Marseilles!

(Continued.)

'I thank you,' said he. 'I will see Ros tand to-morrow morning. CHAPTER XVI.

THE USURERS.

The Sieur Rostand was a shrewd man-He carried on his infamous business with great ability. To put an honorable stamp upon his vacation, he had opened a banking-house; he paid his license; he was legally established. On occaison, heeven knew how to show a little honesty; he loaned money at the same rate as his brethern, the bankers of the town. But, in his establishment, there was, so to speak, a back shop in which he lovingly elaborated his rascalities.

Six months after the opening of his banking house, he became the manager of a body of usurers, of a scoundrelly band which entrusted him with funds. The combination was of a patriarchal peril, brought him their money and begged him to make the most out of it he could. He thus controlled a rapid circulation of funds to a considerable amount, and could largely take advantage of the need of borrowers. Those who furnished the money remained in the background. He solemnly engaged to loan at fabulous rates, at fifty, sixty and even eighty per cent. Each month, the capitalists met at his house he presented his accounts and divided the profits. And he so arranged matters as to keep the largest share for himself, to rob the robbers.

He always sought those doing a small trade. When a merchant, the day before an obligation fell due, desired to borrow, he imposed exorbitant conditions upon him. The merchant invariably accepted them. Rostand had thus caused more than fifty failures in ten years. Everytown; he did not lose an opportunity of cleared. giving ten francs to secure a return of twenty the next day. He watched the eldest sons of high families, the young reprobates who threw money out of the windows; he filled their hands with gold pieces that they might throw more, and stood below to pick up what fell. He also made trips into the country to tempt peasants, and, when the harvests failed, tore from them, strip by strip, their farms and their lands.

This house was a veritable trap in which fortunes were swallowed up. People, entire families, whom he had ruined springs of his trade. They pointed out his capitalists; rich men, former ministerial officials, merchants and even workmen. But they had no proofs. Rostand's license protected him, and he

he been in danger. The affair made a great noise. A lady belonging to a dispious and had dissipated her fortune by tone of a court tipstaff. giving right and left, by bestowing enornotes; having those forgeries in his hand, he was certain of being paid by the brother, who would be interested in avoiding a scandal. The poor lady signed. Charity had ruined her, and the feeble goodness of her character made her succumb. The usurer had made no It is an excellent affair.' mistake in his calculation: the first notes were paid: but, as new obligations were being constantly presented, the brother lost patience and determined to look into the affair. He went to Rostand and threatened to prosecute him; he said he would rather see his sister disgraced than allow himself to be robbed with impunity by a thief like him. The usurer was almost frightened out of his wits; he surrendered the notes remaining in his possession. However, he did not lose a sou; he had loaned the money to the lady at a hundred per cent.

From that day Rostand was extremely prudent. He managed the funds of the secondrelly band with a craftiness that won him the admiration and confidence of the capitalists. While the latter promenaded in the sunlight, like good people who rob nobody, he remained buried in a large gloomy office; it was there that the gold pieces of society shot up and bore fruit. Rostand had grown to passionately love his trade, his cheating and band used their gains to satisfy their pas- A small affair, but a sure profit—a fixed ing the profit of a month's cheatery. Divide your gold; if you have the least sipation. His sole delight was in being comedies succeeded, and then experiensank into a miserly ecstasy.

Such was the man Revertegat had innocently pointed out to Marius as a man likely to loan him the funds he needed.

The following morning, the young man knocked at Rostand's door about eight o'clock. The house was heavy and which gave the front a glacial bareness. and toothless woman servant, clad in a being humane.' rag of dirty calico, partially opened the door.

'Is Monsieur Rostand in?' asked Marius. 'Yes, but he is engaged,' answered the servant, without further opening the door.

The impatient young man pushed her aside and entered the vestibule.

'Very well,' said he, 'I will wait.'

realized that she could not get rid of francs at eighty per cent. to the Marquis ment of terror and surprise. And when she left him in a sort of antechamber. Tingrey.' The room was small and dark; the wal's And Rostand went on thus for a quar- moment of trouble and stupor.

In front of him, an open door permitted a hoarse, oily voice said: him to see the interior of an office, in the banker's private sanctum.

odors of old paper lingered around him. you announced that figure.' The apartment was miserably filthy, and the bareness of the walls gave it a lugu- usurer coldly. brious aspect. Dust was heaped in the webs on the ceiling. The young man sion in the scoundrel's voice. was almost stifled; the scratching of the more noisy, made him nervous.

