

The Goldsmith of Paris

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IN the good old days of France the fair, when no one dared question the divine right of the sovereign, or the purity of the church—when the rights of the feudal seigneurs were unchallenged, and they could head or hang, mutilate or quarter their vassals at their pleasure—when freedom was a word as unmeaning as it is now tinder his sacred majesty, Napoleon the Third, there came to the capital, from Touraine, an artizan, named Anseau, who was as cunning in his trade of goldsmith as Benvenuto Cellini, the half-mad artificer of Florence. He became a burgess of Paris, and a subject of the king, whose high protection he purchased by many presents, both of works of art and good red gold. He inhabited a house built by himself, near the church of St. Leu, in the Rue St. Denys, where his forge was well known to half the amateurs of fine jewelry. He was a man of pure morals and persevering industry; always laboring, always improving, constantly learning new secrets and new receipts, and seeking everywhere for new fashions and devices to attract and gratify his customers. When the night was far advanced, the soldiers of the guard and the revellers returning from their carousals, always saw a lighted lamp at the casement of the goldsmith's workshop, where he was hammering, carving,

chiseling and filing—in a word, laboring at those marvels of ingenuity and toil which made the delight of the ladies and the minions of the court. He was a man who lived in the fear of God, and in a wholesome dread of robbers, nobles, and noise. He was gentle and moderate of speech, courteous to noble, monk and burgess, so that he might be said to have no enemy.

Claude Anseau was strongly built. His arms were rounded and muscular, and his hand had the grip of an iron vice. His broad shoulders reminded the learned of the giant Atlas; his white teeth seemed as if they were formed for masticating iron. His countenance, though placid, was full of resolution, and his glance was so keen that it might have melted gold, though the limpid lustre of his eyes tempered their burning ardor. In a word, though a peaceable man, the goldsmith was not one to be insulted with impunity, and perhaps it was a knowledge of his physical qualities that secured him from attack in those stormy days of ruffianly violence.

Yet sometimes, in spite of his accumulating wealth and tranquil life, the loneliness of the goldsmith made him restless. He was not insensible to beauty, and often, as he wrought a wedding ring for the finger of some fair damsel, he thought with what delight he could forge one for some gentle creature who would love him for himself and not for the riches that called him lord. Then he would sally forth and hie to the river-side, and pass long hours in the dreamy reveries of an artist.

One day as he was strolling, in this tender frame of mind, along the left bank of the Seine, he came to the meadow afterwards called the Pre aux Clercs, which was then in the domain of the Abbey of St. Germain, and not in that of the University. There, finding himself in the open fields, he encountered a poor girl, who addressed him with the simple salutation:—„God save you, my lord!“

The musical intonation of her voice, chiming in with the melodious images that then filled the goldsmith's busy brain, impressed him so pleasantly that he turned, and saw that the damsel was holding a cow by a tether, while it was browsing the rank grass that grew upon the borders of a ditch.

„My child,“ said he, „how is it that you are pasturing your cow on the Sabbath? Know you not that it is forbidden, and that you are in danger of imprisonment?“

„My lord,“ replied the girl, casting down her eyes, „I have nothing to fear, because I belong to the abbey. My lord abbot has given us license to feed our cow here after sunset.“

„Then you love your cow better than the safety of your soul,“ said the goldsmith.

„Of a truth, my lord, the animal furnishes half our subsistence.“

„I marvel,“ said the good goldsmith, „to see you thus poorly clad and barefoot on the Sabbath. Thou art fair to look upon, and thou must needs have suitors from the city.“

„Nay, my lord,“ replied the girl, showing a bracelet that clasped her rounded left arm; „I belong to the abbey.“ And she cast so sad a look on the good burgess that his heart sank within him.

„How is this?“ he resumed—and he touched the bracelet, whereon were engraven the arms of the Abbey of St. Germain.

