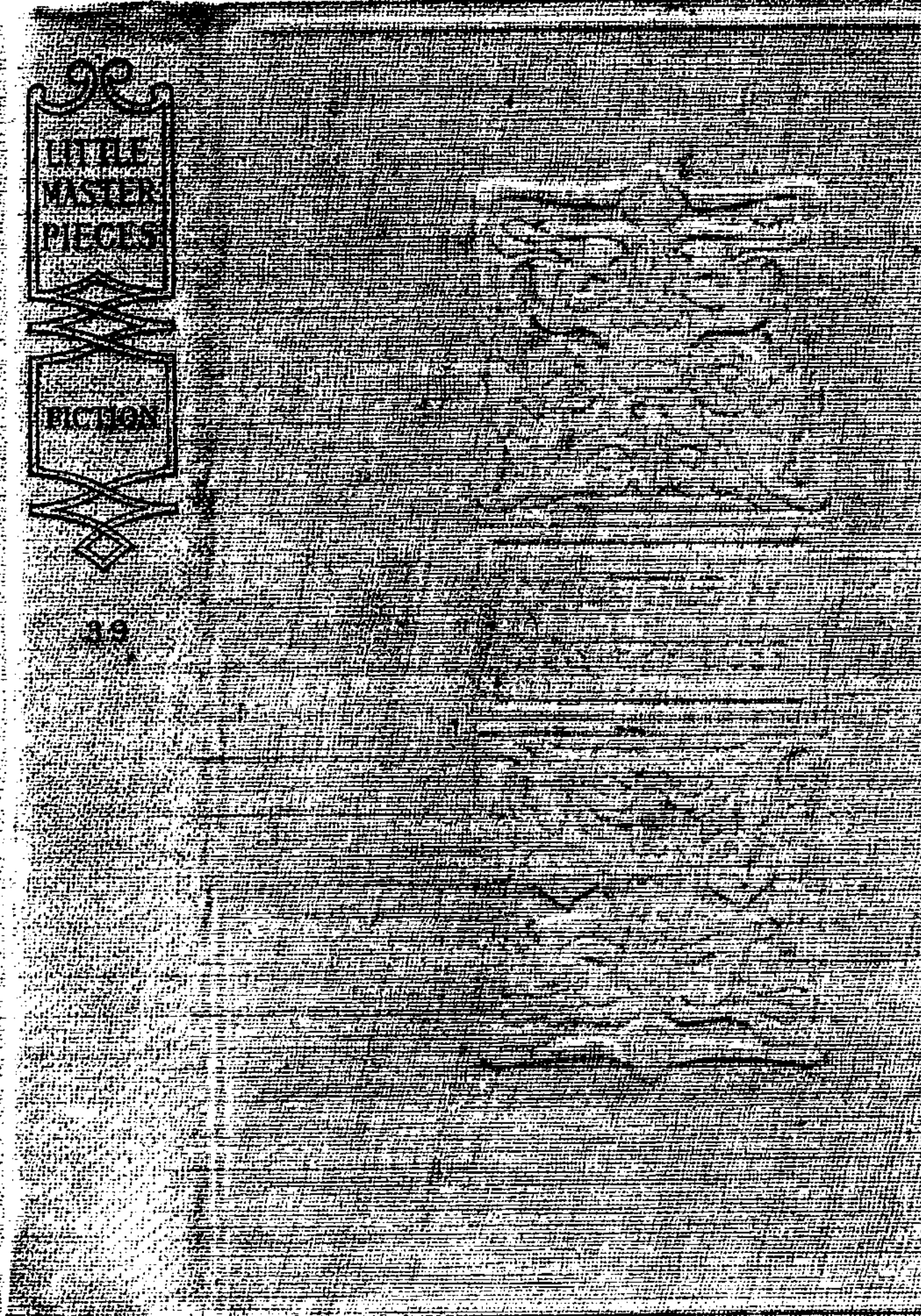
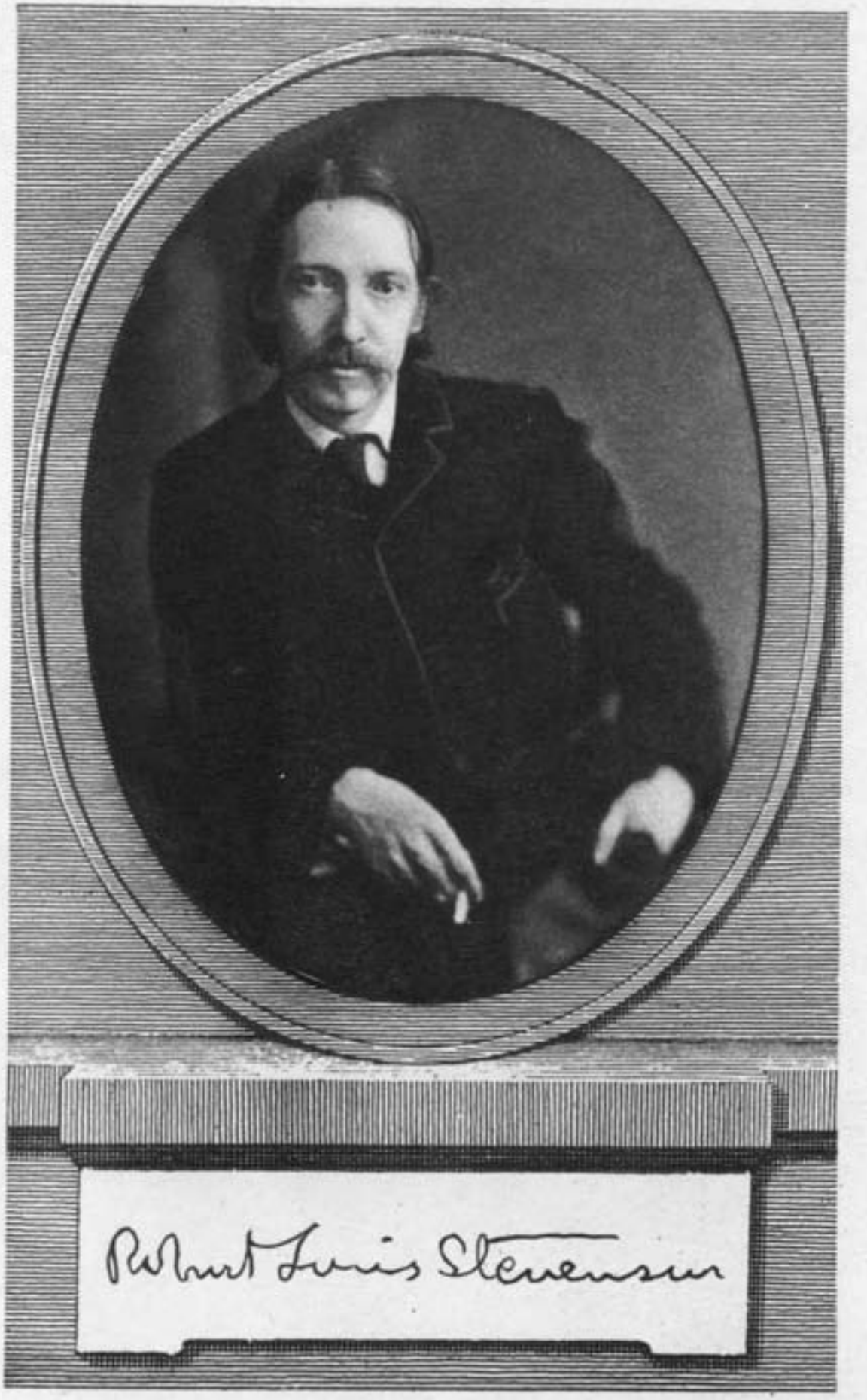

LITTLE
MASTER
PIECES
FICTION

Library of
Little Masterpieces


Robert Louis Stevenson

Library of

Little Masterpieces

In Forty-four Volumes

FICTION

Edited by

HAMILTON W. MABIE

VOLUME XXXIX

PUBLISHED BY
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
FOR
THE REVIEW OF REVIEWS COMPANY
1909

CONTENTS

Library of
Little Masterpieces

STORY OF A WHITE BLACKBIRD*

BY

LOUIS CHARLES ALFRED DE MUSSET

I

IT is a great thing, in this workaday world of ours, to be something a little above the common run of ordinary blackbirds; but then, too, the eminence is not without its inconveniences. I am not a bird of fable; Monsieur de Buffon has written my description, but woe is me! I am rare and but seldom met with. Would to Heaven I had never emerged from the lowly state in which I was born!

My father and mother were a couple of honest people who had lived for many years in the seclusion of a quiet old garden in the Marais. It was a model household. While my mother, in the depths of some bushy thicket, laid three times a year regularly, and hatched out her brood, gently slumbering most of the time, my father, very neat in his attire and very fussy still, notwithstanding his great age, would be pecking, pecking about her all day long with patriarchal devotion, bringing her nice little insects that he was always careful to seize by

the tail, very daintily, so that his wife's delicate stomach might not be offended, and at nightfall he never failed, when the weather was fine, to treat her to a song that delighted all the neighbourhood. Never was there such a thing as a quarrel; never had the smallest cloud ariser to darken this sweet union.

I had hardly made my appearance in the world when, for the first time in his life, my father began to display bad temper. Although as yet I was of only a doubtful shade of gray, he failed to recognise in me either the colour or the form of his numerous progeny. Sometimes he would cock his head, and look at me askance, and say:

"There is an untidy child for you; it would seem as if the little blackguard took pains to go and wallow in every mud-hole and plaster-heap that he came to, he is always so ugly and filthy."

"Eh! Mon Dieu, my friend," my mother would answer, looking like nothing so much as a little round ball of feathers in the old earthenware porringer where she had made her nest, "don't you see that it is owing to his age? And you yourself, in your early days, were you not a charming little scapegrace? Give our little blackbirdling time to grow, and you will see how pretty he will be; I don't think that I ever hatched out a finer one."

My mother was not deceived while pleading my cause in this manner; she saw the growth of my ill-omened plumage, which appeared to her a monstrosity; but she acted as all mothers do,

who allow themselves to become more strongly attached to their offspring for the very reason that nature has ill-used them, as if the responsibility rested on the maternal shoulders, or as if they rejected in advance the injustice of their unkind destiny.

With the approach of my first moulting season, my father became extremely thoughtful, and watched me attentively. He continued to treat me with considerable kindness so long as my feathers kept falling out, and would even bring me something to eat when he saw me shivering, almost naked, in my corner, but as soon as the down began to come out on my poor little half-frozen wings, he would fly into such a tearing rage at every white feather he saw that I greatly feared he would leave me featherless for the remainder of my days. Alas! I had no looking-glass; I did not know the cause of his anger, and I wondered why it was that the best of fathers could treat me so cruelly.

One day, when a glimpse of sunshine and my glowing plumage had cheered me and warmed my heart a little in spite of myself, as I was hopping about an alley, I began, tempted by my evil genius, to sing. At the very first note that he heard, my father flew up into the air like a sky-rocket.

"What do I hear there?" he shouted. "Is that the way a blackbird whistles? Do I whistle that way? Do you call that whistling?"

And perching beside my mother with a most terrific expression of countenance:

"Wretched bird!" he said, "what stranger has been sharing your nest?"

At these words, my mother indignantly threw herself from her porringer, severely injuring one of her claws in doing so; she endeavoured to speak, but her sobs choked her; she fell to the ground in a half-fainting condition. I beheld her at the point of expiring; terrified and trembling with fear, I threw myself upon my knees before my father.

"Oh, father!" I said to him, "if I whistle but poorly, and if I am meanly clad, let not the punishment fall upon my mother. Is it her fault if nature has not graced me with a voice like yours? Is it her fault if I have not your beautiful yellow bill and your handsome black coat *à la Française*, which give you the appearance of a churchwarden about to swallow an omelette? If Heaven has seen fit to make me monster, and if some one must pay the penalty, grant, at least, that I alone may bear the burden of misery."

"That has nothing to do with the case," said my father; "what do you mean by taking the liberty of whistling in that ridiculous manner? Who was it that taught you to whistle thus, contrary to every known rule and custom?"

"Alas! sir," I humbly replied, "I whistled as well as I knew how; for I was feeling in good spirits because the weather is fine, and perhaps I had eaten too many flies."

"That is not the way they whistle in my family," my father rejoined, quite beside himself with anger. "We have been whistling for centuries from generation to generation, and let me tell you that, when I raise my voice at night, there is an old gentleman here on the first floor, and a young *grisette* up there in the garret, who throw up their windows to listen to me. Is it not enough that my eyes are constantly offended by the horrid colour of those idiotic feathers of yours, which make you look like a whitened jack-pudding at a country fair? Were I not the most long-suffering of blackbirds I should have stripped you naked long before this, and reduced you to the condition of a barnyard fowl prepared for the spit."

"Very well!" I cried, unable longer to submit to such injustice, "if that is the case, sir, never mind! I will relieve you of my presence; your eyes shall no more be offended by the sight of these poor white tail-feathers by which you are continually pulling me about. I will go away, sir; I will take refuge in flight; since my mother lays thrice a year, there will be other children in plenty to console your declining years; I will go and hide my wretchedness in some distant country, and it may be," I added, with a sob, "it may be that, along the gutters or in the neighbours' kitchen-garden, I shall find some earth-worms or a few spiders to enable me to eke out my miserable existence."

"As you please," replied my father, far from

melting at this speech of mine; "only let me never set eyes on you again. You are not my son; you are not a blackbird."

"What am I then, sir, if you please?"

"I have not the slightest idea; but you are not a blackbird."

With these crushing words, my father strode slowly away. My mother sadly arose, and went limping to her porringer to have her cry out, while I, for my part, confounded and disconsolate, stretched my wings, and took my flight as well as I could, and went and perched upon the gutter of an adjoining house as I had said I would do.

II

My father was so inhuman as to leave me several days in this mortifying situation. Notwithstanding his violent disposition, his heart was in the right place, and I could see by his way of looking at me askant that he would have been glad to forgive and recall me to my home; my mother, too, was constantly gazing upward at me with eyes that were full of tenderness, and now and then she would even venture to address me with a plaintive little chirrup; but my horrible white plumage inspired them, despite their better feelings, with a fear and a repugnance against which I clearly saw there was no remedy.

"I am not a blackbird!" I kept repeating to myself; and, in truth, as I was preening myself

one morning and contemplating my form reflected in the water of the gutter, I saw only too clearly how little resemblance there was between me and the rest of the family. "Kind Heaven!" I said again, "teach me what I am!"

One night, when the rain was coming down in bucketfuls, and I was getting ready to go to bed, quite worn out with grief and hunger, a bird came and sat down near me, wetter, paler, and more emaciated than I had believed bird could be. He was of something the same colour as I, as nearly as I could judge through the torrents of rain that were streaming down on us; he had scarcely sufficient feathers on his body to clothe a sparrow respectably, and yet he was a bigger bird than I. At first I took him to be some poor, needy wanderer, but, notwithstanding the storm that pelted pitilessly upon his almost naked poll, he maintained a loftiness of demeanour that quite charmed me. I modestly made him a deep bow, to which he replied with a dig of his beak that nearly sent me tumbling off the roof. When he saw me scratch my ear and meekly edge away from him without attempting to answer him in his own language, he asked in a hoarse, thick voice, to correspond with his bald pate:

"Who are you?"

"Alas! my noble lord," I replied (fearing that he might give me another dig), "I cannot tell. I thought that I was a blackbird, but I am convinced now that I am not."

The strangeness of my answer, and my apparent truthfulness, seemed to interest him. He approached me, and made me relate my history, which I did in all sadness and humility, as befitted my position and the unpleasantness of the weather.

"If you were a carrier-pigeon like me," he said to me when I had finished, "the pitiful trifles that you are bewailing so would not disturb your mind an instant. We travel—that is the way we make our living—and we have our loves, indeed, but I don't know who my father is. Cleaving the air, making our way through space, beholding plains and mountains lying at our feet, inhaling the pure ether of the skies and not the exhalations of the earth, hastening to an appointed destination that we never fail to reach—therein lie our pleasures and our life. I travel farther in one day than a man can in ten."

"Upon my word, sir," said I, plucking up a little courage, "you are a bird of Bohemia."

"That is something that I never bother my head about," he replied. "I have no country; I know but three things: travel, my wife, and my little ones."

"But what is it that you have hanging about your neck there? It looks like an old twisted curl-paper."

"They are papers of importance," he answered, bridling up. "I am on my way to Brussels, and I have a piece of intelligence for the celebrated

banker —— that will send the price of *rentes* down one franc and seventy-eight centimes."

"Great Heavens!" I cried, "what a delightful life yours ought to be, and Brussels, I am sure, must be an extremely interesting city to visit. Can't you take me with you? Perhaps I am a carrier-pigeon, since I am not a blackbird."

"If you had been a carrier-pigeon," he rejoined, "you would have paid me back for the clip of the beak that I gave you a while ago."

"Well! sir, I will pay you; we won't quarrel over a little thing like that. See! the day is breaking and the storm is passing away. Let me go with you, I beseech you! I am undone; I have not a penny in the world—if you refuse me there is nothing left for me to do but drown myself in this gutter."

"Very well! *en route!* follow me, if you can."

I cast a parting glance upon the garden where my mother was slumbering. A tear fell from my eye! it was swept away by the wind and rain. I spread my wings, and started forth.

III

As I have said, my wings were not very strong as yet. While my guide pursued his flight with the speed of the wind, I was puffing and panting at his side; I held out for some time, but soon was seized with such an attack of dizziness that I thought I should faint.

"Have we far to go yet?" I asked in a weak voice.

"No," he replied; "we are at Bourget; we have but sixty leagues to go."

I tried to muster up courage, for I did not wish to show the white feather, and flew along for a quarter of an hour longer; but it was of no use—I was quite knocked up.

"Monsieur," I again stammered, "might we not stop for a moment? I am tormented by a horrible thirst, and if we were just to perch upon a tree——"

"Go to the devil! you are nothing but a blackbird!" the pigeon responded in a rage, and, without so much as turning his head, he continued his mad flight. As for me, everything grew dark before my sight, and I fell, senseless, into a field of wheat.

How long my unconsciousness lasted I know not. When I came to, my first recollection was the carrier-pigeon's parting remark: "You are nothing but a blackbird," he had said to me. "Oh! my dear parents," I said to myself, "then you are mistaken after all! I will return to you! you will recognise me as your true and lawful son, and will let me have my place again in that dear little bed of leaves down beneath my mother's porringer."

I made an effort to rise, but the fatigue of the journey and the pain resulting from my fall paralysed my every limb. Scarcely had I got upon my feet when my strength failed me again, and I fell over on my side.

Hideous thoughts of death were now beginning

to arise before my mind, when I beheld two charming creatures advancing toward me on tip-toe through the poppies and cornflowers. One was a little magpie, very stylishly speckled and of extremely coquettish appearance, and the other was a turtle-dove of a rosy complexion. The turtle-dove stopped when she had approached within a few feet of me, with a great display of modesty and compassion for my misfortune, but the pie came skipping up with the most pleasing manner in the world.

"*Eh! Bon Dieu!* my poor child, what are you doing there?" she inquired in a merry, silvery voice.

"Alas! Madame la Marquise," I replied (for I thought that she must be a marquise at the very least), "I am a poor devil of a traveller whom his postilion has abandoned here at the roadside, and I am ready to die of hunger."

"Holy Virgin! what is that you tell me?" said she. And, forthwith, she began to flit about among the surrounding bushes, hopping from one to another and bringing me a great provision of berries and small fruits, which she deposited in a little pile at my side, continuing her fire of questions meanwhile.

"But who are you? Where do you come from? The story of your adventure sounds incredible! And where were you going? To think of your travelling alone, at your age; why, you are only just over your first moulting! What is your parents' business? Where do they

belong? How can they let you go about in the condition that you are in? Why, it is enough to make one's feathers stand on end!"

I had raised myself a little upon my side while she was speaking, and was eating with a ravenous appetite. The turtle-dove had not stirred from her position, and continued to eye me with a look of pity; she remarked, however, that I would turn my head every now and then in a feeble sort of way, and saw that I was thirsty. Upon a leaf of chickweed there remained a drop of the rain that had fallen during the night; she took it in her beak, and timidly brought it and offered it to me; it was deliciously cool and refreshing. Had I not been as ill as I was, a person of her modesty would certainly not have ventured thus to transgress the rules of propriety.

As yet I knew not what it was to love, but my heart was beating violently; I was divided between two conflicting emotions, and an inexpressible charm pervaded my being. My clerk of the kitchen was so lively, and my butler showed such gentleness and feeling, that I would gladly have protracted my breakfast to all eternity; but everything has an end, unfortunately, even the appetite of a convalescent. When the meal was ended, and my strength had in a measure returned to me, I appeased the little pie's curiosity, and related the story of my woes with the same candour that I had displayed the day before in telling them to the pigeon. The pie listened with a deeper interest

than the recital seemed to call for, and the turtle-dove evinced a degree of sensibility that was most charming. When, however, I came to touch upon the final cause of all my sufferings —that is to say, my ignorance as to my own identity—

"Are you joking?" screamed the pie. "What, you, a blackbird! a pigeon, you! Nonsense! you are a pie, my dear child, if pie there ever was, and a very pretty pie, too," she added, giving me a little tap with her wing, as if it had been a fan.

"But, Madame la Marquise," I replied, "it seems to me, respectfully begging your pardon, that I am not of the right colour for a pie."

"A Russian pie, my dear; you are a Russian pie! Don't you know that they are white? Poor child, how innocent you are!"

"But how could I be a Russian pie, madame," I rejoined, "when I was born in the Marais in an old broken porringer?"

"Ah! the simple child! Your folks came here with the invasion, my dear; do you suppose that there are not others in the same case as you? Confide in me and don't allow yourself to worry! I mean to carry you off with me right away and show you the finest things in the world."

"And where to, dear madame, may it please you?"

"To my green palace, pretty one; and you shall see the kind of life we lead there. When you

shall once have been a pie for a quarter of an hour, you will never want to hear tell of anything else. There are about a hundred of us there, not those great, common, village pies who make a business of begging on the highways, but all noble and of good family, spry and slender and no larger than one's fist. There isn't one of us that has either more or less than seven black and five white spots; the rule is unalterable, and we look with contempt on all the rest of the world. It is true that you have not the black spots, but you will have no difficulty in gaining admission on account of your Russian descent. Our time is spent in two occupations: cackling and prinking ourselves. From morning until midday we prink, and from noon till night we cackle. Each of ús selects a tree to perch upon, the tallest and oldest that he can find. In the midst of the forest is a great oak that is uninhabited now, alas! It was the dwelling of the late king Pie X., and we make pilgrimages to it, heaving many a deep sigh; but, apart from this transitory grief, our life is as pleasant as we could wish. Our women are not prudes, nor are our husbands jealous; but our pleasures are pure and honest, because our hearts are as noble as our tongues are merry and unrestrained. Our pride is unbounded, and, if a jay or any such common trash happens to intrude his company upon us, we pluck him without mercy. For all that, however, we are the most good-natured people in the world, and the

sparrows, the finches, and the tomtits who live in our copses always find us ready to protect, feed, and help them. Nowhere is cackling carried to greater perfection than among us, and nowhere is there less scandal. There are plenty of bigoted old hen-pies who do nothing but say their prayers all day, but the friskiest of our young gossips can go right up to the severest old dowager and never get a scratch. To sum it all up, our life consists of pleasure, honour, chatter, glory, and the clothes we put on our backs."

"That is very nice, indeed, ma'am," I answered, "and it would certainly be a piece of very bad manners on my part not to obey your orders. Before doing myself the honour of following you, however, permit me, I pray you, to speak a word to this good damsel here—— Mademoiselle," I continued, addressing the turtle-dove, "I adjure you, speak frankly; do you think that I am really a Russian pie?"

At this question, the turtle-dove drooped her head, and her complexion changed to a light red, like Lolotte's ribbons.

"Why, sir, I don't know if I can——"

"Speak, mademoiselle, for Heaven's sake! I contemplate nothing that can possibly give you offence; quite the reverse. You both appear so charming to me that I call Heaven to witness, here and now, that I will make offer of my heart and claw to either of you that will accept them, the very instant that I learn whether I am a pie or something else; for," I added, lowering my

voice a little to the young creature, "I feel an inexpressible turtle-dovish sensation as I gaze on you that causes a strange disquietude within me."

"Why, truly," said the turtle-dove, blushing more deeply still, "I don't know whether it is the sunlight striking on you through those poppies, but your plumage *does* seem to me to have a slight tint of——"

She dared say no more.

"Oh, perplexity!" I cried, "how am I to know what to depend on? How am I to decide to whom to give my heart when it is divided thus cruelly between you? O Socrates! how admirable was the precept that you gave us, but how difficult of observance, when you enjoined upon us: 'Know thyself'!"

I had not tried my voice since that day when my most unlucky song had so disturbed my father's equanimity, and now the idea occurred to me of making use of it as a means whereby I might arrive at the truth. "*Parbleu!*" I said to myself, "since monsieur my father turned me out of doors for the first couplet, it seems a reasonable enough conclusion that the second should produce an effect of some kind on these ladies." So, making a polite bow to start with, as if appealing to their indulgence on account of the cold that I had caught in the rain-storm, I commenced by whistling, then I warbled, then I diverted my audience with a few trills, and, finally, I set to singing in earnest, vociferously, like a Spanish mule-driver in a gale of wind.

