

LITERATURE, &c.

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THE LAWYER'S FIRST CLIENT.

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In the year 1782 there came from Paris a lawyer to establish himself in Arras, his native town. He was young, full of scholastic learning, but fuller still of Rousseau, whom he worshipped, and Voltaire, whom he detested. Very young, having, in fact, but little passed the age of boyhood, he assumed a very humble appearance. Too poor to afford a servant, he took a young and attached sister, an orphan like himself, to reside with him as house-keeper; and this done, while waiting for business, he devoted himself to study and composition. Small and even awkward was the little room which served as the student's cell, until it should become the advocate's chambers; but scrupulous was its neatness, as if to vie with that of the person of its owner, whose black shoes, shining silver buckles, unspotted white stockings, and ruffled shirt, showed one fall of precision and method.

Early one morning he sat in his studio, an open book in his hand, but not reading. He was dreaming, as those dream who, without being exactly ambitious, foresee the future greatness of their part in the world's history. He was a small, pale young man, of a bilious complexion, with spectacles shading his eyes, and with a nervous twitching in his face and hands that seemed to denote a spirit restless and uneasy within. Near him sat his sister, who having put away the breakfast things, and placed a plate of oranges on the table, had taken in hand some domestic work suited to her age and taste. The young man was at his third orange, a fruit which was constantly devoured, when there was heard a stamping of feet on the landing without, followed by a ring of the bell.

The young woman hastened to open. There stood on the threshold a little old man who, though poor in dress, and hungry and weary in look, wore the costume of a marquis. There were the laced ruffles and red heels, the sword, and every other necessary accessory, even to the look of self-sufficiency and importance, which Moliere's satire had not eradicated. He seemed to hesitate, though the door was open, as if he waited to be quite sure of being right.

'Enter,' said the young lawyer, rising and laying down both his book and his visions: 'I am very happy to see you Monsieur le Marquis.'

'More than any of your profession has said for a long time,' replied the little nobleman, bowing himself into a chair, and laying his old hat upon the ground; 'for I am poor, a bore, and have rich and great men for my enemies.'

'Ah!' said the young lawyer, with one of his nervous twitches, 'and they like not to see you?'

'Certainly not,' he continued, shaking his head, 'for though my cause be rich I am poor.'

'You come to offer it to me,' said the young man drily.

'It's not worth your acceptance, my dear young sir,' said the other with a doleful mixture of hope and dignity.

'You are, Monsieur le Marquis, my first client,' continued the lawyer. 'I know not what your case may be; but you vow, with the frankness of a man, that you are poor, and here the speaker frowned and pressed his teeth together—' that you have rich and great men for your enemies. I am your advocate.'

'My dear sir!'—said the marquis.

'Excuse me,' interrupted the young man, who had been eyeing his client through his spectacles. 'But you have no doubt a long story to tell. You would not wish to deprive me of my breakfast?'

'Not at all,' said the other coolly.

'But, Monsieur le Marquis, if I might presume to request you to keep me company, we can thus talk more freely. Sister let us have breakfast.'

The Marquis made a frigid excuse, to which no attention was paid, the sister smiled, and felt she could have kissed her brother, and then ran out to prepare the young lawyer's second repast.

'You have, I see, a written statement,' said the juvenile man of law, as the old nobleman opened a roll which he held in his hand.

'Yes, a full history. It is long, young man, but so has been my existence, of which this is the history; and speaking thus, he adjusted his spectacles, and began to read. At the first word the man of law started, for the name revealed a case which had been before the Cour d'Artois eight years, but which, from the powerful position of the defendants, had never come to a final hearing. Lawyer after lawyer had been bought off, until the whole bar of the *etat* was bribed against the poor old man. His case however, was very simple.

Twenty years before, he had married his only daughter and child into a high and noble family. The more richly to endow her, he had given as her marriage portion every acre of property he had in the world, houses, castles, &c. When the contract was drawn up, his *homme de confiance* inserted a clause by which the whole returned to him in case of his daughter's death before his, and by which free use of the whole was given him during life. For twelve years all went well, and then the one link of peace was broken, for his daughter died. Her husband and husband's family at once resisted

the return of the property, and went to law with their aged relative, who, after eight years of weary and tedious existence, had resolved on trying the talents and generous enthusiasm of a mere boy, for his avocet was scarcely three-and twenty.