Suddenly he heard people talking in At these words there were terrible exthe adjoining room, and, as the words clamations. Marius hoped for a moment reached him clearly and distinctly, he that the wretches would strangle each was a out to discreetly draw back his other. simplicity. People who had the bump chair when certain phrases nailed of usury and were afraid to operate on him to his place. There are conversa- banker, amid the tumult. 'I make their own account, at their own risk and tions to which one can listen; delicacy enough money for you to induce you to was not made to protect the privacy of pardon me, when, by chance, I cause I have been behind that door and have

> A sharp voice, which seemed to be was not my fault. I was robbed!' that of the master of the house, said, with a friendly bluntness:

talk of serious things. The meeting is ed: called to order. I will render a faithful account of my operations for the month, grain merchant, a solvent man, of whom Rostand, who had no reputation to lose, and we will then proceed to divide the I had the most favorable information

individual conversations being brought him, but that I knew an old miser who to a close. Marius, who could not yet would, perhaps 'advance them at an ex- do understand matters, nevertheless felt a orbitant rate. He returned the next day to listen at the doors? Why do he divined that a strange scene was in accept all conditions. I called his atten- office, if you have nothing to ask of me?" progress behind the door.

sembled his worthy assoiates of the scond- months. He consented. You see that it you are a knave! By what right have I relly hand. The young man had present- was an affair of gold. While I went to listened at that door? By the right that thing was grist to his mill; he as readily ed himself at the very hour of the meet- get the funds, he seated himself at my people of probity have to unmask and lent a hundred sous to a dealer in vege- ing, at the moment the manager was desk and signed seventeen notes for a crush scoundrels! Why have I made tables as a thousand francs to a cattle about to exhibit his books, explain his thousand francs each. I glanced over my way to you? To tell you that you

The sharp voice resumed:

month. We cleared then, on average, lock up his notes. I took the papers in fling himself upon Marius, when the

affairs I have transacted.'

was too cunning to allow himself to be seconds. Then arose a rustling of papers, by the angry comments of the assembly. the slight flapping of the leaves of a ledger. 'Admit, Rostand, that you showed a

tinguished family wished to borrow of ations, giving some explanations in regard time you must watch our interests ignobly in the by-ways of a contemptible America at \$2.00 per year him quite a large sum; she was very to each. He had the noisy and nasal closer. Now, let us divide.

mous alms. Rostand, who knew that all to the young Comte de Salvy, a youth of The robbery committed by this Monier the mark! for amusement and the gratiher property was gone, had told her she twenty, who will be of age in nine months, struck him as in the highest degree fication of your tastes! must sign her brother's name to some He hal lost at cards, and his lady-love, amusing, and, at the bottom of his heart, it seems, had exacted from him a large he applauded the knave who had duped sum. I made him sign notes at ninety another knave. day the debtor will have attained his what had been had been said in the ad- be treated with the consideration due to

given her only two or three thousand indignation had seized upon him at the that is why I came in here! francs. She swore that she would bring recital of Rostand's rascalities; he had The young man saw that he would be de Salvy to me bound hand and foot, to felt a desire to enter and strike the man. murdered if he remained. He retired obtain another loan. This time, I will He experienced a sort of bitter gaiety step by step towards the door, sholding

He resumed, after a brief silence:

month, needs a few hundred francs to Rostand would ask of him fifty per cent. against you, I certainly would be the meet his obligations. To-day his stock and impudently rob him. At this thought, party punished. But, at least, I will not belongs almost entirely to us. I have at the thought that on the other side of have to reproach myself with having again loaned him five hundred francs at the door was a reunion of wretches who been in the presence of men such as you, sixty per cent. Next month, if he asks made money on the poverty and shame without casting my contempt in their me for a sou, I will make him fail and of a town, Marius suddenly arose and faces. Would that my words were a redwe will seize his merchandise.

ing, she gets ten and returns me fifteen chink of gold pieces. The usurers were follow you and hoot at you, and then, his robberies. Certain members of the in the evening. I beleive she drinks. dividing their booty. Each was receiv- perhaps, you would profit by the lesson. income of five francs per day.

a crafty knave, he took as much interest favour district. He has ceded to me, ly tickled their flesh, gave forth at When he was in the street, he smiled ced self-satisfaction and the enjoyment thousand. I have expelled our man from voice uttered amounts with a metallic existence the noble and ridculous role of of a triumphant author, afterwards he the premises. His wife and children sharpness. He dealt out a share to each a Done Quixote of justice and honor. came to me and wept over their poverty. of his partners; he named a sum and let He thought that, perhaps, it would tions, will you not?