The little pie began to back away from me, and the louder I sang the farther she retreated, at first with an air of surprise, which quickly changed to one of stupefaction, and finally terminated in a look of terror accompanied by deep disgust. She kept walking around me in a circle, as a cat walks around a piece of bacon, sizzling hot, against which she has burned her nose, but of which she thinks she would like to try another taste, notwithstanding. I saw how my experiment was turning out, and wished to carry it to a conclusion, so, the more the poor marquise fretted and fumed, the more deliriously did I sing. She stood my melodious efforts for twenty-five minutes, but, at last, she succumbed and flew noisily away, and retired to her palace of verdure. As for the turtle-dove, she had gone off into a sound slumber almost at the very beginning.

"Delightful effect of harmony!" I thought. "Oh, my dear native marsh! Oh, maternal porringer! More than ever am I firmly resolved to return to you!"

Just as I was poising myself in readiness for flight, the turtle-dove opened her eyes.

"Farewell," she said, "pretty and tiresome stranger! My name is Gourouli; don't forget me!"

"Fair Gourouli," I replied, "you are gentle, kind, and charming; I would like to live and die for you, but you are of the colour of the rose; such happiness was never meant for me!"

IV

THE distressing results of my singing could not but sadden me. "Alas, Music! Alas, Poetry!" I said to myself as I winged my way back to Paris, "how few are the hearts that are able to comprehend you!"

While pursuing these reflections, I ran full tilt into a bird who was flying in a direction opposite to mine. The shock was so violent and so unexpected that we both fell into a tree, which, by great good luck, happened to be beneath us. When we had shaken ourselves and pulled ourselves together a bit, I looked at the stranger, fully expecting that there was going to be a quarrel. I saw with surprise that he was white; his head was a little larger than mine, and rising from the middle of his forehead was a kind of plume that gave him an aspect half heroic, half comical. He carried his tail very erect, moreover, in a manner that bespoke an excessive intrepidity of soul; he did not, however, seem to be disposed to quarrel with me. We accosted each other very civilly, and made our mutual excuses, after which we entered into conversation. I took the liberty of asking him what was his name and from what country he was.

"I am surprised," he said, "that you do not know me. Are you not one of our people?"

"Truly, sir," I replied, "I know not of what race I am. Every one asks me that very

question, and tells me the same thing; I think they must be carrying out a bet that they have made."

"You are joking, surely," he replied; "your plumage sets too well upon you that I should fail to recognise a *confrère*. You indubitably belong to that illustrious and venerable race that is known in Latin as *Cacuata*, in scientific nomenclature as *Kakatoës*, and in the vernacular of the vulgar as cockatoos."

"Faith, sir, that may be, and it would be a very great feather in my cap were it so. But favour me by acting as if it were not the case, and have the condescension to tell me to whom I have the honour of addressing myself."

"I am the great poet Kacatogan," the stranger replied. "I have been a mighty traveller, sir, and many are the tiresome journeys that I have made through arid realms and ways of heaviness. I am not a rhymester of yesterday, and my muse has seen misfortune. I have sung love ditties under Louis XVI., sir; I have brawled for the republic, sung the empire in noble strains, applauded the restoration guardedly; even in these later days, I have made an effort, and bowed my neck to meet the demands of this unlettered age. I have given to the world sparkling distichs, sublime odes, graceful dithyrambs, soulful elegies, stirring dramas, blood-curdling romances, vaudevilles in powder, and tragedies in wig. In a word, I may flatter myself that I have added to the temple of the Muses some garlands of gallantry, some gloomy

battlements, and some graceful arabesques. What would you more? I have grown old in harness, but I keep on rhyming still with pristine vigour, and, even as you behold me now, I had my mind on a poem in one canto, to be not less than six pages long, when you came along and gave me that lump on my forehead. Nevertheless, I am entirely at your service, if I can be of use to you."

"To tell the truth, sir, you can," I replied, "for I am in great poetic tribulation just now. I won't venture to say that I am a poet, and, above all, a great poet like you," I added, with a low bow, "but nature has kindly fitted me with an organ that makes its existence felt whenever I am joyous or sorrowful. To be entirely candid with you, I am absolutely ignorant of all the rules of poetry."

"You need not let that trouble you," said Kacatogan; "I myself have forgotten them."

"But there is a very disagreeable circumstance connected with my case," I continued; "my voice produces upon my hearers very much the same effect as did that of a certain Jean de Nivelle upon—— You know what I mean?"

"I know," said Kacatogan. "I have experienced that singular effect in my own person. The cause is unknown to me, but the effect is indisputable."

"Very well, sir. Could you, who seem to me to be the Nestor of poetry, think you, suggest a remedy for this painful state of affairs?"

"No," Kacatogan answered; "speaking for myself, I have never succeeding in finding one. When I was young, it worried me exceedingly that I should be constantly hissed, but now I never think of it. I think that this opposition arises from the fact that the public read other works than ours; they seem to like to do so."

"I am of your opinion; still, sir, you must admit that it is hard on a well-meaning creature that his audience should take to their heels the very moment that he is seized by a fine inspiration. Would you do me the favour to listen to me, and tell me candidly what you think?"

"With the greatest pleasure in the world," said Kacatogan; "I am all ears."

I began to sing forthwith, and had the satisfaction of seeing that Kacatogan neither ran away nor went to sleep. He kept his eyes fixed intently on me, and every now and then gave a little approving nod of the head accompanied by a low, flattering murmur. I soon perceived, however, that he was not listening at all, and that his mind was on his poem. Taking advantage of a moment when I had stopped to breathe, he suddenly interrupted me.

"Ah, that rhyme! I have found it at last!" he said, with a smile and a toss of the head; "that makes the sixty thousand seven hundred and fourteenth that has emanated from this brain! And yet people dare to say that I show the effects of age! I am going to read that

to those good friends of mine; I am going to read it to them, and we'll see what they have to say!"

So saying, he took flight and disappeared, seemingly oblivious of the fact that he had ever met me.

V

LEFT thus solitary with my disappointment, there remained nothing better for me to do than profit by the daylight while it lasted and reach Paris in a single flight, if possible. Unfortunately, I did not know the way; my journey with the carrier-pigeon had been attended with too much discomfort to leave a distinct impression on my memory, so that, instead of keeping straight on, I turned to the left at Bourget, and, the darkness descending suddenly upon me, I found myself obliged to look for a night's lodging in the woods of Morfontaine.

When I reached there, every one was making ready to retire for the night. The pies and jays, who, as is well known, are the worst sleepers on the face of the earth, were squabbling and wrangling on every side. The sparrows were squalling among the bushes, swarming and treading one another under foot. On the bank of the stream, two herons, the George Dandins of the locality, were stalking gravely to and fro, perched on their tall stilts, patiently waiting for their wives in an attitude of profound meditation. Huge crows, already more than half asleep, settled heavily upon the tops of the tallest trees,

and commenced to drone out their evening prayer. Below, the amorous tomtits were pursuing one another through the copses, while a dishevelled woodpecker, marching in rear of his little household, endeavoured to marshal it into the hollow of an old tree. Battalions of hedge-sparrows came in from the fields, whirling in the air like smoke-wreaths, and threw themselves upon a shrub, which they quite concealed from sight; finches, blackcaps and redbreasts perched airily upon the projecting branches in little groups, like the crystal pendants on a girandole. From every side came the sound of voices that said as plainly as could be: "Come, wife!—Come, my daughter!—This way, pretty one!—Come here, darling!—Here I am, my dear! —Good-night, dear mistress!—Farewell, friends! —Sleep soundly, children!"

Imagine what a predicament it was for a bachelor to have to take up his quarters in an inn like that! I thought that I would go to some birds of station similar to my own and request their hospitality. All birds are gray in the dark, I said to myself, and besides, what harm can it do people to have a young fellow sleeping beside them if he behaves himself?

I first bent my steps toward a ditch where there was an assemblage of starlings. They were just making their toilet for the night, and were devoting the most scrupulous attention to it; and I observed that most of them had their wings gilded, and wore patent-leather claws:

they were evidently the dandies of the forest. They were good enough fellows in their way, and did not notice me; but their conversation was so shallow, they displayed such fatuousness in telling one another of their broils and their love affairs, and they crowded together so coarsely, that I could not stand it.

Next I went and perched upon a limb where half-a-dozen birds of different kinds were sitting in a row. I modestly took the last place, away out on the end of the limb, in the hope that they would suffer me to remain there. As my ill-luck would have it, my neighbour was a dove well on in years, as withered and juiceless as a rusty weathercock on a church steeple. At the moment of my approach, she was devoting an affectionate solicitude to the scanty feathers that covered her old bones; she pretended to be smoothing them, but she was too much afraid that she might pull one out to do that: she was only counting them over to see if they were all there. I barely touched her with the tip of my wing, when she drew herself up as majestically as you please.

"What are you doing here, sir?" she cried, with a modesty that would not have disgraced the severest of British prudes, and, giving me a great poke with her elbow, she sent me tumbling from the branch with a vigour worthy of a railway baggageman.

I fell into a brake where a big wood-hen was sleeping. My mother herself, in her porringer,

never wore such a beatific air. She was so plump, so rotund and comfortable, with her well-filled stomach and her fluffy feathers, that one would have taken her for a *pâté* from which the crust had been eaten off. I crept furtively up to her. "She won't wake up," I said to myself, "and, even if she does, such a jolly, fat old lady can't help but be good-natured." She did not turn out as I expected, however. She lazily opened her eyes half-way, and, heaving a faint sigh, said,

"You are crowding me, young fellow; clear out of here."

At the same instant, I heard my name called; it was a band of thrushes up in the top of a mountain-ash who were making signals to me to come to them. "There are some charitable souls, at last," thought I. They made room for me, laughing as if they were crazy, and I slipped into the midst of the feathered group as expeditiously as ever you saw a *billet-doux* disappear in a muff. It soon became evident to me, however, that the ladies had been partaking of the fruit of the vine more liberally than was good for them; it was as much as they could do to keep themselves from falling off their perches, and their equivocal pleasantries, their uproarious bursts of laughter, and their indecent songs compelled me to leave their company.

I was beginning to despair, and was about to search for some lonely corner where I might lay

my head, when a nightingale began to sing. Instantly, silence reigned throughout the grove. Ah! how pure was her voice! Her very melancholy, how sweet did it appear! Far from disturbing the slumbers of others, her tuneful strains seemed to soothe them. No one thought of bidding her be silent, no one took it ill that she selected that hour for singing her song; her father did not beat her, her friends did not fly from her presence.

"It is I alone, then," I cried, "to whom it is not given to be happy! Let me go; let me fly from this cruel world! Better is it to seek my way amid the shades of night, and run the risk of making a meal for some wandering owl, than to linger here and have my heart lacerated by the spectacle of others' happiness!"

Upon this reflection, I started forth, and, for a long time, wandered without definite aim. The first light of breaking day revealed to me the towers of Notre Dame. Quick as a flash I reached them, and from them scanned the horizon; it was long before I recognised our garden. I winged my way to it, swifter than the wind. Alas! it was empty. It was in vain that I called upon my parents: no one responded. The tree where my father had his seat, the bush, my mother's home—the beloved porringer—all had disappeared. The fatal ax had levelled all, and, in place of the verdant alley where I was born, there remained only a pile of firewood.

VI

The first thing that I did was to search through all the gardens of the neighbourhood for my parents, but it was only labour lost; they had doubtless taken refuge in some distant quarter, and I never heard of them more.

Sick at heart, I went and perched upon the gutter that had been my first place of exile when driven from my home by my father's cruelty. There I spent days and nights bewailing my sad existence; I could not sleep; I ate scarcely anything; my grief had nearly caused my death.

One day when, as usual, I was giving way to my sorrowful meditations, I thought aloud, and said:

"So, then, I am not a blackbird, since my father pulled out my feathers; nor a pigeon, since I fell by the way when I tried to fly to Belgium; nor a Russian pie, since the little marquise stopped her ears as soon as I opened my beak; nor a turtle-dove, since Gourouli, even that good, kind Gourouli, could not help snoring like a trooper while I was singing; nor a parrot, since Kacatogan would not condescend to listen to me; nor a bird of any kind whatever, in fine, since they allowed me to sleep by myself at Morfontaine. And yet I have feathers on my body; those appendages are claws, those are wings. I am not a monster, witness Gourouli and the little marquise

herself, who seemed to look on me with eyes of favour. To what inscrutable reason is it owing that these feathers, wings, and claws compose a whole that is nothing more nor less than a nameless mystery? I wonder if I am not——"

I was pursuing my lamentations in this strain when I was interrupted by two women quarrelling in the street.

"Ay! parbleu!" one of them said to the other, "if you succeed in doing it, I will make you a present of a white blackbird!"

"Great Heavens!" I exclaimed; "that decides it. I am the son of a blackbird, and I am white; I am a white blackbird!"

This discovery, as may well be imagined, modified my ideas considerably. I at once ceased to bewail my fate, and began to hold up my head and strut about the gutter, looking out on the world with the air of a conqueror.

"It is no small matter to be a white blackbird," said I to myself; "you don't find them growing on every bush. It was a fine thing for me to do, forsooth, to grieve myself to death because I could find no one like me; it is always so with genius; it is my case! It was my wish to fly from the world; now I will astonish it! Since I am that peerless bird whose existence is denied by the vulgar herd, it is my duty, as it is my intention, to bear myself accordingly and look down on the rest of the feathered tribe with a pride as great as their vaunted Phœnix. I must buy myself

Alfieri's memoirs and Lord Byron's poems; those noble works will inspire in me a towering haughtiness in addition to that which God has endowed me with. Yes, if so it may be, I mean to add to the prestige which is mine by birth. Nature has willed that I should be rare: I will make myself mysterious. It shall be a favour, a glory, to look on me—— And why not, indeed," I added, lowering my voice, "exhibit myself, just simply for money?

"Fie on it! What an ignoble thought! I will write a poem, like Kacatogan, not in one canto, but in twenty-four, like other great men; that is not enough; there shall be forty-eight, with notes and an appendix! The whole universe must know of my existence. I will not fail to make my verse tell the pitiful tale of my loneliness, but it shall be done in such a way that the happiest shall envy me. Since Heaven has denied me a mate, I will defame most horribly the mates of all my acquaintance; I will demonstrate that all the grapes are green except those that are for my eating. Let the nightingales look out for themselves; I will prove, as sure as two and two make four, that their complainings give rise to heart-disease, and that their wares are worthless. I must go and find Charpentier. First of all, I want to make for myself a strong literary position. I mean to have a court around me, composed, not of journalists alone, but of real authors, and even of literary women. I will write a *rôle*

for Mlle. Rachel, and, if she decline to act it, I will trumpet it through the land that there are old actresses in the provinces who are her superiors in talent. I will go to Venice, and there, on the banks of the Grand Canal, in the heart of that fairy-like city, I will hire the beautiful Mocenigo Palace that costs four livres and ten sous a day; there I will drink in the inspiration of all the memories that the author of "Lara" must have left there. From the depths of my solitude, I will inundate the world with a deluge of *terza rima*, copied from the verse of Spenser, in which my great soul shall find solace; the grove shall do me reverence, tomtits shall sigh, turtle-doves coo, woodcocks shed bitter tears, and all the old owls shriek enviously. As regards my personal being, however, I will be inexorable and permit no amorous advances. Vainly will the unfortunate females who shall have been seduced by my sublime strains approach me with prayers and supplications to have pity on them; my only answer to it all will be—'Pshaw!' Oh, glory without end! My manuscripts shall sell for their weight in gold; my books shall cross the sea; fame and fortune shall pursue me everywhere; I alone will appear indifferent to the murmur of the multitude that shall crowd about me. In a word, I will be a perfect white blackbird, a veritable eccentric author, feasted, petted, admired, and envied, but always grumbling and ever insupportable."

VII

It took me only six weeks to bring out my first work. It was, as I had determined it should be, a poem in forty-eight cantos. It is true that there were some passages that showed marks of hasty composition, but that was owing to the prodigious rapidity with which it had been written, and I thought that the public, accustomed as it is to the fine writing that it finds in the feuilletons of the newspapers nowadays, would overlook such a trifling defect.

My success was such as accorded with my merit; that is to say, it was unparalleled. The subject of my work was nothing other than myself; in that, I conformed to the ruling fashion of our time. The egotistic unreserve with which I told the story of my late sufferings was charming; I let the reader into the secret of a thousand domestic details of most absorbing interest; the description of my mother's porringer alone filled no less than fourteen cantos.

The description was perfect; I enumerated every dent, chink, and cranny, every spot and stain, the places where it had been mended and its varying appearances under different lights; I exhibited it inside and out, top, sides, and bottom, curves and plain surfaces; then, passing to what was within, I made a minute study of the blades of grass, sticks, straws, and bits of wood, the gravel-stones and drops of water, the remains of dead flies and broken cockchafers' legs that

were there—the description was simply charming. Do not think, however, that I sent it to the press as an unbroken whole; there are readers who would have known no better than to skip it. I cunningly cut it up into fragments which I interspersed among the episodes of the story in such a way that no part of it was lost, so that, at the most thrilling and dramatic moments, one suddenly came to fifteen pages of porringer. Therein, I think, lies one of the great secrets of our art, and, as there is nothing mean about me, let any one who is inclined to do so profit by it.

All Europe was in a commotion upon the appearance of my book; it greedily devoured the details of private life that I condescended to reveal to it. How could it have been otherwise? Not only had I enumerated every circumstance that had the slightest bearing on my personality, but I gave to the public, in addition, a finished picture of all the idle reveries that had passed through my head since the time when I was two months old; nay, I even inserted at the most interesting part an ode composed by me when in the shell. It may be supposed that I did not fail to allude cursorily to the great theme that is now occupying the attention of the world; to wit, the future of humanity. This problem had seemed to me to have something of interest in it, and, in one of my leisure moments, I had roughly drafted a solution of it, which seemed to give general satisfaction.

There was not a day that I failed to receive

complimentary verses, congratulatory letters, and anonymous declarations of love. As to callers, I adhered unflinchingly to the resolution that I had formed for my protection: my door was rigorously barred against all the world. Still, I could not help receiving two foreigners who had announced themselves as relatives of mine; they were blackbirds both, one from Senegal, the other from China.

"Ah! sir," said they, with an embrace that nearly drove the breath out of my body, "what a great blackbird you are! How well have you depicted in your immortal lay the pangs of unrecognised genius! If we were not already as uncomprehended as possible, we should become so after having read you. How we sympathise with you in your sorrow, in your sublime scorn for the vulgar! We, too, dear sir, have reason to know something, of our own knowledge, of the secret griefs that you have sung so well. Here are two sonnets that we composed while coming hither, and that we beg you will accept."

"Here also is some music," added the Chinese, "that my wife composed on a passage in your preface. It is marvellous in its illustration of the meaning of the author."

"Gentlemen," I said to them, "so far as I can judge, you appear to me to be endowed with great depth of feeling and great brilliancy of intellect; but pardon me for asking you a question: why are you so sad?"

"Eh, monsieur!" replied the traveller from Senegal, "just look at me, and see how I am constructed. My plumage is pleasing to the eye, it is true, and I am dressed in that beautiful shade of green that shines so lustrously on the neck of the duck, but my beak is too small and my foot is too big—and just look at the ridiculous tail that I am tricked out with! It is a great deal longer than my whole body. Is it not enough to tempt one to use profane language?"

"And look at me, too," said the Chinaman; "my pitiable state is even worse than his. My *confrère* sweeps the streets with his tail, but at me the little street urchins point their fingers because I have no tail at all."

"Gentlemen," I rejoined, "I pity you from the bottom of my heart; it is always inconvenient to have too much or too little of anything, be it what it may. Allow me to suggest to you, however, that there are several persons very like you in the Jardin des Plantes, where they have been living very quietly for some time past, in a stuffed condition. Even as it does not suffice a woman of letters to cast her modesty to the winds in order to write a good book, so no blackbird can command genius merely by manifesting discontent. I am the only one of my kind, and I am sorry for it; I may be wrong, but I can't help it. I am white, gentlemen; do you become white, too, and then we'll see what you have to say."

VIII

NOTWITHSTANDING all my resolutions and my affected calmness, I was not happy. My isolation seemed none the less hard to bear for being glorious, and I could never think, without a shudder, of the cheerless prospect that lay before me of living all my life unmated. The return of spring, in particular, brought with it a mortal feeling of disquietude, and I was beginning to fall back into my old morbid state of mind, when an unforeseen circumstance occurred that shaped my future for me.

It is unnecessary here to state that my writings had crossed the Channel, and that the English were quarrelling among themselves for copies. The English quarrel over everything except that which is comprehensible to them. One day I received a letter from London, from a young hen-blackbird.

"I have read your poem," she said, "and the admiration that it inspired in me has induced me to make you the offer of my hand and person. God made us for each other! I am like you—I am a white blackbird!"

My surprise and delight may be readily imagined. "A white hen-blackbird!" I said to myself; "can it be possible? So, then, I am no longer alone upon the earth!" I made haste to answer the fair unknown, and I did it in such a strain as showed how acceptable her proposition was to me. I urged her to come to Paris, or else

permit me to fly to her. She responded that she preferred to come to me, because her parents were plaguing her to death; that she was putting her affairs in order, and would be with me almost immediately.

She arrived, in fact, a few days after her letter. Oh, joy! she was the prettiest little blackbird in the world, and was even whiter than I was.

"Ah! mademoiselle," I cried, "or madame, rather, for, from this moment, I look upon you as my lawful wedded wife, is it possible that so charming a creature can have been a dweller upon earth and the tongue of fame have never told me of her existence? Blessed be the ills that I have endured and the peckings that my father gave me with his beak, since kind Heaven has had in store for me a compensation so unhoped-for! Until this day, I believed myself condemned to eternal solitude, and, to speak to you frankly, the burden was a heavy one to bear; but, now that I look on you, I feel within me all the qualities requisite for a good father and husband. Let us not delay; accept my hand; we will be married in English style, without ceremony, and start at once for Switzerland."

"I don't look at the matter in that light," replied the young lady blackbird. "I mean that our espousals shall be celebrated in magnificent style, and that all the blackbirds in France that have a drop of good blood in their veins shall be present in solemn conclave. People of our quality owe it to their station not to marry like a

couple of cats in a coal-hole. I have a store of bank-notes with me; get out your invitations, go to your tradesmen, and see that you don't skimp the refreshments."

I followed implicitly the instructions of my white Merlette. Our wedding-feast was on a scale of unparalleled luxury; ten thousand flies were consumed at it. We received the nuptial benediction at the hands of a reverend Cormorant father, who was archbishop *in partibus*. The day was brought to an end by a splendid ball; in a word, there was nothing wanting to complete my felicity.

My love for my charming wife increased as I became better acquainted with her character and disposition; in her small person, all accomplishments of mind and body were united. The only blemish was that she was a little prudish in her notions; but I attributed that to the influence of the English fog in which she had been living until then, and I doubted not but this small cloud would quickly melt away in the genial atmosphere of France.

A matter that was cause to me of more serious uneasiness was a sort of mystery in which she would at times enshroud herself with strange inflexibility, shutting herself away under lock and key with her maids, and thus passing, as *she pretended*, whole hours in making her toilet. Husbands are not generally inclined to look with favour upon whims of this description in their family. Twenty times it had happened that I

had gone to my wife's apartment and knocked, and she had not opened the door. It tried my patience cruelly. One day, however, I was so persistent, and in such a horribly bad temper, that she was obliged to yield and unlock the door rather hastily, at the same time reproaching me for my importunity. As I entered, my eyes alighted on a great bottle filled with a kind of paste made of flour and Spanish white. I asked my wife what use she put that ointment to. She replied that it was a lenitive for frost-bites that she was troubled with.

It struck me at the time that there was something more about that lenitive than she chose to tell; but how could I distrust such a sweet, well-behaved creature, who had bestowed her hand on me with such gladness and perfect candour? I had been ignorant at first that my wife was a literary character, but she admitted it after a while, and even went so far as to show me the manuscript of a novel for which she had taken Walter Scott and Scarron as her models. It may be imagined how pleased I was by such an agreeable surprise. Not only did I behold myself possessed of a beauty beyond compare, but I was now also fully assured that my companion's intellect was in all respects worthy of my genius. From that time forth, we worked together. While I was composing my poems, she would bescribble reams of paper. I used to read my poetry aloud to her, and that did not in the least disturb her or prevent her from going on with her

writing. She hatched out her romances with a facility that was almost equal to my own, always selecting the most dramatic subjects, such as parricides, rapes, murders, and even small rascalities, and always taking pains to give the government a slap when she could, and to inculcate the emancipation of female blackbirds. In a word, there was no obstacle of sufficient magnitude to daunt her intelligence, and she allowed no scruples of modesty to keep her from saying a brilliant thing; she never erased a line, and never sat down to her work with a plot arranged beforehand. She was the perfect type of the feminine literary blackbird.

She was working away one day with rather more than her usual industry, when I noticed that she was perspiring violently, and at the same time I was surprised to see that she had a great black spot right in the middle of her back.

"Good gracious!" I said, "what ails you? Are you ill?"

She seemed a little frightened at first, and I even thought that there was a guilty expression on her face; but her habit of familiarity with the world quickly enabled her to regain the wonderful control that she always exercised over herself.