Though he knew the case well, the young man listened—it was ever his wont—without interruption, except to place breakfast before his client; but his mind was not always on the word he heard. His spirit overleaped the present. He was at length a man; for one his senior in years leant upon him for advice and support, and his race of life had begun. But vainly that strange being sought to raise further the thick veil 'beyond;' he saw nothing but void and night, filled, it is true, with scenes, actions, and moving creatures, but shapeless, meaningless, and without form.

'There is a case!' said the marquis in conclusion, looking hopefully at his legal adviser.

'There is!' exclaimed the young lawyer, starting; 'and I will this day and night write a memoir, which to-morrow shall be printed, and in a few days all France shall ring with your wrongs.'

The little marquis rose and seized the ether's hand, for these few words showed his adviser to be in earnest. The man who was capable of printing such an attack on a rich and powerful family was not to be suspected of retreating. After a few hurried words of thanks, he took his hat to go leaving the manuscript on the table.

'I will not stay, young man,' he said, with a voice thick with emotion, 'for I shall hinder you from studying the matter. When may I return?'

'Stay,' said the other musing. 'By six this afternoon I will have half done: I will then pause to dine. If Monsieur le Marquis will honour me, we can then read it over together.'

The noble client of the young man looked hard in the other's face, as if to read some meaning in this invitation; but his advocet was poring over the huge statement which he had given him, and he could detect nothing but legal acumen in the expression of his face.

'I will dine with you,' he said, 'and then he thought to himself, 'I will repay him when I gain my cause, if I can repay such services.'

And with a ceremonious and courtly bow the marquis went out.

'A client at last,' exclaimed the young man, with a smile which was almost savage; 'and a grand case too. What subjects for invective against justice, against oppression, against tyranny.'

'But Francois,' said his sister with a smile, 'what am I to get for dinner?'

'Nothing more than usual, except in quantity; and now my dear girl leave me to my labours.'

With pleasure Francois. But though I could kiss you for your noble conduct to that worthy old man, do look out for a little business too that will pay.'

'Pay,' said the young man, in a voice which was slightly shriller than usual, because it was raised; 'never, sister. I know not why, but I do believe all my clients will be poor.'

And siezing pen and ink, he began to write with that energy and perseverance which were ever the characteristics of the man; nor did he cease until a ring at the door announced the return of his client, whose delight at the progress made was sincere and energetic. The sister, without delay or ceremony, at once served dinner, and down they sat to refresh exhausted nature. The old nobleman, long mured to disappointment, and to whom a gleam of sunshine was like the opening of a life-dungeon, was little hopeful, and even desponding; but the earnest discourse of his advocet somewhat aroused him, and ere dinner was concluded, and when a quiet bottle of wine had warmed the old man, he began to see a path leading out of the desert, in which for eight long years he had wandered.

'Monsieur le Marquis,' said the young man at length, 'I will now read my memoir.'

The client bowed his head to listen, with ears more charmed than those of lovers waiting the first fond avowal of returned affection. The lawyer read. His protraction, though slightly tinged with collegiate pedantry, with that half learned Greek and Latin lore that made bastard Roman of the French of the last century, was vigorous, and above all, audacious; and seven years before the Revolution, he made use of many of those arguments which afterwards brought it about. The rich and powerful family which held the property was most unsparingly handled: no epithet which indignation and generous hate of wrong could invent was spared.

'And you will print and sign your name to this?' said the client with a doabifut shake of his head.

'Why not?' replied the other drily. 'Then my case is won, for it will reach the throne. As for you, young man, I need not promise you any support when reinstated: you will not require it.'

Not quite three months after this interview, the Marquis de Lioncourt Chateaupret took possession of the whole of his property, the oppressors was disgraced at court, and the young lawyer found business crowd upon him sufficiently rapid to warrant the prophecy of his first client.

More than eleven years had passed, and a far different scene presented itself. Paris was at the same time the head-quarters of an army and the highest tribunal of justice, legislative, and executive. Without, Europe was in arms against the Revolution, which made superhuman exertions to defend itself. Its laws ordained that every French citizen was perma-

nently in requisition for the army, and that an extraordinary quantity of arms should be made. The young men were sent to the army, the married men were employed in transporting and preparing materials of war, women made clothes, and attended to the hospitals, children made lint, the old men roused others to enthusiasm by harangues in the public places. Palaces were turned into barracks, and churches into warehouses. All horses were placed at the disposal of government, and in fact every measure taken by the terrible committee which governed France, to repel the invader. To punish the treacherous, the inimical, the indifferent, the suspected; the fearful guillotine was at work day and night, while a mass of prisons were filled by those denounced by the vengeance of the laws.

