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LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

VOL. I.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS;

OR,

MYSTERIES OF LIFE.

BY

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'THE NIGHTSIDE OF NATURE," "SUSAN HOPLEY," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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P R E F A C E.

ALTHOUGH most of the tales which these volumes comprise have appeared in various periodicals ; yet as each of these *brochures* only reaches a circle or class, and there are many persons who never see such publications at all, I have thought it advisable to put forth my stories in a collected form ; an honour of which I hope they will not be found altogether unworthy ; especially the Tales of Continental Jurisprudence ; such as “ The Tile Burner and his

Family," "The Story of the Priest of St. Quentin," "The Bride's Journey," &c. &c., which appear to me to possess a peculiar interest for the reader.

CATHERINE CROWE.

SEPTEMBER 25, 1850.

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LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

I.

THE ACCUSATION.

THE ACCUSATION.

CHAPTER I.

It is now nearly three centuries ago that there existed in the south of France, not far from Toulouse, a family called Châteauroux. Like one or two other great families of that nation, they counted up to the Deluge at least: nothing could be more satisfactory than their genealogical tree, root and branch; but, unfortunately, it was pretty nearly the only one they possessed, and the parchment it covered would almost itself have covered the remnant of the patrimonial estate that

remained to them. They had been rich in their day ; but extravagances on the one hand, and occasional confiscations and fines for political offences on the other, had gradually reduced them from wealth to poverty—the worst kind of poverty, that which is accompanied by a sounding title and aristocratic pretensions.

The possessor of these visionary grandeurs, at the period at which our story commences, was called Joachim—Count Joachim de Châteauroux. Like all the nobility of France in former times, he was in the army ; and, unlike many, had seen a good deal of service. He was a worthy man, tenderly attached to his wife and to his only son Philibert—these two names of Joachim and Philibert being hereditary in the family ; and he would have been a happy and contented one, had it not been for his own pecuniary difficulties, and the painful future he anticipated for this beloved child, whom

embarrassments, greater than those he was himself the victim of, necessarily awaited; for since it was beneath the dignity of so distinguished a race to exercise any profitable occupation, their circumstances inevitably deteriorated with every generation, unless a fortunate marriage happened to repair them. Occasional alliances with wealthy heiresses had indeed hitherto alone rescued the Châteauroux from utter ruin; but their family pride, and the desire to maintain the purity of their blood, had stood greatly in their way in respect of these salutary infusions, since they abjured all connection with fortunes accumulated by commerce, and were only willing to accept for their sons the hereditary heiresses of noble families, who were too much in request to be easily obtained.*

As for Count Joachim himself, he had done nothing toward the redeeming the fortunes of his house. He had married while absent from home on service, and his wife

was never seen at Châteauroux till after the death of his father. He was himself suddenly called home to see the old Count expire; and sometime afterwards the lady arrived, apparently very ill, and in great trouble. And well she might be; for she had undertaken her journey at that most awful of all periods of French history, the massacre of St. Bartholomew—had been attacked in the night by the assassins at Limoges—had seen her infant son torn from her arms and murdered, whilst she herself had almost miraculously escaped with her life, and through great difficulties reached her husband's home. In process of time, however, another son was born to console them for the loss of the first; and in him all their hopes and anxieties now centred. But his mother did not long survive to share them. She never recovered the shock she had received on that fearful night, and the care of the boy soon devolved wholly on the father.

Although no one knew exactly of what family the lady was that Count Joachim had married, it was generally understood that the union had been very obnoxious to his connections ; and it was very evident that she had brought no fortune to compensate her other deficiencies. She was extremely handsome and amiable ; but these qualities concerned nobody but her husband, and counted for nothing with the rest of his generation, who accordingly hated her, and were extremely glad when she was dead.

The Count's difficulties, however, were by no means diminished by this satisfactory event, which to him, indeed, was a very grievous one ; on the contrary, his affairs, as might be expected, grew rather worse than better, from the want of the superintending eye of the judicious wife, and it was as much as he could do to keep his head above water, and educate his son ; and as the only hope he could anchor on was a union with an heiress,

all his thoughts were directed to the accomplishment of that desirable object. But the affair was difficult. Young Philibert, like his father, had a fancy for youth and beauty, and wanted to choose for himself; whilst the old Count, who had outlived and forgotten the foibles of his own youth, was both astonished and indignant at his son's weakness, more especially when the young man refused to pay his court to Madame de Rosemont, *née de la Rive*, a lady of unexceptionable blood, an heiress in her own right, in possession of a large jointure bequeathed by her first husband, and, in short, one of the richest matches in Languedoc. But young Philibert, though he desired the fortune, extremely objected to taking the lady along with it; and it was for a long time in vain that his father dilated on the various good qualities she possessed, and on the happiness he might promise himself in such a union. He represented that all this might be very true, but

that she was ten years too old, and had never been handsome, and that, moreover, he was in love with Emily de Préville, who had a large fortune, and was also in love with him.

“To what purpose,” asked his father, “when she is betrothed to the Duc de Trémouille?”

And the question was a very pertinent one, for young ladies in France do not even now choose their own husbands, and still less did so then; and there was not the most remote chance that the Marquis de Préville would forego an alliance with the wealthy Duke, to give his daughter to a poor Count, though the young people had been twenty times more in love than they were.

However, two events occurred almost simultaneously that sufficed to conquer the young man's opposition to his father's wishes. First, Emily de Préville married the gentleman she was affianced to. She would rather

have married Philibert ; but if she had persisted in saying so, she would have been shut up in a convent till she was brought to a more reasonable state of mind ; so she dropped a few tears to the memory of her young love-dream, and then gracefully submitted to become a Duchess. Philibert was furiously miserable for a month, and held frequent and serious debates with himself as to the judiciousness of blowing out his brains at the gate of the Duke's castle ; but before he had settled this point to his mind, his father was taken alarmingly ill, and when on his death-bed, having disclosed to his son the amount of the family embarrassment, he obtained a promise that he would lose no time in prosecuting his suit with the rich widow ; and, indeed, when the old Count was dead, and the young one began to feel the weight of the burden that had devolved on his own shoulders, namely, the burden of maintaining and feeding an establishment without any

adequate means of doing it, he was willing enough to escape the dilemma by so facile an expedient. So he duly commenced his course of love, which, as it was but a counterfeit, naturally ran smooth enough—for it is only real love that is doomed to encounter so many rocks and shallows. Madame de la Rive de Rosemont, though assuredly not blind to the motives that prompted his suit, was still weak enough to be pleased and flattered by his attentions; and was not a little captivated by the graceful vivacity and agreeable person of her lover. Thus, no long siege was necessary; the lady capitulated after a month's feeble resistance, and at the end of the second the marriage ceremony was performed with all the splendour that became their condition and her great wealth.

And now it seemed quite certain that, if he pleased, the young Count de Châteauroux might have been very happy. Youth and beauty he had not obtained, it is true; but

Sophie de la Rive was an amiable, cheerful, liberal woman, who set no bounds to his command of her fortune, and who was well disposed to indulge him in all the whims and caprices that sudden affluence is apt to gender. She was fond of society, made all his friends welcome to her house, and in fact was extremely attached to him, and very well disposed to make him a kind and indulgent wife; and thus, with all the elements of contentment and prosperity, the first three months passed very agreeably. But about the fourth month light clouds began to flit across the horizon. The first gloss of his new possessions and way of life having somewhat worn off, Philibert, in the wantonness of youth, and with that hungry appetite for pleasures that ever asks for more, began to seek variety and excitement in small flirtations with the young and handsome visitors of his wife.

Now, this Sophie could not suffer; jea-

lousy was her weak side ; and indulgent as she was upon all other matters, in the matter of fidelity she was a dragon. So she pouted and affected coldness ; and when that plan ceased to produce any effect, she expostulated and wept. But tears have no eloquence to reach the heart of man, unless they stream from bright eyes and fall upon blooming cheeks ; poor Madame de Châteauroux might as well have seared up the sluices of hers as hope to gain her point by them. Her complexion at the best was but indifferent, and when she wept, the point of her nose became red, and her cheeks rough and spotty, defects extremely offensive to the taste of Philibert, and he was only driven by a spectacle so disagreeable to direct his eyes more pertinaciously to the youth and beauty around him, for the purpose of avoiding the unpleasing and intrusive object.

Of course, this harshness reacted upon her, and the stage that next ensued was

still more critical. The disappointed and neglected wife became angry ; complaints that grew louder, and reproaches that gained bitterness from day to day and from week to week, alienated and disgusted the thoughtless husband in proportion to their violence, till at length he began to seek his pleasures and amusements where this persecution, as he deemed it, could not follow him. He made frequent journeys—sometimes to visit his friends in the provinces, sometimes to Paris on business ; and as in those days the nobility of France were bound to serve with the army at certain intervals, as vassals to the Crown, he sometimes stayed away months together on the plea of performing this duty.

In the meantime, Madame de Châteauroux passed her life in alternations of solitude and society. Sometimes she would shut herself up, and refuse to see any one, whilst she mourned over the suspected infidelities and

real neglect of her Lothario ; and at others she plunged into a vortex of company, in order to dissipate her *ennui*, and banish the recollection of her disappointment. But, of course, the world found easily the key to all these inconsistencies. It was known that the *ménage* of the Châteauroux was a very unhappy one ; their squabbles and their reconciliations formed the subject of frequent discussion amongst their acquaintance, and in due course of time their domestic dissensions had become matters of such notoriety, that the names of the ill-matched pair was in everybody's mouth, high and low, and at length had grown to be a proverb and a by-word in the country.

Under these circumstances, it may readily be conceived that the Count's absences grew longer, and his visits shorter ; and that when he did come home, his reception was not such as to induce him to remain there. Indeed, the Countess, whose jealousy and irri-

tation rendered her careless of what she said, did not scruple to aver that she was quite sure he never would come home at all, if it were not that he wanted money; and perhaps she was not far wrong, for certain it was, that M. de Franceur, Madame de Châteauroux's agent, intimated by frequent hints and insinuations, that the Count's drafts upon the revenue were increasing to a very serious amount.

They had been married about five or six years, and affairs had reached the unpleasant position we have described, when one evening, about nine o'clock, the Countess being at table with a party of friends, whom she was entertaining at supper, the gate bell rang, and through the open window of the saloon the sound of a horse's foot was heard upon the gravel. The Countess turned pale, the guests looked at each other; there was a rush of servants to the hall; and before any one at the table had broken the ominous silence, the door

of the saloon was thrown open, and the chamberlain announced "Monsieur le Comte !" Of course everybody rose to greet the master of the house—everybody but the Countess, who sat still, affecting indifference, but in reality struggling betwixt joy and resentment ; for in spite of all his misdemeanours, she loved him still, and in her heart was glad to see him ; but, as is unfortunately the custom of ladies on similar occasions, she appeared exactly the reverse. In short, no reception could be more ungracious, and the spectators of the scene very generally came to the conclusion, that, if that were the welcome he met with at home, he could scarcely be blamed for staying away from it.

However, he on his part seemed to take no notice of his wife's demeanour. Having silently saluted her, and exchanged a few words with those of the party he was best acquainted with, he took his seat at the table, and endeavoured, by maintaining the current

of conversation, to set the company at ease. But it was in vain. This very attempt at cheerfulness and sociality only irritated his wife the more. She interpreted every smile into insult, and even her good breeding could scarcely control the ferment of her feelings from bursting into words ; till at length her lowering brow and ominous silence having completely defeated every attempt at resuscitating the conviviality of the meeting, the embarrassed visitors, alarmed at the incandescence, and dreading that, if they did not hasten their departure, they might not escape the conflagration, suddenly called for their carriages, and wishing the unfortunate couple—what they had little hopes of their enjoying—*a very good night*, they drove away from the door, under the full persuasion that, before they reached the park gates, this ill-suppressed rage would explode into open quarrel.

And they were right. A quarrel there

was, as it afterwards appeared; and many high words were overheard by the servants. For two hours after the company had departed, the angry voices of the unhappy pair resounded through the silent house — the tones of the lady loud and passionate; those of the gentleman bitter and contemptuous; whilst the listening menials, half awed and half amused, sat exchanging significant glances in the hall. At length the dispute seemed to have reached its climax; chairs were pushed back, the door of the saloon opened, and the husband and wife were heard to come out of the room. Upon this the Countess's maid arose and prepared to attend her mistress up stairs; whilst one of the men accompanied her to wait upon the Count. As they advanced along the passage which led to the foot of the great staircase, they paused a moment to allow the disputants to ascend before them; and as the Countess laid her hand on the latch of her own door, they

distinctly heard her bid her husband beware ! for *that ere long she would find a means of vengeance he little thought of, and he should be made to feel the consequences of ill-treating a woman of her rank and condition.* The Count made her a short and contemptuous answer, and then, turning in a different direction, entered his chamber, and closed the door.

The two servants now ascended the stairs, and having performed their respective offices, retired. The maid Clarice observed that the countenance of her mistress bore an expression of concentrated rage ; her cheeks were pale, her lips compressed, her eyes fixed ; and she was so wrapt in intense abstraction as to be apparently unconscious of the girl's presence. Mechanically, and in silence, she submitted to the accustomed operations of the *coucher*—and the *coucher* of a French Countess of that period, as well as the *lever*, was a very elaborate affair—ever and anon

drawing a long, slow respiration from her over-charged breast, raising her clenched fist to her closed lips, or pressing the points of her jewelled fingers firmly upon her brow, as if her brain laboured with some portentous thought—a birth too monstrous to take on a definite shape.

Impressed with the demeanour of her mistress, Clarice felt too much awed to interrupt her meditations even by the accustomed *Bon soir, Madame!* And when her service was accomplished, and she had closed the door as silently as she could, she stepped along the vestibule on the points of her toes, and shut herself into her own chamber, using as much precaution to avoid any sound that might break upon the stillness of the night, as do the watchers of the dying or the dead.

The behaviour of the Count during the attendance of his servant Morel was different. His countenance exhibited little trace of

disturbance, and his behaviour none of abstraction. He asked a few questions about general matters, gave some orders for the next day, and desired to have breakfast in his study at an earlier hour than usual, as he expected his agent to be with him on business. "You had better call me at nine," said he ; "and if the morning is chilly, make a fire in the stove."

"Oui, Monsieur," answered Morel, as he closed the door and retired to bed, wondering that his mistress could not contrive to live on better terms with so agreeable a gentleman.