"Is my wife losing her colour?" I asked myself in a frightened whisper. The thought haunted me, and would not let me sleep. The bottle of paste arose before my memory. "Oh, heavens!" I exclaimed, "what a suspicion! Can it be that this celestial creature is nothing more than a

painting, a thin coat of whitewash! Can she have made use of such a trick to deceive me! When I thought that I was pressing to my heart the twin-sister of my soul, the privileged being created for my behoof alone, can it be that I was holding in my embrace but so much flour?"

Haunted by this horrible suspicion, I devised a plan to relieve myself of it. I purchased a barometer, and eagerly awaited the advent of a rainy day. My idea was to select a Sunday when the mercury was falling, take my wife to the country, and see what effect a good washing would have on her. We were in mid July, however, and the weather remained disgustingly fair.

My apparent happiness and my constant habit of writing had wrought my sensibilities up to a very high pitch. While at work, it sometimes happened to me, artless being that I was, that my feeling overmastered my reason, and then I would abandon myself to the luxury of tears while waiting for a rhyme to come to me. These infrequent occasions were a source of much pleasure to my wife; masculine weakness is a spectacle that always affords pleasure to feminine pride. One night, when I was busy filing and polishing, in obedience to Boileau's precept, the flood-gates of my heart were opened.

"O thou!" said I to my dear Merlette, "the only and most fondly loved one! thou, without whom my life is but an empty dream; thou, in whose look, whose smile, the universe is as another world; life of my heart, knowest thou

how I love thee? It were easy for me, with a little study and application, to express in verse the hackneyed ideas that have already been employed by other poets; but where shall I find the glowing words in which to tell thee all that thy beauty inspires within my heart? Can the memory even of the suffering that is past supply me with language fitly to portray to thee the bliss that is present? Before thou camest to me, my lonely state was that of a homeless orphan; to-day, it is that of a king. Knowest thou, my beautiful one, that in this weak frame whose form I bear until it shall be stricken down in death, in this poor, throbbing brain where fruitless ideas are ceaselessly fermenting, knowest thou, dost understand, my angel, that there is not one atom, not one thought, that is not wholly thine? List to what my intelligence can say to thee, and feel how infinitely greater is my love. Oh! that my genius were a pearl, and thou wert Cleopatra!"

While doting in this manner, I was shedding tears over my wife, and her colour was fading visibly. At every tear that fell from my eyes, a feather became, not black, indeed, but a dirty, rusty hue (I believe that she had been playing the same trick before somewhere else). After thus indulging my tenderness for a few minutes I found myself in the presence of an unfloured, unpasted bird, in every respect exactly similar to a common, every-day blackbird.

What could I do? What could I say? What

course was left open to me? Reproaches would have been futile. I might, indeed, have considered the marriage as void on the ground of false representations, and so secured its annulment, but how could I endure to make my shame public? Was not my misfortune great enough as it was? I took my courage in my two claws; I resolved to quit the world, to abandon the literary career, to fly to a desert, could I find one, where never again might I behold living creature, and, like Alcestis, seek

"——some lonely spot
Where leave is granted blackbirds to be white."

IX

THEREUPON I flew away, still dissolved in tears, and the wind, which is to birds what chance is to men, landed me on a branch in Morfontaine wood. At that hour every one was abed. "What a marriage!" I said to myself; "what a catastrophe! That poor child certainly meant well in getting herself up in white, but, for all that, I am none the less to be pitied, and she is none the less mangy."

The nightingale was singing still. Alone in the silence of the night, he was recreating himself with that gift of the Almighty that renders him so superior to the poet, and was pouring out, unhindered, his secrets upon the surrounding stillness. I could not resist the temptation of drawing near and speaking to him.

"What a lucky bird you are!" said I. "Not only can you sing as much as you wish—and very well you do it, too, and every one is pleased to listen to you—but you have a wife and children, your nest, your friends, a comfortable pillow of moss, the full moon, and never a newspaper to criticise you. Rubini and Rossini are nothing compared with you; you are the equal of the one, and you interpret the other. I, too, sir, have been a singer, and my case is pitiable. While you have been here in the forest, I have been marshalling words like Prussian soldiers in array of battle and dovetailing insipidities. May one know your secret?"

"Yes," replied the nightingale, "but it is not what you think. My wife is tiresome; I do not love her. I am in love with the rose: Saadi, the Persian, has mentioned the circumstance. All night long for her sake do I strain my throat in singing, but she sleeps and hears me not. Her petals are closed now, and she has an old scarab sheltered there—and to-morrow morning, when I seek my bed, worn out with fatigue and suffering, then, then, she will open them to receive a bee who is consuming her heart!"

THE OUTCASTS OF POKER FLAT*

BY

FRANCIS BRET HARTE

As Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler, stepped into the main street of Poker Flat on the morning of the 23d of November, 1850, he was conscious of a change in its moral atmosphere since the preceding night. Two or three men, conversing earnestly together, ceased as he approached, and exchanged significant glances. There was a Sabbath lull in the air, which, in a settlement unused to Sabbath influences, looked ominous.

Mr. Oakhurst's calm, handsome face betrayed small concern in these indications. Whether he was conscious of any predisposing cause was another question. "I reckon they're after somebody," he reflected; "likely it's me." He returned to his pocket the handkerchief with which he had been whipping away the red dust of Poker Flat from his neat boots, and quietly discharged his mind of any further conjecture.

In point of fact, Poker Flat was "after somebody." It had lately suffered the loss of several thousand dollars, two valuable horses, and

a prominent citizen. It was experiencing a spasm of virtuous reaction, quite as lawless and ungovernable as any of the acts that had provoked it. A secret committee had determined to rid the town of all improper persons. This was done permanently in regard of two men who were then hanging from the boughs of a sycamore in the gulch, and temporarily in the banishment of certain other objectionable characters. I regret to say that some of these were ladies. It is but due to the sex, however, to state that their impropriety was professional, and it was only in such easily established standards of evil that Poker Flat ventured to sit in judgment.

Mr. Oakhurst was right in supposing that he was included in this category. A few of the committee had urged hanging him as a possible example and a sure method of reimbursing themselves from his pockets for the sums he had won from them. "It's agin justice," said Jim Wheeler, "to let this yer young man from Roaring Camp—an entire stranger—carry away our money." But a crude sentiment of equity residing in the breasts of those who had been fortunate enough to win from Mr. Oakhurst overruled this narrower local prejudice.

Mr. Oakhurst received his sentence with philosophic calmness, none the less coolly that he was aware of the hesitation of his judges. He was too much of a gambler not to accept fate. With him, life was at best an uncertain game,

and he recognised the usual percentage in favour of the dealer.

A body of armed men accompanied the deported wickedness of Poker Flat to the outskirts of the settlement. Besides Mr. Oakhurst, who was known to be a coolly desperate man, and for whose intimidation the armed escort was intended, the expatriated party consisted of a young woman familiarly known as "The Duchess"; another who had won the title of "Mother Shipton"; and "Uncle Billy," a suspected sluice-robber and confirmed drunkard. The cavalcade provoked no comments from the spectators, nor was any word uttered by the escort. Only when the gulch which marked the uttermost limit of Poker Flat was reached, the leader spoke briefly and to the point. The exiles were forbidden to return at the peril of their lives.

As the escort disappeared, their pent-up feelings found vent in a few hysterical tears from the Duchess, some bad language from Mother Shipton, and a Parthian volley of expletives from Uncle Billy. The philosophic Oakhurst alone remained silent. He listened calmly to Mother Shipton's desire to cut somebody's heart out, to the repeated statements of the Duchess that she would die in the road, and to the alarming oaths that seemed to be bumped out of Uncle Billy as he rode forward. With the easy good humour characteristic of his class, he insisted upon exchanging his own riding horse, "Five-Spot,"

for the sorry mule which the Duchess rode. But even this act did not draw the party into any closer sympathy. The young woman readjusted her somewhat draggled plumes with a feeble, faded coquetry; Mother Shipton eyed the possessor of "Five-Spot" with malevolence; and Uncle Billy included the whole party in one sweeping anathema.

The road to Sandy Bar—a camp that, not having as yet experienced the regenerating influences of Poker Flat, consequently seemed to offer some invitation to the emigrants—lay over a steep mountain range. It was distant a day's severe travel. In that advanced season, the party soon passed out of the moist, temperate regions of the foothills into the dry, cold, bracing air of the Sierras. The trail was narrow and difficult. At noon the Duchess, rolling out of her saddle upon the ground, declared her intention of going no farther, and the party halted.

The spot was singularly wild and impressive. A wooded amphitheatre, surrounded on three sides by precipitous cliffs of naked granite, sloped gently toward the crest of another precipice that overlooked the valley. It was, undoubtedly, the most suitable spot for a camp, had camping been advisable. But Mr. Oakhurst knew that scarcely half the journey to Sandy Bar was accomplished, and the party were not equipped or provisioned for delay. This fact he pointed out to his companions curtly, with a philosophic commentary on the folly of

"throwing up their hand before the game was played out." But they were furnished with liquor, which, in this emergency, stood them in place of food, fuel, rest, and prescience. In spite of his remonstrances, it was not long before they were more or less under its influence. Uncle Billy passed rapidly from a bellicose state into one of stupor, the Duchess became maudlin, and Mother Shipton snored. Mr. Oakhurst alone remained erect, leaning against a rock, calmly surveying them.

Mr. Oakhurst did not drink. It interfered with a profession which required coolness, impassiveness, and presence of mind, and, in his own language, he "couldn't afford it." As he gazed at his recumbent fellow exiles, the loneliness begotten of his pariah trade, his habits of life, his very vices, for the first time seriously oppressed him. He bestirred himself in dusting his black clothes, washing his hands and face, and other acts characteristic of his studiously neat habits, and for a moment forgot his annoyance. The thought of deserting his weaker and more pitiable companions never perhaps occurred to him. Yet he could not help feeling the want of that excitement which, singularly enough, was most conducive to that calm equanimity for which he was notorious. He looked at the gloomy walls that rose a thousand feet sheer above the circling pines around him, at the sky ominously clouded, at the valley below, already deepening into shadow; and,

doing so, suddenly he heard his own name called.

A horseman slowly ascended the trail. In the fresh, open face of the newcomer, Mr. Oakhurst recognised Tom Simson, otherwise known as "The Innocent," of Sandy Bar. He had met him some months before over a "little game," and had, with perfect equanimity, won the entire fortune—amounting to some forty dollars—of that guileless youth. After the game was finished, Mr. Oakhurst drew the youthful speculator behind the door, and thus addressed him: "Tommy, you're a good little man, but you can't gamble worth a cent. Don't try it over again." He then handed him his money back, pushed him gently from the room, and so made a devoted slave of Tom Simson.

There was a remembrance of this in his boyish and enthusiastic greeting of Mr. Oakhurst. He had started, he said, to go to Poker Flat to seek his fortune. "Alone?" No, not exactly alone; in fact (a giggle), he had run away with Piney Woods. Didn't Mr. Oakhurst remember Piney? She that used to wait on the table at the Temperance House? They had been engaged a long time, but old Jake Woods had objected, and so they had run away, and were going to Poker Flat to be married, and here they were. And they were tired out, and how lucky it was they had found a place to camp, and company. All this the Innocent delivered rapidly, while Piney, a stout, comely damsel of fifteen, emerged

from behind the pine-tree, where she had been blushing unseen, and rode to the side of her lover.

Mr. Oakhurst seldom troubled himself with sentiment, still less with propriety; but he had a vague idea that the situation was not fortunate. He retained, however, his presence of mind sufficiently to kick Uncle Billy, who was about to say something, and Uncle Billy was sober enough to recognise in Mr. Oakhurst's kick a superior power that would not bear trifling. He then endeavoured to dissuade Tom Simson from delaying further, but in vain. He even pointed out the fact that there was no provision, nor means of making a camp. But, unluckily, the Innocent met this objection by assuring the party that he was provided with an extra mule loaded with provisions, and by the discovery of a rude attempt at a log house near the trail. "Piney can stay with Mrs. Oakhurst," said the Innocent, pointing to the Duchess, "and I can shift for myself."

Nothing but Mr. Oakhurst's admonishing foot saved Uncle Billy from bursting into a roar of laughter. As it was, he felt compelled to retire up the cañon until he could recover his gravity. There he confided the joke to the tall pine-trees, with many slaps of his leg, contortions of his face, and the usual profanity. But, when he returned to the party, he found them seated by a fire—for the air had grown strangely chill and the sky overcast—in apparently amicable con-

versation. Piney was actually talking in an impulsive, girlish fashion to the Duchess, who was listening with an interest and animation she had not shown for many days. The Innocent was holding forth, apparently with equal effect, to Mr. Oakhurst and Mother Shipton, who was actually relaxing into amiability. "Is this yer a d—d picnic?" said Uncle Billy, with inward scorn, as he surveyed the sylvan group, the glancing firelight, and the tethered animals in the foreground. Suddenly an idea mingled with the alcoholic fumes that disturbed his brain. It was apparently of a jocular nature, for he felt impelled to slap his leg again and cram his fist into his mouth.

As the shadows crept slowly up the mountain, a slight breeze rocked the tops of the pine-trees and moaned through their long and gloomy aisles. The ruined cabin, patched and covered with pine boughs, was set apart for the ladies. As the lovers parted they unaffectedly exchanged a kiss, so honest and sincere that it might have been heard above the swaying pines. The frail Duchess and the malevolent Mother Shipton were probably too stunned to remark upon this last evidence of simplicity, and so turned without a word to the hut. The fire was replenished, the men lay down before the door, and in a few minutes were asleep.

Mr. Oakhurst was a light sleeper. Toward morning he awoke benumbed and cold. As he stirred the dying fire, the wind, which was now

blowing strongly, brought to his cheek that which caused the blood to leave it—snow!

He started to his feet with the intention of awakening the sleepers, for there was no time to lose. But turning to where Uncly Billy had been lying, he found him gone. A suspicion leaped to his brain, and a curse to his lips. He ran to the spot where the mules had been tethered—they were no longer there. The tracks were already rapidly disappearing in the snow.

The momentary excitement brought Mr. Oakhurst back to the fire with his usual calm. He did not waken the sleepers. The Innocent slumbered peacefully, with a smile on his good-humoured, freckled face; the virgin Piney slept beside her frailer sisters as sweetly as though attended by celestial guardians; and Mr. Oakhurst, drawing his blanket over his shoulders, stroked his mustaches, and waited for the dawn. It came slowly in a whirling mist of snowflakes that dazzled and confused the eye. What could be seen of the landscape appeared magically changed. He looked over the valley, and summed up the present and future in two words, "Snowed in!"

A careful inventory of the provisions, which, fortunately for the party, had been stored within the hut, and so escaped the felonious fingers of Uncle Billy, disclosed the fact that, with care and prudence, they might last ten days longer. "That is," said Mr. Oakhurst *sotto voce* to the Innocent, "if you're willing to board us. If you ain't—

and perhaps you'd better not—you can wait till Uncle Billy gets back with provisions." For some occult reason, Mr. Oakhurst could not bring himself to disclose Uncle Billy's rascality, and so offered the hypothesis that he had wandered from the camp, and had accidentally stampeded the animals. He dropped a warning to the Duchess and Mother Shipton, who, of course, knew the facts of their associate's defection. "They'll find out the truth about us *all* when they find out anything," he added significantly, "and there's no good frightening them now."

Tom Simson not only put all his worldly store at the disposal of Mr. Oakhurst, but seemed to enjoy the prospect of their enforced seclusion. "We'll have a good camp for a week, and then the snow'll melt, and we'll all go back together." The cheerful gayety of the young man and Mr. Oakhurst's calm infected the others. The Innocent, with the aid of pine boughs, extemporised a thatch for the roofless cabin, and the Duchess directed Piney in the rearrangement of the interior with a taste and tact that opened the blue eyes of that provincial maiden to their fullest extent. "I reckon now you're used to fine things at Poker Flat," said Piney. The Duchess turned away sharply to conceal something that reddened her cheeks through their professional tint, and Mother Shipton requested Piney not to "chatter." But, when Mr. Oakhurst returned from a weary search for the trail, he heard the sound of happy laughter echoed from the rocks.

He stopped in some alarm, and his thoughts first naturally reverted to the whisky, which he had prudently cachéd. "And yet it don't somehow sound like whisky," said the gambler. It was not until he caught sight of the blazing fire through the still blinding storm, and the group around it, that he settled to the conviction that it was "square fun."

Whether Mr. Oakhurst had cachéd his cards with the whisky as something debarred the free access of the community, I cannot say. It was certain that, in Mother Shipton's words, he "didn't say 'cards' once" during that evening. Haply, the time was beguiled by an accordion, produced somewhat ostentatiously by Tom Simson from his pack. Notwithstanding some difficulties attending the manipulation of this instrument, Piney Woods managed to pluck several reluctant melodies from its keys, to an accompaniment by the Innocent on a pair of bone castanets. But the crowning festivity of the evening was reached in a rude camp-meeting hymn, which the lovers, joining hands, sang with great earnestness and vociferation. I fear that a certain defiant tone and Covenanter's swing to its chorus, rather than any devotional quality, caused it speedily to infect the others, who at last joined in the refrain—

> "I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,
> And I am bound to die in His army."

The pines rocked, the storm eddied and whirled

above the miserable group, and the flames of their altar leaped heavenward, as if in token of the vow.

At midnight the storm abated, the rolling clouds parted, and the stars glittered keenly above the sleeping camp. Mr. Oakhurst, whose professional habits had enabled him to live on the smallest possible amount of sleep, in dividing the watch with Tom Simson somehow managed to take upon himself the greater part of that duty. He excused himself to the Innocent by saying that he had "often been a week without sleep." "Doing what?" asked Tom. "Poker!" replied Oakhurst sententiously. "When a man gets a streak of luck—nigger-luck—he don't get tired. The luck gives in first. Luck," continued the gambler reflectively, "is a mighty queer thing. All you know about it for certain is that it's bound to change. And it's finding out when it's going to change that makes you. We've had a streak of bad luck since we left Poker Flat—you come along, and, slap, you get into it, too. If you can hold your cards right along, you're all right. For," added the gambler, with cheerful irrelevance—

"'I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord
And I'm bound to die in His army.'"

The third day came, and the sun, looking through the white-curtained valley, saw the outcasts divide their slowly decreasing store of provisions for the morning meal. It was one of

the peculiarities of that mountain climate that its rays diffused a kindly warmth over the wintry landscape, as if in regretful commiseration of the past. But it revealed drift on drift of snow piled high around the hut—a hopeless, uncharted, trackless sea of white lying below the rocky shores to which the castaways still clung. Through the marvellously clear air, the smoke of the pastoral village of Poker Flat rose miles away. Mother Shipton saw it, and, from a remote pinnacle of her rocky fastness, hurled in that direction a final malediction. It was her last vituperative attempt, and, perhaps for that reason, was invested with a certain degree of sublimity. It did her good, she privately informed the Duchess.

"Just you go out there, and cuss, and see." She then set herself to the task of amusing "the child," as she and the Duchess were pleased to call Piney. Piney was no chicken, but it was a soothing and original theory of the pair thus to account for the fact that she didn't swear and wasn't improper.

When night crept up again through the gorges the reedy notes of the accordion rose and fell in fitful spasms and long-drawn gasps by the flickering campfire. But music failed to fill entirely the aching void left by insufficient food, and a new diversion was proposed by Piney—story-telling. Neither Mr. Oakhurst nor his female companions caring to relate their personal experiences, this plan would have failed too, but for the Innocent. Some months before, he had

chanced upon a stray copy of Mr. Pope's ingenious translation of the Iliad. He now proposed to narrate the principal incidents of that poem—having thoroughly mastered the argument and fairly forgotten the words—in the current vernacular of Sandy Bar. And so, for the rest of that night, the Homeric demigods again walked the earth. Trojan bully and wily Greek wrestled in the winds, and the great pines in the cañon seemed to bow to the wrath of the son of Peleus. Mr. Oakhurst listened with quiet satisfaction. Most especially was he interested in the fate of "Ash-heels," as the Innocent persisted in denominating the "swift-footed Achilles."

So, with small food and much of Homer and the accordion, a week passed over the heads of the outcasts. The sun again forsook them, and again from leaden skies the snowflakes were sifted over the land. Day by day, closer around them drew the snowy circle, until at last they looked from their prison over drifted walls of dazzling white, that towered 20 feet above their heads. It became more and more difficult to replenish their fires, even from the fallen trees beside them, now half hidden in the drifts. And yet no one complained. The lovers turned from the dreary prospect, and looked into each other's eyes, and were happy. Mr. Oakhurst settled himself coolly to the losing game before him. The Duchess, more cheerful than she had been, assumed the care of Piney. Only Mother Shipton—once the strongest of the party—seemed

to sicken and fade. At midnight on the tenth day she called Oakhurst to her side. "I'm going," she said, in a voice of querulous weakness, "but don't say anything about it. Don't waken the kids. Take the bundle from under my head, and open it." Mr. Oakhurst did so. It contained Mother Shipton's rations for the last week, untouched. "Give 'em to the child," she said, pointing to the sleeping Piney. "You've starved yourself," said the gambler. "That's what they call it," said the woman querulously, as she lay down again, and, turning her face to the wall, passed quietly away.

The accordion and the bones were put aside that day, and Homer was forgotten. When the body of Mother Shipton had been committed to the snow, Mr. Oakhurst took the Innocent aside, and showed him a pair of snowshoes, which he had fashioned from the old pack-saddle. "There's one chance in a hundred to save her yet," he said, pointing to Piney; "but it's there," he added, pointing toward Poker Flat. "If you can reach there in two days, she's safe." "And you?" asked Tom Simson. "I'll stay here," was the curt reply.

The lovers parted with a long embrace. "You are not going, too?" said the Duchess, as she saw Mr. Oakhurst apparently waiting to accompany him. "As far as the cañon," he replied. He turned suddenly, and kissed the Duchess, leaving her pallid face aflame, and her trembling limbs rigid with amazement.

Night came, but not Mr. Oakhurst. It brought the storm again and the whirling snow. Then the Duchess, feeding the fire, found that some one had quietly piled beside the hut enough fuel to last a few days longer. The tears rose to her eyes, but she hid them from Piney.

The women slept but little. In the morning, looking into each other's faces, they read their fate. Neither spoke, but Piney, accepting the position of the stronger, drew near and placed her arm around the Duchess's waist. They kept this attitude for the rest of the day. That night the storm reached its greatest fury, and, rending asunder the protecting vines, invaded the very hut.

Toward morning they found themselves unable to feed the fire, which gradually died away. As the embers slowly blackened, the Duchess crept closer to Piney, and broke the silence of many hours: "Piney, can you pray?" "No, dear," said Piney simply. The Duchess, without knowing exactly why, felt relieved, and, putting her head upon Piney's shoulder, spoke no more. And so reclining, the younger and purer pillowing the head of her soiled sister upon her virgin breast, they fell asleep.

The wind lulled as if it feared to waken them. Feathery drifts of snow, shaken from the long pine boughs, flew like white-winged birds, and settled about them as they slept. The moon, through the rifted clouds, looked down upon what had been the camp. But all human stain, all

trace of earthly travail, was hidden beneath the spotless mantle mercifully flung from above.

They slept all that day and the next, nor did they waken when voices and footsteps broke the silence of the camp. And when pitying fingers brushed the snow from their wan faces, you could scarcely have told from the equal peace that dwelt upon them which was she that had sinned. Even the law of Poker Flat recognised this, and turned away, leaving them still locked in each other's arms.

But, at the head of the gulch, on one of the largest pine-trees, they found the deuce of clubs pinned to the bark with a bowie-knife. It bore the following, written in pencil in a firm hand:

†

BENEATH THIS TREE
LIES THE BODY
OF
JOHN OAKHURST,
WHO STRUCK A STREAK OF BAD LUCK
ON THE 23D OF NOVEMBER, 1850,
AND
HANDED IN HIS CHECKS
ON THE 7TH DECEMBER, 1850.

†

And pulseless and cold, with a Derringer by his side and a bullet in his heart, though still calm as in life, beneath the snow lay he who was at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat.

THE ATTACK ON THE MILL*

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA

I

IT was high holiday at Father Merlier's mill on that pleasant summer afternoon. Three tables had been brought out into the garden and placed end to end in the shade of the great elm, and now they were awaiting the arrival of the guests. It was known throughout the length and breadth of the land that that day was to witness the betrothal of old Merlier's daughter, Françoise, to Dominique, a young man who was said to be not overfond of work, but whom never a woman for three leagues of the country around could look at without sparkling eyes, such a well-favoured young fellow was he.

That mill of Father Merlier's was truly a very pleasant spot. It was situated right in the heart of Rocreuse, at the place where the main road makes a sharp bend. The village has but a single street, bordered on either side by a row of low, whitened cottages, but just there, where the road curves, there are broad stretches of meadow-

land, and huge trees, which follow the course of the Morelle, cover the low grounds of the valley with a most delicious shade. All Lorraine has no more charming bit of nature to show. To right and left dense forests, great monarchs of the wood, centuries old, rise from the gentle slopes, and fill the horizon with a sea of waving, trembling verdure, while away toward the south extends the plain, of wondrous fertility and checkered almost to infinity with its small inclosures, divided off from one another by their live hedges. But what makes the crowning glory of Rocreuse is the coolness of this verdurous nook, even in the hottest days of July and August. The Morelle comes down from the woods of Gagny, and it would seem as if it gathered to itself on the way all the delicious freshness of the foliage beneath which it glides for many a league; it brings down with it the murmuring sounds, the glacial, solemn shadows of the forest. And that is not the only source of coolness; there are running waters of all sorts singing among the copses; one cannot take a step without coming on a gushing spring, and, as he makes his way along the narrow paths, seems to be treading above subterrene lakes that seek the air and sunshine through the moss above, and profit by every smallest crevice, at the roots of trees or among the chinks and crannies of the rocks, to burst forth in fountains of crystalline clearness. So numerous and so loud are the whispering voices of these streams that they silence the song of the

bullfinches. It is as if one were in an enchanted park, with cascades falling and flashing on every side.

