

## Literature, &amp;c.

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AUNT AGNES'S WILL.

'My cousin, you are in my last will and testament.' The full force of these words will be perfectly understood when it is known that she who pronounced them was old and rich, and that he who listened to them was as greedy as a pike. Mademoiselle Agnes Duperron had no less than forty thousand francs of Revenue. She was upwards of sixty years of age, and one of her sides was completely paralysed, so it may be judged whether she was likely to be without friends or not. One of the most assiduous, most affectionate, and attentive of her devoted well-wishers was her cousin Gigandet; and this same day, when these remarkable words were uttered (which was the twentieth of January, or the day of St. Agnes), he had come to offer his first compliments and a bouquet of flowers to his most respected and respectable cousin. He had presented himself at the mansion before she had arisen from her couch, and stood with his bouquet in one hand and his hat in the other, repeating to himself for a full hour in a low voice, the compliments which he intended to address to her, until she was ready to receive him. Touched by an affection so ardent, Mademoiselle had invited her good cousin to partake of her breakfast, consisting merely of a little toasted bread and butter, which was moistened with coffee, slightly coloured with cream; but Gigandet in the glow of his generous enthusiasm, had solemnly declared that 'it was the best cream, the best coffee, the best butter, and the best bread that he had eaten during all the period of his mortal life.'

The effect produced by an actor's appearance is termed in the slang of the theatres *physique*. We wish that we could convey to our readers an exact impression of M. Gigandet's *physique*. He was a meagre ghostlike man, a portrait of whose counterpart might be seen any day stuck up in the fields of Brittany during the potato season to frighten away the crows. His long, pale face was armed with a long-pointed nose; and as it was planted between two little holes, from which sparkled two little restless twinkling eyes, it might have struck even the dullest imagination as a curious resemblance to the snout of a weasel. The disproportion that existed between the superior and inferior parts of his person was also as remarkable as it was strange. It was the corporeal frame of a dwarf upon the legs of a giant—it was an infant upon stilts. The breakfast being finished, M. Gigandet seated himself opposite to Mademoiselle Duperron, and it was while gazing on his long thin legs, which stuck out in parallel lines from the fauteuil, and effectually occupied the whole length of the hearthstone, the old dame had expressed her sympathy for him in those touching words—'Rest satisfied, my cousin, you shall be remembered in my last testament.' At these words, he threw such a beaming glance from his little eyes upon his dearly beloved cousin as told the fullness of his soul; but, repressing the excess of his joy, he smiled in the most modest natural way in life, and in a voice trembling with emotion exclaimed—'Oh, my cousin, you have plenty of time to think of that.'

'Oh, that would be too much of a good thing,' said the old lady, shaking her head with a serious air. 'What is the use of remaining in a state of illusion? I know very well that my day is quickly coming, and I have no right to complain. I have been sixty-four years already in this world, and, between you and me, I have not wasted many of them.'

'I know that,' cried M. Gigandet, with a gentle sigh, as he pressed his hands together; 'yours has indeed been a life full of good works.'

'We shall not speak on that point,' interrupted Mlle. Duperron, modestly. Then pursuing her former train of observation, she smilingly said, 'It is not with the notary as with the doctor however—the notary never kills any body when you call him; so that I fear no danger in immediately making my testament.'

The door opened at that instant, and Mlle. Duperron had to receive a second cousin, a second compliment, a second bouquet, and a second embrace. When the usual ceremonials had been finished, Gigandet, assuming that mysterious tone of raillery so characteristic of a man who supposes that he has gained an advantage, exclaimed, 'Are you there, cousin Baculard?'

'Yes,' replied the other, unable to conceal his spite; 'and although late, it is not because I want the good will to be here as soon as you, but I live at some distance, as my cousin knows; and another thing, my legs do not happen to be so long as yours.'

Next to the fear of losing money, there was nothing in the world that Gigandet so dreaded and hated as allusions to his legs. His age was naturally of so cadaverous a hue, that his passion therefore, did not now add anything to its pallor; but his brow lowered and puckered, and his lips trembled, as, addressing his notary with a glance of sovereign contempt and a disdainful smile, he answered, 'I do not wish to deny your ardour, cousin Baculard. You blow your trumpet too loud for any one to call that in question.'