From that moment the Count de Châteauroux disappeared from the castle. When Morel went to call him on the following morning, he was not in his chamber ; when he inquired for him below, nobody had seen him ; and though the fire was lighted in the study, and the breakfast prepared at the appointed hour, still the Count did not

appear. They sought him in the grounds, and rang the great bell of the tower to advertise him that breakfast waited, but still he came not; and after waiting a reasonable time, the agent, M. de Francœur, who, according to appointment had come to breakfast with him, having taken a cup of coffee, went away, desiring the servants to let him know when their master returned. But hour after hour passed; the afternoon, and evening, and night came, and nothing was heard of him; and then the servants began to look strangely in each other's faces. Clarice remembered the singular deportment of her mistress on the preceding evening, and Morel remarked that it was evident the Count had quitted his bed in haste, for the clothes had been thrown off with such violence, that they lay almost all on the floor at the foot of it.

When the second day passed without any intelligence of their master, their wonder and amazement were proportionally augmented;

but when not only days but weeks had elapsed, without any solution of the mystery, strange murmurs began to circulate amongst them. Morel and Clarice ventured to whisper that the sheet which lay on the floor had been stained with blood ; and the latter declared that, having laid her hand on the balustrade as she descended the stairs on the following morning, she had been struck with horror at observing marks of blood upon it. Then they combined with these circumstances the Countess's long discontent, her uncontrollable irritation on the night of her husband's return, together with the parting threat overheard by Clarice and Morel ; and as their suspicions grew stronger their voices grew louder—till, ere long, these hints reaching the outside of the castle, they gradually extended beyond the domain and dependents, and began to circulate amongst the public. Next, the authorities heard of them ; still for some time the rank and character of the

Countess were looked upon as a sufficient guarantee of her innocence; but the public voice grew louder and louder, the Count's family began to stir in the affair, and at length some of its members waited on the Countess, and begged to know what she could tell them in regard to her husband's strange disappearance.

Madame de Châteauroux answered that she saw nothing strange in the matter, and that she could not conceive why anybody else should. The Count had long been in the habit of leaving her for weeks, and sometimes months, during which intervals he never wrote to her; and that, in short, she did not suppose he would ever return to her at all, if it were not that he wanted money.

"When his funds are exhausted he will come, no doubt; and in the meantime I can give you no information about him."

This was the sum of all they could extract from her; and when they gave her to under-

stand that they were not satisfied, and that further means must be taken to elucidate the mystery, she only smiled, and seeming utterly unconcerned, told them they were welcome to take any means they pleased.

On the day succeeding this visit, intelligence reached the castle that the authorities were about to institute further proceedings ; and on the ensuing night, Morel and Clarice fled, at least they were nowhere to be found ; and the Countess took refuge with her friends. When the officers arrived, there was therefore nobody to take into custody ; but after examining the premises and interrogating the servants, they went away, fully persuaded that Madame de Châteauroux had murdered her husband in the night, and that Clarice and Morel had been her accomplices. It is true, that these two people had been her principal accusers, and that all the other witnesses gave them up as their authority. They had undoubtedly made very indiscreet use

of their tongues ; but the wary officers looked upon this apparent indiscretion as a cunning manœuvre to divert suspicion from themselves ; and certain it was that their flight told more severely against their mistress than their evidence could have done.

So powerfully indeed did this circumstance operate against her, that in spite of the great exceptions and consideration afforded by the Legislature at that period to persons of rank and condition, Madame de Châteauroux was pursued to the house of her brother, M. de la Rive, and in spite of her own declarations of innocence, and the indignant protestations of her family, she was there arrested and conveyed in her own carriage to the prison of Arles ; whilst the public gossip was to the effect, that Madame de Châteauroux had not only murdered her husband in his sleep, but that, in order to conceal her crime, she had also made away with the principal witnesses against her, Clarice and Morel.

CHAPTER II.

WE left Madame de Châteauroux in prison ; and as, in the very anomalous state of French judicature at that period, the production of the *corpus delicti*, in trials for murder, was not held necessary to conviction, the step from the prison to the scaffold was often a very short one ; whilst it not unfrequently happened that after the supposed criminal was dead, the supposed victim was found to be alive ; and had the suspected offender in the present instance been an unconnected and obscure person instead of the

Countess of Châteauroux, there is little doubt but that she would soon have been beyond the reach of help ; but as it was, her family and friends rallied around her in considerable force, and, by their influence, obtained that the trial should be delayed till they had had time to ascertain what had become of her husband.

The public journals, with their immense circulation, which now afford such facilities to people who wish to recover their lost friends, or to conjure them, if they do not mean to return themselves, “ to send back the key of the tea-chest,” did not then exist, and, consequently, an inquiry of this description was one of time and difficulty ; but as the lady was wealthy, and their honour as well as their affections involved in the result, no expense was spared nor any means neglected that the machinery of society then furnished for the discovery of the missing gentleman ; but their efforts were vain ; no

traces of him could be detected, dead or alive. And now the friends and connections of the Count began to raise their voices and to insist impatiently that the trial should no longer be delayed ; and their declamations were, perhaps, the louder that their regrets for their relative were somewhat aggravated by personal considerations. They were poor ; the Count was the only wealthy member of the family, and, therefore, the only one to whom each could refer for aid in his occasional extremities ; and as he was a good-natured, liberal young man, he had not turned a deaf ear to their applications. In consequence, therefore, of their interference, the proceedings were at length resumed and pushed forward with so much vigour, that a conviction was obtained, and Madame de Châteauroux was condemned to die, after being first submitted to the rack for the purpose of extracting a confession.

The grief and dismay of her adherents

may be easily conceived ; couriers were despatched to her two brothers, who were still travelling over France in search of the Count, to desire their immediate return ; whilst numbers of the most considerable gentlemen and ladies of Languedoc crowded into Arles from their respective châteaux, in order to lend their countenance and support to the unhappy Countess and her family, and at the same time to gratify their own love of excitement by witnessing so rare a spectacle as the execution of a lady of quality. The preparations for this sad ceremony were commensurate with the rank of the criminal and the interest of the public. Scaffolds were erected, enormous prices were paid for windows, and the commandant of the garrison was ordered to hold his troops in readiness in case there should appear any symptoms of an *émeute* or a rescue on the part of the De la Rive faction.

Two days before that fixed for the execu-

tion arrived M. Eugène de la Rive, the Countess's youngest brother. He was in a state of violent agitation, indignantly arraigned what he called the precipitancy of the proceedings against his sister, which he openly attributed to the malice and undue influence of the opposite party, and authoritatively demanded a respite for the purpose of affording him time to memorialize the King. But his demand was refused, upon the plea that there had already been abundance of time allowed for any such applications, and that the march of justice, as the French call it, could no longer be impeded. He was admitted to see his sister, who again, standing on the brink of the grave, declared that she was entirely innocent of the crime imputed to her, and utterly ignorant of the fate of her husband.

“ My own conviction,” she said, “ is, that in spite of all appearances, he is not dead, and that the intelligence of these proceedings

has never reached him, or I am sure he would have instantly appeared to justify me. He has probably left the country !”

M. de la Rive, on the contrary, leant to the opinion that the Count had committed suicide, although the strict search that had been made for his body in the neighbourhood of the castle scarcely left any grounds for that conjecture.

The eve of the fatal day had now arrived, and they were hourly expecting the Countess's eldest brother, M. Adolphe, when, towards midnight, the sleeping citizens were disturbed by the sound of a horse's feet clattering at full speed over the pavement, and it occurred to many who heard the noise that the rider was probably a courier bringing a respite from the Crown ; and this appeared the more probable, as the horseman never drew his rein till he reached the Hotel de Ville, where he alighted, and having given an authoritative pull at the bell was presently

admitted. In less than half an hour after this, the chief jailor was roused from his slumbers by a summons to conduct the prefect to Madame de Châteauroux's cell. Lights were procured, the heavy keys clanked through the vaulted passages, the door was thrown open, and the poor lady, who was stretched on the couch in an agony of grief and terror, was informed that a letter had just arrived from M. Adolphe, saying that he had found her husband, whom a long and severe illness had kept in ignorance of all that had occurred—that they were following the courier with as much speed as his infirm health would permit, and that they hoped to be at Arles on the following morning.

Here was a happy reverse! Here was a redemption at the eleventh hour from a cruel torture and an ignominious death. The joy of the Countess and her friends, to whom intelligence of the happy event was immediately despatched, we need not dilate upon.

If she before could not sleep for grief, neither could she now sleep for joy ; and although the prefect could not open her prison doors till the actual arrival of the Count, her sympathizing visitors were permitted to stay with her, and the remainder of the night was passed in mutual congratulations on her unexpected escape.

The glad tidings soon spread over the city, and, at an early hour in the morning, the people began to collect in such numbers about the gate of the prison, that it was thought necessary to call out the troops ; and such was the excitement and eagerness of the crowd, when, about nine o'clock, the sound of rapidly revolving wheels announced the approach of the expected carriage, that without the aid of the military, the travellers would not have been able to alight for the dense mass that surrounded them. Everybody pressed forward to get a sight of the hero of this strange romance, which, as the

blinds were closely drawn down, nobody could obtain, till a space being cleared by the soldiers, he had an opportunity of alighting. Then, on the door being opened, there descended two gentlemen ; the first was M. Adolphe de la Rive, the second M. de Châteauroux ; at least so the spectators rather concluded then saw, for he was wrapt in a large cloak, and so muffled that very little of his face was visible. What they saw of it looked very pale, and he appeared extremely feeble, M. de la Rive aiding him to descend and giving him his arm, as to a person unable to support himself without assistance.

As those who were near enough to get a view of his features assured the rest that it was the right man, the mob was satisfied ; and as the prison doors closed upon him, they saluted him with a hearty cheer. Nor did they then all disperse ; many who were not imperatively called away by business still

lingered on the spot, in hopes of seeing the lady and her husband emerge from the fortress and depart in triumph ; but to avoid the annoyance of public observation, their departure was deferred till midnight ; and it was not till the shops were closed, and the streets empty, that the emancipated lady and her recovered husband stepped into their carriage, and were conveyed to their château, where the servants, apprised of their approach, were prepared to receive them.

Two days afterwards they removed to Rémy, another estate belonging to the Countess, situated at some distance from the one they had hitherto resided at ; and it was understood that the indisposition of the Count obliged them for the present to decline all visits and live in retirement. For some weeks this strange story furnished a very agreeable subject of gossip to the good people of Languedoc ; but in process of time, like all other wonders, its interest died away, and

the adventures of the Count and Countess of Châteauroux were forgotten in some later event.

But this impunity did not last long. By-and-by a new rumour began to circulate amongst the public, and it was whispered from one to another that the gentleman produced by M. de la Rive was not the real Count, but a supposititious one, who had been bribed by the lady's family to personate him for the purpose of saving her life. At all events, it appeared that M. de Châteauroux's own family positively refused to acknowledge the individual now living in the castle as their relation ; and, moreover that Madame de Châteauroux's behaviour gave great colour to the suspicion that all was not right. It was not simply that she did not inhabit the same chamber—that French people frequently do not—but the indifference she displayed towards him was wholly unlike what her demeanour to her husband had formerly

been. In short, there were no quarrels ; she was never heard to reproach him with his previous neglect, nor with his last cruel departure ; and the servants affirmed that they seldom met but at table.

Then, as his health improved, and visitors were admitted, the people who went to pay their respects and congratulations began to talk too. Some said it *was* M. de Châteauroux ; some, that it was not. The latter declared that the present occupant of the castle was a smaller man, that the voice was not the voice of the young Count ; and that his accent was that of the northern provinces of France. The other party answered, that a man who had had an illness of two years' duration, which was said to have been the cause of his prolonged absence, would naturally be very much altered in appearance, and possibly somewhat in voice ; and that as for the accent, they had always remarked that the Count had a peculiar mode of

speaking, which they supposed he might have acquired from his mother, who had been a native of Normandy.

But whilst the visitors and the servants, and the public, were discussing this question of identity, the family of M. de Châteauroux filed an information against the stranger as an impostor ; and against M. de la Rive, as his aider and abettor ; demanding that the former should be arrested, and that Madame de Châteauroux should be again arraigned for the murder of her husband—a crime of which they were more than ever persuaded she was guilty.

But M. de la Rive had influential connections, and it was not easy to induce the authorities to offer him and his family such an affront without surer grounds to go upon. So—in order, if possible, to satisfy one party, without rashly bringing themselves into difficulties with the other—they set on foot some private inquiries and investigations, which

they hoped might enable them to see their way before them. But the evidence was so conflicting that this was no easy matter. Almost as many were of one opinion as of the other, whilst amongst those best qualified to decide the question, the parties were also balanced—the De la Rives as vigorously supporting the pretender as the De Châteauroux opposed him. With respect to the lady herself, her verbal evidence was scarcely considered of any weight—she was too much interested in the decision; whilst her tacit and involuntary testimony was said by her opponents to be all against herself.

But there was one witness whose evidence was looked upon as so important, that it was held by the authorities sufficient to strike the balance in favour of Madame de Châteauroux—this was M. de Francœur, the agent or factor on the estate.

He swore point-blank that the gentleman whose identity they were disputing was M.

de Châteauroux, and nobody else ; and that he was not only assured of it from recognition of his person, but from repeated conversations, wherein past circumstances and transactions were alluded to, which no other person whatever but himself, and the Count, could by any possibility be acquainted with.

Now, M. de Francœur's character was considered above all suspicion ; he was universally looked upon as a most respectable man, who would not give false testimony upon any subject whatever ; and this was a case in which he could hardly be mistaken, whilst no conceivable reason could be adduced for his violating the truth, unless it were devotion to the Countess ; but since it was understood that they had not been lately on the best of terms, such a sacrifice was considered improbable. According to the lady's opinion, M. de Francœur was somewhat accessory to the Count's irregularities,

from the facility with which he answered h demands for money ; so that, although she entertained a very high esteem for his character in general, they were by no means cordial. The great weight, therefore, attached to the agent's assertions, satisfied the authorities, who consequently declined further interference ; and whilst the public continued, ever and anon, to discuss the question, M. and Madame de Châteauroux lived on quietly and harmoniously together, receiving few people, and going little into society.

But still the Count's family persisted in their protest, and held themselves aloof from the impostor, as they called him ; whilst the lady and her friends affected to treat their objections with contempt, referring them to motives of private enmity and interest, and making such other allegations as tended to account for these discrepant opinions, and vindicate their own cause and characters.

