to port. In his joy Jonah paid his passage money in advance, contrary to the usual custom, which did not require payment until the conclusion of the voyage. According to some, he paid even the full value of the ship, amounting to 4,000 gold denarii. When the storm arose the kind-hearted sailors, evidently respecting the rich passenger, first lowered Jonah only far enough for the water to reach his knees. Seeing that the storm subsided, they drew him back into the ship, whereupon the sea at once arose again. The sailors repeated the operation several times with the same result, each time lowering him deeper and deeper, until finally they threw him into the sea.

The fish which swallowed Jonah was created in the very beginning of the world for that special purpose. Therefore this fish had so large a mouth and throat that Jonah found it as easy to pass into its belly as he would have found it to enter the portals of a very large synagogue. It had eyes which were as large as windows and lamps lit up its interior. According to another opinion, a great pearl suspended in the entrails of the fish enabled Jonah to see all that was in the sea and in the abyss. The fish informed Jonah that he was to be devoured by Leviathan. Jonah asked to be taken to the monster, when he would save both his own life and that of the fish. Meeting Leviathan, he exhibited the "seal of Abraham," whereupon the monster shot away a distance of two days. To reward him for this service the fish showed Jonah all the wondrous things in the ocean (e. g., the path of the Israelites across the Red Sea; the pillars upon which the earth rests). Thus he spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, but would not pray. God then resolved to put him into another fish where he would be less comfortable. Cramped for room and otherwise made miserable, Jonah finally prayed, acknowledging the futility of his efforts to escape from God (Psalm cxxxix).—From volume 8 of Jewish Encyclopedia, just published by the Funk & Wagnalls Company.

MAILS IN TIME OF WAR.

Puzzling Questions Raised by Recent Acts of Russia.

The present war bids fair to lead to some fuller understanding concerning the status of the mails in time of war, says the New York Tribune. Russia and Japan are both apparently acting upon the theory that all mails consigned to a belligerent port are subject to seizure as contraband of war, or at least to detention and search. Japan has contented herself with the seizure of mails sent out from Port Arthur. Russia has gone much farther than that in stopping British and German ships in the Red Sea and taking from them in bulk all mail sacks marked for Japan.

The status of the mails in time of war has been the subject of much controversy, but has not been clearly defined in treaties or in works on international law. Hostile dispatches, military orders and the like, excepting the messages of ambassadors, have been recognized as contraband and, of course, subject to seizure. Not only is the transportation of them equivalent to the carrying of contraband goods, but the fraudulent transportation of them is regarded as a peculiarly hostile act, subjecting the offending vessel to the severest penalty of confiscation. Such is the argument of Sir William Scott. But a regular mail-carrying vessel, which receives such dispatches in the ordinary course of mail carrying, in ignorance of their character, is not, according to Hautefeuille, subject to penalty. The principles apply, of course, only to hostile dispatches. Ordinary mails of commercial, personal or other non-belligerent character should certainly enjoy a different status and would seem to be entitled to exemption from seizure when under a neutral flag.

Mr. Seward long ago expressed the American view of the case when he said that "there is no recognized sanction of the principle that a bona fide, authenticated and sealed public mail of a friendly or neutral power, found on a commercial vessel navigating between two neutral ports, can be violated lawfully, either by a naval officer or a prize court, merely because the vessel on which it is found is searched and seized as contraband."

A Monkey's Intelligence.

An extraordinary instance of the intelligence of a monkey in the Royal Park, Melbourne, Australia, has been chronicled. A monkey in a large cage was trying to reach a nut which had been thrown down on the gravel path. Putting its arm through the bars and stretching as far as possible, it found that the nut was just beyond his reach. There was straw on the floor of the cage, and going to the back, where it evidently expected to find the straw less damaged, it tested straw after straw, discarding them one by one, not thinking them strong enough for the purpose. At last it found a satisfactory one, returned with it to the front of the cage, and very quickly, with this aid, hooked the nut close enough to be picked up.

Old people sometimes complain because they are left alone so much, but the truth is that they would be bored to death if the young people tried to entertain them.