

CHAPTER 27 - SARDOU at Marly-le-Roy

In Chapter 27 of "The Ways of Men," we travel to the quaint village of Marly-le-Roy, nestled within the verdant triangle of Saint Cloud, Versailles, and Saint Germain. This location, once favored by French royalty and notably by the "Sun King" Louis XIV, holds the memory of grandeur despite the erasure of its royal villas and treasures through time. Among its enduring features are the marble horses by Coustou, now in the Champs Elysees, symbolizing the remnants of its splendid past.

The narrative shifts to focus on the residence of Victorien Sardou, a towering figure in modern drama, sharing this esteemed heritage with Alexandre Dumas FILS. Sardou's abode, adorned with artifacts and relics of a bygone era, lies within the village's outskirts, accessible through a majestic gateway. Upon entering, one is greeted by an avenue flanked by sphinxes, a gift from the late Khedive, leading to Sardou's residence – a testament to his artistic tastes and historical reverence.

Within Sardou's home, every room breathes the essence of the 18th century, with Gobelin tapestries and Louis XIV's relics, reflecting a deep engagement with French history and art. Sardou, a collector at heart, revels in the joy of acquiring, preserving, and showcasing his treasures, each with a story that bridges the past to the present. His acquisition stories, especially the Beauvais tapestry set and a singular piece found in a peasant's stable, reveal not just a collector's pride but a historian's zeal.

The narrative explores Sardou's lineage, tracing back to Sardinian fishermen, hinting at the blend of history and personal legacy that defines the playwright. The scenic descriptions of Marly-le-Roy and the panoramic views from Sardou's estate paint a picture of tranquil beauty intertwined with historical grandeur.

Transitioning to the outdoors, Sardou shares his vision for his estate's gardens, inspired by historical maps and prints. His passion extends to the restoration of 18th-century garden designs, statues, and fountains, indicating his dedication to preserving heritage beyond his theatrical endeavors.

Sardou's assortment of artifacts, including pieces from Versailles and Saint Cloud, showcases his deep engagement with French history. The column from the Tuileries, with its royal emblems, stands as a symbol of resilience and historic memory, cherished and showcased by Sardou with pride.

The chapter concludes with insights into Sardou's workspace, a library arranged methodically by historical periods, facilitating his research and writing. This personal space reflects Sardou's scholarly approach to his work, embodying his passion for history and its influence on his plays, notably mentioned is "Robespierre," which enjoyed successful staging in London, despite Sardou's personal absence due to travel apprehensions.

This exploration not only honors Sardou's contributions to drama and historical preservation but also casts a light on the personal convictions and passions that drive his artistic and collectible endeavors, showcasing a life devoted to the celebration and preservation of French history and art.