One concession, however, they did make, for the purpose of conciliating public opinion, which was, that they returned to the residence they had previously inhabited ; their enemies having taken advantage of their removal from their former neighbourhood and the retirement in which they lived, to strengthen their own cause, alleging that the motive of this violation was evidently the desire to avoid the inquisitorial eyes that might detect their fraud. So they came back to Arles, and being immediately visited by every creature who could advance the slightest claims to their acquaintance, each with the view of gratifying his own curiosity, the dispute with respect to the Count's identity was naturally revived, and that with so much heat and acrimony, that there is no saying what might be the consequence, had not the Count and Countess bethought themselves of giving a grand ball and *fête champêtre*, to which all the persons of any

distinction or pretensions within their reach were invited—an expedient which proved entirely successful; for certain it was, that the sight of the cards they issued on this occasion had a perfectly magical effect upon the opinions of those who received them; and as no expense was spared to render the entertainment brilliant and agreeable, it is needless to say that these favourable impressions were much fortified. A series of pleasant parties, *déjeûners* at noon, and *soirées dansantes* at night, confirmed them; and it was not long before the innocence of the Countess, and the identity of the Count were pretty generally admitted by everybody, except the relations of the latter (who refused to be appeased by these hospitalities, or even to accept them), and a few persons of uncertain position, who had not been included in the invitations, and who felt themselves grievously affronted by the omission.

Public opinion was thus pretty well gained over, or at least, the public voice was silenced; the only remarks that were now indulged in being occasional sly little sarcasms on the Count's manners, or rather his want of *usage*; for his demeanour was always modest, obliging, and inoffensive; but it was whispered amongst this elegant and fastidious aristocracy that he frequently exhibited an ignorance of the customs of good society that was truly marvellous in a person of his birth. However, he had his defenders too; and these affirmed that the manners of the Count de Châteauroux were always exactly as they were now, and, moreover, that they were just what his father's had been. All these foolish observations and strictures, they said, merely arose out of his peculiar position, and the closeness with which his behaviour was watched—a degree of unpleasant surveillance that nobody could endure unscathed.

One thing was certain, namely, that the habits and character of the Count were extremely changed. His roving propensities seemed quite cured ; he never quitted his home now, even for a day ; and, as the lady's partizans suggested, there was little justice in the objection that the husband and wife had ceased to quarrel—the fact being, that the cause of quarrel no longer existed.

This state of affairs had lasted upwards of eighteen months, when one fine morning it was discovered, to the surprise of every body, that M. de Châteauroux, weary of his good behaviour, had again vanished. His room was found empty ; this time, his bed had not been lain in at all ; and he had taken nothing with him but the clothes he wore.

It was now definitively settled that he had either some *liaison* that lured him from home, or that he was the victim of temporary fits of insanity.

There was no suspicion of foul play now and instead of injuring the lady, his departure was of great service to her. It was held to be a triumphant proof of his identity and of her innocence, which was no longer disputed. She bore his absence with perfect equanimity ; and everybody said that he would no doubt reappear when he had recovered his senses, or was tired of roving.

But months flew away, till months became years ; and it began to be apprehended that neither of these desirable consummations were likely to ensue. Whether from lunacy or licentiousness, it was feared that the Count de Châteauroux had abandoned his home for ever. Little children grew to be men and women, and the middle-aged became old, and still he came not ; and at length Madame de Châteauroux herself fell sick, and, after an illness of some weeks' duration—died ; and was buried with all the honours due to her rank and fortune.

On her death-bed, she had a long interview with her confessor, and there arose many and strange reports as to what she had confessed ; but, of course, no one could know the truth on that subject but the reverend father himself.

But even now the interest of the public in this affair was not suffered to die away ; for as soon as the lady was laid in her grave, the question arose on whom her estate devolved. If her husband lived, it was his for the term of his “ natural life,” as the lawyers have it ; if he were dead, it reverted to Madame de Châteauroux’s family.

Now the De Châteauroux, who had before asserted so pertinaciously that he had been murdered, suddenly became equally confident that he was alive ; whilst the De la Rives, with nearly equal inconsistency, declared their conviction that he was dead ; and as it was found impossible to come to any agreement

between themselves on the subject, they had recourse to the law, which, whilst it consumed the revenues of the estate, seemed little likely to settle the question.

CHAPTER III.

THE suit between these contending interests had lasted upwards of twelve years, several of the parties concerned in it were dead, and amongst the rest the Countess's elder brother—that M. Adolphe de la Rive who had saved her life by so critically producing her husband—and still the truth of the affair was as much in the clouds as ever. Amongst the survivors, the one to whom the decision was now most important, was M. Eugène de la Rive, the second brother of the

Countess, for he had several children, and was not rich. Madame de Châteauroux's large fortune had descended to her from her aunt, and the other members of the family were by no means wealthy.

As time advanced, and there appeared no prospect of obtaining a verdict one way or the other, this gentlemen felt very desirous of coming to a compromise with the adverse party, an expedient which he had several times suggested, but which had always been vehemently opposed by M. de Francœur, the agent, who urged the folly of giving up a part when ultimately he must inevitably obtain the whole ; and as M. de Francœur had a personal interest in the question, he had hitherto, by his strong representations, succeeded in dissuading M. Eugène from what would have been considered by most people a very judicious proceeding. This interest arose from the probability of a marriage taking place betwixt a daughter of the agent and M. Eugène's youngest son.

The young people had been long attached ; and although such a connection was somewhat of a *mésalliance* for the son of a noble, yet the father did not seem inclined to forbid it. He had a large family to provide for, and M. de Francœur having been very fortunate in some, as it was understood, rather hazardous speculations, had contrived to amass a good deal of money, and was now the possessor of one of the finest estates in Languedoc. He was, moreover, remotely connected with the De la Rive family, and M. Eugène had a particular regard for him, De Francœur having once, when they were both young men, saved him from drowning at the risk of his own life ; and altogether, being of an easy, liberal temper, though he had never yet formally given his consent, the young people had happily proceeded with their courtship, countenanced by De Francœur, and not discouraged by De la Rive. The agent's opinion had thus very considerable weight with

M. Eugène, especially as he was universally considered to be a man of wonderful sagacity and knowledge of business, qualities of which his prosperity was a standing testimony. He was now rich, although he had begun the world with nothing.

Under these circumstances, it surprised nobody that M. de Franceœur's opinions had always been coincident with the wishes and interests of the De la Rive family. He had formerly stoutly asserted his conviction that M. de Châteauroux was alive, and that the pretender, as the adverse faction called him, was he. He now maintained with equal pertinacity that M. de Châteauroux was dead. He did not deny that "the pretender" had been the real M. de Châteauroux; at least, he said he had believed so, although he could not but admit that some circumstances during the latter part of his residence in the castle had somewhat shaken his opinion; but whether he had been right or wrong on that

occasion, he was now quite certain that the Count no longer existed; and having been called upon in the course of the law-suit to allege his reasons for his conviction, he answered, that whenever M. de Châteauroux was absent from home, he had always been in the habit of sending to him for money. "This custom was invariable," said he, "and, indeed, how could it be otherwise, when he had no other means of living, but what he derived from the proceeds of the estate?"

The only time the Count had ever failed to do this, he averred, was when he had the first time suddenly disappeared from his chamber, and that circumstance, together with the fact that he had never received any application for funds since, not only satisfied him that M. de Châteauroux was dead, but considerably augmented his doubts concerning the so-called pretender; and as it was well known that the Count had no resources but what were derived from his wife's

property, this argument was not without weight with the legal authorities.

Affairs had been some time in this position, when M. Eugène, finding that as his family grew up, the demands on his pocket became more frequent, and the importance of a final arrangement more urgent, arrived one afternoon at the château, and summoned M. de Francœur to a conference. Ever since the Countess's death, the house had remained under the care of the agent, and untenanted except by the old *concierge* and his wife, who opened the windows and kept it aired. One room only was in habitable order, and that was a small one, which had formerly been the Count's study, or room of business. It adjoined the *salon*, and contained nothing but a writing-table and chairs, except books and a full-length portrait of Count Joachim de Châteauroux, the father of the last Count, attired in a mulberry-coloured suit of clothes, short cloak,

and black stockings. A glass door led from the *salon* to a fine terrace which overlooked the park, and here M. de la Rive, with his mind intent upon the affair that had brought him to Arles, paced backwards and forwards till the agent arrived. When he did, he re-entered the *salon* by the glass door which they left open, and proceeded to the study, where, having seated themselves at the table, they opened their conference by inspecting and comparing certain letters and papers appertaining to the cause, which De Francœur had brought with him.

“ I am resolved,” said M. de la Rive, “ to put an end to this ruinous suit if any reasonable sacrifice can do it. I agree with you in entertaining no doubt of the Count’s death ; but what signifies that to us if we cannot prove it, which it is clear we never shall be able to do ? I would rather accept one-third of the property, and let the Châteauroux

have the rest, than pursue the thing any further."

As was his custom when similar propositions were offered, M. de Francoeur shook his head, and observed that it would be making a terrible sacrifice.

"No doubt," replied De la Rive, "but a part is less than the whole, and if we do not come to some arrangement, the entire property will be swallowed up by the suit ; so that, even if we could obtain a verdict, by-and-by it will be of no use—there would be nothing left to inherit."

"If his death could only be substantiated!" said the agent, speaking rather to himself than to his companion.

"Ay, if it could ! But it cannot," replied the latter. "There is the misfortune ! If we could only find out what became of the two servants, Clarice and Morel, perhaps they might throw some light on the mystery !"

“They are probably dead,” returned De Francœur ; “ besides, if we could find them, who knows which way their evidence might turn—it might be exactly the reverse of what we wish.”

“ Very well, let it be so !” answered De la Rive, who was a man of high principle ; “ let it be so ! All I desire to get at is the fact of whether Châteauroux is dead or alive. If he is alive, let him take the estates—they are his for his life, beyond a doubt ; but in the meantime it is very hard that neither one party nor the other can enjoy them, whilst the property itself is melting away in the heat of the dispute ;—but who is that in the next room ? I hear a foot, and I believe we left the window open to the terrace ; just see who it is.”

There was indeed a creaking of shoes, and the sound of a heavy firm step, which seemed to be crossing the saloon towards the study. M. de Francœur rose and turned to

open the door ; but before he could do so, it was done by a hand on the other side.

“ Ah ! M. de Francœur, I think ! ” said an elderly gentleman, advancing into the room with his hat in his hand ; “ in spite of the years that have elapsed since we parted, you are still recognisable.”

Whilst the stranger was uttering these words with the calmest countenance, the most gracious smile, and the most complaisant and self-possessed air imaginable, M. de la Rive sat still in his chair, with his mouth open and his dilated eyes fixed upon him, whilst his right hand, which held a pinch of snuff, suspended half-way betwixt the snuff-box and his nose, denoted extreme surprise. On M. de Francœur the sudden apparition of this visitor had a still more powerful effect ; the moment he caught sight of him, his limbs seemed to fail, and he had staggered back against the wall, where he now stood with his face of an ashy pale-

ness, his eyes fixed with a wild and ghastly stare upon the stranger, and his whole attitude and expression denoting as much horror as amazement, whilst the occasion of this extraordinary disturbance stood composedly awaiting what was to follow.

The first person that made an effort to break the charm that bound him was M. de la Rive, who deliberately turned his head and directed his eyes towards the picture of Count Joachim that hung over the mantel-piece.

“Nay, I am no ghost,” said the stranger, addressing the agent, “though,” added he, as he turned to M. de la Rive, “time has, I believe, made me somewhat resemble my father.”

“I was looking if the picture had stepped out of its frame,” replied De la Rive, rising. “Is it possible I see M. de Châteauroux?” continued he, as he advanced towards the stranger.

"I have scarcely a right to be surprised at your asking the question," returned the latter; "so many years have elapsed since we met. I have the pleasure of addressing M. Adolphe de la Rive, I think?"

"I am Eugène," answered De la Rive; "my brother Adolphe is dead. But where, in the name of Heaven, have you been all these years?"

"Ah, that would be a long history," replied the old gentleman, smiling, as he took his seat at the table without appearing further to notice M. de Francœur's demeanour; "we must keep it for more leisure moments; but, tell me—relieve my impatience—how is my wife?"

"Are you not aware that my sister is dead?" answered De la Rive, with an air of astonishment.

"Dead!" reiterated the stranger, covering his face with his hands; "dead, before I have had the opportunity of asking her

pardon for my long desertion. Alas ! poor, poor Sophie !”

“ Long, indeed !” returned De la Rive. “ But if you did not choose to return, why in Heaven’s name did you never write ? Knowing the peril your first desertion entailed upon my sister, it was surely monstrous to do the same thing again, and never take the trouble of ascertaining the consequences to her nor to us !”

“ My first desertion !” repeated the Count “ Peril to my wife ! What first desertion ? What peril do you allude to ?”

“ How !” exclaimed De la Rive ; “ then it really was not you that my brother brought from Paris the night before my sister was to have been executed ?”

“ You speak in riddles !” said the Count. “ Your sister executed ! What can you possibly mean ?”

“ I mean that in consequence of your unaccountable disappearance, and some ap-

parently corroborating circumstances, your wife was accused of having made away with you ; and that she was only preserved from an ignominious death by my brother's producing you on the very evening preceding the day that was to have been her last."

"Producing me !" reiterated the Count. "How could he produce me ? I do not understand you."

"Why, if it was not yourself, he produced your double," answered the other ; "for although some people disputed the identity, the person my brother brought was generally received as the Count de Châteauroux."

"This is really a most extraordinary story !" said the Count ; "but surely you were not deceived, De Francœur ?" added he, turning towards the agent, who had never resumed his seat, but still stood with his back against the wall, where his first surprise had thrown him, although with a different expression of countenance to that he then ex-

hibited. The terror that had disturbed his features had now given place to an air of contemptuous incredulity; his lip curled, and his nostrils arched, as in reply to the Count's question, he said that, "If he had been deceived once, he would take care not to be duped a second time."

"Why, no," answered the Count, with a careless smile, "*cela serait trop fort!*—that would be too much!"

He then addressed his conversation to M. de la Rive, making many inquiries respecting their mutual friends and relations, and asking especially the most minute particulars regarding the latter days, and the death of the Countess—a circumstance he appeared sincerely to lament.

In this sort of discourse the evening wore on, till, as it grew late, the Count remarked that it was time for him to consider where he should sleep. "Are there any beds prepared here?" he inquired.

"None," replied De la Rive ; " I intend to mount my horse and ride back to town, and you had better go with me ; you will find a bed at the inn."

" Why, I suppose I must," answered the Count, " unless M. de Francœur will lodge me for to night. To-morrow I will set people to work to put things in order here ; and as soon as I am established, De la Rive, I hope you will come and make this your home for some time, as we have a great deal to say to each other, and a good deal of business to discuss."

M. de la Rive bowed, and appeared tacitly to accept this invitation ; and indeed it was remarkable, that, so far from seeming to participate in M. de Francœur's scepticism, he had rushed into the opposite extreme ; as if, by an excess of confidence on his own part, he had sought to counterbalance the insulting incredulity of the other.

The agent's immediate response to the

Count's request of a night's lodging was only a disdainful smile ; but presently, seeming to recollect himself, he changed his attitude for the first time, and, advancing a step or two, he said, " I have a bed at your service."

