

The Patron

Guy de Maupassant

We never dreamed of such good fortune! The son of a provincial bailiff, Jean Marin had come, as do so many others, to study law in the Quartier Latin. In the various beer-houses that he had frequented he had made friends with several talkative students who spouted politics as they drank their beer. He had a great admiration for them and followed them persistently from cafe to cafe, even paying for their drinks when he had the money.

He became a lawyer and pleaded causes, which he lost. However, one morning he read in the papers that one of his former comrades of the Quartier had just been appointed deputy.

He again became his faithful hound, the friend who does the drudgery, the unpleasant tasks, for whom one sends when one has need of him and with whom one does not stand on ceremony. But it chanced through some parliamentary incident that the deputy became a minister. Six months later Jean Marin was appointed a state councillor.

He was so elated with pride at first that he lost his head. He would walk through the streets just to show himself off, as though one could tell by his appearance what position he occupied. He managed to say to the shopkeepers as soon as he entered a store, bringing it in somehow in the course of the most insignificant remarks and even to the news vendors and the cabmen:

"I, who am a state councillor--"

Then, in consequence of his position as well as for professional reasons and as in duty bound through being an influential and generous man, he felt an imperious need of patronizing others. He offered his support to every one on all occasions and with unbounded generosity.

When he met any one he recognized on the boulevards he would advance to meet them with a charmed air, would take their hand, inquire after their health, and, without waiting for any questions, remark:

"You know I am state councillor, and I am entirely at your service. If I can be of any use to you, do not hesitate to call on me. In my position one has great influence."

Then he would go into some cafe with the friend he had just met and ask for a pen and ink and a sheet of paper. "Just one, waiter; it is to write a letter of recommendation."

And he wrote ten, twenty, fifty letters of recommendation a day. He wrote them to the Cafe Americain, to Bignon's, to Tortoni's, to the Maison Doree, to the Cafe Riche, to the Helder, to the Cafe Anglais, to the Napolitain, everywhere, everywhere. He wrote them to all the officials of the republican government, from the magistrates to the ministers. And he was happy, perfectly happy.

One morning as he was starting out to go to the council it began to rain. He hesitated about

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taking a cab, but decided not to do so and set out on foot.

The rain came down in torrents, swamping the sidewalks and inundating the streets. M. Marin was obliged to take shelter in a doorway. An old priest was standing there--an old priest with white hair. Before he became a councillor M. Marin did not like the clergy. Now he treated them with consideration, ever since a cardinal had consulted him on an important matter. The rain continued to pour down in floods and obliged the two men to take shelter in the porter's lodge so as to avoid getting wet. M. Marin, who was always itching to talk so as to let people know who he was, remarked:

"This is horrible weather, Monsieur l'Abbe."

The old priest bowed:

"Yes indeed, sir, it is very unpleasant when one comes to Paris for only a few days."

"Ah! You come from the provinces?"

"Yes, monsieur. I am only passing through on my journey."

"It certainly is very disagreeable to have rain during the few days one spends in the capital. We officials who stay here the year round, we think nothing of it."

The priest did not reply. He was looking at the street where the rain seemed to be falling less heavily. And with a sudden resolve he raised his cassock just as women raise their skirts in stepping across water.

M. Marin, seeing him start away, exclaimed:

"You will get drenched, Monsieur l'Abbe. Wait a few moments longer; the rain will be over."

The good man stopped irresistibly and then said:

"But I am in a great hurry. I have an important engagement."

M. Marin seemed quite worried.

"But you will be absolutely drenched. Might I ask in which direction you are going?"

The priest appeared to hesitate. Then he said:

"I am going in the direction of the Palais Royal."

"In that case, if you will allow me, Monsieur l'Abbe, I will offer you the shelter of my umbrella: As for me, I am going to the council. I am a councillor of state."

The old priest raised his head and looked at his neighbor and then exclaimed:

"I thank you, monsieur. I shall be glad to accept your offer."