„My lord, I am the daughter of a serf. Thus, whoever should unite himself to me in marriage would become a serf himself, were he a burgess of Paris, and would belong, body and goods, to the abbey. For this reason I am shunned by

every one. But it is not this that saddens me—it is the dread of being married to a serf by command of my lord abbot, to perpetuate a race of slaves. Were I the fairest in the land, lovers would avoid me like the plague.“

„And how old are you, my dear?“ asked the goldsmith.

„I know not, my lord,“ replied the girl; „but my lord abbot has it written down.“

This great misery touched the heart of the good man, who for a long time had himself eaten the bread of misfortune. He conformed his pace to that of the girl, and they moved in this way towards the river in perfect silence. The burgess looked on her fair brow, her regal form, her dusty but delicately-formed feet, and the sweet countenance which seemed the true portrait of St. Genevieve, the patron saint of Paris.

„You have a fine cow,“ said the goldsmith.

„Would you like a little milk?“ replied she. „These early days of May are so warm, and you are so far from the city.“

In fact, the sky was cloudless and burned like a forge. This simple offer, made without the hope of a return, the only gift in the power of the poor girl, touched the heart of the goldsmith, and he wished that he could see her on a throne and all Paris at her feet.

„No, ma mie,“ replied he; „I am not thirsty—but I would that I could free you.“

„It cannot be; and I shall die the property of the abbey. For a long time we have lived here, from father to son, from mother to daughter. Like my poor ancestors, I shall pass my days upon this land, for the abbot does not loose his prey.“

„What!“ cried the goldsmith, „has no gallant been tempted by your bright eyes to buy your liberty, as I bought mine of the king?“

„Truly, it would cost too much. Therefore those I pleased at first sight went at they came.“

„And you never thought of fleeing to another country with a lover, on a fleet courser?“

„O, yes. But, my lord, if I were taken I should lose my life, and my lover, if he were a lord, his land. I am not worth such sacrifice. Then the arms of the abbey are longer than my feet are swift. Besides, I live here, in obedience to Heaven that has placed me here.“

„And what does your father, maiden?“

„He is a vine-dresser, in the gardens of the abbey.“

„And your mother?“

„She is a laundress.“

„And what is your name?“

„I have no name, my lord. My father was baptized Etienne, my dear mother is la Etienne, and I am Tiennette, at your service.“

„Tiennette,“ said the goldsmith, „never has maiden pleased me as thou dost. Hence, as I saw thee at the moment when I was firmly resolved to take a helpmate, I think I see a special providence in our meeting, and if I am not displeasing in thine eyes, I pray thee to accept me a lover.“

The girl cast down her eyes. These words were uttered in such a sort, with tone so grave and manner so penetrating, that Tiennette wept.

„No, my lord,“ replied she, „I should bring you a thousand troubles and an evil fortune. For a poor serf, it is enough that I have heard your generous proffer.“

„Ah!“ cried Claude, „you know not with whom you have to deal.“ He crossed himself, clasped his hands, and said:—„I here vow to Saint Eloi, under whose protection is my noble craft, to make two inches of enamelled silver, adorned with the utmost labor I can bestow. One shall be for the statue of my lady the virgin, and the other for my patron saint, if I succeed, to the end that I may give thanks for the emancipation of Tiennette, here present, and for whom I pray their high assistance. Moreover, I vow, by my eternal salvation, to prosecute this enterprise with courage, to expend therein all that I possess, and to abandon it only with my life. Heaven hath heard me, and thou, fair one,“ he added, turning to the girl.

„Ah, my lord! My cow is running across the field,“ cried she weeping, at the knees of the good man. „I will love you all my life—but recall your vow.“

„Let us seek the cow,“ said the goldsmith, raising her, without daring to imprint a kiss upon her lips.

„Yes,“ said she, „for I shall be beaten.“

The goldsmith ran after the cow, which recked little of their loves. But she was seized by the horns, and held in the grasp of Claude as in an iron vice. For a trifle he would have hurled her into the air.