The meadows below are never athirst. The shadows beneath the gigantic chestnut trees are of inky blackness, and along the edges of the fields long rows of poplars stand like walls of rustling foliage. There is a double avenue of huge plane trees ascending across the fields toward the ancient castle of Gagny, now gone to rack and ruin. In this region, where drought is never known, vegetation of all kinds is wonderfully rank; it is like a flower garden down there in the low ground between those two wooded hills, a natural garden, where the lawns are broad meadows and the giant trees represent colossal beds. When the noonday sun pours down his scorching rays, the shadows lie blue upon the ground, vegetation slumbers in the genial warmth, while every now and then a breath of almost icy coldness rustles the foliage.

Such was the spot where Father Merlier's mill enlivened nature run riot with its cheerful clack. The building itself, constructed of wood and plaster, looked as if it might be coeval with our planet. Its foundations were in part laved by the Morelle, which here expands into a clear pool. A dam, a few feet in height, afforded sufficient head of water to drive the old wheel, which creaked and groaned as it revolved, with the asthmatic wheezing of a faithful servant who has grown old in her place. Whenever Father Merlier was advised to

change it, he would shake his head and say that like as not a young wheel would be lazier and not so well acquainted with its duties, and then he would set to work and patch up the old one with anything that came to hand, old hogshead-staves, bits of rusty iron, zinc, or lead. The old wheel only seemed the gayer for it, with its odd, round countenance, all plumed and feathered with tufts of moss and grass, and, when the water poured over it in a silvery tide, its gaunt black skeleton was decked out with a gorgeous display of pearls and diamonds.

That portion of the mill which was bathed by the Morelle had something of the look of a Moorish arch that had been dropped down here by chance. A good half of the structure was built on piles; the water came in under the floor, and there were deep holes, famous throughout the whole country for the eels and the huge crawfish that were to be caught there. Below the fall, the pool was as clear as a looking-glass, and, when it was not clouded by foam from the wheel, one could see great fish swimming about in it with the slow, majestic movements of a fleet. There was a broken stairway leading down to the stream, near a stake to which a boat was fastened, and over the wheel was a gallery of wood. Such windows as there were, were arranged without any attempt at order. The whole was a quaint conglomeration of nooks and corners, bits of wall, additions made here and there as afterthoughts, beams and roofs, that gave the mill the aspect of

an old dismantled citadel; but ivy and all sorts of creeping plants had grown luxuriantly, and kindly covered up such crevices as were too unsightly, casting a mantle of green over the old dwelling. Young ladies who passed that way used to stop and sketch Father Merlier's mill in their albums.

The side of the house that faced the road was less irregular. A gateway in stone afforded access to the principal courtyard, on the right and left hand of which were sheds and stables. Beside a well stood an immense elm that threw its shade over half the court. At the farther end, opposite the gate, stood the house, surmounted by a dovecote, the four windows of its first floor symmetrically aligned. The only manifestation of pride that Father Merlier ever allowed himself was to paint this façade every ten years. It had just been freshly whitened at the time of our story, and dazzled the eyes of all the village when the sun lighted it up in the middle of the day.

For twenty years had Father Merlier been mayor of Rocreuse. He was held in great consideration on account of his fortune; he was supposed to be worth something like eighty thousand francs, the result of patient saving. When he married Madeleine Guilliard, who brought him the mill as her dowry, his entire capital lay in his two strong arms, but Madeleine had never repented her choice, so manfully had he conducted their joint affairs. Now his wife was dead, and he was left a widower with his daughter

Françoise. Doubtless, he might have sat himself down to take his rest and suffered the old mill-wheel to sleep among its moss, but he would have found the occupation too irksome, and the house would have seemed dead to him, so he kept on working still, for the pleasure of it. In those days, Father Merlier was a tall old man, with a long, unspeaking face, on which a laugh was never seen, but beneath which there lay, none the less, a large fund of good-humour. He had been elected mayor on account of his money, and also for the impressive air that he knew how to assume when it devolved on him to marry a couple.

Françoise Merlier had just completed her eighteenth year. She was small, and for that reason was not accounted one of the beauties of the country. Until she reached the age of fifteen, she was even homely; the good folks of Rocreuse could not see how it was that the daughter of Father and Mother Merlier, such a hale, vigorous couple, had such a hard time of it in getting her growth. When she was fifteen, however, though still remaining delicate, a change came over her, and she took on the prettiest little face imaginable. She had black eyes, black hair, and was red as a rose withal; her little mouth was always graced with a charming smile, there were delicious dimples in her cheeks, and a crown of sunshine seemed to be ever resting on her fair, candid forehead. Although small as girls went in that region, she was far from being slender; she might not have been able to raise a sack of wheat to her

shoulder, but she became quite plump with age, and gave promise of becoming eventually as well-rounded and appetising as a partridge. Her father's habits of taciturnity had made her reflective while yet a young girl; if she always had a smile on her lips, it was in order to give pleasure to others. Her natural disposition was serious.

As was no more than to be expected, she had every young man in the country-side at her heels as a suitor, more even for her money than for her attractiveness, and she had made a choice at last —a choice that had been the talk and scandal of the entire neighbourhood. On the other side of the Morelle lived a strapping young fellow who went by the name of Dominique Penquer. He was not to the manor born; ten years previously he had come to Rocreuse from Belgium to receive the inheritance of an uncle who had owned a small property on the very borders of the forest of Gagny, just facing the mill and distant from it only a few musket-shots. His object in coming was to sell the property, so he said, and return to his own home again; but he must have found the land to his liking, for he made no move to go away. He was seen cultivating his bit of a field and gathering the few vegetables that afforded him an existence. He hunted, he fished; more than once he was near coming in contact with the law through the intervention of the keepers. This independent way of living, of which the peasants could not very clearly see the resources,

had in the end given him a bad name. He was vaguely looked on as nothing better than a poacher. At all events, he was lazy, for he was frequently found sleeping in the grass at hours when he should have been at work. Then, too, the hut in which he lived, in the shade of the last trees of the forest, did not seem like the abode of an honest young man; the old women would not have been surprised at any time to hear that he was on friendly terms with the wolves in the ruins of Gagny. Still, the young girls would now and then venture to stand up for him, for he was altogether a splendid specimen of manhood, was this individual of doubtful antecedents, tall and straight as a young poplar, with a milk-white skin and ruddy hair and beard that seemed to be of gold when the sun shone on them. Now, one fine morning, it came to pass that Françoise told Father Merlier that she loved Dominique, and that never, never would she consent to marry any other young man.

It may be imagined what a knock-down blow it was that Father Merlier received that day! As was his wont, he said never a word; his countenance wore its usual reflective look, only the fun that used to bubble up from within no longer shone in his eyes. Françoise, too, was very serious, and for a week father and daughter scarcely spoke to each other. What troubled Father Merlier was to know how that rascal of a poacher had succeeded in bewitching his daughter. Dominique had never shown himself at the

mill. The miller played the spy a little, and was rewarded by catching sight of the gallant, on the other side of the Morelle, lying among the grass and pretending to be asleep. Françoise could see him from her chamber window. The thing was clear enough; they had been making sheep's eyes at each other over the old mill-wheel, and so had fallen in love.

A week slipped by; Françoise became more and more serious. Father Merlier still continued to say nothing. Then, one evening, of his own accord, he brought Dominique to the house, without a word. Françoise was just setting the table. She made no demonstration of surprise; all she did was to add another plate, but her laugh had come back to her, and the little dimples appeared again upon her cheeks. Father Merlier had gone that morning to look for Dominique at his hut on the edge of the forest, and there the two men had had a conference, with closed doors and windows, that lasted three hours. No one ever knew what they said to each other; the only thing certain is that, when Father Merlier left the hut, he already treated Dominique as a son. Doubtless, the old man had discovered that he whom he had gone to visit was a worthy young man, even though he did lie in the grass to gain the love of young girls.

All Rocreuse was up in arms. The women gathered at their doors and could not find words strong enough to characterise Father Merlier's folly in thus receiving a ne'er-do-well into his

family. He let them talk. Perhaps he thought of his own marriage. Neither had he possessed a penny to his name at the time when he married Madeleine and her mill, and yet that had not prevented him from being a good husband to her. Moreover, Dominique put an end to their tittle-tattle by setting to work in such strenuous fashion that all the countryside was amazed. It so happened just then that the boy of the mill drew an unlucky number, and had to go for a soldier, and Dominique would not hear of their engaging another. He lifted sacks, drove the cart, wrestled with the old wheel when it took an obstinate fit and refused to turn, and all so pluckily and cheerfully that people came from far and near merely for the pleasure of seeing him. Father Merlier laughed his silent laugh. He was highly elated that he had read the youngster aright. There is nothing like love to hearten up young men.

In the midst of all that laborious toil, Françoise and Dominique fairly worshipped each other. They had not much to say, but their tender smiles conveyed a world of meaning. Father Merlier had not said a word thus far on the subject of their marriage, and they had both respected his silence, waiting until the old man should see fit to give expression to his will. At last, one day along toward the middle of July, he had had three tables laid in the courtyard, in the shade of the big elm, and had invited his friends of Rocreuse to come that afternoon and drink a

glass of wine with him. When the courtyard was filled with people and every one there had a full glass in his hand, Father Merlier raised his own high above his head and said:

"I have the pleasure of announcing to you that Françoise and this stripling will be married in a month from now, on Saint Louis' fête-day."

Then there was a universal touching of glasses, attended by a tremendous uproar; every one was laughing. But Father Merlier, raising his voice above the din, again spoke:

"Dominique, kiss your wife that is to be. It is no more than customary."

And they kissed, very red in the face, both of them, while the company laughed still louder. It was a regular fête; they emptied a small cask. Then, when only the intimate friends of the house remained, conversation went on in a calmer strain. Night had fallen, a starlit night and very clear. Dominique and Françoise sat on a bench, side by side, and said nothing. An old peasant spoke of the war that the emperor had declared against Prussia. All the lads of the village were already gone off to the army. Troops had passed through the place only the night before. There were going to be hard knocks.

"Bah!" said Father Merlier, with the selfishness of a man who is quite happy, "Dominique is a foreigner; he won't have to go—and, if the Prussians come this way, he will be here to defend his wife."

The idea of the Prussians coming there seemed

to the company an exceedingly good joke. The army would give them one good, conscientious thrashing, and the affair would be quickly ended.

"I have seen them, I have seen them," the old peasant repeated in a low voice.

There was silence for a little, then they all touched glasses once again. Françoise and Dominique had heard nothing; they had managed to clasp hands behind the bench in such a way as not to be seen by the others, and this condition of affairs seemed so beatific to them that they sat there, mute, their gaze lost in the darkness of the night.

What a magnificent, balmy night! The village lay slumbering on either side of the white road as peacefully as a little child. The deep silence was undisturbed save by the occasional crow of a cock in some distant barnyard, acting on a mistaken impression that dawn was at hand. Perfumed breaths of air, like long-drawn sighs, almost, came down from the great woods that lay around and above, sweeping softly over the roofs, as if caressing them. The meadows, with their black intensity of shadows, took on a dim, mysterious majesty of their own, while all the springs, all the brooks and watercourses that gurgled and trickled in the darkness, might have been taken for the cool and rhythmical breathing of the sleeping country. Every now and then the old dozing mill-wheel, like a watch-dog that barks uneasily in his slumber, seemed to be dreaming as if it were endowed with some strange

form of life; it creaked, it groaned, it talked to itself, rocked by the fall of the Morelle, whose current gave forth the deep, sustained music of an organ-pipe. Never was there a more charming or happier nook; never did more entire or deeper peace come down to cover it.

II

One month later to a day, on the eve of the fête of Saint Louis, Rocreuse was in a state of alarm and dismay. The Prussians had beaten the emperor, and were advancing on the village by forced marches. For a week past, people passing along the road had brought tidings of the enemy: "They are at Lormières, they are at Novelles"; and, by dint of hearing so many stories of the rapidity of their advance, Rocreuse woke up every morning in the full expectation of seeing them swarming down out of Gagny wood. They did not come, however, and that only served to make the affright the greater. They would certainly fall upon the village in the night-time, and put every soul to the sword.

There had been an alarm the night before, a little before daybreak. The inhabitants had been aroused by a great noise of men tramping upon the road. The women were already throwing themselves upon their knees and making the sign of the cross when some one, to whom it happily occurred to peep through a half-opened window, caught sight of red trousers. It was a

French detachment. The captain had forthwith asked for the mayor, and, after a long conversation with Father Merlier, had remained at the mill.

The sun rose bright and clear that morning, giving promise of a warm day. There was a golden light floating over the woodland, while, in the low grounds, white mists were rising from the meadows. The pretty village, so neat and trim, awoke in the cool dawning, and the country, with its stream and its fountains, was as gracious as a freshly plucked bouquet. But the beauty of the day brought gladness to the face of no one; the villagers had watched the captain, and seen him circle round and round the old mill, examine the adjacent houses, then pass to the other bank of the Morelle, and from thence scan the country with a field-glass: Father Merlier, who accompanied him, appeared to be giving explanations. After that, the captain had posted some of his men behind walls, behind trees, or in hollows. The main body of the detachment had encamped in the courtyard of the mill. So there was going to be a fight, then? And when Father Merlier returned, they questioned him. He spoke no word, but slowly and sorrowfully nodded his head. Yes, there was going to be a fight.

Françoise and Dominique were there in the courtyard, watching him. He finally took his pipe from his lips, and gave utterance to these few words:

"Ah! my poor children, I shall not be able to marry you to-day!"

Dominique, with lips tight set and an angry frown upon his forehead, raised himself on tiptoe from time to time, and stood with eyes bent on Gagny wood, as if he would have been glad to see the Prussians appear and end the suspense they were in. Françoise, whose face was grave and very pale, was constantly passing back and forth, supplying the needs of the soldiers. They were preparing their soup in a corner of the courtyard, joking and chaffing one another while awaiting their meal.

The captain appeared to be highly pleased. He had visited the chambers and the great hall of the mill that looked out on the stream. Now seated beside the well, he was conversing with Father Merlier.

"You have a regular fortress here," he was saying. "We shall have no trouble in holding it until evening. The bandits are late; they ought to be here by this time."

The miller looked very grave. He saw his beloved mill going up in flame and smoke, but uttered no word of remonstrance or complaint, considering that it would be useless. He only opened his mouth to say:

"You ought to take steps to hide the boat; there is a hole behind the wheel fitted to hold it. Perhaps you may find it of use to you."

The captain gave an order to one of his men. This captain was a tall, fine-looking man of about

forty, with an agreeable expression of countenance. The sight of Dominique and Françoise seemed to afford him much pleasure; he watched them as if he had forgotten all about the approaching conflict. He followed Françoise with his eyes as she moved about the courtyard, and his manner showed clearly enough that he thought her charming. Then, turning to Dominique:

"You are not with the army, I see, my boy?" he abruptly asked.

"I am a foreigner," the young man replied.

The captain did not seem particularly pleased with the answer; he winked his eyes, and smiled. Françoise was doubtless a more agreeable companion than a musket would have been. Dominique, noticing his smile, made haste to add:

"I am a foreigner, but I can lodge a rifle-bullet in an apple at five hundred yards. See, there's my rifle, behind you."

"You may find use for it," the captain dryly answered.

Françoise had drawn near; she was trembling a little, and Dominique, regardless of the bystanders, took and held firmly clasped in his own the two hands that she held forth to him, as if committing herself to his protection. The captain smiled again, but said nothing more. He remained seated, his sword between his legs, his eyes fixed on space, apparently lost in dreamy reverie.

The Attack on the Mill

It was ten o'clock. The heat was already oppressive. A deep silence prevailed. The soldiers had sat down in the shade of the sheds in the courtyard, and begun to eat their soup. Not a sound came from the village, where the inhabitants had all barricaded their houses, doors, and windows. A dog, abandoned by his master, howled mournfully upon the road. From the woods and the near-by meadows, that lay fainting in the heat, came a long-drawn whispering, soughing sound, produced by the union of what wandering breaths of air there were. A cuckoo sang. Then the silence became deeper still.

And all at once, upon that lazy, sleepy air, a shot rang out. The captain rose quickly to his feet; the soldiers left their half-emptied plates. In a few seconds, all were at their posts; the mill was occupied from top to bottom. And yet the captain, who had gone out through the gate, saw nothing; to right and left the road stretched away, desolate and blindingly white in the fierce sunshine. A second report was heard, and stillnothing to be seen, not even so much as a shadow; but, just as he was turning to reënter, he chanced to look over toward Gagny, and there beheld a little puff of smoke, floating away on the tranquil air, like thistle-down. The deep peace of the forest was apparently unbroken.

"The rascals have occupied the wood," the officer murmured. "They know we are here."

Then the firing went on, and became more and more continuous, between the French soldiers posted about the mill and the Prussians concealed among the trees. The bullets whistled over the Morelle without doing any mischief on either side. The firing was irregular; every bush seemed to have its marksmen, and nothing was to be seen save those bluish smoke-wreaths that hung for a moment on the wind before they vanished. It lasted thus for nearly two hours. The officers hummed a tune with a careless air. Françoise and Dominique, who had remained in the courtyard, raised themselves to look out over a low wall. They were more particularly interested in a little soldier who had his post on the bank of the Morelle, behind the hull of an old boat; he would lie face downward on the ground, watch his chance, deliver his fire, then slip back into a ditch a few steps in his rear to reload, and his movements were so comical, he displayed such cunning and activity, that it was difficult for any one watching him to refrain from smiling. He must have caught sight of a Prussian, for he rose quickly and brought his piece to the shoulder, but, before he could discharge it, he uttered a loud cry, whirled completely around in his tracks, and fell backward into the ditch, where for an instant his legs moved convulsively, just as the claws of a fowl do when it is beheaded. The little soldier had received a bullet directly through his heart. It was the first casualty of the day.

Françoise instinctively seized Dominique's hand, and held it tight in a convulsive grasp.

"Come away from there," said the captain. "The bullets reach us here."

As to confirm his words, a slight, sharp sound was heard up in the old elm, and the end of a branch came to the ground, turning over and over as it fell; but the two young people never stirred, riveted to the spot as they were by the interest of the spectacle. On the edge of the wood, a Prussian had suddenly emerged from behind a tree, as an actor comes upon the stage from the wings, beating the air with his arms and falling over upon his back. And beyond that there was no movement; the two dead men appeared to be sleeping in the bright sunshine; there was not a soul to be seen in the fields on which the heat lay heavy. Even the sharp rattle of the musketry had ceased. Only the Morelle kept on whispering to itself with its low, musical murmur.

Father Merlier looked at the captain with an astonished air, as if to inquire whether that were the end of it.

"Here comes their attack," the officer murmured. "Look out for yourselves! Don't stand there!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a terrible discharge of musketry ensued. The great elm was riddled; its leaves came eddying

down as thick as snowflakes. Fortunately, the Prussians had aimed too high. Dominique dragged, almost carried Françoise from the spot, while Father Melier followed them, shouting:

"Get into the small cellar; the walls are thicker there."

But they paid no attention to him; they made their way to the main hall, where ten or a dozen soldiers were silently waiting, watching events outside through the chinks of the closed shutters. The captain was left alone in the courtyard, where he sheltered himself behind the low wall, while the furious fire was maintained uninterruptedly. The soldiers whom he had posted outside only yielded their ground inch by inch; they came crawling in, however, one after another, as the enemy dislodged them from their positions. Their instructions were to gain all the time they could, taking care not to show themselves, in order that the Prussians might remain in igno rance of the force they had opposed to them. Another hour passed, and, as a sergeant came in, reporting that there were now only two or three men left outside, the officer took his watch from his pocket, murmuring:

"Half-past two. Come, we must hold out for four hours yet."

He caused the great gate of the courtyard to be tightly secured, and everything was made ready for an energetic defence. The Prussians were

on the other side of the Morelle; consequently, there was no reason to fear an assault at the moment. There was a bridge, indeed, a mile and a quarter away, but they were probably unaware of its existence, and it was hardly to be supposed that they would attempt to cross the stream by fording. The officer, therefore, simply caused the road to be watched; the attack, when it came, was to be looked for from the direction of the field.

The firing had ceased again. The mill appeared to lie there in the sunlight, void of all life. Not a shutter was open; not a sound came from within. Gradually, however, the Prussians began to show themselves at the edge of Gagny wood. Heads were protruded here and there; they seemed to be mustering up their courage. Several of the soldiers within the mill brought up their pieces to an aim, but the captain shouted:

"No, no; not yet; wait. Let them come nearer."

They displayed a great deal of prudence in their advance, looking at the mill with a distrustful air; they seemed hardly to know what to make of the old structure, so lifeless and gloomy, with its curtains of ivy. Still, they kept on advancing. When there were fifty of them or so in the open, directly opposite, the officer uttered one word:

"Now!"

A crashing, tearing discharge burst from the

position, succeeded by an irregular, dropping fire. Françoise, trembling violently, involuntarily raised her hands to her ears. Dominique, from his position behind the soldiers, peered out upon the field, and when the smoke drifted away a little, counted three Prussians extended on their backs in the middle of the meadow. The others had sought shelter among the willows and the poplars. And then commenced the siege.

For more than an hour the mill was riddled with bullets; they beat and rattled on its old walls like hail. The noise they made was plainly audible as they struck the stonework, were flattened, and fell back into the water; they buried themselves in the woodwork with a dull thud. Occasionally a creaking sound would announce that the wheel had been hit. Within the building, the soldiers husbanded their ammunition, firing only when they could see something to aim at. The captain kept consulting his watch every few minutes, and, as a ball split one of the shutters in halves, and then lodged in the ceiling:

"Four o'clock," he murmured. "We shall never be able to hold the position."

The old mill, in truth, was gradually going to pieces beneath that terrific fire. A shutter that had been perforated again and again until it looked like a piece of lace, fell off its hinges into the water, and had to be replaced by a mattress. Every moment, almost, Father Merlier exposed himself to the fire in order to take account of the damage sustained by his poor wheel, every wound

of which was like a bullet in his own heart. Its period of usefulness was ended this time, for certain; he would never be able to patch it up again. Dominique had besought Françoise to retire to a place of safety, but she was determined to remain with him; she had taken a seat behind a great oaken clothes-press, which afforded her protection. A ball struck the press, however, the sides of which gave out a dull, hollow sound, whereupon Dominique stationed himself in front of Françoise. He had as yet taken no part in the firing, although he had his rifle in his hand; the soldiers occupied the whole breadth of the windows, so that he could not get near them. At every discharge, the floor trembled.

"Look out! look out!" the captain suddenly shouted.

He had just descried a dark mass emerging from the wood. As soon as they gained the open, they set up a telling platoon fire. It struck the mill like a tornado. Another shutter parted company, and the bullets came whistling in through the yawning aperture. Two soldiers rolled upon the floor; one lay where he fell, and never moved a limb; his comrades pushed him up against the wall because he was in their way. The other writhed and twisted, beseeching some one to end his agony, but no one had ears for the poor wretch; the bullets were still pouring in, and every one was looking out for himself and searching for a loophole whence he might answer the enemy's fire. A third soldier was wounded;

that one said not a word, but with staring, haggard eyes sank down beneath a table. Françoise, horror-stricken by the dreadful spectacle of the dead and dying men, mechanically pushed away her chair and seated herself on the floor, against the wall; it seemed to her that she would be smaller there and less exposed. In the meantime, men had gone and secured all the mattresses in the house; the opening of the window was partially closed again. The hall was filled with débris of every description, broken weapons, dislocated furniture.

"Five o'clock," said the captain. "Stand fast, boys. They are going to make an attempt to pass the stream."

Just then Françoise gave a shriek. A bullet had struck the floor, and, rebounding, grazed her forehead on the ricochet. A few drops of blood appeared. Dominique looked at her, then went to the window and fired his first shot, and, from that time, kept on firing uninterruptedly. He kept on loading and discharging his piece mechanically, paying no attention to what was passing at his side, only pausing from time to time to cast a look at Françoise. He did not fire hurriedly or at random, moreover, but took deliberate aim. As the captain had predicted, the Prussians were skirting the belt of poplars and attempting the passage of the Morelle, but each time that one of them showed himself he fell with one of Dominique's bullets in his brain. The captain, who was watching the performance, was amazed;

he complimented the young man, telling him that he would like to have many more marksmen of his skill. Dominique did not hear a word he said. A ball struck him in the shoulder; another raised a contusion on his arm. And still he kept on firing.

There were two more deaths. The mattresses were torn to shreds, and no longer availed to stop the windows. The last volley that was poured in seemed as if it would carry away the mill bodily, so fierce it was. The position was no longer tenable. Still, the officer kept repeating:

"Stand fast. Another half-hour yet."

He was counting the minutes, one by one, now. He had promised his commanders that he would hold the enemy there until nightfall, and he would not budge a hair's breadth before the moment that he had fixed on for his withdrawal. He maintained his pleasant air of good-humour, smiling at Françoise by way of reassuring her. He had picked up the musket of one of the dead soldiers, and was firing away with the rest.