" Well, then," said the Count with easy gaiety, " I think, as it is getting late, we had better adjourn for to-night. We will first see you mount your horse, De la Rive, and then De Francœur and I will walk to Beau-lieu," which was the name of the agent's residence. " By the bye, I must speak a few words to the *concierge* before I go," added he. " I suppose I shall see him in the lodge as we pass ;" and thereupon, the Count taking the precedence, they went forth to where M. de la Rive's horses and groom were standing ; and the equestrians having mounted their steeds, the whole party proceeded towards the lodge. At the gate, ready to open it, and eager to salute the brother of their former mistress, stood the *concierge* and his wife, on

observing which De la Rive drew his rein to speak to them.

“Well, Martin, how is your rheumatism this year?” he asked.

“But indifferent please your honour,” answered Martin; “and I doubt it will never be better. Old age and the rheumatics are friends that, when they have once met, seldom part till death divides them. I hope your honour and the young lords and ladies are all well?” added Martin with his best bow; but before his obeisance was completed, and he had time to recover the perpendicular, he was startled by a loud scream from his wife, and, on looking round, he saw the old woman with her face as white as her apron, leaning against the gate-post. Her arms were raised in an attitude of astonishment, and her eyes fixed upon the newly-arrived Count: and no sooner had the husband turned his in the same direction, in order to discover the cause of her agitation, than he became equally disturbed.

Nor was this to be wondered at. The features and the person of the Count not only bore the most striking resemblance to the picture of Count Joachim, but his dress was precisely the same ; so that the worthy unsophisticated couple, who were perfectly familiar with the portrait, thought nothing less than that it had really come to life, and walked out of its frame, as De la Rive had jestingly insinuated. When an explanation ensued—an explanation in which, however, M. de Francœur took no part—though less terrified, they were scarcely less surprised ; and no sooner had the gentleman left them than, after sundry ejaculations of wonder and thanksgiving, the old man seized his hat and stick, and hobbled forth to carry the extraordinary news amongst the tenants, who one and all agreed, what a pity it was that the Countess had not survived to see that day !

In the meantime, whilst Martin was spreading the unexpected tidings over the

neighbourhood, and Madelon, his wife, much against her own will, was obliged to stay at home and relieve her excited mind by apostrophising the Countess's parrot (a bird that enjoyed an easy fortune of a hundred francs per annum, bequeathed to it by the Countess, who, at the same time, appointed this worthy couple its guardians), M. de la Rive rode thoughtfully forward to the city of Arles. He had reason to be thoughtful ; for the re-appearance of his hale and healthy-looking brother-in-law removed him to a considerable distance from his sister's inheritance ; and the projects he had for some time entertained for the advancement of his family must be laid aside for others more consistent with his means. The marriage of his son Ernest with De Francœur's daughter Alphonsine was perhaps now more desirable than he had formerly considered it ; but, on the other hand, it was just possible that De Francœur might think otherwise ; for the

agent, untitled as he was, had a *de* to his name, and was a gentleman by birth, though the road by which he had passed from poverty to wealth, being soiled by commerce, or something like it, had considerably damaged his pretensions.

With all the pride of poor nobility, De la Rive resolved to *take the initiative*, as the French have it, and to bid his son immediately relax his attentions till De Francoeur declared himself; and firm in this resolution, he rode into the town, where he found a crowd assembled round the inn door in consequence of the rumour having got abroad that M. de Châteauroux had arrived at the Lion d'Or, the same afternoon in a handsome carriage with four horses, and that, having taken a slight refreshment, without alighting or saying a word to anybody, he had driven forward in the direction of the château. He had no servant, the postilions had been perfectly silent, and moreover, had they been

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otherwise, they could have given no information with respect to the traveller, of whom, on their return, they declared they knew nothing whatever, except that they had been engaged to drive him. He paid them liberally, and had sent them back to put up at the inn, finding the stables at the château quite unprovided. But the innkeeper himself had seen him whilst he was taking his coffee at the door, and so had several other persons ; and not one of them entertained a doubt of his being the long lost Count. On the appearance of M. de la Rive, the host and a few others who thought themselves entitled to question him, accompanied him to his chamber, and having communicated their own impressions with regard to the traveller, they had the gratification of hearing them confirmed. There was no doubt about the matter—the long lost Count de Châteauroux was come to light again, and had arrived to claim the estate.

That was a glorious night for the host of the Lion d'Or! What potations, pottle deep, were quaffed to the health and welcome of that prodigal husband! For, if in nothing else, there is one particular in which mankind is apt to resemble the angels; and as heaven rejoices more over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons, so does the world not unfrequently exalt a man into its hero for having simply left off behaving worse than other people; and thus the good people of Arles lavished more time and money in celebrating the return of this peccant Count, than they had ever done upon all the well-conducted Counts of Languedoc put together, who had been staying at home and attending to their conjugal duties, whilst he had been dissolutely wandering over the world and neglecting his. Gratitude, however, may have something to do with this peculiarity. Life is generally but a dull procession of

events ; and at Arles, as elsewhere, it was not unnatural to feel obliged to the man who had broken its monotony by such startling eccentricities and stirring interests. The news-hunters and the gossips might now consider themselves provisioned for a month's campaign at least ; and it behoved the host of the Lion d'Or to count his wine casks, and see that his larder was well filled.

CHAPTER IV.

IN the meantime, the hero of all this sensation had reached Beaulieu with M. de Francœur. When M. de la Rive rode away, the Count had quietly turned his steps in that direction, saying, "Now, I will have the pleasure of accompanying you ;" and the agent had silently acquiesced, and walked by his side.

"I hope Madame de Francœur still survives," said the Count.

"She does," returned the agent.

"Your children were but infants when I saw them," observed the first. The agent made no answer. "May I ask what family you have?" continued the Count.

"I have three daughters and one son," returned De Francœur, in an impatient, sulky tone.

"Any of them married?" inquired the Count, who did not appear at all affected by the ungracious demeanour of his companion, and who, in spite of the almost fierce negative granted to this question, pursued his interrogatories with the most entire composure.

"Ah, you have been building, I see, and making great improvements here," he observed, as they passed the farm where De Francœur had formerly resided. "I think, if I remember rightly, where I now see a garden there was formerly an orchard and a well?"

At this last observation, De Francœur

started, and looked hard at the Count. "That well, I see, no longer exists—where do you get your water now?"

"I opened another behind the house," answered the agent, with a voice that assumed indifference; but it was evident that something had given a shock to his nerves. This discomposure did not escape the Count, and he felt inclined to pursue the subject further, when the new residence came into view, and the appearance of an elderly lady on the door-steps interrupted the conversation.

"Ah, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" exclaimed she, as she hastened towards them; "surely I cannot be mistaken—the person, the dress. It must be the Count de Château-roux!"

"Madame de Francœur, I presume," said the Count gallantly, taking her hand.

"Can it be possible?" said she; "returned after so many years' absence! I was at my

chamber window, and I recognised you the moment my eyes fell upon your figure."

"Yet years have made a great change in it, since you and I danced together at my wedding," said the Count. "You were then not married."

"Ah, that's true!" replied the lady. "However, you look wonderfully well for your age."

The Count, of course, returned the compliment, and thus they walked up the garden towards the house, whilst De Francœur quitted them and entered it, without uttering a word or even informing his wife that their visitor was to pass the night under their roof. However, the Count, whom nothing seemed to discompose or abash, took upon himself to apprise his hostess that her husband had been so kind as to promise him a night's hospitality—a communication that evidently afforded her great satisfaction; so having conducted him to the *salon*, and

introduced him to her daughters, she left them together, whilst she gave orders for the preparation of his chamber ; and so well did he contrive to please the young ladies, that when he retired to dress, two of them at least were voluble in his praises.

“ Oh, mamma,” said Mademoiselle Laure “ I do not know what the Count was when he was young, but he is perfectly charming now.” Laure was the eldest of the girls by several years, and did not forget that this agreeable elderly gentleman was a widower ; a recollection to which her carefully studied *toilette*, when she appeared at dinner, bore lively testimony.

“ Do look at Laure !” said Alphonsine, “ dressing at that grey-headed old profligate in his chocolate coat ! How eminently ridiculous.”

“ Not if she admires him,” answered Rose ; “ I really think he is very agreeable. But you cannot view him indulgently, I

know, Alphonsine, and I do not wonder at it. His resuscitation, I fear, will be the grave of your hopes."

"I do not know," answered Alphonsine. "If papa is less willing, M. de la Rive will have fewer objections to the match. No, really I am disgusted with the utter selfishness and want of feeling he has evinced all through life. He made the misery of his excellent wife, and nearly caused her to suffer an ignominious death; and now that he is come back to suit his own convenience and finds her dead, he evidently does not care a sou about it; no, I cannot like such a man."

But in spite of the justness of these objections, it was not easy to retain fast hold of them in the Count's presence—his countenance was so open, his manner so frank, and they found his conversation at dinner so extremely entertaining. There was not so much travelling in those days as there is

now ; and as everybody that made a journey did not write a book about it, people who stayed at home knew much less of the world they did not see than we do. M. de Châteauroux, it appeared, had been a great traveller. He had not only crossed the Alps, but he had been to the east and to the west—could talk about those proud islanders who ate raw beef and vegetables boiled in water, which rendered them so savage that they had actually cut off the head of the most beautiful Queen in Europe ; and could relate how the women in the East, as soon as they were married, instead of enjoying that liberty that French maidens sigh for, were shut up in a harem for the rest of their lives, with nobody to admire them but their own tiresome husbands. Even Alphonsine's prejudices began to yield at last ; and when the ladies took their leave, and had retired to enjoy their nightly gossip, she scarcely disputed the justice of their laudations.

“But that papa does not like him,” said she, “is very clear. He cannot pardon his unfeeling conduct, because he is agreeable and entertaining, if we can.” And so indeed it appeared; for all the Count’s addresses had been met by a dogged silence on the part of De Francœur, and now that the gentlemen were left alone, he still retained the same discontented and sullen expression of countenance, while on the other side of the table sat M. de Châteauroux, with an air of the most absolute comfort and complacence.

“I think I could name the vines that grew this wine,” said he, raising the glass to his lips; “it has exactly the flavour of the Burgundy I used to get from Lecoque. By the bye, how are the cellars at the château filled? Has the stock been kept up?”

“Indifferently well,” replied M. de Francœur, drily.

“I must have that looked into immediately,” returned the Count, “as it is my

intention to reside here chiefly for the rest of my life."

"Indeed!" said De Francœur, lifting up his eyebrows with a peculiar expression of sarcasm.

"Yes, indeed," replied the Count. "I suppose you suspect that my roving propensities will be too strong for my resolutions. Is that the case, De Francœur? You think I shall be off again?"

Whereupon M. de Francœur, turning slowly round upon his chair till he faced the Count, placing his two arms upon the table, and fixing his eyes upon those of his companion, answered with a firm and significant tone, "I do."

"You are mistaken, quite mistaken," returned the Count, with perfect good humour and equanimity; "years have brought experience. I see the folly of my past life; besides, age has changed my taste. I languish for repose and a little quiet society."

"Then I would advise you to seek them elsewhere," replied M. de Francœur, with uncontrollable irritation. "The jest is stale, sir," said he, turning away contemptuously; "it may have answered once—it won't do a second time."

"De Francœur," returned the Count, turning towards him a face of amazement, but still with the utmost suavity of voice, "you really surprise me; you don't mean to imply that you doubt my identity?"

"Your identity," echoed the agent, with an indescribable curl of the lip; "your identity! *Aux autres!* You may impose upon M. de la Rive, sir, but you cannot impose upon me; be assured of that."

"Well, this is really singular," said the Count, without the least appearance of displeasure—on the contrary, he laughed; "you believe an impostor when he comes here in my name, and you won't believe me now I am really before your eyes."

"*I never believed in the impostor, sir, any more than I believe in you now; but I countenanced the imposition for a time, for the sake of the Countess,*" answered De Francœur. "But that motive no longer exists, and I will not see her family defrauded of her estates by a scoundrel."

"Bravo!" said the Count, with an air of lively approbation. "You really charm me, De Francœur. You are acting exactly as you ought to do. Your doubts are extremely natural, and so far from blaming your caution, I admire it. It is certainly within the range of possibility that that fellow should have come here to try his luck a second time, and it would be too much to let him stand in my shoes for another eighteen months, wouldn't it? But never fear; I am the right man at last, depend upon it, and so I shall be able to prove to you."

"Never, sir," returned the agent with unflinching firmness—"never;" and as he

uttered the last word, he forcibly struck the table with his clenched fist.

“ Ha, ha !” laughed the Count, “ there is something really comical in this.”

“ You may think so,” answered De Francœur ; “ but I fancy you will find the joke not quite so good as you expected. It would, no doubt, be extremely agreeable to step quietly into so fine an estate ; and had I been dead, you might probably have succeeded. As it is, you cannot ; and if you will take a piece of well-meant advice, you will mount your horse to-morrow morning with the earliest dawn, and disappear from this part of the country for ever.”

“ A modest request, De Francœur, certainly,” returned the Count ; “ I am sorry I cannot oblige you by complying with it. I shall remain and establish my right and identity beyond the possibility of controversy.”

“ You cannot do it, sir ; you cannot do

it," answered the agent, vehemently; "you cannot prove what is false. The Count de Châteauroux is dead—dead, sir. Who you are, I do not know; but you are no more the Count de Châteauroux than I am myself!"

"But, De Francœur," returned the Count, "how can you possibly know that I am not he, when not only De la Rive but your own wife recognised my person at a glance? I thought I understood you to say that no tidings of the Count whatever had reached you since his departure. Is not that so?"

"Precisely," answered M. de Francœur, in a less confident tone, and slightly changing colour.

"Then, how can you be so well assured of his death?" asked the Count, fixing his eyes on the agent's face.

"Because I—I have no doubt of it," replied De Francœur, with evident embarrassment. "I have no doubt he is dead."

“Pooh !” said the Count ; “is that all ? How will that serve you in a court of law ? What will your ‘no doubt’ weigh there ?”

“It does not matter,” replied De Franceur, making an effort to recover the assured and confident demeanour with which he had commenced the dispute ; “you are not the Count de Châteauroux, and you know it. Resign a hopeless enterprise, sir—one I am resolved to defeat ; begone in peace, and I will not impede your departure, although I am aware that if I did my duty, I should expose you to the chastisement you merit ; but I countenanced your deception once, and I am not perhaps entitled to be severe. I give you till to-morrow morning ; if you have not quitted this house, nay, and this neighbourhood, before nine o’clock to-morrow, beware the consequences. With that, I wish you good night !” and thereupon he summoned a servant, and bade him conduct the visitor to his chamber.