In order to comprehend the full force of M. Gigandet's reply, it must be recorded that M. Baculard was in every point his very opposite in personals. The latter was fat and rubicund

and carried upon a pair of the very shortest legs a most voluminous and rotund body. Although still very young, he was most extraordinary plethoric, and, as this plethora had found access to his lungs, he was also very asthmatic. At thirty years of age he had fallen in love, and the object of the dear, insidious, subduing sentiment was a rich and beautiful heiress. Unfortunately for his suit, whilst in the midst of a warm and ardent declaration of his passion, his respiration suddenly failed him, and the youthful, simpering, blushing beautiful object of his love, having profited by this interruption to burst into laughter, the indignant Baculard resolved thenceforth to eschew the sex; but still one remnant of weakness remained entrenched in his great heart, to show that he was human—he could no more philosophise over his asthma, than Gigandet over his legs.

Mlle. Duperron sunk back in her seat, and secretly rejoiced at this altercation, just as a mischievous urchin would be amused by two curs worrying each other in the street for a bone which was snatched away from them after all; nevertheless, fearing the noisy consequences of a protracted display of this kind between her relatives, she judged it prudent to interfere. Cousin Baculard, said she, in as winning a way as an aged dame with her infirmities could assume, 'I have equal confidence in the strength of your affection as in that of my cousin Gigandet, and I am equally grateful to you as to him. Yes my friends—my good friends,' added she, with overflowing heartiness, and stretching out to them the only hand which was now at her or anybody's service, 'you are both equally dear to me, and you shall both be remembered in my will.'

Believing that the last sentence was of the most fruitful significance to her relatives, and that the expression of it had given her the right to be now alone, Mlle. Duperron intimated to the gentleman her desire to avail herself at present of that right; and these two worthies, who seemed walking illustrations of the two extremes in the chain humanity, took their leave. They descended the stairs side by side, in silent meditation; for they were both busy discussing with themselves whether it would be advantageous to maintain their present enmity, or to form a mutual alliance. Accident we shall see, declared for the latter alternative.

As they reached the vestibule, a young woman passed rapidly before them, and began lightly to ascend the stairs which they had just quitted. Her dress of indiana, her simple little chip-bonnet, and her leather shoes were not very striking indications of opulence; and if any body, even independent of these evidences, had still retained doubts of her social position, the little bandbox which she carried would have sufficed to dissipate them. But her little shoe, although so coarse in its material, inclosed a foot so light and handsome, and her dress of humble stuff was arranged so gracefully on so lovely and faultless a form, and from beneath her bonnet escaped such a rich profusion of long, shining, waving, fair curls, that nobody who looked upon her with an impartial eye for a moment would not have asked if one so rich in nature's jewels was scant of earthly treasures. As she lightly tripped up the stairs as graceful as a fawn, the two cousins seemed to have taken root upon the straw mat which lay at the bottom of the first flight of steps; and Gigandet whose awful brow had lowered portentously at the sight of that young woman, quickly interrupted, with an elbow stroke in the region of the ribs, the mute contemplation of the profound Baculard, and at the same time exclaimed, 'Who could doubt, cousin Baculard, as you look at that baggage, that you have not a right to hate her perfidious sex for ever?'

'Oh, hem,' said Baculard, laying his hand ungracefully on his side, and drawing a painful respiration which much resembled croak of a frog—'Oh, hem, cousin Gigandet, you must not suppose me influenced by past ideas altogether. Exceptions don't form rules.'

Alas, for the majesty of human nature! Baculard still retained a portion of that amiable weakness called vanity; and as he did not wish M. Gigandet, above every one else, to suppose that he was *hors de combat* in the tilting-ground of Cupid, it was not very likely that he should at once assent to that dear relative's proposition. In addition to this secret sentiment so common to fat men, M. Baculard's pectoral muscle was suffering from the application of Gigandet's spear-like elbow, and this circumstance conducing to ruffle his otherwise not very equable temper, did not incline him to a ready recognition of even his strongest convictions. 'I cannot confirm your assertion,' continued M. Baculard, looking very pompous and very much inclined for a little argumentation; 'I am impelled to dissent from you in favour of one little exception.'

M. Gigandet looked hard at his cousin, and then his little twinkling eyes glanced brightly up the stair; and then, in a tone meant for a very grave one, but which bore a strong resemblance to the squeak of a juvenile pig, he exclaimed, 'In favour of that low-horn creature whom you have now recognised?'

'Recognised!' cried Baculard, in a tone of surprise, as he turned on his kinsman; 'I vow to you, cousin, that I have seen her for the first time.'

'In that case I beg your pardon,' said Gigandet, bending his frame to a bow. 'You do not know, then, that that little mix is the most dangerous enemy to your interests and mine?'

'That puppet that just now ascended the stair, cousin Gigandet!' cried Baculard with a start.

Yes, that young gillflirt there,' answered Gigandet; 'for she is the daughter of William Duperron, our valuable relative's veritable nephew.'