There were but four soldiers left in the room. The Prussians were showing themselves *en masse* on the other bank of the Morelle, and it was evident that they might now pass the stream at any moment. A few moments more elapsed; the captain was as determined as ever, and would not give the order to retreat, when a sergeant came running into the room, saying:

"They are on the road; they are going to take us in the rear."

The Prussians must have discovered the bridge. The captain drew out his watch again.

"Five minutes more," he said. "They won't be here within five minutes."

Then exactly at six o'clock, he at last withdrew his men through a little postern that opened on a narrow lane, whence they threw themselves into the ditch, and in that way reached the forest of Sauval. The captain took leave of Father Merlier with much politeness, apologising profusely for the trouble he had caused. He even added:

"Try to keep them occupied for a while. We shall return."

While this was occurring, Dominique had remained alone in the hall. He was still firing away, hearing nothing, conscious of nothing; his sole thought was to defend Françoise. The soldiers were all gone, and he had not the remotest idea of the fact; he aimed, and brought down his man at every shot. All at once there was a great tumult. The Prussians had entered the courtyard from the rear. He fired his last shot, and they fell upon him with his weapon still smoking in his hand.

It required four men to hold him; the rest of them swarmed about him, vociferating like madmen in their horrible dialect. Françoise rushed forward to intercede with her prayers. They were on the point of killing him on the spot, but an officer came in and made them turn the prisoner over to him. After exchanging a few

words in German with his men, he turned to Dominique and said to him roughly, in very good French:

"You will be shot in two hours from now."

III

It was the standing regulation, laid down by the German staff, that every Frenchman, not belonging to the regular army, taken with arms in his hands, should be shot. Even the *compagnies franches* were not recognised as belligerents. It was the intention of the Germans, in making such terrible examples of the peasants who attempted to defend their firesides, to prevent a rising *en masse*, which they greatly dreaded.

The officer, a tall, spare man about fifty years old, subjected Dominique to a brief examination. Although he spoke French fluently, he was unmistakably Prussian in the stiffness of his manner.

"You are a native of this country?"

"No; I am a Belgian."

"Why did you take up arms? These are matters with which you have no concern."

Dominique made no reply. At this moment the officer caught sight of Françoise where she stood listening, very pale; her slight wound had marked her white forehead with a streak of red. He looked from one to the other of the young people, and appeared to understand the situation; he merely added:

"You do not deny having fired on my men?"

"I fired as long as I was able to do so," Dominique quietly replied.

The admission was scarcely necessary, for he was black with powder, wet with sweat, and the blood from the wound in his shoulder had trickled down and stained his clothing.

"Very well," the officer repeated. "You will be shot two hours hence."

Françoise uttered no cry. She clasped her hands, and raised them above her head in a gesture of mute despair. Her action was not lost upon the officer. Two soldiers had led Dominique away to an adjacent room, where their orders were to guard him and not lose sight of him. The girl had sunk upon a chair; her strength had failed her, her legs refused to support her; she was denied the relief of tears—it seemed as if her emotion was strangling her. The officer continued to examine her attentively, and finally addressed her:

"Is that young man your brother?" he inquired.

She shook her head in negation. He was as rigid and unbending as ever, without the suspicion of a smile on his face. Then, after an interval of silence, he spoke again:

"Has he been living in the neighbourhood long?"

She answered yes, by another motion of the head.

"Then he must be well acquainted with the woods about here?"

This time she made a verbal answer. "Yes, sir," she said, looking at him with some astonishment.

He said nothing more, but turned on his heel, requesting that the mayor of the village should be brought before him. But Françoise had risen from her chair, a faint tinge of colour on her cheeks, believing that she had caught the significance of his questions, and, with renewed hope, she ran off to look for her father.

As soon as the firing had ceased, Father Merlier had hurriedly descended by the wooden gallery to have a look at his wheel. He adored his daughter, and had a strong feeling of affection for Dominique, his son-in-law who was to be; but his wheel also occupied a large space in his heart. Now that the two little ones, as he called them, had come safe and sound out of the fray, he thought of his other love, which must have suffered sorely, poor thing; and bending over the great wooden skeleton, he was scrutinising its wounds with a heartbroken air. Five of the buckets were reduced to splinters; the central framework was honeycombed. He was thrusting his fingers into the cavities that the bullets had made, to see how deep they were, and reflecting how he was ever to repair all that damage. When Françoise found him, he was already plugging up the crevices with moss and such *débris* as he could lay hands on.

"They are asking for you, father," said she.

And at last she wept as she told him what she had just heard. Father Merlier shook his head. It was not customary to shoot people like that. He would have to look into the matter. And he re-entered the mill with his usual placid, silent air. When the officer made his demand for supplies for his men, he answered that the people of Rocreuse were not accustomed to be ridden roughshod, and that nothing would be obtained from them through violence; he was willing to assume all the responsibility, but only on condition that he was allowed to act independently. The officer at first appeared to take umbrage at this easy way of viewing matters, but finally gave way before the old man's brief and distinct representations. As the latter was leaving the room, the other recalled him to ask:

"Those woods there, opposite, what do you call them?"

"The woods of Sauval."

"And how far do they extend?"

The miller looked him straight in the face. "I do not know," he replied.

And he withdrew. An hour later, the subvention in money and provisions that the officer had demanded was in the courtyard of the mill. Night was closing in; Françoise followed every movement of the soldiers with an anxious eye. She never once left the vicinity of the room in which Dominique was imprisoned. About seven o'clock, she had a harrowing emotion; she saw

the officer enter the prisoner's apartment, and for a quarter of an hour heard their voices raised in violent discussion. The officer came to the door for a moment, and gave an order in German which she did not understand, but when twelve men came and formed in the courtyard with shouldered muskets she was seized with a fit of trembling, and felt as if she should die. It was all over, then; the execution was about to take place. The twelve men remained there ten minutes; Dominique's voice kept rising higher and higher in a tone of vehement denial. Finally, the officer came out, closing the door behind him with a vicious bang, and saying:

"Very well; think it over. I give you until to-morrow morning."

And he ordered the twelve men to break ranks by a motion of his hand. Françoise was stupefied. Father Merlier, who had continued to puff away at his pipe while watching the platoon with a simple, curious air, came and took her by the arm with fatherly gentleness. He led her to her chamber.

"Don't fret," he said to her; "try to get some sleep. To-morrow it will be light, and we shall see more clearly."

He locked the door behind him as he left the room. It was a fixed principle with him that women are good for nothing, and that they spoil everything whenever they meddle in important matters. Françoise did not retire to her couch, however; she remained a long time seated on her

bed, listening to the various noises in the house. The German soldiers quartered in the courtyard were singing and laughing; they must have kept up their eating and drinking until eleven o'clock, for the riot never ceased for an instant. Heavy footsteps resounded from time to time through the mill itself; doubtless, the tramp of the guards as they were relieved. What had most interest for her was the sounds that she could catch in the room that lay directly under her own; several times she threw herself prone upon the floor and applied her ear to the boards. That room was the one in which they had locked up Dominique. He must have been pacing the apartment, for she could hear for a long time his regular, cadenced tread passing from the wall to the window and back again; then there was a deep silence; doubtless, he had seated himself. The other sounds ceased, too; everything was still. When it seemed to her that the house was sunk in slumber, she raised her window as noiselessly as possible, and leaned out.

Without, the night was serene and balmy. The slender crescent of the moon, which was just setting behind Sauval wood, cast a dim radiance over the landscape. The lengthening shadows of the great trees stretched far athwart the fields in bands of blackness, while in such spots as were unobscured the grass appeared of a tender green, soft as velvet. But Françoise did not stop to consider the mysterious charm of night. She was scrutinising the country and looking to see

where the Germans had posted their sentinels. She could clearly distinguish their dark forms outlined along the course of the Morelle. There was only one stationed opposite the mill, on the far bank of the stream, by a willow whose branches dipped in the water. Françoise had an excellent view of him; he was a tall young man, standing quite motionless with face upturned toward the sky, with the meditative air of a shepherd.

When she had completed her careful inspection of localities, she returned, and took her former seat upon the bed. She remained there an hour, absorbed in deep thought. Then she listened again; there was not a breath to be heard in the house. She went again to the window, and took another look outside; but one of the moon's horns was still hanging above the edge of the forest, and this circumstance, doubtless, appeared to her unpropitious, for she resumed her waiting. At last the moment seemed to have arrived; the night was now quite dark; she could no longer discern the sentinel opposite her, the landscape lay before her black as a sea of ink. She listened intently for a moment, then formed her resolve. Close beside her window was an iron ladder made of bars set in the wall, which ascended from the mill-wheel to the granary at the top of the building and had formerly served the miller as a means of inspecting certain portions of the gearing, but, a change having been made in the machinery, the ladder had long since become lost to sight

beneath the thick ivy that covered all that side of the mill.

Françoise bravely climbed over the balustrade of the little balcony in front of her window, grasped one of the iron bars, and found herself suspended in space. She commenced the descent; her skirts were a great hindrance to her. Suddenly, a stone became loosened from the wall, and fell into the Morelle with a loud splash. She stopped, benumbed with fear, but reflection quickly told her that the waterfall, with its continuous roar, was sufficient to deaden any noise that she could make, and then she descended more boldly, putting aside the ivy with her foot, testing each round of her ladder. When she was on a level with the room that had been converted into a prison for her lover, she stopped. An unforeseen difficulty came near depriving her of all her courage: the window of the room beneath was not situated directly under the window of her bedroom; there was a wide space between it and the ladder, and when she extended her hand it only encountered the naked wall.

Would she have to go back the way she came, and leave her project unaccomplished? Her arms were growing very tired; the murmuring of the Morelle, far down below, was beginning to make her dizzy. Then she broke off bits of plaster from the wall, and threw them against Dominique's window. He did not hear; perhaps he was asleep. Again she crumbled fragments from the wall, until the skin was peeled

from her fingers. Her strength was exhausted, she felt that she was about to fall backward into the stream, when at last Dominique softly raised his sash.

"It is I," she murmured. "Take me quick; I am about to fall." Leaning from the window, he grasped her and drew her into the room, where she had a paroxysm of weeping, stifling her sobs in order that she might not be heard. Then, by a supreme effort of the will, she overcame her emotion.

"Are you guarded?" she asked, in a low voice.

Dominique, not yet recovered from his stupefaction at seeing her there, made answer by simply pointing toward his door. There was a sound of snoring audible on the outside; it was evident that the sentinel had been overpowered by sleep and had thrown himself upon the floor close against the door in such a way that it could not be opened without arousing him.

"You must fly," she continued earnestly; "I came here to bid you fly and say farewell."

But he seemed not to hear her. He kept repeating:

"What, is it you, is it you? Oh, what a fright you gave me! You might have killed yourself." He took her hands; he kissed them again and again. "How I love you, Françoise! You are as courageous as you are good. The only thing I feared was that I might die without seeing you again, but you are here, and now they may shoot

me when they will. Let me but have a quarter of an hour with you, and I am ready."

He had gradually drawn her to him; her head was resting on his shoulder. The peril that was so near at hand brought them closer to each other, and they forgot everything in that long embrace.

"Ah, Françoise!" Dominique went on in low, caressing tones, "to-day is the fête of Saint Louis, our wedding-day, that we have been waiting for so long. Nothing has been able to keep us apart, for we are both here, faithful to our appointment, are we not? It is now our wedding morning."

"Yes, yes," she repeated after him, "our wedding morning."

They shuddered as they exchanged a kiss. But suddenly she tore herself from his arms; the terrible reality arose before her eyes.

"You must fly; you must fly," she murmured breathlessly. "There is not a moment to lose." And as he stretched out his arms in the darkness to draw her to him again, she went on in tender, beseeching tones: "Oh! listen to me, I entreat you. If you die, I shall die. In an hour it will be daylight. Go; go at once; I command you to go."

Then she rapidly explained her plan to him. The iron ladder extended downward to the wheel; once he had got that far he could climb down by means of the buckets and get into the boat, which was hidden in a recess. Then it would be an easy matter for him to reach the other bank of the stream and make his escape.

"But are there no sentinels?" said he.

"Only one, directly opposite here, at the foot of the first willow."

"And if he sees me—if he gives the alarm?"

Françoise shuddered. She placed in his hand a knife that she had brought down with her. They were silent.

"And your father—and you?" Dominique continued. "But no, it is not to be thought of; I must not fly. When I am no longer here, those soldiers are capable of murdering you. You do not know them. They offered to spare my life if I would guide them into Sauval forest. When they discover that I have escaped, their fury will be such that they will be ready for every atrocity."

The girl did not stop to argue the question. To all the considerations that he adduced, her one simple answer was: "Fly. For love of me, fly. If you love me, Dominique, do not linger here a single moment longer."

She promised that she would return to her bedroom; no one should know that she had assisted him. She concluded by folding him in her arms and smothering him with kisses in an extravagant outburst of passion. He was vanquished. He put only one more question to her:

"Will you swear to me that your father knows what you are doing, and that he counsels my flight?"

"It was my father who sent me to you," Françoise unhesitatingly replied.

She told a falsehood. At that moment, she had but one great, overmastering longing—to know that he was in safety, to escape from the horrible thought that the morning's sun was to be the signal for his death. When he should be far away, then calamity and evil might burst upon her head; whatever fate might be in store for her would seem endurable, so that only his life might be spared. Before and above all other considerations, the selfishness of her love demanded that he should be saved.

"It is well," said Dominique; "I will do as you desire."

No further word was spoken. Dominique went to the window to raise it again. But, suddenly, there was a noise that chilled them with affright. The door was shaken violently; they thought that some one was about to open it; it was evidently a party going the rounds who had heard their voices. They stood by the window, close locked in each other's arms, awaiting the event with anguish unspeakable. Again there came the rattling at the door, but it did not open. Each of them drew a deep sigh of relief; they saw how it was: the soldier lying across the threshold had turned over in his sleep. Silence was restored, indeed, and presently the snoring commenced again, sounding like sweetest music in their ears.

Dominique insisted that Françoise should return to her room first of all. He took her in his arms, he bade her a silent farewell, then assisted her to grasp the ladder, and himself climbed out

on it in turn. He refused to descend a single step, however, until he knew that she was in her chamber. When she was safe in her room, she let fall, in a voice scarce louder than the whispering breeze, the words:

"*Au revoir*, I love you!"

She kneeled at the window, resting her elbows on the sill, straining her eyes to follow Dominique. The night was still very dark. She looked for the sentinel, but could see nothing of him; the willow alone was dimly visible, a pale spot upon the surrounding blackness. For a moment, she heard the rustling of the ivy as Dominique descended, then the wheel creaked, and there was a faint plash which told that the young man had found the boat. This was confirmed when, a minute later, she descried the shadowy outline of the skiff on the gray bosom of the Morelle. Then a horrible feeling of dread seemed to clutch her by the throat and deprive her of power to breathe; she momently expected to hear the sentry give the alarm; every faintest sound among the dusky shadows seemed to her overwrought imagination to be the hurrying tread of soldiers, the clash of steel, the click of musket-locks. The seconds slipped by, however; the landscape still preserved its solemn peace. Dominique must have landed safely on the other bank. Françoise no longer had eyes for anything. The silence was oppressive. And she heard the sound of trampling feet, a hoarse cry, the dull thud of a heavy body falling. This was

followed by another silence, even deeper than that which had gone before. Then, as if conscious that Death had passed that way, she became very cold in presence of the impenetrable night.

IV

At early daybreak, the repose of the mill was disturbed by the clamour of angry voices. Father Merlier had gone and unlocked Françoise's door. She descended to the courtyard, pale and very calm, but when there could not repress a shudder upon being brought face to face with the body of a Prussian soldier that lay on the ground beside the well, stretched out upon a cloak.

Soldiers were shouting and gesticulating angrily about the corpse. Several of them shook their fists threateningly in the direction of the village. The officer had just sent a summons to Father Merlier to appear before him in his capacity as mayor of the commune.

"Here is one of our men," he said, in a voice that was almost unintelligible from anger, "who was found murdered on the bank of the stream. The murderer must be found, so that we may make a salutary example of him, and I shall expect you to coöperate with us in finding him."

"Whatever you desire," the miller replied, with his customary impassiveness. "Only, it will be no easy matter."

The officer stooped down and drew aside the skirt of the cloak which concealed the dead man's

face, disclosing, as he did so, a frightful wound. The sentinel had been struck in the throat, and the weapon had not been withdrawn from the wound. It was a common kitchen-knife, with a black handle.

"Look at that knife," the officer said to Father Merlier. "Perhaps it will assist us in our investigation."

The old man had started violently, but recovered himself at once; not a muscle of his face moved as he replied:

"Every one about here has knives like that. Like enough, your man was tired of fighting, and did the business himself. Such things have happened before now."

"Be silent!" the officer shouted in a fury. "I don't know what it is that keeps me from applying the torch to the four corners of your village."

His rage fortunately kept him from noticing the great change that had come over Françoise's countenance. Her feelings had compelled her to sit down upon the stone bench beside the well. Do what she would, she could not remove her eyes from the body that lay stretched upon the ground, almost at her feet. He had been a tall, handsome young man in life, very like Dominique in appearance, with blue eyes and golden hair. The resemblance went to her heart. She thought that, perhaps, the dead man had left behind him in his German home some loved one who would weep for his loss. And she recognised her knife in the dead man's throat. She had killed him.

The officer, meantime, was talking of visiting Rocreuse with some terrible punishment, when two or three soldiers came running in. The guard had just that moment ascertained the fact of Dominique's escape. The agitation caused by the tidings was extreme. The officer went to inspect the locality, looked out through the still open window, saw at once how the event had happened, and returned in a state of exasperation.

Father Merlier appeared greatly vexed by Dominique's flight. "The idiot!" he murmured; "he has upset everything."

Françoise heard him, and was in an agony of suffering. Her father, moreover, had no suspicion of her complicity. He shook his head, saying to her in an undertone :

"We are in a nice box, now!"

"It was that scoundrel! it was that scoundrel!" cried the officer. "He has got away to the woods; but he must be found, or, by ——, the village shall stand the consequences." And, addressing himself to the miller, "Come, you must know where he is hiding?"

Father Merlier laughed in his silent way, and pointed to the wide stretch of wooded hills.

"How can you expect to find a man in that wilderness?" he asked.

"Oh! there are plenty of hiding-places that you are acquainted with. I am going to give you ten men; you shall act as guide to them."

"I am perfectly willing. But it will take a week to beat up all the woods of the neighbourhood."

The old man's serenity enraged the officer; he saw, indeed, what a ridiculous proceeding such a hunt would be. It was at that moment that he caught sight of Françoise where she sat, pale and trembling, on her bench. His attention was aroused by the girl's anxious attitude. He was silent for a moment, glancing suspiciously from father to daughter and back again.

"Is not this fellow," he at last coarsely asked the old man, "your daughter's lover?"

Father Merlier's face became ashy pale, and he appeared for a moment as if about to throw himself on the officer and throttle him. But he straightened himself up, and made no reply. Françoise had hidden her face in her hands.

"Yes, that is how it is," the Prussian continued; "you or your daughter have assisted him to escape. You are his accomplices. For the last time—will you surrender him?"

The miller did not answer. He had turned away, and was looking at the distant landscape with an air of supreme indifference, just as if the officer were talking to some other person. That put the finishing touch to the latter's wrath.

"Very well, then!" he declared, "you shall be shot in his stead."

And again he ordered out the firing-party. Father Merlier was as imperturbable as ever. He scarcely did so much as shrug his shoulders; the whole drama appeared to him to be very doubtful taste. He probably believed that they would not take a man's life in that unceremonious

manner. When the platoon was on the ground, he gravely said:

"So, then, you are in earnest? Very well, I am willing it should be so. If you feel you must have a victim, it may as well be I as another."

But Françoise arose, greatly troubled, stammering: "Have mercy, good sir; do not harm my father. Take my life instead of his. It was I who assisted Dominique to escape; I am the only guilty one."

"Hold your tongue, my girl," Father Merlier exclaimed. "Why do you tell such a falsehood? She passed the night locked in her room, monsieur; I assure you that she does not speak the truth."

"I *am* speaking the truth," the girl eagerly replied. "I left my room by the window; I incited Dominique to fly. It is the truth, the whole truth."

The old man's face was very white. He could read in her eyes that she was not lying, and her story terrified him. Ah, those children, those children! how they spoiled everything, with their hearts and their feelings! Then he said angrily:

"She is crazy; do not listen to her. It is a lot of trash she is giving you. Come, let us get through with this business."

She persisted in her protestations; she kneeled, she raised her clasped hands in supplication. The officer stood tranquilly by and watched the harrowing scene.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said at last, "I take your

father because the other has escaped me. Bring me back the other man and your father shall have his liberty."

She looked at him for a moment with eyes dilated by the horror which his proposal inspired in her.

"It is dreadful," she murmured. "Where can I look for Dominique now? He is gone; I know nothing beyond that."

"Well, make your choice between them; him or your father."

"Oh! my God! how can I choose? Even if I knew where to find Dominique, I could not choose. You are breaking my heart. I would rather die at once. Yes, it would be more quickly ended thus. Kill me, I beseech you; kill me——"

The officer finally became weary of this scene of despair and tears. He cried:

"Enough of this! I wish to treat you kindly; I will give you two hours. If your lover is not here within two hours, your father shall pay the penalty that he has incurred."

And he ordered Father Merlier away to the room that had served as a prison for Dominique. The old man asked for tobacco, and began to smoke. There was no trace of emotion to be descried on his impassive face. Only, when he was alone, he wept two big tears that coursed slowly down his cheeks as he smoked his solitary pipe. His poor, dear child, what a fearful trial she was enduring!

Françoise remained in the courtyard. Prussian

soldiers passed back and forth, laughing. Some of them addressed her with coarse pleasantries which she did not understand. Her gaze was bent upon the door through which her father had disappeared, and, with a slow movement, she raised her hand to her forehead, as if to keep it from bursting. The officer turned sharply, and said to her:

"You have two hours. Try to make good use of them."

She had two hours. The words kept buzzing, buzzing in her ears. Then she went forth mechanically from the courtyard; she walked straight ahead with no definite end. Where was she to go? what was she to do? She did not even endeavour to arrive at any decision, for she felt how utterly useless were her efforts. And yet she would have liked to see Dominique; they could have come to some understanding together; perhaps they might have hit on some plan to extricate them from their difficulties. And so, amid the confusion of her whirling thoughts, she took her way downward to the bank of the Morelle, which she crossed below the dam by means of some stepping-stones which were there. Proceeding onward, still involuntarily, she came to the first willow, at the corner of the meadow, and, stooping down, beheld a sight that made her grow deathly pale—a pool of blood. It was the spot. And she followed the trace that Dominique had left in the tall grass; it was evident that he had run, for the footsteps that crossed the

meadow in the diagonal line were separated from one another by wide intervals. Then, beyond that point, she lost the trace, but thought she had discovered it again in an adjoining field. It led her onward to the border of the forest, where the trail came abruptly to an end.

Though conscious of the futility of the proceeding, Françoise penetrated into the wood. It was a comfort to her to be alone. She sat down for a moment; then, reflecting that time was passing, rose again to her feet. How long was it since she left the mill? Five minutes? or a half-hour? She had lost all idea of time. Perhaps Dominique had sought concealment in a clearing that she knew of, where they had gone together one afternoon and eaten hazelnuts. She directed her steps toward the clearing; she searched it thoroughly. A blackbird flew out, whistling his sweet and melancholy note; that was all. Then she thought that he might have taken refuge in a hollow among the rocks where he went sometimes with his gun to secure a bird or a rabbit; but the spot was untenanted. What use was there in looking for him? She would never find him, and, little by little, the desire to discover his hiding-place became a passionate longing. She proceeded at a more rapid pace. The idea suddenly took possession of her that he had climbed into a tree, and thenceforth she went along with eyes raised aloft, and called him by name every fifteen or twenty steps, so that he might know she was near him. The cuckoos answered her;

a breath of air that rustled the leaves made her think that he was there, and was coming down to her. Once she even imagined that she saw him; she stopped, with a sense of suffocation, with a desire to run away. What was she to say to him? Had she come there to take him back with her, and have him shot? Oh, no! she would not mention those things; she would tell him that he must fly, that he must not remain in the neighbourhood. Then she thought of her father, awaiting her return, and the reflection caused her most bitter anguish. She sank upon the turf, weeping hot tears, crying aloud:

"My God! My God! Why am I here?"

It was a mad thing for her to have come. And, as if seized with sudden panic, she ran hither and thither, seeking to make her way out of the forest. Three times she lost her way, and had begun to think she was never to see the mill again, when she came out into a meadow, directly opposite Rocreuse. As soon as she caught sight of the village, she stopped. Was she going to return alone?

She was standing there when she heard a voice calling her by name, softly:

"Françoise! Françoise!"

And she beheld Dominique, raising his head above the edge of a ditch. Just God! she had found him!

Could it be, then, that heaven willed his death? She suppressed a cry that rose to her lips, and slipped into the ditch beside him.

"You were looking for me?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, bewildered, scarce knowing what she was saying.

"Ah! what has happened?"

She stammered, with eyes downcast, "Why, nothing; I was anxious; I wanted to see you."

Thereupon, his fears alleviated, he went on to tell her how it was that he had remained in the vicinity. He was alarmed for them. Those rascally Prussians were not above wreaking their vengeance on women and old men. All had ended well, however, and he added, laughing:

"The wedding will be deferred for a week, that's all."

He became serious, however, upon noticing that her dejection did not pass away.