The Count, quite unmoved, rose from his seat, bowed courteously, retired to his room, and carefully locked the door.

By nine o'clock on the following morning he was gone—but it was no farther than the château, where, having engaged the necessary domestics, he quietly took up his abode, his right to do so being unarraigned by the De la Rives or anybody else. Not only so, but to the extreme annoyance of M. de Francœur, M. de la Rive persisted in living on the best possible terms with this, as the agent asserted, impostor. It was in vain that the latter argued the case, and represented the extreme folly of relinquishing the property to a mere adventurer. He went farther than he had ever done before in acknowledging, that he had not been duped by the pretender even for a moment.

“How could I,” he said, “when the pecuniary transactions betwixt the Count and me were unknown to everybody else? The

man, whoever he was, had been extremely well tutored doubtless ; and by means of silence and reserve contrived to act his part very tolerably ; but much fewer people were deceived than affected to be so, and the moment he was alone with me I detected him. Why, you have confessed to me yourself that your suspicions were very strong, although, for your sister's sake, you never admitted them."

"I had my suspicions certainly," returned M. Eugène, "but I had never seen much of the Count de Châteauroux, and I had no desire to trouble my sister by expressing them ; but I have none now. The extraordinary resemblance, or rather identity of feature, air, and voice, leave no doubt upon my mind whatever."

"But this resemblance was just as extraordinary before, yet the man your brother brought was not the Count de Châteauroux," urged De Francœur ; "or if he

were, this man is not, by his own confession."

"Very true, but take my word for it this is the veritable man," still responded De la Rive, to the infinite annoyance of the agent, who, after an argument on this subject, would go away in a state of undisguised irritation at what appeared to him the extraordinary infatuation of his friend; and as the belief of men in general is extremely apt to be influenced by their interest, it certainly did seem very extraordinary that M. Eugène should so obstinately persist in a persuasion that was so contrary to his own advantage; and in order to explain this seeming inconsistency, we must request our readers to accompany us back to that night described in our first chapter, when M. and Madame de Châteauroux were overheard in high altercation by their servants.

When the young Count Philibert married Madame De Rosemont, he had no intention

of making her unhappy, for he was a good-natured man in the main, but not loving her so well as he loved his diversions, he wished to make her happy at as small an expense to his own inclination as possible, and he might perhaps have conciliated both objects—his own pleasures and her contentment—if it had not unfortunately happened that she fell in love with him ; as men are constituted, the most injudicious thing a wife can do, especially if she is older than her husband. This unlucky passion was the destruction of both. She could no longer control her own feelings, or manage his selfishness—a woman who wishes to manage her husband must take care not to be in love with him—but indeed a woman in love never desires to manage the object of her affection, she only aspires to please him, and poor Madame de Châteauroux would have been too happy to have rendered obedience for love ; but the love was beyond her attainment, and by her

struggle to retain her volatile charmer, she only disgusted and alienated him more and more, till, as she justly upbraided him, he never came home except when he was in need of money; and it was precisely the necessity of replenishing his purse, together with an unpleasant report regarding financial affairs, that had brought him back on that unlucky night.

The family of De Francœur, though not noble, were gentry, and, as we have said, distantly connected with the De la Rives; but being without fortune, they had been obliged to seek their subsistence in the law or the church. François de Francœur, who figures in our story, had been educated for the former; but instead of pursuing his vocation, when Sophie de la Rive inherited the immense fortune bequeathed to her by her aunt, he consented to undertake the agency of the property. The entire management of it was placed in his hands, and during her minority

and the life of her first husband, she had every reason to congratulate herself on this judicious appointment. When she married M. de Châteauroux, no alteration was made in this particular. The young Count knew nothing of the business, nor had any vocation to it, and he had no desire to have anything more to do with the estate than to draw what money he wanted, and be left to spend it according to his own pleasure. De Franceœur supplied him to his heart's content, and thus at first all went well. Gradually, however, his demands increased; he had taken to play, and he drew to an amount that alarmed the agent, who thought it right to give a hint of the growing evil to the Countess, whose money it was. But she was very fond of her husband then, and had not resigned all hopes of reclaiming him by indulgence. She would not therefore risk offending him for the sake of money. "How can I help it?" said she; "he must spend what he likes."

"You might speak to him on the subject," suggested the agent.

"Never," replied the lady ; " if it goes too far, you can say you have no money. If there is to be any restriction, you must manage it yourself."

The agent objected that that would be a very awkward thing for him to do ; and so, between them both, nothing was done, and the thing went on as before, ultimately leading to consequences much more serious than the parties concerned had foreseen.

De Franceur's prosperity had been growing with his years, and as his means increased so did his desires. He was no longer satisfied with the profits of his agency and the gains of agriculture, but was induced to embark in speculations more dazzling, but also more precarious. He meant no harm in the beginning, and at first he played this game only with his own money : but, from some unexpected turn of affairs, suddenly finding him-

self in difficulties, he disentangled himself from the immediate dilemma by borrowing from the funds of his client, Madame de Châteauroux. When he took the money, he meant to replace it ; but somehow or other, instead of doing so he borrowed more. The first infraction cost him a good deal of uneasiness ; the second less ; and by degrees he got so used to the thing, that one might have thought the money was his own, he took it so comfortably. He had terrible facilities for doing it, for the Countess never inspected his accounts, nor ever doubted his integrity, although when complaining of her husband's desertion, she accused the agent of furnishing him the means of staying away from her ; but she had refused to interfere when he had honestly recommended her to do so, and his own interest and safety now forbade him to take any step that might force on an explanation.

A circumstance unexpectedly occurred, how-

ever, which seemed extremely likely to produce this very alarming consummation. A property which divided two of the Countess's estates, and which she had on that account long wished to possess, suddenly came into the market, and De Francœur immediately received her injunctions to purchase it, but he had not the money, and the only excuse he could make for not having it, was to lay the deficit at the door of the Count's exorbitant drafts on the revenue. This being an amount of extravagance that she had not reckoned upon, the Countess was both surprised and angry, and she declared her determination to put a stop to it, and to tell M. de Châteauroux her mind on the subject the next time he condescended to visit her.

Here was the crisis which De Francœur had hoped to avert, but which sooner or later overtakes everybody who ventures on a similar course of dishonest appropriation. His perplexity was great, to avoid the impending

exposure he would gladly have sold his own estate, but there was no time to look for a purchaser, and Madame de Châteauroux missed the acquisition of the property she desired. This vexed her extremely, and all the agent dared to hope was, that it might be long before a visit from her husband afforded her an opportunity of arraigning his prodigality, and that in the meantime something might occur to relieve him from his embarrassment. Evil thoughts are sure to find their way into the mind of a man so situated. "What a good thing it would be if the Count never came home again!" thought he; and his imagination painted all the possible casualties that might befall him. Worse thoughts still would intrude sometimes, and it seemed to him as if the devil was at his ear, whispering wicked suggestions of what might happen if they were riding over the lands together, through the tall fern and the lonely pine forests, where a traveller is not seen twice in

a week ; but he cried avaunt ! and would not listen and went away to the fields to see his labourers at work and admire his crops.

But there came a pang again—how fine and rich they looked as they waved in the light breeze, or fell beneath the scythe of the reaper ; but if everybody had their own, whose were they ? Not his assuredly ; and though they grew upon his land, they might never be stacked in his yard ; for he lived with a sword over his head, which, every day he rose, he feared might fall ere night. His life was wretched, and his brain teemed with projects to escape from his misery ; but there are many more roads for getting into trouble than for getting out of it, and before he could find one, M. de Châteauroux came home.

CHAPTER V.

It was evening, and being the anniversary of his wedding-day, M. de Francœur had some friends at his house. He was at this period a man of about five-and-thirty; he had been married some years to an agreeable woman much younger than himself; he had two little children on whom he doted, and he had in short everything in the world to make life happy, but one thing—the most important of all—a clear conscience; that one blessed

possession which enables us to live without the fear of man.

There can be no manner of doubt that anybody who has once played away this inestimable treasure, and thereby sold himself a bond-slave for life, would, unless he be so sunk in brutality as to have forfeited his humanity and be abandoned of conscience altogether, give everything else he possesses in the world to recover that one untarnished gem. M. de Francœur would have done so, for he was a man still of sentiment and feeling, loving his family and naturally courteous to his friends. But this cruel memory that sat with him at meat and forbade him to be cheerful, marred his enjoyments and spoilt his temper. However, to-day, he had determined to be happy, come what might hereafter: what was the use of meeting sorrow half-way, and poisoning the present by the fear of a future that might never arrive for him? Besides, it had more than once occurred to

him that he might borrow money enough, by mortgaging his own estate, to replace what was deficient, and that then he would go to the Countess, and tell her, that he had discovered an extraordinary error in his own account with M. de Châteauroux ; that by a mistake in figures he had in his book assigned a much larger sum to him than he had received, and that he, M. de Francœur, now found that he had all that money in hand. She would be annoyed at missing the purchase, and would accuse him of carelessness, and there it would end.

His project, which had sometimes appeared feasible and sometimes not, according to whichever side of it he surveyed, now presented its most smiling aspect. He felt sure it would answer his purpose ; and although the mortgage would straiten his own circumstances terribly, yet he might pay it off with time and economy ; and if not, what was the restriction of his means to the anguish of his

mind! Nothing; he would do it; and in the meantime, he would be happy for that day at least.

His wife was delighted to see him more cheerful than he had been for a long time, and his friends took the occasion of its being his wedding-day, to congratulate him on his domestic felicity. When English and Scotch people assemble together for the purposes of enjoyment, their custom is to sit at a table in a close room, and eat and drink for several successive hours as much as they can, which is generally much more than they ought, and enough to make them somewhat uncomfortable the next morning, and unfit them for their day's work, whatever it may be. When French people assemble for the same purpose, they dance—out of doors, if the season will admit of it; and some light and simple refreshments send them home with as clear heads and good digestions as they brought. When they are older and graver, and have no

young ones in their society, a *petit souper*, without any strong potations after it, is a sufficient attraction to bring them together, and is a very innocuous mode of entertainment after their early dinner.

On this memorable night M. de Francœur's young wife and her friends were gaily dancing on the lawn, and Madame de Châteauroux, whose disappointment had made her graver than her years, was pleasantly entertaining half a dozen of her acquaintances with a *petit souper* in her saloon, whilst on the road from Arles to Beaulieu, which latter lay on the way to the château, a fine black horse was jogging gently forwards, bearing on its back the person that was to mar this harmony. However thoughtless, and imprudent, and selfish Philibert de Châteauroux had shown himself since his marriage, he was not a man altogether without conscience and honour, and consequently when any circumstance occurred to place his own conduct be-

fore him in the broad light of day and force him to look at it, he was not insensible to its deformity ; and such a circumstance was a report that had just reached him that the property so long desired by his wife had fallen into other hands in consequence of his extravagance and her inability to purchase it. But two days before, he had written to De Francœur for supplies to a rather large amount, but on hearing this rumour, he resolved to go and fetch the money himself, and at the same time inquire into the state of affairs at home. He had neglected his wife shockingly, but to ruin her into the bargain was too much ; and if he found it necessary, he must resolve to pull in and retrench ; and as he must needs pass Beaulieu, he would stop there and have a little conversation with De Francœur before he met the Countess ; so when he reached the gate, he alighted and fastened his horse to it—for he never travelled with a servant—having his own reasons for

not carrying home with him a person who might blab of his whereabouts.

As by this time the evening was closing in, the dancers had just re-entered the house, and their host was supplying them with refreshments, when a servant approached and told him he was wanted by a gentleman, who refused to come in.

“ Say I am engaged,” said he, “ and bid the person call to-morrow. I cannot see anybody to-night.”

The man, who was but an occasional servant, was turning away with this answer, when M. de Francœur’s own valet whispered, “ It is M. le Comte de Châteauroux that is in the hall, sir.”

Little thought he that said those words what a significance they had for him who heard them. They were like an immediate sentence of death to a criminal who had reckoned surely on a reprieve, if not a pardon.

“Excuse me !” said he to a lady standing beside him, and hastening out of the room—for he felt his colour change and his knees giving way—and in a moment he was in the hall face to face with his unwelcome visitor.

“Ah, my dear Count, how are you ?” he said, affecting a hearty welcome. “I have some friends here celebrating the anniversary of my wedding ; come in and join us.”

“I would with pleasure if I were suitably attired,” answered the Count ; “but I have ridden far in the dust and heat, and am not fit to be seen in a ball-room.”

“Oh, nonsense !” replied De Francœur, taking refuge in a forced gaiety ; “the gallant Count de Châteauroux will be welcome to the ladies in any dress. Come, come ;” and he drew him by the arm towards the door of the dancing-room.

“Excuse me !” said De Châteauroux ; “not to-night ; besides, I am tired ; but I want to talk to you about business, and I

wish you would come to breakfast with me to-morrow at ten o'clock, will you? I am very much annoyed to learn that that property my wife wanted to purchase has fallen into other hands."

"Well, if you will not come in," said De Francœur, "I suppose I must let you go?"

"You'll be with me at ten?" rejoined the Count.

"Certainly!" answered De Francœur.

"Good night, then," said the former: "I will not detain you longer from your friends. *A demain!*" and he quitted the hall to remount his horse.

"Attend M. de Châteauroux!" said the agent to one of the servants, whilst he himself, instead of re-entering the ball-room, strode hastily up-stairs to his own chamber, in order to steal a few minutes from the many eyes below that he feared might read his secret in his face. Oh, blest, blest are they who need fear no human eye!

But sitting alone, and reviewing his situation in all its horrors, M. de Francœur found was not the way to enable him to meet his company with more self-possession ; so he returned amongst them and endeavoured to forget himself and his troubles in wine and revelry. His sober visitors were amazed at the long draughts he swallowed and at his noisy demonstrations of joy ; but they accounted for it by the remark, that when sober, quiet people do outstep their customary bounds of discretion, they are apt to rush into greater excesses than habitual revellers.

“ *Pauvre homme !*” said one ; “ it has been evident for a long time past that he has devoted himself too much to business and been too anxious ; he is like a child broke loose from school, that manifests its happiness by all sorts of absurd gambols.”

“ He is an excellent man, M. de Fran-

cœur," said another; "so desirous of doing well for his family!"

"And such an invaluable friend to Madame de Châteauroux," observed a third. "I do not know what she would have done without him."

"And with all his care and anxiety, I fear the property is very much injured by that scapegrace her husband. It is reported that he has spent enormous sums," remarked a fourth.

"They say it is that circumstance that has been weighing so painfully on De Francœur's mind for some time back," observed one of the speakers. "He has certainly been very much depressed of late."