It was early morning at the Luxembourg—one of the many prisons of the gloomy Reign of Terror—that era when, for causes not to be inquired into here, the air was thick with blood, when the atmosphere seemed crimson, and when grass grew in all the rich quarters of the city. The mass of prisoners—aristocrats, Federalists, Girondists, Brissotists, Fayettestists, and others, congregated together in their palace made prison—were dispersed in knots, conversing or reading the public prints. In one corner were a batch about to appear before the revolutionary tribunal, in whose pale faces there could be traced a ray of satisfaction at the prospect of being removed by death from wearisome confinement; others, whose fate was less near, spoke carelessly of the events of the day, criticised the leading men of the hour, or expressed their hope of the triumph of this or that party—cautiously, because no one knew but that his neighbour was a spy placed in the prison by Herbert or Marat to seek the discovery of plots.

Apart from the rest was a group of touching interest.

On a rude bench, in a dark and gloomy corner, sat an old man, very old and very feeble. He was seventy, and his spare gray hairs seemed to remove all idea of his having been capable of conspiring against the Republic. And yet he was a secret agent of the exiled Bourbons, and had been caught in the act of organizing a rising against the Convention. In those days, when death was the penalty of falling for those in power, there could be no shadow of hope for this old man. He was guilty of conspiring against the government, and had he succeeded in his end, would have led all who then ruled to the scaffold. He complained not, for as he would feebly say, 'It were they or I; had I gained, they had fallen. Victory is with them, they are right to use it.'

While none hoped, all pitied and sorrowed for that grey headed old man, but none more seriously and more effectually than the young and lovely widow of a general officer, who had been convicted of secreting a treasonable correspondence. No sooner did she see how weak and exhausted the aged prisoner was, than forgetting herself, she piously devoted her whole thoughts to one who reminded her of happy hours, of soft and gentle memories, of the delightful and sunny period of existence, when she knew no other care than to see to a beloved and invalid parent's wants. She brought to him his food, assisted him in his walks about the Common Hall, read to him from the terrible chronicles of the day, and more than all besides, talked to him of a dear and only child long lost to him, but whose face was ever fresh before him, as when in baby prattle it called him father.

'But I will be your child,' she would say. 'Once out of this gloomy prison, we will fly to the country; till war ceases to desolate the land, and infuriate and demoralise the people, we will live in secret retirement; and think you that you have reformed your daughter—in me, my good, good father.'

'Amelie,' would the old man reply, 'we shall never leave this place but to ride in the fatal *charrette*. I am a conspirator against the Republic—its enemy, I am in its power: I must die.'

'No, no,' cried Amelie, on the day in question, with a shudder, which plainly told how little confidence she had in her own words: 'never will they slay you.'

'Child, child! the men who govern France sit on the summit of a dreadful volcano: whoever seeks to hurl them down and fails, must perish. I am a dead man, 'You child,' he added, fondly gazing on her lovely face, 'you may—nay, will escape.'

'I have no trace of hope,' said she mournfully.

'The Citizen Liancourt,' thundered a hoarse voice.

The pair raised their heads, and saw six men, whose huge cutlasses, vast tri-coloured cockades, loose coats, coarse hats and shoes, with shining muskets, showed them to be some of the national guard. Near them stood the jailer.

'Here,' replied the old man, rising and advancing, leaning on the arm of his fair and trembling aid.

'Prepare for a removal, Citizen,' said the chief of the band, roughly, but not brutally.

'Without my child?' exclaimed the old man, clinging to his supporter, and calling her by the name she had adopted.

'Faith of a republican,' said the chief, observing his feeble aspect; 'the *Citoyen Représentant*—here he glanced at a paper—' said nothing of a daughter; but that can be easily corrected. En route.'

The old man pressed fondly on the arm of Amelie, who, too accustomed to the rapid and dramatic course of events in those days, felt no surprise at her sudden departure; and though she left behind her worldly wealth, in a small box of clothes, made no observation

Though carriages were generally abolished as signs of aristocracy, yet a vehicle stood at the door—one of those used by the leading men of the Committee of Public Safety to return home in after late debates at the Convention—and into this the old man and his devoted child of adoption entered. The sans culotte guard mounted their horses, and the cortege moved slowly towards the Seine.