"But what is the matter? You are concealing something from me."

"No, I give you my word I am not. I am tired; I ran all the way here."

He kissed her, saying it was imprudent for them both to remain there longer, and was about to climb out of the ditch in order to return to the forest. She stopped him; she was trembling violently.

"Listen, Dominique; perhaps it will be as well for you to remain here, after all. There is no one looking for you; you have nothing to fear."

"Françoise, you are concealing something from me," he said again.

Again she protested that she was concealing nothing. She only liked to know that he was

near her. And there were other reasons still that she gave in stammering accents. Her manner was so strange that no consideration could now have induced him to go away. He believed, moreover, that the French would return presently. Troops had been seen over toward Sauval.

"Ah! let them make haste; let them come as quickly as possible," she murmured fervently.

At that moment, the clock of the church at Rocreuse struck eleven; the strokes reached them, clear and distinct. She arose in terror; it was two hours since she had left the mill.

"Listen," she said, with feverish rapidity, "should we need you, I will go up to my room and wave my handkerchief from the window."

And she started off homeward on a run, while Dominique, greatly disturbed in mind, stretched himself at length beside the ditch to watch the mill. Just as she was about to enter the village, Françoise encountered an old beggarman, Father Bontemps, who knew every one and everything in that part of the country. He saluted her; he had just seen the miller, he said, surrounded by a crowd of Prussians; then, making numerous signs of the cross and mumbling some inarticulate words, he went his way.

"The two hours are up," the officer said, when Françoise made her appearance.

Father Merlier was there, seated on the bench beside the well. He was smoking still. The young girl again proffered her supplication, kneel-

ing before the officer and weeping. Her wish was to gain time. The hope that she might yet behold the return of the French had been gaining strength in her bosom, and amid her tears and sobs she thought she could distinguish in the distance the cadenced tramp of an advancing army. Oh! if they would but come, and deliver them all from their fearful trouble!

"Hear me, sir; grant us an hour—just one little hour. Surely, you will not refuse to grant us an hour!"

But the officer was inflexible. He even ordered two men to lay hold of her and take her away, in order that they might proceed undisturbed with the execution of the old man. Then a dreadful conflict took place in Françoise's heart. She could not allow her father to be murdered in that manner; no, no, she would die in company with Dominique rather, and she was just darting away in the direction of her room in order to signal her *fiancé*, when Dominique himself entered the courtyard.

The officer and his soldiers gave a great shout of triumph, but he, as if there had been no soul there but Françoise, walked straight up to her; he was perfectly calm, and his face wore a slight expression of sternness.

"You did wrong," he said. "Why did you not bring me back with you? Had it not been for Father Bontemps, I should have known nothing of all this. Well, I am here, at all events."

V

It was three o'clock. The heavens were piled high with great black clouds, the tail-end of a storm that had been raging somewhere in the vicinity. Beneath the coppery sky and ragged scud, the valley of Rocreuse, so bright and shining in the sunlight, became a grim chasm full of sinister shadows. The Prussian officer had done nothing with Dominique beyond placing him in confinement, giving no indication of his ultimate purpose in regard to him. Françoise, since noon, had been suffering unendurable agony; notwithstanding her father's entreaties, she would not leave the courtyard. She was waiting for the French troops to appear, but the hours slipped by, night was approaching, and she suffered all the more since it appeared as if the time thus gained would have no effect on the final result.

About three o'clock, however, the Prussians began to make their preparations for departure. The officer had gone to Dominique's room, and remained closeted with him for some minutes, as he had done the day before. Françoise knew that the young man's life was hanging in the balance; she clasped her hands, and put up fervent prayers. Beside her sat Father Merlier, rigid and silent, declining, like the true peasant he was, to attempt any interference with accomplished facts.

"Oh! my God! my God!" Françoise exclaimed, "they are going to kill him!"

The miller drew her to him, and took her on his lap as if she had been a little child. At this juncture, the officer came from the room, followed by two men conducting Dominique between them.

"Never, never!" the latter exclaimed. "I am ready to die."

"You had better think the matter over," the officer replied. "I shall have no trouble in finding some one else to render us the service which you refuse. I am generous with you; I offer you your life. It is simply a matter of guiding us across the forest to Montredon; there must be paths."

Dominique made no answer.

"Then you persist in your obstinacy?"

"Shoot me, and have done with the matter," he replied.

Françoise, in the distance, entreated her lover with clasped hands; she was forgetful of all considerations save one—she would have had him commit a treason. But Father Merlier seized her hands that the Prussians might not see the wild gestures of a woman whose mind was disordered by her distress.

"He is right," he murmured; "it is best for him to die."

The firing party was in readiness. The officer still had hopes of bringing Dominique over, and was waiting to see him exhibit some signs of weakness. Deep silence prevailed. Heavy peals of thunder were heard in the distance; the fields and woods lay lifeless beneath the swelter-

ing heat. And it was in the midst of this oppressive silence that suddenly the cry arose:

"The French! the French!"

It was a fact; they were coming. The line of red trousers could be seen advancing along the Sauval road, at the edge of the forest. In the mill, the confusion was extreme; the Prussian soldiers ran to and fro, giving vent to guttural cries. Not a shot had been fired as yet.

"The French! the French!" cried Françoise, clapping her hands for joy. She was like a woman possessed. She had escaped from her father's embrace, and was laughing boisterously, her arms raised high in the air. They had come at last, then, and had come in time, since Dominique was still there, alive!

A crash of musketry that rang in her ears like a thunder-clap caused her to suddenly turn her head. The officer had muttered, "We will finish this business first," and, with his own hands pushing Dominique up against the wall of a shed, had given the command to the squad to fire. When Françoise turned, Dominique was lying on the ground, pierced by a dozen bullets.

She did not shed a tear; she stood there like one suddenly rendered senseless. Her eyes were fixed and staring, and she went and seated herself beneath the shed, a few steps from the lifeless body. She looked at it wistfully; now and then she would make a movement with her hand in an aimless, childish way. The Prussians had seized Father Merlier as a hostage.

It was a pretty fight. The officer, perceiving that he could not retreat without being cut to pieces, rapidly made the best disposition possible of his men; it was as well to sell their lives dearly. The Prussians were now the defenders of the mill, and the French were the attacking party. The musketry fire began with unparalleled fury; for half an hour there was no lull in the storm. Then a deep report was heard, and a ball carried away a large branch of the old elm. The French had artillery; a battery, in position just beyond the ditch where Dominique had concealed himself, commanded the main street of Rocreuse. The conflict could not last long after that.

Ah! the poor old mill! The cannon-balls raked it from wall to wall. Half the roof was carried away; two of the walls fell in. But it was on the side toward the Morelle that the damage was greatest. The ivy, torn from the tottering walls, hung in tatters, débris of every description floated away upon the bosom of the stream, and, through a great breach, Françoise's chamber was visible with its little bed, the snow-white curtains of which were carefully drawn. Two balls struck the old wheel in quick succession, and it gave one parting groan; the buckets were carried away down stream, the frame was crushed into a shapeless mass. It was the soul of the stout old mill, parting from the body.

Then the French came forward to carry the place by storm. There was a mad hand-to-hand conflict with the bayonet. Under the dull sky

the pretty valley became a huge slaughter-pen; the broad meadows looked on affrightedly, with their great isolated trees and their rows of poplars dotting them with shade, while to right and left the forest was like the walls of a tilting-ground inclosing the combatants, and, in nature's universal panic, the gentle murmur of the springs and watercourses sounded like sobs and wails.

Françoise had not stirred from the shed, where she remained hanging over Dominique's body. Father Merlier had met his death from a stray bullet. Then the French captain, the Prussians being exterminated and the mill on fire, entered the courtyard at the head of his men. It was the first success that he had gained since the breaking out of the war, so, all afire with enthusiasm, drawing himself up to the full height of his lofty stature, he laughed pleasantly, as a handsome cavalier like him might laugh, and, perceiving poor, idiotic Françoise where she crouched between the corpses of her father and her husband among the smoking ruins of the mill, he saluted her gallantly with his sword, and shouted:

"Victory! Victory!"

THE LEG

BY

JOHANN HEINRICH DANIEL ZSCHOKKE

IN the autumn of 1782, the surgeon Louis Thévenet, of Calais, received an unsigned invitation, requesting him to come on the following day to a country-house situated on the road to Paris, and to bring with him the instruments necessary for the performance of an amputation. Thévenet was widely known at that time as the most skilful practitioner of his art; it was not uncommon to summon him across the Channel to England for consultation. He had long served in the army, and had kept something brusque in his bearing, but his natural kindliness rendered him universally beloved.

Thévenet was surprised at the anonymous note. Time and place were indicated with the greatest exactitude; he was told where and when he was expected, yet, as has been said, a signature was lacking. "Some young fool," he thought to himself, "probably wants to send me on a wild-goose chase." And he did not go.

Three days later he received a similar invitation, more pressing still, and informing him that at nine o'clock on the next morning a

carriage would stop at his house to fetch him. And in fact, next morning, at the stroke of nine, a handsome open carriage appeared. Thévenet hesitated no longer, but entered it.

Outside the city gate he asked the coachman, "To whom are you taking me?" The man answered, "I don't know, and it doesn't concern me." These words were spoken in English.

"You are a boor," replied Thévenet. The carriage finally stopped before the country-house in question. "To whom am I to go? Who lives here? Who is ill?" Thévenet asked the coachman before he got out of the carriage. The latter gave his previous answer, to which the physician, too, replied as before. At the door of the house a handsome young man, about twenty-eight years old, met him, and led him up a flight of stairs into a large room. The young man's accent showed him to be an Englishman. Consequently, Thévenet addressed him in that language, and received a friendly answer.

"You have summoned me here," said the surgeon.

"I am very grateful to you for having taken the trouble to come," answered the Englishman. "Will you not be seated? Here are chocolate, coffee, wine, in case you should care to take something before performing the operation."

"But, sir, I should first like to see the patient. I must examine the injury to see whether an amputation is necessary."

"It is necessary, Mr. Thévenet. Kindly sit

down. I have every confidence in you. Therefore, listen: I have in this purse two hundred guineas, which I design to pay you for performing the operation you are to undertake. More will be forthcoming if it is successfully done. If it turns out badly, or if you refuse to accede to my wishes—you see this loaded pistol, and you are in my power—I will shoot you down, so help me God!"

"Sir, I do not fear your pistol. But what do you desire? Speak plainly, without preamble. What am I to do here?"

"You must cut off my right leg."

"With the greatest pleasure, and, if you wish it, your head too. Only, if I noticed rightly, the leg seems to be in perfectly good condition. You sprang up the stairs before me like a rope-dancer. What is the matter with the leg?"

"Nothing. I want to get rid of it."

"Sir, you are a fool."

"That does not concern you, Mr. Thévenet."

"What sin has your admirable leg committed?"

"None. But have you made up your mind to rid me of it?"

"Sir, I do not know you. Produce witnesses to prove you otherwise sound and healthy in mind."

"Will you yield to my wishes, Mr. Thévenet?"

"Sir, as soon as you give me a reasonable ground for this mutilation."

"I cannot tell you the truth now; perhaps I may at the end of a year. But I am willing

to bet that, after the space of a year, you yourself will confess that my reasons for getting rid of this leg were the noblest conceivable."

"I will not bet unless you tell me your name, your place of residence, your family, and your occupation."

"You shall know all that in the future, but not now. I beg you to consider me a man of honour."

"A man of honour does not threaten his physician with pistols. I have certain duties even toward you, who are unknown to me. If it will please you to become the murderer of the innocent father of a family—then shoot!"

"Very well, Mr. Thévenet," said the Englishman, taking up the pistol, "I will not shoot you, but, for all that, I will force you to amputate my leg. What you will do neither as a favour to me, nor from desire of reward, nor for fear of a bullet, you will grant me out of pity."

"And how so?"

"I will shatter my own leg with a bullet, and that right here and now, before your very eyes."

The Englishman sat down, took the pistol, and pressed its muzzle close to his knee. Thévenet made a motion to jump up and prevent him.

"Do not move," said the Englishman, "or I shoot. Answer me this single question: Do you wish to prolong and intensify my pain unnecessarily?"

"Sir, you are a fool, but I will do as you wish. I will rid you of your confounded leg."

Everything was prepared for the operation. When the knife was set to the leg, the Englishman lit his pipe and swore that he would not let it go out. He kept his word. The dead leg lay on the floor. The Englishman continued to smoke.

Thévenet performed his task in a masterly way. By means of his skill, the sick man was healed in a comparatively short time. He rewarded his physician, whom he esteemed more highly every day, thanked him with tears of joy for the loss of his limb, and sailed off to England with a wooden leg.

About eighteen weeks after his departure, Thévenet received a letter from England to the following effect:

"Inclosed you will find, as a proof of my profound gratitude, an order on M. Pachaud, the Paris banker, for two hundred and fifty guineas. By ridding me of a limb which stood in the way of my earthly happiness you have made me the happiest of mortals. Excellent man, you may now know the reason for what you called my foolish whim. You declared that there could be no reasonable ground for such voluntary mutilation. I proposed to enter on a bet with you. You did well not to accept it.

"After my second return from India, I became acquainted with Emily Harley, the

most perfect of women. I adored her. Her fortune and connections pleased my family; I cared only for her beauty, for her angelic disposition. I became one of her crowd of admirers. Ah, my dear Thévenet, I was happy enough to become the unhappiest of all my rivals. She loved me, *me* before all men, made no secret of it, and yet for that very reason she repelled me. In vain did I beg for her hand; in vain did my parents and her friends beg for me. She remained unmoved.

"For a long time I could not discover the cause of her aversion to a marriage with me, whom, by her own confession, she loved to distraction. At last one of her sisters revealed the secret to me. Miss Harley was a marvellous beauty, but she had one defect—she was one-legged, and on account of this imperfection she feared to become my wife. She dreaded that I should despise her for it. My mind was immediately made up. I would share her misfortune. Thanks to you, my dear Thévenet, I became able to do it!

"I returned home with a deceptive wooden leg. The first thing I did was to visit Miss Harley. The news had gone abroad, and I myself had written them to England that I had broken my leg by falling from a horse, and that it had been amputated. I was universally pitied. Emily fainted at our first meeting. For a long time she was unconsolable; but she became my wife. Not until the day after our

marriage did I tell her the secret of the sacrifice that I had made in order to win her. She loved me the more tenderly for it. Oh, excellent Thévenet, had I ten legs to lose, I would give them all, without pulling a face, for Emily.

"As long as I live I shall be grateful to you. Come to London, visit me, become acquainted with my adorable wife, and then still say, if you can, that I am a fool! CHARLES TEMPLE."

Thévenet communicated the story and the contents of the letter to his friends, laughing heartily as often as he related it.

"For all that, he remains a fool!" cried the doctor.

His reply to the letter ran as follows:

"Sir: I thank you for your valuable present. I call it thus, for I can hardly call it a reward for my small trouble.

"I wish you happiness on your marriage with the most charming of all Englishwomen. It is true, a leg is not much to give in exchange for a beautiful, virtuous, and tender wife, if only in the end one is not deceived in one's bargain. Adam had to pay a rib of his own body for the possession of a wife; many another man has paid as much, some even their head.

"Nevertheless, you will permit me humbly to keep to my original opinion. To be sure, at this moment you are in the right. You now dwell in the paradise of love's springtide. But

I, too, am right, with this difference, that the truth of my opinion, like every truth that one hesitates a long time to accept, will be slow to ripen.

"Sir, hear what I say. I fear that after two years you will regret having had your leg amputated above the knee. It would have done just as well below, you will say to yourself. At the end of three years you will be convinced that the loss of a foot would have been sufficient. At the end of four years, you will declare that the sacrifice of the great toe would have been too much; at the end of five, you will assert the same of the little toe. When six years shall have passed, you will confess to me that the paring of the nails would have been quite enough.

"All this I say without trying to detract from the merits of your charming wife. Ladies can keep their beauty and their virtues more changeless than men their judgments. In my youth, I would at any time have given my life for my beloved; in my life I should never have given a leg. The former sacrifice I would never have regretted, the latter always. For had I made it, I would have said to myself to this very day: 'Thévenet, you were a fool!' With which remark, I have the honour to be, sir, your humble servant, G. THÉVENET."

. . . . . .

In the year 1793, during the Reign of Terror, having been brought into suspicion of aris-

tocratic leanings by a younger colleague, Thévenet fled to London, in order to save his life from the levelling guillotine.

Either because time hung heavily on his hands, or because he wished to seek acquaintances, he went to see Sir Charles Temple.

He was directed to that gentleman's mansion. He was announced and received. In an armchair, over a pot of foaming porter, near the chimney, and surrounded by twenty newspapers, sat a stout gentleman, so unwieldy that he could scarcely rise.

"Ah, welcome, Mr. Thévenet," cried the stout gentleman, who was no other than Sir Charles himself. "Don't take it ill that I remain seated, but the infernal wooden leg hinders me in everything. My friend, I suppose you have come to see *whether the truth has ripened?*"

"I come as a refugee, seeking protection of you."

"You must be my guest, for, on my life, you are a wise man. You must console me. In truth, Thévenet, I might have been an admiral to-day, if this miserable wooden leg had not rendered me unfit for the service of my country. As it is, I read the papers, and curse myself blue in the face on account of my forced inactivity. Come, console me!"

"Your wife will be better able to console you than I."

"Not at all. Her wooden leg prevents her from dancing, and so she has taken to cards and

gossip. There is no getting along with her. In other things, she is an excellent woman."

"And so I seem to have been in the right?"

"Oh, entirely, my dear Thévenet, but let us be silent on that subject. I acted like an ass. Could I get my leg back, I would not give the paring of a toe-nail! Between you and me, I was a fool! But keep this information to yourself."

MARKHEIM

BY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

"YES," said the dealer, "our windfalls are of various kinds. Some customers are ignorant, and then I touch a dividend on my superior knowledge. Some are dishonest," and here he held up the candle, so that the light fell strongly on his visitor, "and, in that case," he continued, "I profit by my virtue."

Markheim had but just entered from the daylight streets, and his eyes had not yet grown familiar with the mingled shine and darkness in the shop. At these pointed words, and before the near presence of the flame, he blinked painfully and looked aside.

The dealer chuckled. "You come to me on Christmas Day," he resumed, "when you know that I am alone in my house, put up my shutters, and make a point of refusing business. Well, you will have to pay for that; you will have to pay for my loss of time, when I should be balancing my books; you will have to pay, besides, for a kind of manner that I remark in you to-day very strongly. I am the essence of discretion, and ask no awkward questions; but, when a customer cannot look me in the eye, he

has to pay for it." The dealer once more chuckled; and then, changing to his usual business voice, though still with a note of irony, "You can give, as usual, a clear account of how you came into the possession of the object?" he continued. "Still your uncle's cabinet? A remarkable collector, sir!"

And the little, pale, round-shouldered dealer stood almost on tip-toe, looking over the tops of his gold spectacles, and nodding his head with every mark of disbelief. Markheim returned his gaze with one of infinite pity and a touch of horror.

"This time," said he, "you are in error. I have not come to sell, but to buy. I have no curios to dispose of; my uncle's cabinet is bare to the wainscot; even were it still intact, I have done well on the Stock Exchange, and should more likely add to it than otherwise, and my errand to-day is simplicity itself. I seek a Christmas present for a lady," he continued, waxing more fluent as he struck into the speech he had prepared, "and, certainly I owe you every excuse for thus disturbing you upon so small a matter. But the thing was neglected yesterday; I must produce my little compliment at dinner; and, as you very well know, a rich marriage is not a thing to be neglected."

There followed a pause, during which the dealer seemed to weigh this statement incredulously. The ticking of many clocks among the curious lumber of the shop, and the faint rush-

ing of the cabs in a near thoroughfare, filled up the interval of silence.

"Well, sir," said the dealer, "be it so. You are an old customer after all; and if, as you say, you have the chance of a good marriage, far be it from me to be an obstacle. Here is a nice thing for a lady now," he went on, "this hand-glass—fifteenth century, warranted; comes from a good collection too; but I reserve the name, in the interests of my customer, who was, just like yourself, my dear sir, the nephew and sole heir of a remarkable collector."

The dealer, while he thus ran on in his dry and biting voice, had stooped to take the object from its place; and, as he had done so, a shock had passed through Markheim, a start both of hand and foot, a sudden leap of many tumultuous passions to the face. It passed as swiftly as it came, and left no trace beyond a certain trembling of the hand that now received the glass.

"A glass," he said hoarsely, and then paused, and repeated it more clearly. "A glass? For Christmas? Surely not?"

"And why not?" cried the dealer. "Why not a glass?"

Markheim was looking upon him with an indefinable expression. "You ask me why not?" he said. "Why, look here—look in it—look at yourself! Do you like to see it? No! nor I—nor any man."

The little man had jumped back when Markheim had so suddenly confronted him with the

mirror; but now, perceiving there was nothing worse on hand, he chuckled. "Your future lady, sir, must be pretty hard-favoured," said he.

"I ask you," said Markheim, "for a Christmas present, and you give me this—this damned reminder of years, and sins and follies—this hand-conscience! Did you mean it? Had you a thought in your mind? Tell me. It will be better for you if you do. Come, tell me about yourself. I hazard a guess now—that you are in secret a very charitable man?"

The dealer looked closely at his companion. It was very odd; Markheim did not appear to be laughing; there was something in his face like an eager sparkle of hope, but nothing of mirth.

"What are you driving at?" the dealer asked.

"Not charitable?" returned the other gloomily. "Not charitable; not pious; not scrupulous; unloving, unbeloved; a hand to get money, a safe to keep it. Is that all? Dear God, man, is that all?"

"I will tell you what it is," began the dealer, with some sharpness, and then broke off again into a chuckle. "But I see this is a love-match of yours, and you have been drinking the lady's health."

"Ah!" cried Markheim, with a strange curiosity. "Ah, have you been in love? Tell me about that."

"I," cried the dealer. "I in love! I never had the time, nor have I the time to-day for all this nonsense. Will you take the glass?"

"Where is the hurry?" returned Markheim. "It is very pleasant to stand here talking; and life is so short and insecure that I would not hurry away from any pleasure—no, not even from so mild a one as this. We should rather cling, cling, to what little we can get, like a man at a cliff's edge. Every second is a cliff, if you think upon it—a cliff a mile high—high enough, if we fall, to dash us out of every feature of humanity. Hence it is best to talk pleasantly. Let us talk of each other: why should we wear this mask? Let us be confidential. Who knows, we might become friends?"

"I have just one word to say to you," said the dealer: "Either make your purchase, or walk out of my shop!"

"True, true," said Markheim. "Enough fooling. To business. Show me something else."

The dealer stooped once more, this time to replace the glass upon the shelf, his thin blond hair falling over his eyes as he did so. Markheim moved a little nearer, with one hand in the pocket of his greatcoat; he drew himself up and filled his lungs; at the same time, many different emotions were depicted together on his face: terror, horror, and resolve, fascination and a physical repulsion; and, through a haggard lift of his upper lip, his teeth looked out.

"This, perhaps, may suit," observed the dealer; and then, as he began to re-arise, Markheim bounded from behind upon his victim. The long, skewerlike dagger flashed and fell.

The dealer struggled like a hen, striking his temple on the shelf, and then tumbled on the floor in a heap.

Time had some score of small voices in that shop, some stately and slow as was becoming to their great age; others garrulous and hurried. All these told out the seconds in an intricate chorus of tickings. Then the passage of a lad's feet, heavily running on the pavement, broke in upon these smaller voices, and startled Markheim into the consciousness of his surroundings. He looked about him awfully. The candle stood on the counter, its flame solemnly wagging in a draught; and, by that inconsiderable movement, the whole room was filled with noiseless bustle and kept heaving like a sea: the tall shadows nodding, the gross blots of darkness swelling and dwindling as with respiration, the faces of the portraits and the china gods changing and wavering like images in water. The inner door stood ajar, and peered into that league of shadows with a long slit of daylight like a pointing finger.

From these fear-stricken rovings Markheim's eyes returned to the body of his victim, where it lay both humped and sprawling, incredibly small, and strangely meaner than in life. In these poor, miserly clothes, in that ungainly attitude, the dealer lay like so much sawdust. Markheim had feared to see it, and lo! it was nothing. And yet, as he gazed, this bundle of old clothes and pool of blood began to find elo-

quent voices. There it must lie; there was none to work the cunning hinges or direct the miracle of locomotion—there it must lie till it was found. Found! ay, and then? Then would this dead flesh lift up a cry that would ring over England, and fill the world with the echoes of pursuit. Ay, dead or not, this was still the enemy. "Time was that when the brains were out," he thought; and the first word struck into his mind. Time, now that the deed was accomplished—time, which had closed for the victim, had become instant and momentous for the slayer.

The thought was yet in his mind, when, first one and then another, with every variety of pace and voice—one deep as the bell from a cathedral turret, another ringing on its treble notes the prelude of a waltz—the clocks began to strike the hour of three in the afternoon.