"Allons; messieurs et mesdames, *dansons la ronde!*" cried the host, clapping his hands, and dispersing the little circle of gossips.

"Why, De Francœur, you have shaken off fifteen years to-night. You are a boy again," said one.

“To be sure,” cried the agent, “what is the use of being sad? *Toujours gai, et vive la bagatelle!* that is my motto.”

“Bravo!” cried his friend. “De Francœur for ever! Long live our noble host!”

When the hour arrived at which his company would naturally have dispersed, he would not allow them to go; and when they tried to slip away, he locked the hall-door, and threw the key out of the window; and by this and similar mad pranks, he contrived, with or without their consent, to keep them with him till the night was more than half spent. But time, like death, is inexorable, and it will not be defrauded of its prey, which, amongst many other hollow things, reckons all factitious joys and ill-based pleasures; so that, defer their departure as he would, the hour came that left M. de Francœur alone with his thoughts, his memories, and his fears. The moment the doors closed upon the last of his party, he

told his wife that he was quite exhausted, and must go to bed. He could face the visitors, but he could not face her that was accustomed to read his features; so he hid them upon his pillow, where, however, no sleep came to smooth care's furrows, or to bring back colour to the bloodless cheeks; and whilst he lies there, waiting the unwelcome morning, we will follow M. de Châteauroux on his way to the castle.

As we have intimated above, the Count was going home oppressed with a consciousness that he was by no means blameless in regard to his wife. He had hitherto excused himself at her expense, attributing his own errors to her want of youth and beauty, and her injudicious reproaches. But he could not help feeling that if she was not wise, she was at least liberal, when he reflected what unrestrained command he had had of her money; a privilege which she might have retracted at any moment she

chose, the fortune by her aunt's will being entirely in her own power. Softened by this penitent feeling, he resolved to meet her with a more affectionate and genial manner than he had done on his recent visits ; and though he knew himself too well to promise that he would reform his ways altogether, he determined to see his home more frequently, and to be more friendly and agreeable to his wife whilst he was there, than of late years had been his custom.

But unfortunately all these good resolutions were rendered null, and a long concatenation of unthought-of misfortunes, entailed by the circumstance of finding his wife in company. Without that *contretems* all might have been well ; but her injudicious reception and unhappy display of temper reacting upon him, his good feelings of repentance were stifled ; he returned to his former opinion that the faults were hers, not his ; and instead of his heart being softened towards

her, it became harder than ever. She had now, too, destroyed that motive which often serves to keep people from extremes when all better ones have failed; she had exposed their domestic squabbles to her acquaintance, and if *she* had no more delicacy, he thought there was no reason that *he* should. He did not betray so much ill-humour before the supper-party as she did, both because he had more command of himself, and because, having no love to aggravate his vexation, his irritation was less poignant; but as soon as they were gone, and the Countess broke forth into complaints and reproaches, she found him more hard and contemptuous than on any former occasion. Instead of making the slightest admission that he was wrong, he told her that she had no right to expect he would ever come home at all when she made that home so disagreeable to him; and when she reproached him with his extravagance, he retorted by accusing her of meanness—a

reproof she certainly did not merit; but in domestic quarrels, above all others, people are the least scrupulous with regard to the weapons they use.

When they had exhausted their whole repertory of bitternesses, they retired to their chambers, separating with that vague threat uttered by the Countess, and his contemptuous answer recorded in our first chapter. It was not till the Count had lain down in bed and his servant had left him, that he began to feel the sting of that menace. She certainly could revenge herself if she pleased, by stopping the supplies, and that was probably what she contemplated. This unpleasant anticipation, together with the previous excitement of his brain, very naturally prevented his sleeping. He resolved to banish the whole thing from his mind, but that is a resolution more easily made in similar situations than fulfilled; he turned on one side, then on the other; thought of a

flowing stream, of a flock of sheep, and of waving corn ; but it was all of no use—sleep rejected his allurements, and would not visit him. Now, most people have experienced how very unpleasantly active the imagination is apt to become under this sort of insomnolence ; how small evils swell into great ones, and what a terrible gripe any disagreeable fancy takes of the mind. It was so with the Count ; he had no money at the time ; not a sou ; probably on the following day she would issue her commands to the agent to give him no more. A pleasant situation he would be in ! A prisoner for want of the means of going elsewhere, and his wife his jailor !

Then another idea occurred to him. These words, prisoner and jailor, awakened a new fear ; how, if the Countess applied for a *lettre de cachet*, and got him shut up in the Bastille ! These terrible letters which might deprive a man of his liberty for the rest of

his life, without his knowing why or wherefore, were rife in those days ; and Madame de Châteauroux had many influential connections that might aid her to procure such an order. Perhaps that was the revenge she was meditating ; it would certainly be the most signal and bitter injury she could inflict upon him. As these apprehensions and suspicions got possession of him, he now began to regret exceedingly that he had come home, and, from wishing he had not come, he naturally began to question with himself how he could go. The first step was to obtain some money in the morning from De Francœur ; but how, if she forbade the agent to supply him ? and unluckily M. de Francœur was to be at the château at ten o'clock, which would afford her the earliest opportunity of doing it.

“ I'll be beforehand with her,” thought he, suddenly flinging off the bed-clothes and leaping to the floor. “ I'll be off to De

Francœur, get some money, and be out of her reach before she is up. Then I'll write to her, and propose terms of separation."

The dawn was just breaking when the Count arrived at this determination, so he dressed himself hastily, and was about leaving the room, when, in throwing on his cloak, he overthrew the glass that covered a stuffed bird, and in the attempt to save it he cut his hand severely. Having wiped the blood on the sheet, he bound up his wounded hand with a handkerchief, and then, after softly opening his room door and listening, he cautiously descended the stairs to the hall, and let himself out. His horse he could not get at without disturbing the grooms, so he resolved to borrow one of De Francœur, who would send his own after him; and being thus safely out of the house, he bent his steps towards the agent's.

Now, as we have described, M. de Francœur's couch that night was no more a bed

of down than the Count's. Sleep, that loves the cool and dewy brow and calm pulsations of a heart at ease, shunned these hot, uneasy pillows ; and as there is no place so wretched as the bed that sleep refuses to visit, the agent had also risen with the dawn, and had descended to the garden to seek the fresh morning air that his fevered skin was thirsting for, and he was slowly pacing backwards and forwards, weighing his fortune and balancing his chances, when he was surprised to behold the very person that chiefly occupied his thoughts coming towards him.

"Bless me !" he cried, for a moment forgetting his dilemma in his amazement, " what in the world has brought you out so early, Count ? Has anything happened ?"

"Why, nothing very new has happened," answered the Count, " but I am going away, and I want you to give me five thousand francs immediately."

1

“Going away!” reiterated the agent, “going so soon?”

“Yes,” replied the other, “my wife and I cannot agree, and it is much better for both parties that we should separate. I dare say I am in fault, but so is she; and whenever I come home there is inevitably a quarrel. She accuses me of extravagance too, and I dare say I have spent more money than I ought, though not so much as she says I have; but women, when they are angry, never stick to the truth. Now, you see, De Franceur, I cannot stand this any longer, and I mean to bring matters to a settlement. First of all, I want you to furnish me with an exact statement of all the sums I have drawn from you since our last winding-up of accounts, so that at least she may not have it in her power to misrepresent me; and then I shall request her to appoint some of her friends to arbitrate betwixt us, and arrange a separation. Do you not think I am right?”

"But what made you come so early? Why are you in such a hurry?" inquired De Francœur, rather pursuing his own thought than attending to the Count's question.

"Why, I did not sleep, and I wished to be away before Madame de Châteauroux can open her morning battery upon me."

"Then have you left the château without taking leave of her?"

"Certainly I have. I left it before anybody was up, and even came away without my horse, because I wanted to avoid any delay or chance of disturbing her. I believe, De Francœur, that you have no experience of this sort of thing in your *menage*; if you had, you would not be so surprised at my making this vigorous effort to escape it. By the bye, you must lend me a horse."

"You had better stay and take your breakfast here," said the agent.

"Not for the world," answered the Count;
"I mean to be ten miles off at least before

breakfast time; but tell me, De Francœur, what is the reason you did not purchase the *La Roche* property, which my wife was always so anxious to possess?"

"Why, we hadn't the money ready," returned the agent, stooping to pluck up some weeds from the gravel; "and a cousin of *La Roche's* who has long wished for the land, just stepped in and snapped it up."

"But that is exactly what I do not understand," returned the Count; "what do you mean by not having the money ready?"

"If there had not been a purchaser on the spot to anticipate us, I could soon have got it together," replied the other; "but they gave us no time."

"But why should you need time?" insisted the Count, who was not unobservant of De Francœur's confusion, and who, for the first time in his life, was sensible of a faint suspicion that the agent might not be

the mirror of integrity they had hitherto thought him. "Do you not regularly collect the rents?"

"As regularly as the tenants will pay them," answered the agent.

"But what are the arrears?" inquired the Count.

"I am sure I cannot recollect without looking at my books," said the former. "But you know last year some of the vines failed."

"If the deficit arises from arrears of rent, I should like to have it properly understood," said the Count; "because you see, De Francœur, I do not choose to have it in my wife's power to complain to the world that she is distressed by my extravagance, and that it is owing to me that she has lost La Roche. For my part, I am really very sorry the property was not bought, and I confess I cannot understand it."

"It came into the market so unex-

pectedly," replied the other; "but what is the matter with your hand?"

"A mere trifle; I cut it with some glass."

"You had better come in and let me get something to bind it up; it's bleeding."

"Nothing so good as a little cold water; I'll wash it here at the well."

"And I'll fetch you a clean handkerchief," said De Francœur, returning into the house.

"I have half a mind to stay and breakfast with him after all," thought the Count, as he turned towards the well, which was in an orchard on one side of the building. "I should like very much to make out what has become of all the money; I *will* stay too, I am determined."

In the meanwhile, De Francœur, glad to escape into the house in order to avoid so embarrassing a conversation, fetched a clean white handkerchief to bind up the wounded hand, and was returning to the orchard with

it when it occurred to him that he would also take out the five thousand francs which he happened luckily to have by him, as possibly the Count, once provided with them, might be disposed to depart immediately. So he took a key out of his pocket, and opened the door of a small apartment, where he kept his money and valuables. "Ah, Bernard, Bernard ! down, down !" said he to a fine young dog of the St. Bernard breed, who was always left by night in that room as a guard. The dog, delighted to be set free, jumped and gambolled about him whilst he unlocked his escritoir and took out the money ; and then when he saw his master turn towards the door, he bounded before him into the garden.

At this moment the Count, who had drawn up some fresh water for himself, was stooping over the bucket bathing his hand, the dog, a large and powerful creature, full of spirit and activity, sprang forward, and leaped with his

two forefeet upon his shoulders. The animal was in sport, but it was death to the man ; the sudden push caused him to lose his balance, and he went head foremost into the well.

De Francœur, who was hastening forward to prevent the dog alarming the Count, was just in time to see the accident as he turned the corner of the house ; he rushed forwards a few steps—then he stopped short—there was a voice from the deep water—then a second—and he distinguished his own name ; the dog stood looking down wistfully and whined ; then there was another cry more faint and stifled. The agent looked all around him, and up at the windows of his own house ; they were closed, and there was nobody to be seen, and he stepped a little nearer to the well. He heard the water splashing, splashing ; but presently the sound ceased—the water was still.

Then he drew nearer ; the dog looked at him, and then whined again ; De Francœur turned his eye from the aperture, but with his foot he pushed the board over it, and covered it up.

CHAPTER VI.

UPON what narrow chances our lives depend ! and not only our lives, but even sometimes our guilt or innocence ! Had it not occurred to De Francœur to take out the money as well as the handkerchief, the dog would not have been released at that critical moment, and the Count de Châteauroux would not have been drowned in the well ; and had De Francœur been a little less rapid in his movements, he would have escaped witnessing the accident, nor was it probable

that he would have discovered what had become of his visitor till it was too late to afford him any assistance. It was certainly possible that his efforts to save the Count might have been unavailing ; though the probabilities were that had he immediately let down the bucket, the victim might have extricated himself from the water ; but whilst the result of what *might* have been done was uncertain, there was one thing too certain—he had done nothing ! he had suffered the man to die whilst calling upon his name ; he had not stretched out an arm to help him, and he felt that he was guilty of his death.

It was not, however, immediately that he was conscious of the weight of this conviction. His first sensations were those of relief and security—no one could arraign him now ; no mortal lived that could prove or disprove anything he had affirmed regarding the Count's expenditure ; he was safe, safe, safe ; nobody could touch him there. What a

release it was from a daily fear ! It is true, there was a worse fear behind ; but that was veiled, and he did not see it yet.

When De Francœur had covered the well, he whistled the dog to follow him, and returned into the house, where he locked up the animal in the same room he had released him from; and then he retired to his chamber and lay down, for no one in the house knew that he had been astir thus early ; and as the whole family had gone to bed fatigued, they slept soundly and rose late. He would have been glad to sleep too, but he had murdered sleep ! and he lay restless and listening till he heard the servants moving, and then he rose and called for water to shave ; “ for,” said he to his valet, “ I have to be at the château at ten, to breakfast with the Count !”

He did not dare to look at the man as he said it ; he was afraid of what he might read in his face ; but he might safely have done so —the face was perfectly blank, and expressed

no interest whatever in the communication, neither did he make any answer—there was none to make. But De Francœur felt his silence as if it were something significant, and glanced at him to see the reason of it; for how did he know that some wakeful eye, undiscerned by him, had not witnessed that morning's tragedy?

“No, not he, at least,” thought De Francœur, as he saw the man, with an unconcerned countenance, arranging the clothes his master was about to put on.

He felt somewhat fortified by this; he had encountered one human countenance, and it expressed no suspicion. Then he inquired the hour, and what sort of morning it was, and he spoke to the servant with unusual familiarity, for he was glad to keep him in the room; the man seemed to stand betwixt him and that other that was there too—there for him, though the fleshly eye could not discern him.

As soon as he was dressed, he called for his hat and gloves, and sallied forth on his way to the château. He was rather early for his appointment; and indeed there was no need to hasten to keep it—*he would be there first*; but he was restless, and motion relieved him; besides, he did not wish to meet his wife just then, nor to look upon the faces of his young children; and instead of going the direct road, he went a far way round through the fields and meadows, and the clock struck ten as he walked up the avenue to the castle. Madelon, then a young woman, had opened the gate for him, and said she supposed he was aware that Monsieur had returned the night before, and he answered, “Yes; I am come to breakfast with him;” and walked on to the terrace; where he rang the bell.

“I hope I am not late,” said he to the servant who opened the door; “is the Count down stairs yet?”

"Oui, Monsieur," answered the man, "my lord is gone out."