Baculard's entire frame trembled, from the point of his toes to the summit of his heavy confounded looking head; and from the depths of his bodily gravity issued, as if with a desperate struggle, the ejaculation of 'Misericorde!'

'And you can easily guess,' continued Gigandet, 'that it is not without some motive that she mounts that stair to the house of her grandaunt, with such a gay, saucy air upon the morning of St. Agnes. I can see through her motive, Baculard,' said he, with sundry knowing winks, 'his treason, my cousin. Ah you have good reason to detest women. I know as well as you of what they are capable—and this one in particular. I can perceive her from this spot putting on her affected airs before her aunt, modulating her voice to the sweetest tone before she speaks to her, and then cajoling her with a thousand blandishments, and kisses, and flatteries, to seduce her.' Here Gigandet having exhausted his strength, paused, looked solemn, and then casting up his eyes resumed, in a colloquial way, his reflections, 'Old dotards have such feeble minds! She may leave all to her because she is her niece, as if that relationship was sufficient reason for so doing. A shop girl!' cried Gigandet, his virtuous heart swelling indignantly, at the idea of such as her having any claim upon any body's affection or estate; 'a beggar,' he added with all the force of venom in his frame; 'a gadding magpie, to boot, I assure! And shall we allow her?' he exclaimed with great energy—'shall we allow her to rob us of our beautiful success, cousin Baculard?'

'No, truly,' replied Baculard, in an explosion of indignation which had been communicated to him by the noble spirit of his kinsman; 'we must not allow ourselves to be thus despoiled.' He paused, and gasped, and then enquired eagerly, while the perspiration rolled down his face, 'Do you know of any means to prevent his designs?'

'Mlle. Duperron is a very good woman,' said Gigandet with a smile, 'and without doubt holds morality in high esteem, being now sixty-four years of age.—If she should come to understand, then, that her niece—' and here Gigandet winked his eyes very hard, while Baculard, eagerly interrupting him exclaimed with a knowing smile,

'I have you. I will undertake to find the information.'

'And while you are gathering the information,' said Gigandet, coolly, 'the testament will be made, and that second attack of paralysis which we hope for, and which I begin to fear will have taken place.' It would take some time to get up the true case,' he continued, 'although of course, you know we could easily prove it. I am sure that I hate deceit, exclaimed the virtuous man, laying his hand upon the place beneath which a heart should have beat; 'but with a young shop girl so young and so pretty, we run no risk of falling into a mistake.' 'A mistake' repeated Gigandet, laying his hand upon his cousin's shoulder, and winking at him as if his eyes had been two Will-o'-the-wisps dancing before a prize ox, to lead it into a quagmire. 'It comes all to the same thing, you know' he continued with a most genial smile. 'There must be no time lost: the information must be furnished directly; and your business must be to find proofs.'

Baculard was not so bright in the moral eyes as to see any objection to come to this conclusion, and so the thing was settled.

The two wiseacres, like many other people in this world who think themselves very wise, took what they supposed to be true for granted, without any demur or question. Bless us some folks never make mistakes; they are never for a moment divergent from the true centre of judgment; they have such subtle and perfect intuitions, such clear perceptions of everything according to their own vanities, that they never take the trouble to exercise the vulgar attribute of reflection. Gigandet and Baculard, full of this beautiful and enviable state of presence, never took the trouble to inquire whether the damsel ascended to the house of Mlle. Duperron, or whether she was even known to her. Blinded by that all-blinding passion avarice, they assured themselves of acting most excellently and casually, and so they despatched to their respectable relative a letter full of the usual anonymous protestations of pure motives and grief, and so forth, but containing the grievous intimation that the conduct of Louis Duperron, her grandniece, the shop girl in the Rue Neuve des Petites Champs, was so scandalous and disgraceful to the name she bore, that she no longer merited her aunt's countenance or indulgence.

Mlle. Agnes Duperron, the grandaunt of the poor Louise, was a native of Bourges, and daughter of the printer to the archbishop. Her father had reared her with great care, and with all that strictness which pertained to his position in the world, and his peculiar connection with the cathedral. Nature, which had given, to her a most beautiful form, had also endowed her with one of the sweetest, richest, and most flexible of voices. Struck with the warblings of the child, the chapel organist had asked permission of his friend, her father, to cultivate the insipient powers of his daughter, and in the solitude and solemn presence of the vaulted church he taught her his art, until her voice filled with the music of her soul; would rise and fall in such rich and thrilling melody that her master often forgot that she was his pupil, and would weep as his feelings were subdued by her song. As she increas-

ed in years her powers as a cantatrice became strengthened and elevated, she added her fine natural capacities an ardent zeal which rendered the labours of the organist and her own progress easy and rapid. Not in all the city of Bourges was there a more beautiful maiden than Agnes; and when the full clear swell of the organ lent its hundred voices in the cathedral to the solemn music of the organ, the sweetest most angelic voice in all that tuneful band was that of the printer's daughter.