The sudden outbreak of so many tongues in that dumb chamber staggered him. He began to bestir himself, going to and fro with the candle, beleaguered by moving shadows, and startled to the soul by chance reflections. In many rich mirrors, some of home design, some from Venice or Amsterdam, he saw his face repeated and repeated, as it were an army of spies; his own eyes met and detected him; and the sound of his own steps, lightly as they fell, vexed the surrounding quiet. And still, as he continued to fill his pockets, his mind accused him with a sickening iteration of the thousand faults of his

design. He should have chosen a more quiet hour; he should have prepared an alibi; he should not have used a knife; he should have been more cautious, and only bound and gagged the dealer, and not killed him; he should have been more bold, and killed the servant also; he should have done all things otherwise: poignant regrets, weary, incessant toiling of the mind to change what was unchangeable, to plan what was now useless, to be the architect of the irrevocable past. Meanwhile, and behind all this activity, brute terrors, like the scurrying of rats in a deserted attic, filled the more remote chambers of his brain with riot; the hand of the constable would fall heavy on his shoulder, and his nerves would jerk like a hooked fish; or he beheld, in galloping defile, the dock, the prison, the gallows, and the black coffin.

Terror of the people in the street sat down before his mind like a besieging army. It was impossible, he thought, but that some rumour of the struggle must have reached their ears and set on edge their curiosity; and now, in all the neighbouring houses, he divined them sitting motionless and with uplifted ear—solitary people, condemned to spend Christmas dwelling alone on memories of the past, and now startlingly recalled from that tender exercise; happy family parties, struck into silence round the table, the mother still with raised finger: every degree and age and humour, but all, by their own hearths, prying and hearkening and weaving the

rope that was to hang him. Sometimes it seemed to him he could not move too softly; the clink of the tall Bohemian goblets rang out loudly like a bell; and alarmed by the bigness of the ticking, he was tempted to stop the clocks. And then, again, with a swift transition of his terrors, the very silence of the place appeared a source of peril, and a thing to strike and freeze the passer-by; and he would step more boldly, and bustle aloud among the contents of the shop, and imitate, with elaborate bravado, the movements of a busy man at ease in his own house.

But he was now so pulled about by different alarms that, while one portion of his mind was still alert and cunning, another trembled on the brink of lunacy. One hallucination in particular took a strong hold on his credulity. The neighbour hearkening with white face beside his window, the passer-by arrested by a horrible surmise on the pavement—these could at worst suspect; they could not know; through the brick walls and shuttered windows, only sounds could penetrate. But here, within the house, was he alone? He knew he was; he had watched the servant set forth sweethearting, in her poor best, "out for the day" written in every ribbon and smile. Yes, he was alone, of course; and yet, in the bulk of empty house above him, he could surely hear a stir of delicate footing—he was surely conscious, inexplicably conscious, of some presence. Ay, surely; to every room and corner of the house his imagination followed it;

and now it was a faceless thing, and yet had eyes to see with; and again it was a shadow of himself; and yet again behold the image of the dead dealer, reinspired with cunning and hatred.

At times, with a strong effort, he would glance at the open door which still seemed to repel his eyes. The house was tall, the skylight small and dirty, the day blind with fog; and the light that filtered down to the ground story was exceedingly faint, and showed dimly on the threshold of the shop. And yet, in that strip of doubtful brightness, did there not hang wavering a shadow?

Suddenly, from the street outside, a very jovial gentleman began to beat with a staff on the shop door, accompanying his blows with shouts and railleries in which the dealer was continually called upon by name. Markheim, smitten into ice, glanced at the dead man. But no! he lay quite still; he was fled away far beyond earshot of these blows and shoutings; he was sunk beneath seas of silence; and his name, which would once have caught his notice above the howling of a storm, had become an empty sound. And presently the jovial gentleman desisted from his knocking, and departed.

Here was a broad hint to hurry what remained to be done, to get forth from this accusing neighbourhood, to plunge into a bath of London multitudes, and to reach, on the other side of day, that haven of safety and apparent innocence—his bed. One visitor had come: at any moment

another might follow, and be more obstinate. To have done the deed, and yet not to reap the profit, would be too abhorrent a failure. The money—that was now Markheim's concern; and, as a means to that, the keys.

He glanced over his shoulder at the open door, where the shadow was still lingering and shivering; and, with no conscious repugnance of the mind, yet with a tremor of the belly, he drew near the body of his victim. The human character had quite departed. Like a suit half-stuffed with bran, the limbs lay scattered, the trunk doubled, on the floor; and yet the thing repelled him. Although so dingy and inconsiderable to the eye, he feared it might have more significance to the touch. He took the body by the shoulders and turned it on its back. It was strangely light and supple, and the limbs, as if they had been broken, fell into the oddest postures. The face was robbed of all expression; but it was as pale as wax, and shockingly smeared with blood about one temple. That was, for Markheim, the one displeasing circumstance. It carried him back, upon the instant, to a certain fair day in a fishers' village: a gray day, a piping wind, a crowd upon the street, the blare of brasses, the booming of drums, the nasal voice of a ballad-singer; and a boy going to and fro, buried over-head in the crowd and divided between interest and fear, until, coming out upon the chief place of concourse, he beheld a booth and a great scene with pictures dismally de-

signed, garishly coloured: Brownrigg, with her apprentice; the Mannings, with their murdered guest; Weare, in the death-grip of Thurtell; and a score, besides, of famous crimes. The thing was as clear as an illusion; he was once again that little boy; he was looking once again, and with the same sense of physical revolt, at these vile pictures; he was still stunned by the thumping of the drums. A bar of that day's music returned upon his memory; and, at that, for the first time, a qualm came over him, a breath of nausea, a sudden weakness of the joints, which he must instantly resist and conquer.

He judged it more prudent to confront than to flee from these considerations; looking the more hardily in the dead face, bending his mind to realise the nature and greatness of his crime. So little a while ago that face had moved with every change of sentiment, that pale mouth had spoken, that body had been all on fire with governable energies; and now, and by his act, that piece of life had been arrested, as the horologist, with interjected finger, arrests the beating of the clock. So he reasoned in vain; he could rise to no more remorseful consciousness; the same heart which had shuddered before the painted effigies of crime looked on its reality unmoved. At best he felt a gleam of pity for one who had been endowed in vain with all those faculties that can make the world a garden of enchantment, for one who had never lived, and who was now dead. But of penitence, no, not a tremor.

With that, shaking himself clear of these considerations, he found the keys, and advanced toward the open door of the shop. Outside, it had begun to rain smartly; and the sound of the shower upon the roof had banished silence. Like some dripping cavern, the chambers of the house were haunted by an incessant echoing, which filled the ear and mingled with the ticking of the clocks. And, as Markheim approached the door, he seemed to hear, in answer to his own cautious tread, the steps of another foot withdrawing up the stair. The shadow still palpitated loosely on the threshold. He threw a ton's weight of resolve upon his muscles, and drew back the door.

The faint, foggy daylight glimmered dimly on the bare floor and stairs; on the bright suit of armour posted, halberd in hand, upon the landing; and on the dark wood-carvings, and framed pictures that hung against the yellow panels of the wainscot. So loud was the beating of the rain through all the house that, in Markheim's ears, it began to be distinguished into many different sounds. Footsteps and sighs, the tread of regiments marching in the distance, the chink of money in the counting, and the creaking of doors held stealthily ajar, appeared to mingle with the patter of the drops upon the cupola and the gushing of the water in the pipes. The sense that he was not alone grew upon him to the verge of madness. On every side, he was haunted and begirt by presences. He heard

them moving in the upper chambers; from the shop, he heard the dead man getting to his legs; and, as he began with a great effort to mount the stairs, feet fled quietly before him, and followed stealthily behind. If he were but deaf, he thought, how tranquilly he would possess his soul! And then again, and hearkening with ever fresh attention, he blessed himself for that unresting sense which held the outposts and stood a trusty sentinel upon his life. His head turned continually on his neck; his eyes, which seemed starting from their orbits, scouted on every side, and on every side were half rewarded as with the tail of something nameless vanishing. The four-and-twenty steps to the first floor were four-and-twenty agonies.

On that first story the doors stood ajar, three of them like three ambushes, shaking his nerves like the throats of cannon. He could never again, he felt, be sufficiently immured and fortified from men's observing eyes; he longed to be home, girt in by walls, buried among bedclothes, and invisible to all but God. And, at that thought, he wondered a little, recollecting tales of other murderers and the fear they were said to entertain of heavenly avengers. It was not so, at least, with him. He feared the laws of nature, lest, in their callous and immutable procedure, they should preserve some damning evidence of his crime. He feared tenfold more, with a slavish, superstitious terror, some scis-

sion in the continuity of man's experience, some wilful illegality of nature. He played a game of skill, depending on the rules, calculating consequence from cause; and what if nature, as the defeated tyrant overthrew the chess-board, should break the mould of their succession? The like had befallen Napoleon (so writers said) when the winter changed the time of its appearance. The like might befall Markheim: the solid walls might become transparent, and reveal his doings like those of bees in a glass hive; the stout planks might yield under his foot like quicksands, and detain him in their clutch; ay, and there were soberer accidents that might destroy him: if, for instance, the house should fall, and imprison him beside the body of his victim; or the house next door should fly on fire, and the firemen invade him from all sides. These things he feared; and, in a sense, these things might be called the hands of God reached forth against sin. But about God Himself he was at ease; his act was doubtless exceptional, but so were his excuses, which God knew; it was there, and not among men, that he felt sure of justice.

When he had got safe into the drawing-room, and shut the door behind him, he was aware of a respite from alarms. The room was quite dismantled, uncarpeted besides, and strewn with packing-cases and incongruous furniture; several great pier-glasses, in which he beheld himself at various angles, like an actor on a stage;

many pictures, framed and unframed, standing, with their faces to the wall; a fine Sheraton sideboard, a cabinet of marquetry, and a great old bed, with tapestry hangings. The windows opened to the floor; but, by great good fortune, the lower part of the shutters had been closed, and this concealed him from the neighbours. Here, then, Markheim drew in a packing-case before the cabinet, and began to search among the keys. It was a long business, for there were many; and it was irksome, besides; for, after all, there may be nothing in the cabinet, and time was on the wing. But the closeness of the occupation sobered him. With the tail of his eye he saw the door—even glanced at it from time to time directly, like a besieged commander pleased to verify the good estate of his defences. But, in truth, he was at peace. The rain falling in the street sounded natural and pleasant. Presently, on the other side, the notes of a piano were awakened to the music of a hymn, and the voices of many children took up the air and words. How stately, how comfortable was the melody! How fresh the youthful voices! Markheim gave ear to it smilingly as he sorted out the keys, and his mind was thronged with answerable ideas and images—church-going children and the pealing of the high organ; children afield, bathers by the brookside, ramblers on the brambly common, kite-flyers in the windy and cloud-navigated sky; and then, at another cadence of the hymn, back again to church, and

the somnolence of summer Sundays, and the high genteel voice of the parson (which he smiled a little to recall), and the painted Jacobean tombs, and the dim lettering of the Ten Commandments in the chancel.

And as he sat thus, at once busy and absent, he was startled to his feet. A flash of ice, a flash of fire, a bursting gush of blood, went over him, and then he stood transfixed and thrilling. A step mounted the stair slowly and steadily, and presently a hand was laid upon the knob, and the lock clicked, and the door opened.

Fear held Markheim in a vise. What to expect he knew not, whether the dead man walking, or the official ministers of human justice, or some chance witness blindly stumbling in to consign him to the gallows. But when a face was thrust into the aperture, glanced round the room, looked at him, nodded and smiled as if in friendly recognition, and then withdrew again, and the door closed behind it, his fear broke loose from his control in a hoarse cry. At the sound of this the visitant returned.

"Did you call me?" he asked pleasantly, and, with that, he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Markheim stood and gazed at him with all his eyes. Perhaps there was a film upon his sight, but the outlines of the new-comer seemed to change and waver like those of the idols in the wavering candle-light of the shop; and at times he thought he knew him; and at times he thought

he bore a likeness to himself; and always, like a lump of living terror, there lay in his bosom the conviction that this thing was not of the earth and not of God.

And yet the creature had a strange air of the commonplace, as he stood looking on Markheim with a smile; and when he added, "You are looking for the money, I believe?" it was in the tones of everyday politeness.

Markheim made no answer.

"I should warn you," resumed the other, "that the maid has left her sweetheart earlier than usual, and will soon be here. If Mr. Markheim be found in this house, I need not describe to him the consequences."

"You know me?" cried the murderer.

The visitor smiled. "You have long been a favourite of mine," he said; "and I have long observed and often sought to help you."

"What are you?" cried Markheim; "the devil?"

"What I may be," returned the other, "cannot affect the service I propose to render you."

"It can," cried Markheim; "it does! Be helped by you? No, never; not by you! You do not know me yet; thank God, you do not know me!"

"I know you," replied the visitant, with a sort of kind severity or, rather, firmness. "I know you to the soul."

"Know me!" cried Markheim. "Who can do so? My life is but a travesty and slander on

myself. I have lived to belie my nature. All men do; all men are better than this disguise that grows about and stifles them. You see each dragged away by life, like one whom bravos have seized and muffled in a cloak. If they had their own control—if you could see their faces, they would be altogether different; they would shine out for heroes and saints! I am worse than most; myself is more overlaid; my excuse is known to me and God. But, had I the time, I could disclose myself."

"To me?" inquired the visitant.

"To you before all," returned the murderer. "I supposed you were intelligent. I thought—since you exist—you would prove a reader of the heart. And yet you would propose to judge me by my acts! Think of it; my acts! I was born, and I have lived, in a land of giants; giants have dragged me by the wrists since I was born out of my mother—the giants of circumstance. And you would judge me by my acts! But can you not look within? Can you not understand that evil is hateful to me? Can you not see within me the clear writing of conscience, never blurred by any wilful sophistry, although too often disregarded? Can you not read me for a thing that surely must be common as humanity—the unwilling sinner?"

"All this is very feelingly expressed," was the reply, "but it regards me not. These points of consistency are beyond my province, and I care not in the least by what compulsion you may

have been dragged away, so as you are but carried in the right direction. But time flies; the servant delays, looking in the faces of the crowd and at the pictures on the boardings, but still she keeps moving nearer; and remember, it is as if the gallows itself was striding toward you through the Christmas streets! Shall I help you; I, who know all? Shall I tell you where to find the money?"

"For what price?" asked Markheim.

"I offer you the service for a Christmas gift," returned the other.

Markheim could not refrain from smiling with a kind of bitter triumph. "No," said he, "I will take nothing at your hands; if I were dying of thirst, and it was your hand that put the pitcher to my lips, I should find the courage to refuse. It may be credulous, but I will do nothing to commit myself to evil."

"I have no objection to a death-bed repentance," observed the visitant.

"Because you disbelieve its efficacy!" Markheim cried.

"I do not say so," returned the other; "but I look on these things from a different side, and, when the life is done, my interest falls. The man has lived to serve me, to spread black looks under colour of religion, or to sow tares in the wheat-field, as you do, in a course of weak compliance with desire. Now that he draws so near to his deliverance, he can add but one act of service—to repent, to die smiling, and thus to

build up in confidence and hope the more timorous of my surviving followers. I am not so hard a master. Try me. Accept my help. Please yourself in life as you have done hitherto; please yourself more amply, spread your elbows at the board; and, when the night begins to fall and the curtains to be drawn, I tell you, for your greater comfort, that you will find it even easy to compound your quarrel with your conscience and to make a truckling peace with God. I came but now from such a death-bed, and the room was full of sincere mourners, listening to the man's last words: and, when I looked into that face, which had been set as a flint against mercy, I found it smiling with hope."

"And do you, then, suppose me such a creature?" asked Markheim. "Do you think I have no more generous aspirations than to sin, and sin, and sin, and, at the last, sneak into Heaven? My heart rises at the thought. Is this, then, your experience of mankind? Or is it because you find me with red hands that you presume such baseness? And is this crime of murder indeed so impious as to dry up the very springs of good?"

"Murder is to me no special category," replied the other. "All sins are murder, even as all life is war. I behold your race, like starving mariners on a raft, plucking crusts out of the hands of famine and feeding on each other's lives. I follow sins beyond the moment of their acting; I find in all that the last consequence

is death; and, to my eyes, the pretty maid who thwarts her mother with such taking graces on a question of a ball drips no less visibly with human gore than such a murderer as yourself. Do I say that I follow sins? I follow virtues also; they differ not by the thickness of a nail; they are both scythes for the reaping angel of Death. Evil, for which I live, consists not in action, but in character. The bad man is dear to me; not the bad act, whose fruits, if we could follow them far enough down the hurtling cataract of the ages, might yet be found more blessed than those of the rarest virtues. And it is not because you have killed a dealer, but because you are Markheim, that I offer to forward your escape."

"I will lay my heart open to you," answered Markheim. "This crime on which you find me is my last. On my way to it, I have learned many lessons; itself is a lesson, a momentous lesson. Hitherto I have been driven with revolt to what I would not; I was a bond-slave to poverty, driven and scourged. There are robust virtues that can stand in these temptations; mine was not so: I had a thirst of pleasure. But to-day, and out of this deed, I pluck both warning and riches—both the power and a fresh resolve to be myself. I become in all things a free actor in the world; I begin to see myself all changed, these hands the agents of good, this heart at peace. Something comes over me out of the past; something of what I

have dreamed on Sabbath evenings to the sound of the church organ, of what I forecast when I shed tears over noble books, or talked, an innocent child, with my mother. There lies my life; I have wandered a few years, but now I see once more my city of destination."

"You are to use this money on the Stock Exchange, I think?" remarked the visitor; "and there, if I mistake not, you have already lost some thousands?"

"Ah," said Markheim, "but this time I have a sure thing."

"This time, again, you will lose," replied the visitor quietly.

"Ah, but I keep back the half!" cried Markheim.

"That also you will lose," said the other.

The sweat started upon Markheim's brow. "Well, then, what matter!" he exclaimed. "Say it be lost; say I am plunged again in poverty, shall one part of me, and that the worst, continue until the end to override the better? Evil and good run strong in me, haling me both ways. I do not love the one thing; I love all. I can conceive great deeds, renunciations, martyrdoms; and, though I be fallen to such a crime as murder, pity is no stranger to my thoughts. I pity the poor. Who knows their trials better than myself? I pity, and help them; I prize love, I love honest laughter; there is no good thing nor true thing on earth but I love it from my heart. And are my vices

only to direct my life, and my virtues to lie without effect, like some passive lumber of the mind? Not so; good, also, is a spring of acts."

But the visitant raised his finger. "For six-and-thirty years that you have been in this world," said he, "through many changes of fortune and varieties of humour, I have watched you steadily fall. Fifteen years ago, you would have started at a theft. Three years back, you would have blanched at the name of murder. Is there any crime, is there any cruelty or meanness, from which you still recoil—five years from now, I shall detect you in the fact! Downward, downward lies your way; nor can anything but death avail to stop you."

"It is true," Markheim said huskily, "I have in some degree complied with evil. But it is so with all; the very saints, in the mere exercise of living, grow less dainty, and take on the tone of their surroundings."

"I will propound to you one simple question," said the other; "and as you answer, I shall read to you your moral horoscope. You have grown in many things more lax; possibly, you do right to be so; and, at any account, it is the same with all men. But, granting that, are you in any one particular, however trifling, more difficult to please with your own conduct, or do you go in all things with a looser rein?"

"In any one?" repeated Markheim, with an anguish of consideration. "No," he added, with despair, "in none! I have gone down in all."

"Then," said the visitor, "content yourself with what you are, for you will never change, and the words of your part on this stage are irrevocably written down."

Markheim stood for a long while silent, and, indeed, it was the visitor who first broke the silence. "That being so," he said, "shall I show you the money?"

"And grace?" cried Markheim.

"Have you not tried it?" returned the other. "Two or three years ago, did I not see you on the platform of revival meetings, and was not your voice the loudest in the hymn?"

"It is true," said Markheim; "and I see clearly what remains for me by way of duty. I thank you for these lessons from my soul; my eyes are opened, and I behold myself at last for what I am."

At this moment, the sharp note of the door-bell rang through the house; and the visitant, as though this were some concerted signal for which he had been waiting, changed at once in his demeanor.

"The maid!" he cried. "She has returned, as I forewarned you, and there is now before you one more difficult passage. Her master, you must say, is ill; you must let her in, with an assured but rather serious countenance — no smiles, no overacting, and I promise you success! Once the girl within, and the door closed, the same dexterity that has already rid you of the dealer will relieve you of this last danger in

your path. Thenceforward, you have the whole evening—the whole night, if needful—to ransack the treasures of the house and to make good your safety. This is help that comes to you with the mask of danger. Up!" he cried; "up, friend; your life hangs trembling in the scales: up, and act!"

Markheim steadily regarded his counsellor. "If I be condemned to evil acts," he said, "there is still one door of freedom open—I can cease from action. If my life be an ill thing, I can lay it down. Though I be, as you say truly, at the beck of every small temptation, I can yet, by one decisive gesture, place myself beyond the reach of all. My love of good is damned to barrenness; it may, and let it be! But I have still my hatred of evil; and from that, to your galling disappointment, you shall see that I can draw both energy and courage."

The features of the visitor began to undergo a wonderful and lovely change: they brightened and softened with a tender triumph, and, even as they brightened, faded and dislimned. But Markheim did not pause to watch or understand the transformation. He opened the door, and went down-stairs very slowly, thinking to himself. His past went soberly before him; he beheld it as it was, ugly and strenuous like a dream, random as chance-medley—a scene of defeat. Life, as he thus reviewed it, tempted him no longer; but, on the further side, he perceived a quiet haven for his bark. He paused in the

passage, and looked into the shop, where the candle still burned by the dead body. It was strangely silent. Thoughts of the dealer swarmed into his mind as he stood gazing. And then the bell once more broke out into impatient clamour.

He confronted the maid upon the threshold with something like a smile.

"You had better go for the police," said he. "I have killed your master."

L'ARRABIATA

BY

JOHANN LUDWIG PAUL HEYSE

THE sun had not yet risen. Over Vesuvius hung a broad, gray sheet of mist, which stretched across as far as Naples, and darkened the little towns along that strip of coast. The sea lay calm. But, on the quays, which had been built along a small inlet of the sea under the high cliffs of the Sorrentine shore, the fishermen and their wives were already astir for the purpose of drawing ashore with stout cables the boats from which their nets had hung during the night. Others rigged their craft, trimmed the sails, or dragged oars and masts out of the huge grated vaults hewn deep into the rock to serve as a shelter for the tackle overnight. No one was idle; for even the aged who could no longer venture out upon the sea became links in the long chain of those who were hauling in the nets. Here and there on a flat roof stood an old woman spinning or busying herself with her grandchildren, whose mother was helping her husband.

"Do you see, Rachela? Yonder is our *padre curato*," said one of the old women to a little thing of ten, swinging a spindle beside her. "At this moment he is entering the boat. Antonio

is to row him over to Capri. Maria Santissima, how drowsy the reverend *signore* looks!" And she waved her hand to a diminutive, benevolent-looking priest, who was settling himself comfortably in the boat, after he had carefully lifted up the skirts of his black coat and spread them over the wooden seat. The others on the shore stopped in their work to watch their pastor set out, while he distributed friendly greetings right and left.

"And why must he go to Capri, grandmother?" asked the child. "Have the people there no pastor, that they must borrow ours?"

"Don't ask such foolish questions," said the old woman. "They have enough priests there, and the finest churches, and even a hermit, which is more than we have. But there is a noble *signora* who dwelled long at Sorrento, and was so ill that many a time the *padre* had to carry her the Most Holy Sacrament when it was thought she would not outlive the night. But, by the help of the Holy Virgin, she grew to be hale and strong again, so that she could bathe in the sea daily. And when she left here for Capri, she gave a great heap of ducats to the church and the poor folk, and would not go, they say, until the *padre* had promised to visit her there that she might confess to him. For it is astonishing in what esteem she holds him. Truly, we may bless ourselves for having a *curato* who has the gifts of an archbishop, and who is so much sought after by the great folk. The Madonna

be with him!" And again she waved her hand toward the little boat which was just putting out from shore.

"Shall we have fine weather, my son?" asked the little priest, looking thoughtfully over toward Naples.

"The sun is not yet out," answered the fellow. "We shan't let a bit of mist annoy us."

"Then row fast, so that we may arrive before the heat sets in."

Antonio was on the point of grasping the long oar, to propel the bark into the open sea, when he stopped suddenly, and gazed up at the steep path that leads from the little town of Sorrento to the quays below. Above was visible a slender girlish figure, tripping hastily down the stones and waving a kerchief. She carried a little bundle under her arm, and her attire was poor enough. But she had a noble, if somewhat wild way of throwing back her head, and the dark tresses wreathed about her forehead bore the semblance of a crown.

"What are we waiting for?" asked the *curato.*

"There's some one else coming who wishes to go to Capri—if you permit, *padre.* We'll go no slower for that; she's only a young thing, barely eighteen."

At that moment, the girl appeared from behind the wall which encloses the winding path. "Laurella?" asked the *curato.* "What business has she in Capri?"

Antonio shrugged his shoulders. She came

down with rapid strides, looking straight before her.

"Good-day, l'Arrabiata!" shouted several of the young boatmen. They would have said more, had not the *curato's* presence kept them in check, for the sullen silence with which the girl received their greeting seemed to tempt the more wanton among them.

"Good-day, Laurella," the priest cried too. "How are you? You wish to come with us to Capri?"

"If it is permitted, *padre*."

"Ask Antonio; he owns the boat. Every man is lord of his own, and God is the Lord of us all."

"There is half a *carlino*," said Laurella, without looking at the young boatman, "if it's enough!"

"You may have better use for it," he muttered, and shoved aside some baskets of oranges to make room. These he was to sell at Capri, for that rocky isle does not produce enough for the needs of its many visitors.