"Gone out," repeated De Francoeur, "I came to breakfast with him."

"He expects you, Sir," returned the servant, "and he will doubtless return immediately."

"Good," said De Francoeur—and good it appeared to him, for here was no suspicion either, and he followed the man into the breakfast room, where the table was laid for two; the servant closed the door, and there he was alone—waiting for him that was to eat with him.

He was in that very room where hung the picture of Count Joachim, over the mantelpiece—the father of him he waited for, and who came not. Do what he would, he could not keep his eyes from the portrait; he felt himself bewitched to stare upon it, and sometimes he fancied it returned his stare and looked at him strangely. Allowing for the

difference of age and dress, it was exceedingly like the young Count; and he saw that the handsome features of Joachim were just what those of Philibert would have become with time—but he and time were divorced for ever, and those handsome young features were fixed in death.

De Francœur passed his hand across his brow, and turned to the window, which looked out upon the broad gravel walk, and the soft greensward beyond. There were a few sheep with very white rich fleeces, and two extremely handsome cows, selected for their beauty, and placed there for the gratification of the Countess. It was a calm and lovely scene; the trees that dotted the turf here and there, and the innocent animals living their pure life—and it brought a choking sensation into the beholder's throat that made him suddenly turn away from the sight of it. Presently the servant entered, under pretence of arranging something on the table, in order that

he might have the opportunity of communicating that he had been looking for the Count everywhere, but could not find him. Having said this, he went out again, and De Francœur stayed on for another half hour.

By this time the Countess had risen ; and having been told by Clarice that M. de Francœur had been waiting below for a considerable time to breakfast with Monsieur, who had invited him to be there at ten, she desired that the great bell should be rung, as no doubt the Count was walking in the grounds and had forgotten the appointment. So they rung the bell which brought up Madelon to ask what had happened.

But still the Count came not, neither had she seen him pass the gate ; wherever he was, however, he must be on foot, and therefore at no great distance, for on inquiry it was ascertained that his horse was in the stable. The Countess now sent Clarice to

M. de Francœur to recommend him to take his breakfast and wait no longer ; so he followed her advice and went away. When he reached home he found his wife in great spirits, and very talkative about the preceding evening's amusement, and he tried to listen to her ; but do what he would, his thoughts would wander away to that dismal well in the orchard. Then, there was the dog ; he could not keep the animal shut up in a room, and he was somehow afraid that if he let him out, he would bound away to that fatal spot and draw attention to it. The best thing he could do was to mount his horse and take a ride, and let the dog go with him.

As he had expected, the animal ran to the well the moment he was outside the door ; but when he saw his master cantering off, he left it and sprang after him. De Francœur, though he was fond of the dog, would now have been very glad to get rid of him ; but it was difficult to lose a large animal like that

whose owner was well known, and it being a gift of Madame de Francœur's brother, he could not with propriety part with him. For a few days, the inconvenience continued ; the dog insisted on remembering what his master wished to forget ; but by the end of a week he had forgotten too, and left off running to the spot. At the same time, M. de Francœur closed up the well, under pretence that it was too near the garden, and dangerous for his young children, who were now beginning to run about alone, and he opened one in another situation.

Meantime, the mystery of the Count's disappearance was making a great sensation amongst the servants and retainers of the family, although the Countess herself evinced neither alarm nor curiosity on the subject. The fact was, she entertained no suspicion whatever of any ill having befallen her husband, nor did any such notion occur to her till the rumours that were circulating abroad

were brought home by her own friends. For her part, she concluded that he had never intended to remain with her many days, and the quarrel that succeeded his arrival was quite enough, in her opinion, to account for his sudden departure. Besides, the threat she had used was very likely to have added spurs to his speed. It had been indeed but a mere vague menace uttered in a passion; but she comprehended that he might have understood it as implying a deliberate design. Her pride and the consciousness of her innocence led her to treat the imputation with contempt, and she had scorned to take any steps in her own justification, till she was seized by the authorities.

The first thing that led her to apprehend the possibility that some mischief had occurred, was the flight of her two servants—a proceeding she was quite at a loss to comprehend, and which was itself, in the extremely anomalous state of French judicature, very fatal

to her case ; for as there was no robbery, nor any conceivable reason to be assigned that would have induced Clarice and Morel to take the Count's life themselves, it was concluded that they had been her accessories, or at least the witnesses of her crime, and it was thus that the disposal of his body was accounted for. This suspicion was strengthened by the fact of all the servants testifying that when they themselves retired to bed, these two people went up stairs to attend on their master and mistress. Moreover, Clarice and Morel alone slept on the same gallery as the Count and Countess ; all the rest of the establishment lodged in another part of the building, and quite out of hearing of anything that might have happened.

While all this was going on, M. de Francœur kept as much as possible out of the way. He took the opportunity of going to Paris to transact some business he had on hand there, and he professed his opinion that the fuss

that was making about the Count was absurd, and that he would doubtless appear by-and-by to laugh at them. But although affecting to treat the matter thus lightly, he lived in anguish lest all these inquiries should lead to a discovery of where the body was ; in which case he would almost inevitably fall under the suspicion of being the assassin. But when he heard of the Countess's danger, his situation became much worse. He shrank with horror from the idea of allowing her to suffer for a crime of which he knew her to be innocent, when a word of his could vindicate and save her. How gladly he would have spoken the word if he had dared, and how he regretted that he had not made known the accident the moment he witnessed it, instead of entailing by his silence a life of constant terror on himself, and all this injustice and misery on others !

But still the fear that then closed his lips closed them still ; and, no doubt, the longer

the communication was deferred, the more certain it was to bring down destruction on himself. So he delayed and delayed till the Countess's condemnation, and then he felt he must save her, though it was at the expense of his own life and honour. He wrote a statement of the case, omitting, however, to confess his dishonest appropriations of the money intrusted to him, but narrating all the circumstances of the accident as he had witnessed them, dilating upon his own confusion and terror, and attributing his silence to the true motives, namely, as there was no witness but himself, that he might be suspected of the murder, and the difficulty he had placed himself in by not making known the circumstances at first. He made his will and set his affairs in order ; and then, having signed and sealed his confession, and embraced his wife and children on the pretence of a journey to Paris, he bade adieu to his home, as he believed, for ever, and started for

Arles, in order to deliver his letter himself at the door of the prefecture ; after which, in order to avoid the ignominy and misery that awaited him if he lived, he had provided himself with a sure and speedy means of death.

The love of life, and the vague hope that the Countess might escape, and so deliver him from this fearful extremity, had induced him to defer this step to the latest moment, and it was now late in the evening of the day preceding that fixed for her execution that he entered the city on foot, for he sought to avoid notice, and he did not wish to be encumbered with a horse. There are few people who are doing anything, although it be an indifferent thing, consciously for the *last* time, who are not sensible of a painful feeling of regret ; and there was not a step taken by M. de Francœur on that evening over the ground so often trod in happier circumstances, nor an object on which his eye

fell, that did not bring a pang to his heart, with the bitterness of self-reproach to sharpen its sting. How happy he might have been had he but have observed the simple rule of honesty ! By how many blessings was he surrounded ! Everything that was required to make life happy he possessed ; but he had forfeited all by his unholy greediness for more, and the beloved family whose aggrandizement he had sought would find the fortune he left them tainted with suspicion and disgrace.

Oppressed with these overwhelming reflections, he paced through the street of Arles, unnoticed and unknown, till he reached the one where the prefect resided. As he approached the Hotel de Ville, and was about to lay his hand upon the bell, the consciousness that that paper once delivered, the step was irrevocable, and the vague apprehension that he might be pursued and overtaken before he had reached the lonely spot

he had fixed upon for the closing scene of his sad drama, caused him to hesitate and draw back a moment, more especially as the clatter of a horse's feet denoted that some one was approaching; so he crossed over to the other side just as the animal reached the gate, but he was near enough to distinguish that the rider was a government courier.

"See," said a pastrycook who was standing at the door of his shop with his apron on, "that's a king's courier—what will you bet it is not a pardon, or a reprieve for the Countess?"

"I had rather bet with you than against you," replied his companion; "I never expected, for my part, to see the sentence put into execution. Bah! man, a Countess! They do not cut off the heads of such high game if they can help it."

"It will be a terrible disappointment to the populace," observed the *pâtissier*; "I shouldn't wonder if there was an *émeute*."

“If the despatch regards the Countess, we shall soon know it,” observed the other, “because the prefect will carry the news to the prison himself.”

So thought De Francœur, who, with burning ears, had been listening to this dialogue. If it were as these men imagined, he was saved; he would have confessed and died to rescue the Countess from death, because he could not contemplate the horror of living with her blood upon his soul; but he was not equal to making so great a sacrifice to vindicate her fame; so that the bearer of that despatch, supposing it to concern Madame de Châteauroux, was the herald of life or death to him. It may be judged, therefore, with what eager interest he observed the movements that ensued at the gate of the Hotel de Ville.

Having rung the bell, the man alighted, and throwing the rein to the porter, who admitted him, he entered the court. The

horse was led in too, and the gate closed. A quarter of an hour now elapsed without any indication of what was going on within; during which interval the people of the neighbourhood were gathering together on the spot, whilst the news spread from mouth to mouth that a royal pardon had arrived for the Countess. A few who, for some reason or other, were attached to her party, rejoiced at her prospect of escape; but the mass of the people, disappointed at losing the spectacle they had hoped to enjoy, vented their vexation in strong expressions of indignation at the favouritism shown to the rich. M. de Francœur stood silently amongst them with his hat drawn over his brow and his eyes fixed upon the gate, which at length opened, and exhibited the prefect already mounted, who rode forth accompanied by the courier, and followed by the mob. De Francœur fell into the throng, and followed too to the door of the prison, where, now feeling pretty

secure that the conjectures of the people were well-founded, he made an effort to disengage himself from the crowd and advance, intending to address the prefect ; but before he could push his way through, the great man had entered, and the door was closed. He paused, hesitating what to do betwixt his anxiety to learn the truth, and his dislike to enter those heavy gates, which open so easily on one side and so hardly on the other ; and before he could summon courage to ring the bell, the courier came out alone.

“ What is it ? What’s the news ? Is the Countess pardoned ? ” cried the people, pressing round him.

“ What’s that to you ? ” said the man ,
“ go about your business ! Disperse, *canaille* ! ”

But the *canaille* did not disperse ; on the contrary, their numbers kept increasing every moment ; and as it was in the nature of such an assemblage to get riotous and make a

noise about something, the mob, finding they could obtain no satisfaction of their curiosity, began to batter at the gates, and utter loud murmurs against the court for pardoning all manner of crimes to rich people, and hanging up poor ones for nothing at all. As one fortified another, and their increasing numbers gave them courage, the disturbance was growing louder and louder every minute, when again the gates opened, and the prefect and the jailors were seen on the other side. Silence instantly ensued, but there was a general rush forwards as if they would have entered the court. The prefect held up his hand.

“My friends,” said he, with a loud voice, “disperse! It is time that all good citizens were in their own homes. The Countess de Châteauroux has been falsely accused. Her brother, M. de la Rive, has found her husband, who is now on the road. The Count de Châteauroux will be here to-morrow morning.”

An English mob would have given three cheers for the Countess; the French one turned away in silence from the gate, and it was a minute or two before they recovered their surprise sufficiently to comment on the unexpected intelligence. When they did, most of them discovered that they "had always thought so," and remarked severely on the imperfect jurisprudence that was constantly subjecting people to death for crimes that had not been committed at all. Those who had nothing particular to prevent them, resolved to be at the prison the next day betimes, in order to witness the arrival of the Count and the lady's liberation; and thus terminated the grand event of the evening as far as the public were concerned.

But there was one amongst that throng on whose ears the words of the prefect sounded strangely! M. de Châteauroux was found! He that was dead—that had lain for months at the bottom of that deep well—would be

at Arles to-morrow ! How could that be ? It could not be the real Count de Châteauroux that was coming—that was impossible ! Yet the prefect had said so ; and M. de la Rive could not be deceived in the identity of his brother-in-law ; his trying to deceive the authorities would be too vain an attempt to be thought of for a moment. Then wild and fantastic thoughts invaded his brain. Could the Count have escaped from the well ? The notion seemed absurd ; but every now and then impossible adventures and miraculous escapes were heard of, that nobody could have believed till they had actually occurred. If this were the case, there was nothing left for him but to fulfil the intention with which he had left home that evening ; but it could not be ; if anything was certain on earth, the Count de Châteauroux was dead, and no mortal knew where the body lay but himself.

Distracted by these thoughts, and feeling

himself quite unable to determine whether he should live and face the future, or die and escape the sufferings it might have in store for him, he resolved to make a bold step, and go at once to the prison for the purpose of ascertaining what was really known regarding the Count's fate. He had but to ring; his name and connexion with the heroine of the drama were his passport to instant admittance, and he was met by the congratulations of all the officials. The prefect shook hands with him, and offered to conduct him to the injured lady.

"But is it certain?" inquired De Francœur; "is the Count de Châteauroux really found?"

"Not a shadow of doubt of it;" returned the prefect. "He was found in Paris in very bad health, a long and severe illness having brought him to the brink of the grave, whilst it prevented his hearing of the strange suspicions his disappearance had given rise to."

“And he will be here to-morrow?”

“He would have been here to-night, were it not that his infirm health obliges them to rest at Nimes, and so the prefect of Nimes sent forward the courier to announce their approach. But come, you must see the Countess ; her brother, M. Eugène, and several of her friends are with her.”

“Excuse me,” returned De Francœur ; “I must hasten home to inform my wife of this good news ; I cannot allow her to remain ignorant of what will give her so much pleasure. Present my congratulations to the Countess.”

De Francœur, however, did not go home ; these assurances of the prefect had only served to make perplexity more perplexed, and the agitation of his mind forbade repose to his body. So he wandered forth to the outskirts of the town till morning, and then, muffling his face between his hat and handkerchief, he re-entered the gates and joined the throng that was already collected in front

of the prison. He was there when the travellers arrived, and as they alighted from the carriage, he saw what appeared to him the pale and shrunken features, and the attenuated form of the Count de Châteauroux. His intellect said, *No ; it is impossible !* but his eyes responded, *Yes, it is he.*

Terrified and confounded, he fled from the city, and made the best of his way to Paris, there to await the disclosures he expected to follow. But none ensued ; his wife wrote to him that the Count had been found, that the lady was liberated, and that the happy pair were living together in the greatest harmony.

“So we hear, at least,” she added, “for they are not at Châteauroux, but are residing at Rémy, where they pass their days in great retirement. Some foolish people refuse to believe it is really the Count, and declare it is some impostor whom M. de la Rive has substituted to save his sister’s life. Can

anything be so absurd ? I had a letter from the Countess yesterday. She inquires where you are, and begs, with her best regards, that you will pay them a visit as soon as you return."