M. Marin then took his arm and led him away. He directed him, watched over him and advised him.

"Be careful of that stream, Monsieur l'Abbe. And be very careful about the carriage wheels; they spatter you with mud sometimes from head to foot. Look out for the umbrellas of the people passing by; there is nothing more dangerous to the eyes than the tips of the ribs. Women especially are unbearable; they pay no heed to where they are going and always jab you in the face with the point of their parasols or umbrellas. And they never move aside for anybody. One would suppose the town belonged to them. They monopolize the pavement and the street. It is my opinion that their education has been greatly neglected."

And M. Marin laughed.

The priest did not reply. He walked along, slightly bent over, picking his steps carefully so as not to get mud on his boots or his cassock.

M. Marin resumed:

"I suppose you have come to Paris to divert your mind a little?"

The good man replied:

"No, I have some business to attend to."

"Ali! Is it important business? Might I venture to ask what it is? If I can be of any service to you, you may command me."

The priest seemed embarrassed. He murmured:

"Oh, it is a little personal matter; a little difficulty with--with my bishop. It would not interest you. It is a matter of internal regulation--an ecclesiastical affair."

M. Marin was eager.

"But it is precisely the state council that regulates all those things. In that case, make use of me."

"Yes, monsieur, it is to the council that I am going. You are a thousand times too kind. I have to see M. Lerepere and M. Savon and also perhaps M. Petitpas."

M. Marin stopped short.

"Why, those are my friends, Monsieur l'Abbe, my best friends, excellent colleagues, charming men. I will speak to them about you, and very highly. Count upon me."

The cure thanked him, apologizing for troubling him, and stammered out a thousand

grateful promises.

M. Marin was enchanted.

"Ah, you may be proud of having made a stroke of luck, Monsieur l'Abbe. You will see-- you will see that, thanks to me, your affair will go along swimmingly."

They reached the council hall. M. Marin took the priest into his office, offered him a chair in front of the fire and sat down himself at his desk and began to write.

"My dear colleague, allow me to recommend to you most highly a venerable and particularly worthy and deserving priest, M. L'Abbe----"

He stopped and asked:

"Your name, if you please?"

"L'Abbe Ceinture."

"M. l'Abbe Ceinture, who needs your good office in a little matter which he will communicate to you.

"I am pleased at this incident which gives me an opportunity, my dear colleague----"

And he finished with the usual compliments.

When he had written the three letters he handed them to his protege, who took his departure with many protestations of gratitude.

M. Marin attended to some business and then went home, passed the day quietly, slept well, woke in a good humor and sent for his newspapers.

The first he opened was a radical sheet. He read:

"OUR CLERGY AND OUR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

"We shall never make an end of enumerating the misdeeds of the clergy. A certain priest, named Ceinture, convicted of conspiracy against the present government, accused of base actions to which we will not even allude, suspected besides of being a former Jesuit, metamorphosed into a simple priest, suspended by a bishop for causes that are said to be unmentionable and summoned to Paris to give an explanation of his conduct, has found an ardent defender in the man named Marin, a councillor of state, who was not afraid to give this frocked malefactor the warmest letters of recommendation to all the republican officials, his colleagues.

"We call the, attention of the ministry to the unheard of attitude of this councillor of state----"

M. Marin bounded out of bed, dressed himself and hastened to his colleague, Petitpas, who said to him:

"How now? You were crazy to recommend to me that old conspirator!"

M. Marin, bewildered, stammered out:

"Why no--you see--I was deceived. He looked such an honest man. He played me a trick--a disgraceful trick! I beg that you will sentence him severely, very severely. I am going to write. Tell me to whom I should write about having him punished. I will go and see the attorney-general and the archbishop of Paris--yes, the archbishop."

And seating himself abruptly at M. Petitpas' desk, he wrote:

"Monseigneur, I have the honor to bring to your grace's notice the fact that I have recently been made a victim of the intrigues and lies of a certain Abbe Ceinture, who imposed on my kind-heartedness.

"Deceived by the representations of this ecclesiastic, I was led----"

Then, having signed and sealed his letter, he turned to his colleague and exclaimed:

"See here; my dear friend, let this be a warning to you never to recommend any one again."

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