„Farewell, dearest. If you go into the city, come to my house, near St. Leu. I am called Master Anseau, and am the goldsmith of our seigneur, the king of France, at the sign of St. Eloi. Promise me to be in this field the next Sabbath, and I will not fail to come, though it were raining halberts.“

„I will, my lord. And, in the meanwhile, my prayers shall ascend to heaven for your welfare.“

There she remained standing, like a saint carved in stone, stirring not, until she could no longer see the burgess, who retired with slow steps, turning every now and then to look upon her. And even when he was long lost to sight, she remained there until nightfall, lost in reverie, and not certain whether what had happened was a dream or bright reality. It was late when she returned home, where she was beaten for her tardiness—but she did not feel the blows.

The good burgess, on his part, lost his appetite, closed his shop, and wandered about, thinking only of the maiden of St. Germain, seeing her image everywhere. On the morrow, he took his way towards the abbey, in great apprehension, but still determined to speak to my lord abbot. But as he bethought him that it would be most prudent to put himself under the protection of some powerful courtier, he retraced his steps, and sought out the royal chamberlain, whose favor he had gained by various courtesies, and especially by the gift of a rare chain to the lady whom he loved. The chamberlain readily promised his assistance, had his horse saddled and a hackney made ready for the goldsmith, with whom he came presently to the abbey, and demanded to see the abbot, who was then Monseigneur Hugo de Senecterre, and was ninety-three years old. Being come into the hall, with the goldsmith, who was trembling in expectation of his doom, the chamberlain prayed the Abbot Hugo to grant him a favor in advance, which could be easily done, and would do him pleasure. Whereat, the wily abbot shook his head, and replied that it was expressly forbidden by the canons to plight one's faith in this manner.

„The matter is this, then, my dear father,“ said the chamberlain. „The goldsmith of the court, here, has conceived a great love for a girl belonging to

the abbey, and I charge you, as you would have me grant the favors you may seek hereafter, to liberate this girl.“

„Who is she?“ asked the abbot of the burgess.

„She is named Tiennette,“ replied the goldsmith, timidly.

„Oh! ho!“ said the good old Hugo, smiling. „Then the bait has brought us a good fish. This in a grave case, and I cannot decide it alone.“

„I know, father, what these words are worth,“ said the chamberlain, frowning.

„Beau sire,“ replied the abbot, „do you know what the girl is worth?“

The abbot sent for Tiennette, telling his clerk to dress her in her best clothes, and make her as brave as possible.

„Your love is in danger,“ said the chamberlain to the goldsmith, drawing him one side. „Abandon this fancy; you will find everywhere, even at court, young and pretty women who will willingly accept your hand, and the king will help you to acquire an estate and title—you have gold enough.“

The goldsmith shook his head. „I have made my choice, and embarked on my adventure,“ said he.

„Then you must purchase the manumission of this girl. I know the monks. With them, money can accomplish everything.“

„My lord,“ said the goldsmith to the abbot, turning towards him, „you have it in charge and trust to represent here on earth the bounty of Providence, which is always kind to us, and has infinite treasures of mercy for our miseries. Now I will enshrine you, for the rest of my days, each night and morning in my prayers, if you will aid me to obtain this girl in marriage. And I will fashion you a box to enclose the holy Eucharist, so cunningly wrought, and so enriched with gold and precious stones, and figures of winged angels, that another such shall never be in Christendom—it shall remain unique, shall rejoice your eyes, and so glorify your altar that the people of the city, foreign lords—all, shall hasten to see it, so wondrous shall it be.“

„My son,“ replied the abbot, „you have lost your senses. If you are resolved to have this girl in wedlock, your property and person will escheat to the chapter of the abbey.“

„Yes, my lord, I am devoted to this poor girl, and more touched by her misery and truly Christian heart, than by her personal perfections. But I am,“ said he, with tears in his eyes, „yet more astonished at your hardness, and I say it, though I know my fate is in your hands. Yes, my lord, I know the law. Thus, if my goods must fall into your possession, if I become a serf, if I lose my home and my citizenship, I shall yet keep the skill developed by my culture and my studies, and which lies here,“ he added, touching his forehead, „in a place where God alone, besides myself, is master. And your whole abbey cannot purchase the creation of my brain. You will have my body and my wife, but nothing can give you my genius, not even tortures, for I am stronger than iron is hard, and more patient than suffering is great.“

Having said this, the goldsmith, enraged at the calmness of the abbot, who seemed resolved to secure the good man's doubloons to the abbey, dealt such a blow with his fist on an oaken chair, it flew in pieces as if struck by a sledge-hammer.