"I do not care to go for nothing," answered the girl, and her black eyebrows quivered.

"Come, child," said the priest; "he is a good lad, and does not want to enrich himself at the expense of your poverty. There, step in," and he held out his hand to her—"and sit down next to me. See, he has spread his jacket that you may sit more comfortably. He did not think of doing it for me. But that is like young people. They take more care of a slip of a girl than of ten

reverend fathers. Never mind, Tonino, there's no excuse needed. Thus has the Lord made us, that like and like hold together."

Meantime, Laurella had stepped in and taken her seat, after having silently pushed the jacket away. The young boatman let it lie, and murmured something between his teeth. Then he pushed vigorously away from the pier, and the little boat flew out into the bay.

"What have you in the bundle?" asked the *padre*, as they floated over the sea, just turning gold under the first rays of the sun.

"Silk, thread, and a loaf, *padre*. I am to sell the silk to one woman in Capri who makes ribbons, and the thread to another."

"Did you spin it yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"If I am not mistaken, you also once learned how to weave ribbons."

"Yes, sir. But mother is so much worse again that I cannot work away from home, and a loom of our own we cannot afford."

"Worse again? Ah me! When I was with you, last Easter, she was sitting up."

"Spring is always the worst time for her. Since we had those great storms and earthquakes, she has been forced to lie abed from pain."

"Cease not to pray, my child, that the Blessed Virgin may intercede for you. And be good and industrious, that your prayers may be heard."

After a pause: "When you were coming down toward the shore, I heard them calling to you

'Good-day, l'Arrabiata.' Why should they speak thus? 'Tis no nice name for a Christian girl, who should be gentle and mild." The girl's dark face glowed and her eyes flashed.

"They mock me because I will not dance and sing like the others, and have few words for any. But they shall leave me in peace. I do them no harm."

"True, but you can be civil to all. Let the others dance and sing to whom life is an easier matter; but even the sorrowful may utter a kind word."

She lowered her dark eyes, and drew her brows closer over them, as if to hide them. For a space, they floated on in silence. Over the moutains stood the splendour of the sun; the peak of Vesuvius soared out from the mass of clouds that hid its base, and the houses on the plain of Sorrento glittered white from amid the green orange-groves.

"Has that painter never been heard of again?" asked the *curato*—"that Neapolitan who wanted you to be his wife?"

She shook her head.

"He came to paint your picture. Why would you not let him?"

"What did he want it for? There are handsomer girls than I. And then, who can tell what he would have done with it. He might have bewitched me, my mother said, or injured my soul."

"Believe not such sinful things," said the

priest earnestly. "Are we not always in God's hand, and shall a mere man, with naught but a picture, prevail against the Lord? And you could see that he wished you well, or he would not have cared to marry you."

She was silent.

"And why did you refuse him? He was an honest man, they say, and handsome, and would have earned a better living for you and your mother than ever you can with your bit of spinning and weaving."

"We are only poor folk," she said passionately, "and mother has been ill for so long. We should have become a burden to him. And I should not suit a fine gentleman. If his friends had come to see him, he would have been ashamed of me."

"How can you speak so? I tell you the man was an excellent one. And, moreover, he wished to live at Sorrento. It will be long before another comes, as if sent from heaven to help you."

"I do not want a husband, and never shall!" she said defiantly, as if to herself.

"Have you made a vow, or do you intend to enter a convent?"

She shook her head.

"The people are right enough who reproach you for your wilfulness, even though the name they give you is an unkind one. You do not remember that you are not alone in the world, and that your stubbornness only embitters your sick mother's life. And what weighty reason

can you give why you should reject every honest hand held out to assist you and your mother? Answer me, Laurella!"

"Well, I have a reason," she said softly and reluctantly, "but I cannot reveal it."

"Not reveal it—not even to me, your confessor whom you trust and whom you know to be your friend?"

Laurella nodded.

"Then ease your mind, child. If you are right, I shall be the last to oppose you. But you are young, and know little of the world, and you may some day come to regret having thrown away your good fortune for some childish fancy."

She threw a quick, shy look at the young fellow who sat astern, busily rowing, his woolen cap pulled low over his forehead. He gazed far out across the sea and seemed buried in his own thoughts. The *curato* saw her look, and inclined his head nearer to her.

"You never knew my father," she whispered, and her eyes gleamed darkly.

"Your father? He died, I believe, when you were barely ten. What has your father (may his soul rest in Paradise) to do with your stubbornness?"

"You never knew him, *padre*. You do not know that he alone was the cause of mother's illness."

"And how?"

"Because he ill-treated her, and beat her, and trampled upon her. I remember the nights

when he came home raging. She never said a word, and obeyed him in all things. But he beat her so that my heart nearly broke. Then I pulled the bedclothes over my head, and pretended to sleep. But I wept through the night. And then, when he saw her lying on the floor, he would suddenly lift her up, and kiss her till she cried out that he would strangle her. Mother forbade me ever to speak of this; but it wore her out so that, during all these long years since his death, she has never been able to get well. And, if she should die before her time, which may Heaven forbid, I know right well who killed her."

The little priest wagged his head slowly, undetermined how far he should approve the young girl's reasons. At last he said: "Forgive him even as your mother has forgiven him. Fix not your thoughts on those sad memories, Laurella. Happier days will come and make you forget all that."

"Never can I forget that," she said, and shuddered. "And this is the reason, *padre*, why I wish to remain single—that I may not have to live with any one who would first ill-treat and then caress me. If now some one were to beat me or kiss me, I should know how to defend myself; but my mother could defend herself neither against the blows nor the kisses, because she loved him. And I do not wish to love any one so dearly that I must be ill and wretched for the sake of him."

"Ah, but you are a child, and speak like one

who does not know how things go in the world. Are all men like your poor father, that they yield to every mood and passion and are unkind to their wives? Have you not seen good, honest people enough in the whole neighbourhood, and wives who live in peace and unity with their husbands?"

"Yes, but it was not known of my father, either, how he behaved to my mother, for she would rather have died a thousand times than speak of it or complain. And all this was so because she loved him. If love be such that it seals the lips when one should cry for help, and makes one defenseless against worse things than one would expect from one's bitterest enemy—if that is love, then I will never set my heart upon any man."

"And I tell you that you are a child, and know not of what you speak. Your heart will little ask you, when the time comes, whether you wish to love or not. All that you take into your head now will not help you then." He paused; then he added: "And that painter, did you think that he, too, would be cruel?"

"He had the same look in his eyes that I saw in my father's when he begged mother's pardon, and took her in his arms to make it up with her. I know that look. A man can have that look and yet find it in his heart to beat his wife who has never done anything to vex him. I shuddered when I saw that look."

Then she became persistently silent. Nor did

the *curato* speak. He thought of many edifying sayings with which to comfort the girl, but the presence of the young boatman, who had grown restless during the latter part of the conversation, closed his lips.

When they arrived in the little harbour of Capri, after a two-hours' row, Antonio carried the little priest out of the boat over the shallow waves by the shore, and set him down reverently. But Laurella would not wait until he waded back for her. She gathered her short skirts about her, took her little wooden shoes in one hand and her bundle in the other, and splashed trippingly to the shore.

"I shall probably make a long stay at Capri to-day," said the *padre;* "you need not wait for me. I may not return until to-morrow. And you, Laurella, when you return home, remember me to your mother. I will stop in to see you within the week. You return before night, do you not?"

"If there is a chance," said the girl, as she busied herself with her skirts.

"I must return, too, as you know," said Antonio in a tone of forced indifference. "I shall wait for you until the *Ave Maria.* If you do not come then, it will be just the same to me."

"You must come, Laurella," said the little priest. "You should not leave your mother alone at night. Must you go far?"

"To a vineyard in Anacapri."

"And I to Capri. God keep you, child, and you, my son!"

Laurella kissed his hand, and murmured a farewell for the *padre* and Antonio to share between them. Antonio would have none of it. He doffed his cap to the *padre*, but did not give Laurella a look.

When, however, they had both turned their backs, his eyes followed the *padre*, who was laboriously crossing the loose gravel for only a little space, and then turned to the girl, who was ascending the rock toward the right and shielding her eyes from the glare of the sun. The shore lay below her; above her towered the steep crag. The sea was azure with an unusual depth of colour—it was a sight worthy to linger over. And chance would have it so that her look, passing the bark of Antonio, met the look with which his eyes had followed her. Each made a movement as if in excuse for some mistake, and then the girl, with her darkest frown, continued on her way.

It was an hour after noon. For two hours Antonio had been sitting on a bench in front of the fishers' tavern. Something was on his mind, for every now and then he would jump up, step out into the sun, and gaze carefully along the road which led, right and left, to the two little island towns. He seemed not to trust the weather, and said so to the hostess of the tavern. It was clear enough, to be sure, but he knew that colour of the sea and sky. Just so had it looked

before the last great storm, when the English family was barely saved. Did she remember?

"No," said the woman.

"Well, if the weather were to change before night, she was to think of him," he said.

"Have you many rich people over there?" asked the woman after a while.

"It is just beginning. We have had bad times up to now. Those who come for the sake of the baths, came late."

"It was a late spring. Did you earn more than we here at Capri?"

"Hardly enough for macaroni twice a week, if I had been dependent on my boat alone. To carry a letter to Naples now and then, or to take a fine gentleman fishing—that was about all. But you know that my uncle has large orange-groves, and is a man of substance. 'Tonio,' said he, 'you shall not want for anything so long as I live, and afterward you will not go empty, either.' And so, with the help of God, I got through the winter."

"Has your uncle any children?"

"No. He never married, and lived in foreign parts for a long time, where he gathered many a good *lira*. Now he is going to set up a great fishing business, and will put me at the head of it to look after his interests."

"Why, then, you are a made man, Antonio."

The young boatman shrugged his shoulders. "Every one has his own load to carry," he said. Then he jumped up again and looked at the

sky to the right and left, although he knew that there can be but one weather side.

"I'll bring you another bottle; your uncle can pay for it," said the hostess.

"Only another glassful; your wine here is of a fiery quality. Even now my head is warm with it."

"But it does not heat the blood. You may drink as much as you care to. Here comes my husband; you must sit and chat a while with him."

And, in fact, there he came, down from the heights, the stately *padrone* of the tavern, a net hung over his shoulder, and a red cap on his curly hair. He had taken into the town fish which had been ordered by a noble lady for the *padre's* dinner. As soon as he espied the young boatman, he waved him a cordial welcome, took his seat on the bench, and began to ask questions and tell of his own doings. His wife was just bringing a second bottle of the genuine wine of Capri, when the white sand to the left crunched beneath a footstep, and Laurella appeared on the road from Anacapri. She nodded slightly, and then stood still hesitatingly.

Antonio jumped up. "I must go," said he; "there's a girl from Sorrento who came over with the *signore curato* this morning, and must return for the night to her sick mother."

"Well, well, it's a long time till night," said the fisherman. "There's time enough for her

to drink a glass of wine with us. Come, wife, bring another glass."

"I thank you, but I do not drink," said Laurella, and remained at a distance.

"Fill the glass, wife; fill it! She only needs a little urging."

"Let her be," said the young fellow. "She has a stubborn mind, and no saint can persuade her against her will." And therewith he said a quick farewell, ran down to his boat, loosened the rope, and stood waiting for the girl. The latter nodded once more to the hosts of the tavern, and then, with hesitating steps, approached the bark. She looked about in all directions, as if she were expecting another passenger. But the shore was deserted; the fishermen slept or were out at sea with their rods and nets; a few women and children sat before their doors, sleeping or spinning, and the strangers, who had come over in the morning, were waiting until the cooler part of the day for their return. Laurella had not long to wait, for, ere she could stop him, Antonio had taken her into his arms, and carried her, as though she were a child, into the boat. Then he leapt in after her, and with a few strokes of his oar they were out on the open sea. She had taken her seat at the end of the boat, half averted from him, so that he could see her profile only. Her features seemed sterner than ever; the low, straight brow was shaded by her hair; the delicate nostril quivered wilfully, but her rounded lips were firmly

closed. After they had thus gone on for a space in silence, she began to feel the heat of the sun, unwrapped her bundle and threw the kerchief over her head. Then she began to eat, making her dinner of bread, for she had eaten nothing at Capri.

Antonio could not bear this long. He took out of the baskets two oranges that had been left over from the morning, and said: "Here is something to eat with your bread, Laurella. Don't think I kept them for you. They rolled from the baskets into the boat, and there I found them."

"Do you eat them. The bread is enough for me."

"They are refreshing in the heat, and you have walked far."

"They gave me a drink of water, and that refreshed me."

"As you please," he said, and let the oranges fall back into the basket.

Silence once more. The sea was as smooth as a mirror. Not a ripple was heard against the prow. Even the white seabirds that roost among the caves at Capri sought their prey in silence.

"You might have taken the oranges to your mother," Antonio began again.

"We have oranges at home, and when they are gone I can go and buy others."

"Well, then, take them to her with my compliments."

"She does not know you."

"You could tell her who I am."

"I do not know you either."

It was not the first time that she had thus denied him. A year ago, when that painter had been in Sorrento, it happened that one Sunday Antonio, with another young fellow, was playing bowls on the little public square near the main street. There the painter first saw Laurella, who was carrying a water-jug on her head, and went past without noticing him. The Neapolitan, struck by her appearance, stood still, and gazed after her, not seeing that he stood in the midst of the game which he might have cleared with two steps. A swift ball whirred against his ankle, to remind him that here was not the place to lose himself in meditation. He looked about, as if expecting some excuse. But the young boatman who had thrown the ball stood silent and defiant amid his friends, so the stranger found it advisable to avoid a discussion and go his ways. But the encounter had been remarked upon, and was spoken of anew when the painter had openly pressed his suit to Laurella. "I do not even know him," she had said indignantly, when the painter asked whether he was being refused for the sake of that uncivil fellow. But she had heard the gossip, too, and since then, whenever she had met Antonio, she recognised him well enough.

And now they sat together in the boat like

the deadliest enemies, while the hearts of both throbbed furiously. Antonio's usually good-natured face was crimson; he struck out with his oars so violently that the foam spattered him, and at times his lips twitched as if he were uttering angry words. She pretended not to notice, wore her most unconcerned look, and bent over the side of the boat, letting the cool water glide through her fingers. Then she unwound the kerchief, and arranged her hair, as if she were alone in the boat. Only, her eyebrows quivered, and it was in vain that she held her cool, moist hands against her burning cheeks.

Now they were well out in the open sea, and no sail was to be seen near or far. The island was left behind, the coast lay far before them in the sunny haze; not even a sea-mew disturbed that great loneliness. Antonio looked about him. An idea seemed to take shape in his mind. The colour suddenly faded from his cheeks, and he let the oars fall. Involuntarily, Laurella looked at him, with strained attention, but without fear.

"I must make an end of this!" the young fellow broke forth. "It has lasted too long already, and I wonder it has not made an end of me before. You say that you do not know me? Have you not seen long enough how I pass you like a madman, my whole heart full of what I had to tell you? And you only made a cross face, and turned your back to me!"

"What had I to say to you?" she answered

curtly. "I saw well enough that you wished to meddle with me, and I did not want to be on the tongues of wicked gossips for nothing at all. Because I will not have you for a husband—neither you nor any other."

"Nor any other? You will not always talk like that. Because you sent the painter away? Pshaw! you were a mere child then! Some day you will feel lonely, and then, mad as you are, you will take the first who offers himself."

"No one can foresee the future; maybe I might change my mind. What is it to you?"

"What is it to me?" he burst forth, and jumped up from the bench so that the little boat rocked. "What is it to me, you say? Surely you know. The man will meet with a bad end that you are kinder to than you have been to me!"

"Have I ever promised myself to you? Is it my fault if you are mad? What right have you to me?"

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "to be sure, it has not been put in writing; no advocate has put it into Latin and stamped it with his seal. But I have as much right to you as I have to enter Heaven if I have been an honest man. Do you think I can look on while you go into church with another, and bear to have the girls pass me shrugging their shoulders?"

"Do as you please. You cannot frighten me with all your threats, but I, too, shall do what I please."

"You shall not speak like this any more!"

His whole body shook with passion. "I am man enough not to let a stubborn wench like you spoil my life any longer. Do you know that you are in my power here, and must do my bidding!"

She started slightly, but her eyes flashed at him.

"Kill me if you dare," she said slowly.

"One should do nothing by halves," he said, and his voice sounded hoarse. "There's room for both of us in the sea. I cannot help it, child,"—he spoke these last words almost beseechingly and dreamily—"we must both go down there, both—now, now!" he shouted, and encircled her suddenly with both arms. But, in an instant, he drew back his right hand; the blood gushed out; she had bitten him fiercely.

"Must I do your bidding?" she cried, and pushed him away with a rapid movement. "We shall see whether I am in your power!" Swiftly she sprang overboard, and disappeared for a moment in the depths.

She rose again at once. Her little skirt clung close; her hair, loosened by the waves, hung heavy about her neck. With swift, strong, silent strokes of her arms, she swam away from the boat toward the coast. His senses seemed numbed by a sudden fright. He stood in the boat, bent forward, his eyes fixed upon her as if he were witnessing a miracle. He shook himself, threw himself upon his oars, and, straining every nerve, rowed after

her, while blood streamed into the bottom of the boat.

Swiftly though she swam, he was at her side in a trice. "For the love of the Holy Virgin, come into the boat!" he cried. "I have been mad, mad! God alone can tell what darkened my brain. Like a flash of lightning it came upon me and flamed up in me, and I forgot what I was saying or doing. I don't ask you to forgive me, Laurella; only save yourself!"

She swam on as if she had heard nothing.

"You cannot reach the land; it is two miles off. Think of your mother! If you were drowned I should die of horror!"

She measured the distance with her eyes, and then, without replying, swam back to the boat and grasped its side with her hands. He rose to help her, and his jacket, which had been lying on the bench, slipped into the sea as the boat tilted under the girl's weight. With great agility, she swung herself on board and regained her former seat. Seeing her safe, he took up his oars again. She wrung the water out of her skirt and hair. When she saw the blood at the bottom of the boat, she glanced swiftly at the hand which plied the oar as if unhurt. "There," she said, and gave him her kerchief. He shook his head, and rowed on. Finally, she got up, came near him, and bound the cloth tightly over the deep wound. Then, notwithstanding his resistance, she took the oar out of his hand, but without looking at him,

and, keeping her eyes fixed on the blood-stained wood, propelled the boat with rapid strokes. They were both pale and silent. When they neared the shore, fishermen who were about to cast their nets for the night met them. They shouted to Antonio, and teased Laurella; neither moved an eyelid nor spoke a word.

The sun stood high over Procida when they landed. Laurella shook out her skirt, which was nearly dry, and jumped ashore. The old spinning-woman who had watched them depart in the morning stood on the roof again. "What is the matter with your hand, Tonino?" she called down. "Christ, but the boat is full of blood!"

"It's nothing, godmother," the young fellow answered. "I tore my hand against a nail, which stuck out too far. It will be well by to-morrow. Only this blood of mine that is so quick to start makes it seem worse than it is."

"Wait a moment, little godson; let me put herbs on it."

"Do not trouble yourself, godmother. It has been done already, and to-morrow it will be over and forgotten. I have a healthy skin that soon closes again over a wound."

"*Addio*," said Laurella, and turned to the path winding up the cliff.

"Good-night!" he answered, without looking at her. Then he took his oars and baskets from the boat, and climbed up the little stone steps to his own hut.

. . . . . .

He was alone in his two little rooms, where he was now pacing up and down. Through the small unglazed windows the wind blew cooler than on the calm sea, and the solitude soothed him. Long he stood before a little picture of the Virgin, gazing devoutly at her halo of silver paper. But he did not think of praying. And what should he pray for, who had no hope left?

This day seemed unending. He yearned for the darkness, for he was weary, and weak from loss of blood. His hand pained him violently, and, seating himself on a little wooden stool, he undid the cloth that enwrapped it. The repressed blood gushed out again, and all about the wound his hand was swollen. He washed it carefully, and cooled it in water. As he drew it forth again he could see clearly the marks of Laurella's teeth. "She was right," he said to himself; "I was a brute, and deserved no better. To-morrow I will send her back the cloth by Giuseppe. She shall not see me again." And he washed the cloth carefully, and spread it in the sun, after he had bound up his hand again as well as he might with the other and with his teeth. Then he threw himself upon his bed and closed his eyes.

The bright light of the moon and the pain in his hand awakened him from his uneasy slumber. He rose again to cool in water the throbbing of his blood, when he heard a noise. "Who is it?" he called, and opened the door. Laurella stood before him.

She entered without speaking. She threw off the shawl that had covered her head, and placed a little basket on the table. Then she drew a deep breath.

"You have come to fetch your cloth," he said. "You could have saved yourself the trouble. I should have asked Giuseppe to take it to you in the morning."

"It is not on account of the cloth," she answered quickly. "I have been on the mountain to gather herbs that stop the flow of the blood. There!" And she uncovered the little basket.

"Too much trouble," he said, though without bitterness; "far too much! It's much better already, and, if it were worse, I should only have my deserts. Why do you come here at this hour? If any one should see you here—you know how they talk, empty as the talk is."

"I care for no one's talk," she said with passion. "But I wish to see your hand, and to put the herbs on it, for you can never do it with your left."

"I tell you it is unnecessary."

"Then let me see it, that I may believe you."

She grasped the unresisting hand and unbound the rag. When she saw the swelling, she shuddered, and cried, "Jesu, Maria!"

"It's a bit swollen," said he, "but in a night and a day it will be gone." She shook her head. "You cannot go to sea for a week in this state.'

"The day after to-morrow, surely. And if not, what does it matter?"

She fetched a basin, and, docile as a child, he let her wash the wound. Then she applied the healing herbs, which speedily relieved the burning pain, and finally she bandaged the hand with a strip of linen that she had brought with her.

When it was done, he said: "I thank you. Now, listen: If you will do me a single kindness, forget the madness that seized me to-day, and all that I said and did. I don't know how it came. It was no fault of yours, and you shall never again hear anything from me to vex you."

She interrupted him. "It is I who must ask pardon of you. I might have explained everything better, and not have enraged you by my sullen ways. And now that wound——"

"It was self-defense, and high time to bring me back to my senses. And then, it's nothing serious. Don't speak of forgiveness. You have been good to me, and I thank you. And now go home to sleep, and there—there is your cloth; you may as well take it now."

He held it out to her, but still she lingered, struggling within herself. At last she said: "You lost your jacket, too, on account of me, and I know that the money for the oranges was in it. I did not remember until afterward. I cannot replace it now. We have nothing—or if we had anything it would be mother's. But I have this silver cross, which the painter put

on the table for me the last time he was with us. I have not looked at it since, and do not care to have it in my box any longer. It's worth a few *lire*, mother said. If you were to sell it, it might make up the lost money, and, if not quite, I could earn the rest by spinning at night when mother sleeps."

"I will take nothing," he said shortly, and pushed back the little cross that she had taken from her pocket.

"You must take it," said she. "Who knows how long the wound will keep you from earning anything? There it is; I don't wish ever to see it again."

"Then throw it into the sea."

"But it is no present; it is your just due."

"Nothing is due from you to me. If, in future, you meet me, do me the kindness not to look at me, that I may not think you wish to remind me of what I owe you. And now, good-night. Let this be the last word said."

He put her cloth and the cross into the basket and covered it. But when he looked up into her face, he started. Great heavy drops, unheeded by her, flowed down her cheeks.

"Maria Santissima!" he cried. "Are you ill? You are trembling from head to foot."

"It is nothing," she said. "I must go home." She staggered to the door. A fit of weeping overcame her. She leaned her brow against the door and sobbed bitterly. Before he reached

her, she turned round suddenly and fell upon his neck.

"I cannot bear it!" she cried, and clung to him as a dying man does to life; "I cannot listen to your kind words that bid me go with a sin on my conscience. Beat me! trample on me! curse me! Or, if it is true that after all the evil I have done you, you still love me, take me, and keep me, and do with me as you will. But do not send me away from you!" And she sobbed again, and could say no more.

Silently he held her in his arms for a while. "Do I love you still?" he cried at last. "Holy Mother of God! Do you think that all my heart's blood flowed through that little wound? Do you not feel that throbbing in my breast, for you, for you? But, if you only speak like this to try me, or because you pity me, then go, and I will forget that too. You must not think that you owe this to me because you know what I have suffered for you."

"No," she said firmly, looking up from his shoulder with eyes that were full of tears, "I love you, and have loved you for long, but I was afraid, and tried to resist it. But now I will be different, for I cannot bear it any longer not to see you when we meet on the road. And now I will kiss you," she said, "that you may doubt no more, but say to yourself, 'She kissed me, and Laurella kisses only the man she wants for her husband.'"

She kissed him thrice, and then made her es-

cape, saying: "Good-night, my love. Go to sleep now, and let your hand heal. Do not come with me, for I am afraid of no one but yourself."

And so she slipped through the door and disappeared in the shadow of the wall. But, for a long while, he looked out of the window and across the sea, over which the stars were trembling.

. . . . . .

When the little *padre curato* next came from the confessional where Laurella had knelt before him a long time, he smiled quietly to himself. "Who would have thought," he said to himself, "that God would so soon have pity on this strange heart? And I reproached myself that I did not resist the demon of stubbornness more vigorously! But our weak eyes can discern only a little of the ways of Heaven. Well, may the Lord bless her, and let me live to be rowed over the sea by Laurella's eldest born as by his father before him. Ah, to think of it—l'Arrabiata!"