'I hope we are not to be taken to the horrid Conciergeri?' said Amelie shuddering.

'Heaven only knows!' said the old man: 'let us be thankful we are not separated.'

With these words all conversation ceased, both gazing out curiously at the streets of Paris, to which they had been many months strangers. Presently they started, for they were crossing the bridge which led to the Place de la Revolution, and a sudden turn of the carriage made both close their eyes. The guillotine *en permanence* had struck them to stone. Next minute they were sobbing on each other's bosom. Escaping thus the of knots idlers, and the degrading spectacle of the ferocious women called the 'furies of the guillotine,' who lurked round in waiting for prey to torture and insult, they roused themselves, when having crossed the Rue de la Republique (now Rue Royale,) they halted before a house of mean appearance in the Rue St. Honore.

Both gazed curiously at what they expected to be their new prison; but ere they could examine much, two or three fanatical and sombre-looking men had rushed forward and opened the carriage door. The chief of the sans culottes made a sign to them to descend, which Amelie did with alacrity to assist the old man. This done, they passed through a carpenter's yard, where lay huge piles of timber, entered a little court, and then ascending a stair, was ushered into a large apartment. It was a bedroom and study both. On the bed lay papers, maps, open books; on the table a huge mass of ugly scrawled manuscript, and of English newspapers, which the occupant of the room was eagerly devouring, while every now and then he muttered to himself impatiently, 'Pit, always Pit, and George, and me—my armies, my troops, my resources! Miserable li-bellers—hump!'

The man raised his head, and the lawyer and his first client were once more in presence.

'Citoyen Robespierre!' cried the old man. 'Citoyen Liancourt!' replied the Dictator of France with a smile—'sit down. What sayest thou to breakfasting with me again? My sister will serve us as usual.'

The old man sank into a chair overwhelmed with emotion.

'Citoyen,' said Robespierre after causing Amelie to be seated, 'I have, not, thou see'st, forgotten my first client, and my last; for I was last night thy advocet for two hours before the committee. St. Just said thou wast a traitor; and so thou art: but surely I may for once offend my colleague by saving even one guilty against his country.'

'Against the Republic,' stammered the old man scarcely recovered from his surprise.

'Which is thy country and mine just now,' said the deputy of Arras, dryly. 'Bet let us not dispute. We differ in opinion; thou servest one master, I another; both hard to serve, and thankless; but in serving thine thou hast forfeited thy life!'

'Which you are about to save?'

'I am, my old, my first client,' said Robespierre sadly. 'That was a happy day, citizen Liancourt—a happy day; I had not then the fate of thirty millions of men on my head, and all Europe leagued against me. Ah, my friend, little dost thou know the thankless office so many envy me. I neither rest nor sleep—I am no more myself—I am weary, and he slipped as usual some comomile tea: 'but in revolution one can but advance—or die.'

'You are far from that citizen,' put in the still wondering marquis.

'I know not. The fearful torrent rolls on apace, and must be stopped.'

'Men say not wrongly, then,' cried the royalist, 'when they think you wish to stay this fearful tide?'

'To will and to do is different,' said the tettering Dictator. 'Just now it is in my power to save thee: no man knows how soon I may be the weaker of the two. Let us talk of thy safety and of that of thy friend.'

Robespierre then explained that he had provided a passport for the Citizen Scipio Mentor, *en mission* for the frontier, to which he now added, without asking a single question, the name of his daughter. This, signed as it was by himself, with a few assignats, would enable the old man, he said, to gain the border, and there end his days in peace.

'And now my good old friend, farewell! We are embarked on different roads. 'Thou art for the old, I for the new. Thorny is my path, and difficult, and severely shall I be judged; but, and he took the hand of the old man, 'let me have the satisfaction of knowing that amongst those who do not wholly condemn me is my first client.'

'My saviour and that of my child!' replied the aged royalist fervently, 'fear not my blame. I will do you justice at least. It is not for me to judge your acts and motives.'

'And now my friends, once more, farewell! There wait without ambassadors, deputations, proconsuls, supplicants, the whole crowd that wait on power, and I must meet them. We shall never meet again. Think of me, for the few hours I have to live, not too ill.'

And Robespierre, after pressing the hands of both, led them to a side door, where his faithful sister awaited them with breakfast. The meal, gratefully accepted and despatched, the