In 1785 a troop of opera-singers paid a visit to Bourges. The organist proud of his pupil, and full of the glory of teaching such a songstress, had boasted to the first tenor of the troop, that in six months he might have such a cantatrice in his band as had seldom before trod the operatic boards; and Agnes being introduced to the opera-singer, was forthwith induced to study Italian, and despite the entreaties of her family, to appear upon the stage. Upon the assumed name of Signora Brambilla she acquired in a short time fame and a fortune.

Renouncing the theatre, which she had never loved—re-assuming her own name, which she had laid aside only that she might preserve it in purity—and returning to France, still young, and with sufficient means to gratify her benevolent intentions to her family, she was fated to find her father dead, and her brother occupying his situation and house, from which he indignantly drove her as one who had disgraced her father's name. Agnes bent her head submissively to the harsh decree, and established herself in Paris, where she had attained to sixty-four years of age, without having heard one word of a single relative save her cousins Gigandet and Baculard, who had now recalled, unwittingly to themselves, thoughts of her dear old home, her father, and even her harsh brother, whose grandchild held so humble a situation in so obscure a street in Paris.

Mlle. Duperron had lived alone for thirty years. She had had no objections to marry; but then she was ambitious of marrying a man; and as she had unfortunately been wooed by none but fortune hunters and fools, she had renounced all ideas of matrimony some years after her establishment in the capital, and had gradually contracted her sphere of acquaintance, and retired into a peaceful and calm solitude.

There were not many women who had studied human character so successfully as Agnes Duperron, and there were not many women who had warmer or nobler hearts, so that cousin Gigandet and Baculard had an intelligent as well as respectable relative, and Louise Duperron unknown to herself, a loving aunt.

Unfortunately for the plot of these last named gentlemen, Mlle. Duperron was sitting in a quiet, reflective mood in her bedchamber, when the anonymous letter was presented to her, which, instead of producing anything like the result anticipated by the malicious plotters, called up her saddest and her fondest feelings.

'A Duperron a shop girl in the Rue Neuve des Petites Champs?' exclaimed the old lady raising her hands and eyes: 'oh when did she come there?' She is doubtless less wealthy than her Grandfather was, and will not refuse to see me. Where shall I find her, poor girl? and the voice of the aged lady trembled with emotion. 'A sempstress in that little obscure street, and perhaps suffering from want, that the labor of her little fingers cannot supply. Marcel,' she cried, ringing her bell and calling a faithful attendant, 'take my carriage and visit the house of every sempstress in the street named in that note, and when you have found one having an apprentice named Louise Duperron, bring that girl to me with a parcel of anything you can get: it is of little matter whether it be neckerchiefs or handkerchiefs.'

Marcel had often engaged in more difficult enterprises than this; and it was not long therefore before she returned with the young apprentice. The old woman gazed upon the girl's fair, elastic form, which her crushing toil had not yet bent or worn, and in her beautiful face, which had not yet been touched with the consumptive pallor of too protracted labor, she was carried back to the days of her own youth and beauty, and sighing she turned to her maid and said, Marcel, how beautiful she is. Do you not think that she somewhat resembles me?'

The young sempstress started and looked timidly upon the old and withered face of the paralytic, and a smile of innocent incredulity gathered on her beautiful lips, as she caught the import of her words; but still the tone in which these words were uttered were so full of heart and earnestness that the girl looked, as if waiting for an explanation, in so respectful a manner, that the heart of her aged relative yearned towards her.

'Marcel,' said Mlle. Duperron, bring my miniature and present it to this sweet maiden, and she will see if I depreciated her beauty in saying she was like me.

The picture had been taken when Agnes Duperron was in the full glory of her charms and of her renown; and as Louise gazed upon it she could not restrain her admiration. 'I indeed madam, you have paid me but too great a compliment,' she said, with the most modest and charming naivete.

'Then my dear,' said the aged dame, smiling, 'if you think that I have not spoken falsely with regard to our personal resemblance, perhaps we may be able to discover some others as striking. You are called Duperron—Louise Duperron are you not?'

'Yes, madam,' said the young woman, surprised at the question.

'Your father was of Bourges?' continued the old lady, with a meaning smile.