„See, my lord, what a serf you will have, and how of an artificer of divine things you will make a draught-horse.“

„My son,“ replied the abbot, calmly, „you have wrongfully broken mine oaken chair and lightly judged my heart. This girl belongs to the abbey, and not to me.

I am the faithful administrator of the rights and usages of this glorious monastery. Although I may, indeed, liberate this girl and her heirs, I owe an account to God and to the abbey. Now, since there has been here an altar, serfs and monks, id est, from time immemorial, never has there been an instance of a burgess becoming the property of the abbey by marriage with a serf. Hence, need there is of exercising this right, that it may not be lost, effete and obsolete, and fall into desuetude, the which would occasion troubles manifold. And this is of greater advantage for the state and for the abbey than your boxes, however beautiful they may be, seeing that we have a fund which will enable us to purchase jewels and bravery, and that no money can establish customs and laws. I appeal to my lord, the king's chamberlain, who is witness of the pains infinite our sovereign taketh each day to do battle for the establishment of his ordinances."

"This is to shut my mouth," said the chamberlain.

The goldsmith, who was no great clerk, remained silent and pensive. Hereupon came Tiennette, clad in glorious apparel, wearing a robe of white wool, with her hair tastefully dressed, and, withal, so royally beautiful, that the goldsmith was petrified with ecstasy, and the chamberlain confessed that he had never seen so perfect a creature. Then, thinking that there was too great danger to the goldsmith in this spectacle, he carried him off to the city, and begged him to think no more of the affair, since the abbey would never yield so beautiful a prize.

In fact, the chapter signified to the poor lover that, if he married this girl, he must resolve to abandon his property and house to the abbey, and to acknowledge himself a serf; and that then, by special grace, the abbey would allow him to remain in his house, on condition of his furnishing an inventory of his goods, of his paying a tribute every year, and coming annually, for a fortnight, to lodge in a burg appertaining to the domain, in order to make act of serfdom. The goldsmith, to whom every one spoke of the obstinacy of the monks, saw plainly that the abbey would adhere inflexibly to this sentence, and was driven to the verge of despair. At one time he thought of setting fire to the four corners of the monastery—at another, he proposed to inveigle the abbot into some place where he might torment him till he signed the manumission papers of Tiennette—in fine, he projected a thousand schemes, which all evaporated into air. But, after many lamentations, he thought he would carry off the girl to some secure place, whence nothing could draw him, and made his preparations in consequence, thinking that, once out of the kingdom, his friends or the sovereign could manage the monks and bring them to reason. The good man reckoned without his host, for, on going to the meadow, he missed Tiennette, and learned that she was kept in the abbey so rigorously, that, to gain possession of her, he would have to besiege the monastery. Then master Anseau rent the air with complaints and lamentations, and, throughout Paris, the citizens and housewives spoke of nothing but this adventure, the noise of which was such, that the king, meeting the old abbot at court, asked him why, in this juncture, he did not yield to the great love of his goldsmith, and practise a little Christian charity.

"Because, my lord," replied the priest, "all rights are linked together, like the part of a suit of armor, and if one fail, the whole falls to pieces. If this girl were taken from us, against our will, and the usage were not observed, soon your subjects would deprive you of your crown, and great seditions would arise in all

parts, to the end of abolishing the tithes and taxes which press so heavily upon the people.“

The king was silenced. Every one was anxious to learn the end of this adventure. So great was the curiosity, that several lords wagered that the goldsmith would abandon his suit, while the ladies took the opposite side. The goldsmith having complained with tears to the queen that the monks had deprived him of the sight of his beloved, she thought it detestable and oppressive. Whereupon, pursuant to her command, the goldsmith was allowed to go daily to the parlor of the abbey, where he saw Tiennette; but always in the company of an aged monk, and attired in true magnificence, like a lady. It was with great difficulty that he persuaded her to accept the sacrifice he was compelled to make of his liberty, but she finally consented.