hundred francs. I threatened him with With pale face, and firm honest looks, he that he would correct no one. But, when not to ruin him by making public his hold. insolvency. I consented to make the The young man had before him a the usurers through instinct, as any man square. All the blinds were closed, and took more than twelve hundred ing in front of his desk; behind him was francs' worth of furniture and linen; that an open safe from which he took handfuls an air of mystery and suspicion. An old is, I gained over four hundred francs by of gold. Around the desk, seated in an

in the assembly. Marius heard the half- share, others counting the money they suppressed laughter of those men, who had just received. Every minute the were gloating over Mr. Rostand's shrewd- banker consulted his accounts, stooping ness. The banker centinued:

three thousand francs loaned at forty per partners were staring greedily at his cent. to Simon, the merchant; fifteen hun- hands. dred francs at fifty per cent, to the cattle At the sound of the door in opening chance had confided to her. The surprised and hesitating servant merchant, Charancon; two thousand every head turned with a sudden move-

such a determined intruder. She decided de Cantarel, a hundred francs at thirty- the usurers perceived Marius, grave and to take him into the second storey, where five per cent. to the son of the notary, indignant, each instinctively placed his

were covered with greenish paper which ter of an hour reading out names and The young man instantly recognized

'I am never deceived,' answered the

Marius, who had almost glued his ear corners, and spiders were spinning their to the door, thought he noticed indeci-'I have not yet told you all,' continued

goose-quill pen, which grew more and Rostand, with embarrassment. 'A week ago, we lost twelve thousand francs!'

'The devil!' Listen to me!' cried the

you to lose in a transaction. Besides, it heard all the details of your meeting.

He uttered these words with all the indignation of an honest man. When

asked me for twelve thousand francs. I There was a slight tumult, a sound of replied that I could not lend them to voice: tion to the fact that the miser demanded In truth, the usurer Rostand had as- five thousand francs interest for six corner of this table. Then I chatted a indignation! few minutes with Monier, who had had exchanged the notes for a similar Various exclamations broke forth, package of derisory bills, smeared with One might say that a displeased crowd ink, to the order of I know not whom,

preferred to hold my tongue! A profound silence reigned for several This recital was frequently interrupted 'Well, we have lost our money, and will their lives! But you, Messieurs, steal Then Rostand enumerated his oper- only get fifty-five per cent. Another disgracefully in the darkness, you slink

'I loaned,' said he, 'ten thousand francs indignation, could not repress a smile. rich! You commit villiany, God save

demand the cession of a piece of property. when remembering his errand in this den | the usurers in check with his glance. At We have still nine months to shear the of cut-throats, What innocence, good the door he paused again. young idiot, whom his mother leaves God! It was here that he had hoped to 'I am well aware, Messieurs,' said he, find the fifteen thousand francs necessary 'that I cannot drag you before human Rostand turned the leaves of the ledger. to save Philippe, and he had waited for justice. Your wealth, your influence and an hour that the banker might turn him your shrewdness render you inviolable. 'Jourdier-a cloth merchant, who, each into the street like a beggar. Or, perhaps If I were stupid enough to struggle

put his hand on the door-knob.

You will give me credit for all such vexa- fall a pile of gold pieces, which struck have been better had he not entered the desk with a ringing sound.

open circle, were the members of the the jailer and the flower-girl, the latter There was a little rustle of satisfaction scoundrelly band, some awaiting their exclaimed: over his ledger, letting the money go give them a certain pliancy of conscience; 'Now, we come to ordinary matters; with the utmost prudence. His worthy thus Fine, altogether upright as she was

hand over his heap of gold. There was a

the dampess had discolored in large figures, enumerating loans which ranged the wretches. He had met them in the patches. The only piece of furniture was from ten to ten thousand francs, and streets, with heads held high, with a straw-bottomed chair; Marius seated ates which varied from twenty to a countenances dignified and honest, and hundred per cent. When he had finished, he had even bowed to some of them, who might have saved his brother. They all 'You must have been wrong in your were rich, honored and influential; which a clerk was writing with a goose- statement a little while ago, my dear among them were former officials, proquill pen, which scratched terribly on friend! You have toiled marvellously perty-holders, men who assiduously fre the paper. To the left of him was this month. All these transactions are quented the churches and the salons of another door, which looked as if it led to excellent. It is impossible for the pro- the town. Marius, on seeing them thus, fits not to average more than fifty-five debased and contemptible, blanching, be-Marius waited a long while. Pungent per cent. You were snre!y deceived when neath his glances, made a gesture of dis gust and disdain.

Rostand rushed towards the intruder His eyes snapped excitedly; his wan lips trembled: all his reddish and wrinkled miser's mask expressed a sort of terrified astonishment.

'What do you want?' asked he of Marius hesitatingly. 'It is not customary to enter houses in this way.

'I wanted fifteen thousand francs,' answered the young man in a cold and jeer

'I have no money,' the usurer hastened to reply, moving towards his safe. 'Oh! rest easy: I have abandoned the idea of being robbed. For an hour past

This declaration fell like the blow of a club, and made all the members of the scoundrelly band turn away their heads. 'Messieurs, we are all present; let us quiet was once more restored, he proceed- These men yet possessed the shame belonging to their honorable station; some This is the whole story: Monier, a of them hid their faces in their hands. recovered himself little by little. He approached Marius and cried, in a loud

"Who are you? By what right lively curiosity take possession of him; and informed me that he was ready to you make your way into my private 'Who am I?' said Marius, in a low calm tone. 'I am an honest man and

Rostand trembled with rage. He did not Before going into details, I must tell arisen; after having pocketed the money, seek to explain to himself the presence you that the results of this month have he made his preparations to depart. of this avenger, who hurled truths in his Globe' and the 'Home-Maker.' not been as satisfactory as those of last When he had gone, I thought I would face. He was about to cry aloud and sixty per cent, but now we have made my hand. Just think of it!-the knave latter stopped him with an energetic

'Be quiet!' thundered he. 'I am on the point of going; I am sufficating here. was protesting in murmurs. There ap- without signature. I was robbed. I But I did not wish to withdraw without pear to be at least fifteen persons in the nearly had a rush of blood to the head. I revealing myself a little. Ah! Messieurs ran after the thief, who was tranquilly you have a furious appetite. You share Messieurs,' continued Rostand, with a walking in the sun on the Cours. At the among you the tears and despair of certain jeering bitterness, 'I have done first word I addressed to him, he called families with a terrible gluttony; you were cited. Everybody knew the secret all I could; you ought to thank me. The me a usurer and threatened to drag me gorge yourselves with robberies and business grows more difficult daily. But before the commissaire de police. This rascalities! I am glad to be able to here are my accounts; I will rapidly Monier has the reputation of being an disturb your digestion a trifle, and make make you acquainted with some of the upright and honest man, and, ma foi! I you shiver with uneasiness to the depths of your cowardly hearts!'

Rostand strove to interrupt him. He continued in a more resonant voice: vocation! And, worst of all, you can live Marius, despite his anguish and his without being knaves! You all are America.

Some of the usurers arose menacingly 'You have never seen the anger of an honest man, have you?' added Marius days for eighteen thousand francs. These He knew now what was Rostand's jeeringly. 'The truth irritates and notes are dated, as they should be, on the business. He had not lost a word of frightens you. You are accustomed to majority. The Salvys own large estates. joining room, and he had easily imagined an upright people, and, as you have se the scene that had been going on the re. arranged matters as to hide your infamies A fawning murmur greeted the usurer's Leaning slightly forward on his chair, and preserve everybody's esteem, you his ear strained, he had seen with his have at last grown to believe in the re-'The next day,' continued he, 'I received | mind's eye the usurers wrangling, with spect accorded to you hypocrisy! Well, a visit from the Comte's lady-love; she greedy looks and faces contracted by the I desired that once in your lives you was exasperated, the young man having evil passions which agitated them. Deep might be insulted as you deserve, and

hot iron to brand your foreheads with 'Marianne-a huckster. Every morn- In the apartment was heard the sharp infamy. The crowd in that case would This money they were counting, bit of probity left, it will burn your hands! 'Laurent-a peasant of the Roque- the music of which voluptuous- Marius closed the door and departed.

in each of his operations as in a poignant strip by strip, a piece of land he times the sound of sobs; one might say sadly. He saw life stretch out before owned near the Arc. This property is that the usurers' victims were lamenting. him, with all its shame and misery, and worth five thousand francs; it cost us two Amid the echoing silence, the banker's said to himself that he was filling in

Rostand's office. He had grown indig-Andre, a miller. He owed us eight Then Marius turned the door-knob. nant to no purpose whatever; he knew a seizure. Then he hastened to beg me stood or several seconds on the thres- indignation urged him on, he altogether lost control of himself; he had attacked seizure myself, without the aid of a bailiff strange spectacle. Rostand was stand- would crush base and dangerous reptiles.

CHAPTER XVII. TWO INFAMOUS SCOUNDRELS.

When Marius related his adventure to

"We have not advanced a step! Why did you get angry? That man, perhaps, would have loaned you the money." Young girls have infatuations which would, doubtless, have turned a deaf ear to Rostand's rascalities, and, on occasion, would even have made use of the secrets To be continued.

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