When the city was made acquainted with the submission of the goldsmith, who, for the love of his lady, abandoned his fortune and his liberty, every one was anxious to see him. The ladies of the court encumbered themselves with jewels they did not need, to make a pretext for talking with him. But if some of them approached Tiennette in beauty, none possessed her heart. At last, at the approach of the hour of servitude and love, Anseau melted all his gold into a royal crown, which he inlaid with all his pearls and diamonds; then coming secretly to the queen, he gave it into her hands, saying:

„My lady, I know not in whose hands to trust my faith and fortune but yours. To-morrow everything found in my house will become the property of those accursed monks, who have no pity on me. Deign, then, to take care of this. It is a poor return for the pleasure I enjoyed by your means, of seeing her I love, since no treasure is worth one of her glances. I know not what will become of me—but if, one day, my children become free, I have a faith in your generosity as a woman and a queen.“

„Well said, good man,“ replied the queen. „The abbey may one day have need of my assistance, and then I will remember this.“

There was an immense crowd in the abbey church at the espousals of Tiennette, to whom the queen presented a wedding dress, and whom the king authorized to wear earrings and jewels. When the handsome couple came from the abbey to the lodgings of Anseau, who had become a serf, near St. Leu, there were torches at the windows to see them pass, and in the street two lines of people, as at a royal progress. The poor husband had wrought a silver bracelet, which he wore upon his left arm, in token of his belonging to the abbey of St. Germain. Then, notwithstanding his servitude, they cried, „Noel, Noel!“ as to a new king. And the good man saluted courteously, happy as a lover, and pleased with the homage each one paid to the grace and modesty of Tiennette. Then the good goldsmith found green branches, and a crown of bluettes on his doorposts, and the principal persons of the quarter were all there, who, to do him honor, saluted him with music, and cried out, „You will always be a noble man, in spite of the abbey!“

Tiennette was delighted with her handsome lodgings, and the crowd of customers who came and went, delighted with her charms. The honey-moon passed, there came one day, in great pomp, old abbot Hugo, their lord and master, who entered the house, which belonged no more to the goldsmith, but to the chapter, and, being there, said to the newly married pair:

„My children, you are free, and quit of all claims on the part of the abbey. And I must tell you that, from the first, I was greatly moved with the love which

linked you to each other. Thus, the rights of the abbey having been recognized, I determined to complete your joy, after having proved your loyalty. And this manumission shall cost you nothing.“

Having said this, he touched them lightly on the cheeks, and they kneeled at his feet and wept for joy. The goldsmith apprised the people who had collected in the street of the bounty and blessing of the good abbot Hugo. Then, in great honor, Anseau held the bridle of his mare, as far as the gate of Bussy. On the way, having taken a sack of money with him, he threw the pieces to the poor and suffering, crying:

„Largesse! largesse to God! God save and guard the abbey! Long live the good Lord Hugo!“

The abbot, of course, was severely reproached by his chapter, who had opened their jaws to devour the rich booty. Thus, a year afterwards, the good man Hugo falling sick, his prior told him that it was a punishment of Heaven, because he had neglected their sacred interests.

„If I judge this man aright,“ replied the abbot, „he will remember what he owes us.“

In fact, this day happening to be the anniversary of the marriage, a monk came to announce that the goldsmith begged his benefactor to receive him. When he appeared in the hall where the abbot was, he displayed two marvellous caskets, which, from that time, no workman has surpassed in any place of the Christian world, and which were called „the vow of perseverance in love.“ These two treasures are, as every one knows, placed on the high altar of the church; and are judged to be of inestimable workmanship, since the goldsmith had expended all he had on them.

Nevertheless, this gift, instead of emptying his treasury, filled it to overflowing, because it so increased his fame and profits that he was able to purchase broad lands and letters of nobility, and founded the house of Anseau, which has since been in high honor in Touraine.