Upon this De Francœur immediately retraced his steps to Beaulieu, where a pressing invitation to Rémy awaited him. Thither he proceeded, and having the satisfaction of finding himself extremely well received, after a week's visit to the happy pair, he repaired to his own home and resumed his former mode of life.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM the details of our last chapter it will not be difficult to comprehend, first, the surprise and agitation of De Francœur at the appearance of the old gentleman ; and next his obstinate incredulity with respect to his being the person he claimed to be ; but it was not an easy matter for him to bring the rest of the world over to his conviction, or to communicate the foundations on which he rested it. He had countenanced and accredited the first imposture for the sake of the

Countess and his own safety, but these motives no longer existed ; she was dead, and time had placed him, as he considered, beyond danger, whilst on the other hand, he had every motive for resisting the present aggression. Not only was he attached to the interest of the De la Rive family, but the projected alliance gave him a personal one in the property, and it was not to be expected that he would tamely allow this stranger to step in "and push them from their stools ;" yet while M. Eugène was so infatuated as to believe in him, how was he to be unseated ?

Nobody had discovered who the pretender was, nor whence he came. M. de la Rive had maintained an absolute silence with regard to him, and had never, as far as was known, made a single confidant. It was at one time hoped that the priest with whom Madame de Châteauroux had a long conference before her death, might be able to

throw some light on the mystery, and as during the law-suit it was considered that he might justifiably disclose the secret, if he knew it, he was sought out and examined. But he had nothing to tell. Though very old, he was perfectly capable of understanding what was required of him, and the Countess and M. Adolphe being dead, he had no objection to communicate what he knew. He said the lady had admitted in her confession, that the man her brother had produced was not the Count, though she had not given any indication of who he really was ; but at the same time, with her dying breath, she had declared to him her entire innocence of the crime imputed to her. She lamented the offence she had given to her husband ; and said, that after they had parted on that fatal night, she had become so conscious of her error, that she had actually risen and gone to the door of his room with the intention of seeking a reconciliation ; but that

her pride having got the better of her good resolution, she had returned to her own chamber without doing it—an error she had, during the latter years of her life, continually besought God to forgive her.

Thus the fact of the imposition was established ; but on the present occasion, this success was of less value than might have been expected ; because the old gentleman himself asserted the same thing. Whilst he assumed to be the real Count de Châteauroux, he declared that he had never returned since his first departure on the night after the quarrel. Then the public were for him decidedly. They urged that there was no reasonable grounds whatever for concluding that the Count was dead ; and that it was utterly impossible that anybody could be so like the portrait of the old Count but his own son ; and as for M. Eugène, no arguments that De Francœur could use seemed to make the least impression on him.

The more he talked to him, he said, the more firmly he was convinced that there was no deception.

“ You have been deceived once, De Francœur, and that makes you suspicious ; but be assured you are mistaken ; who the pretender was I know not ; but this is the Count de Châteauroux, I am certain.”

“ Impossible !” exclaimed De Francœur.

“ But why impossible ? We have no proof whatever that he is dead ; and if alive, he was pretty sure to return sooner or later.”

“ It is not always easy to prove a death,” answered the agent.

“ Then, in the absence of such proof, I do not see what we can do but admit the pretensions of this gentleman ; whose person certainly furnishes very remarkable testimony in his favour.”

“ I am really suprised, sir,” responded the agent, “ that you should be so willing to give

up a fine estate, and allow yourself to be gulled by a scoundrel!"

"It is very easy talking, De Francœur," replied M. Eugène, "but what can I do? I am no more willing to give up an estate than other people are—I pretend to no such disinterestedness. Furnish me with adequate proof that the Count de Châteauroux is dead, and you shall soon see the measure of my self-denial."

"Ah!" thought De Francœur, as he walked away; "but how am I to do that without criminating myself?" It was certainly no easy matter.

It is not to be supposed that during all these years, M. de Francœur's mind, with that heavy secret weighing upon it, had been very comfortable; far from it. For a considerable time the fear of detection had haunted him day and night. Of late years, that apprehension had subsided; but conscience was not silent; and if he had escaped

detection on the score of his embezzlements, he had purchased his immunity very dearly. Besides, all the strange events that had arisen out of the Countess's danger had kept him in continual hot water ; and even now, after the lapse of so long a period, he was not free from the persecution !

He was like a man haunted by the spectre of one he had murdered. Thirty years before he had seen M. de Châteauroux fall into the well—he was dead—and yet, here he was returned upon his hands again ; and how to lay the ghost he could not tell. The necessity for doing this, however, became doubly urgent, when one morning the old gentleman sent him a summons to appear at the château on a certain day to render an exact account of his stewardship since the time he—that is to say the Count—had quitted his home. As Madame de Châteauroux had never lost confidence in him, she had neither been in the habit of inspecting his books nor inves-

tigating his statements. For years before her death he had carried everything as he liked, and now, although he had no plea for refusing this demand, he was aware that he could not comply with it without entailing the risk of a ruinous exposure.

What was to be done? Play for a great game—all or nothing? If his books were laid open, he would be deserted, and there was no telling what suspicions might be awakened by the discovery of his dishonesty. But if, without betraying that, the Count's death could be proved, the pretender would be at once unseated, and losing all credit, be obliged to retire with ignominy; whilst he hoped that the advantages accruing to M. de la Rive would indispose him to making too curious inquiry into an affair that happened so long ago. Besides, M. Eugène was his most intimate friend; and he trusted much in his unwillingness either to harm him or even suspect him of evil.

Having come to this resolution, without making any demur, he appointed a day for producing his accounts ; expressing himself perfectly willing to do it, although protesting against the authority that demanded the statement ; at the same time, he begged permission of both M. Eugène and the Count to make some alteration in his old farm at Beaulieu, where, by the bye, he no longer resided, having erected a handsome new house on another part of his property, which was now very considerable ; and his request being granted, he took care that the job should be put in hand without delay.

The plan proposed, however, involved one inconvenience, which was that the well, the *new well*, as it was called in contradistinction to the one into which the Count had fallen, must be filled up and built over. The architect pointed out this, and there was a consultation held as to the best site for opening another. To this consultation M.

Eugène was a party ; as in this, as well as in all his other proceedings, the agent ostentatiously treated him as the real owner of the estate. This naturally led him to inquire why they had filled up the old one ; and De Francœur answered that one of the reasons was, that the water had become so offensive that they could not use it.

“But that must have been from some accidental cause,” observed De la Rive. “The water of that well was not very abundant, but it was always excellent. Didn’t you send anybody down to see what was wrong?”

“I’m sure I forget, it is so long ago,” replied the agent. “But I rather think old Gilles, who was alive then, did go down himself, and said that he could not discover any cause, except that there was very little water—it was an extremely dry season, I remember. But the truth is, I did not spend much trouble about it, because at that time I had a

notion of taking that part of the ground into my garden, and I did not want to have a well so near the house on account of my young children."

"But now it would be no inconvenience to you," said De la Rive; "and it would be much less expensive than digging a new well—a little reparation would possibly set it all right. I recommend you to send somebody down to examine it."

De Franceur made a few objections, but yielded to the opinion of M. Eugène. "We'll send to Arles for Lemoine," said he; "he understands these matters better than anybody, and perhaps you will meet him and hear what he says."

M. de la Rive did not seem to think his own attendance necessary; but as the agent wished it, he promised to ride over.

This was an anxious crisis for De Franceur; but he carried it off wonderfully, going about with a thoroughly disengaged

air; calling upon his acquaintance, talking gaily of his improvements on the farm, and jesting freely on the pretender and his claims. The day before Lemoine was to descend the well, he actually had a party to dinner; walked with them over the grounds—showed them the new well and the old one, and discussed with them the relative advantages of re-opening the latter, or digging a third.

All this excited no attention at the time, it seemed the most natural thing in the world; but it was remembered afterwards by M. de la Rive and the Count, when they compared their recollections, and discussed his character.

Well, the eventful morning arrived. De Francœur, as may be imagined, had never closed his eyes during the night—but he bathed his face with cold water, and endeavoured to look as fresh and cheerful as he could—indeed, it was subsequently thought that he had rather over-acted his part in this

latter respect—he had been too facetious ; and Lemoine, who had of late years found him a reserved and silent man, was particularly struck with this deviation from his usual demeanour.

When M. Eugène rode up to the gate, the agent was not sorry to see him accompanied by the lord of the château ; who, for some reason or another of his own, had never testified any indignation at De Francœur's insulting incredulity, nor taken offence at his refusing to acknowledge him. He had contented himself with quietly asserting his rights and assuming possession of the estate—rights which it was nobody's business to dispute, as long as the next heir raised no objections. He came now, as lord of the soil, to inspect the plans for the proposed improvements.

Whilst Lemoine was making some precautions to prevent accident from foul air and so forth, the gentlemen walked over the farm ; with every inch of which the Count,

or pseudo-Count, whichever he was, showed himself intimately acquainted. His familiarity with the land might have deceived anybody but M. de Francœur; and M. Eugène evidently deferred to him as the owner of the property. At length, the agent proposed to return and see what Lemoine was doing. When they arrived at the well, he had just descended with lights, and De Francœur, stooping over, called out to know if there were any water in it.

"Not a drop—it's as dry as my hand," cried Lemoine.

"Doubtless it dried up when you opened the other well so near it," said M. Eugène—"the new one would draw off all the water."

"Send down a basket," cried Lemoine.

"He has found a treasure, I hope!" said De Francœur; but as he spoke, his self-command failed him—his cheek grew pale, and his lip quivered. However, to hide his

confusion, he busied himself with lowering the basket.

Lemoine's request had awakened curiosity, and all the assistants drew round the aperture to watch for what was to come. The signal being given, the basket was drawn up first. It appeared to be filled with a heap of dirt. One of the labourers put in his hand and took up something.

"What's that?" said M. de la Rive.

"I think it's a bone," said the man. It *was* a bone, perfectly black and much decayed.

"Some dog, or sheep, or something, has fallen into the well—probably it was that that spoilt the water," observed M. de la Rive.

Whilst this conversation was going on, De Francœur was leaning over the aperture, superintending the drawing up of the engineer—but there was an eye upon his face that watched every turn of feature or change of colour with scrutinising curiosity.

“What is this you’ve sent up?” inquired M Eugène, as Lemoine set his foot on *terra firma*.

“I don’t exactly know yet,” replied the engineer, stepping towards the basket.

“Is there any leak, or falling in, anywhere?” asked De Francoeur, affecting to have no interest in its contents.

“None whatever that I can see,” replied Lemoine; “a few bricks out here and there, that’s all. Was anybody ever missing in these parts?” said he, turning out of the basket; “for if I’m not much mistaken somebody has been lost in this well. Here are the remains of clothes; and I suspect these are human bones.”

“Here is a watch, too,” said one of the men, taking up what at first appeared clay, till the outer covering of dirt was cleared away.

“That may have been dropped in,” said M. Eugène.

“Disturb nothing more,” said the lord of the château, cutting short the discussion with authority. “Place it all in the basket again ; bring out a cart, and it shall accompany me home.”

When De Francœur entered upon this bold enterprise—this neck-or-nothing expedient—he had overrated his own powers of dissimulation ; and when the crisis arrived, they utterly failed him. Indeed, it was too severe a trial for any man’s nerves ; and what exceedingly added to his confusion, was the demeanour of the Count from the moment the basket was drawn up. There was something in that curious, inquiring eye, following his every look and gesture, that put to flight all his self-possession, and confounded all his tactics. That eye seemed to read his soul ; and his own fell before its penetrating glance convicted and abashed.

“Come, De la Rive, let us be gone,” said the Count ; “and you, Lemoine, will take

charge of the basket and accompany us."

M. Eugène acquiesced in silence ; whilst M. de Francœur, making an effort to recover himself, asked them to go into the house and take some refreshment, but they declined ; and he walked beside them to the gate, where their horses and the cart awaited them.

"We will ride gently, and you will keep near us with the basket," said the Count to Lemoine in a low voice. "I must not lose sight of it."

As the two gentlemen rode away, they silently touched their hats to the agent, who stood bareheaded on the footway. "I'll be back," said Lemoine, who understood nothing of what was going on, "as soon as I have delivered the basket at the château, and tell you what I advise about the water."

"I am lost !" said the agent, as he turned from the gate. "Fool, fool, that I was to attempt it. I have pulled down the roof

upon my own head, and must perish beneath the ruins !”

“Didn’t I tell you so ?” said the Count to M. Eugène ; “I was certain that sooner or later he would betray himself.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“AND now,” said M. de la Rive, as they sipped their wine on the evening of the day that had betrayed M. de Francœur’s secret, “fulfil your promise to tell me your story. I cannot imagine how you came to suspect what nobody else ever dreamt of.”

“I will,” said the Count, “but I must begin with a sketch of my own history.

“The earliest thing I can recal, was living with my mother, then a very pretty young woman, in a square opposite to a large

church, and being visited by a gentleman, whom I called father. He was a soldier; and the men who came to the house with messages from him, used to call him *Le Commandant*. I conclude he was commander of the garrison. Be that as it may, he was evidently a person in authority. He seemed very fond of me, and always told me I should be a soldier and an officer; and already in my childhood I began to sigh for the fine clothes and fine horses I saw in the possession of my father. I can recal those circumstances and feelings perfectly, although I do not think I could be more than four, or at the most five, years of age, when I understood that my father had lost some near relative, and was about to quit us, and that I and my mother were shortly to follow him.

“He departed; and my mother busied herself in preparing a quantity of clothes, some of which were black. I remember

being delighted when I was put into mourning myself.

“ After an interval of, I fancy, some weeks, I was placed on a horse in front of a servant, and with my mother, and a girl called Lucile, who had the care of me, we started on a journey. My recollections of this journey are very vague ; but I think we must have travelled several days, when one night I was awakened out of my sleep by a great noise and the light of numerous torches ; and on opening my eyes, I perceived two or three men in the room with drawn swords, and my mother, in whose bed I slept, on the floor, in an attitude of supplication. She was on her knees, and holding up her hands, as if entreating the assassins to spare her. At this sight, I gave vent to my terror in as loud a cry as my small lungs could emit, by which means, I fancy, I first betrayed my presence to the troop, for I remember one of them immediately rushed to

the bed, and lifting me up in his arms, was about to thrust his sword into my side, when my mother, forgetting her own danger, flew to my rescue ; and so sudden were her movements, that she had snatched me from the men, and had darted out of the open door with me in her arms, before they could stop her.

“Of what followed I have a very obscure recollection. I remember that the whole town was in a violent commotion ; that I saw soldiers and naked swords in every direction, and people flying as if for their lives ; the cries and screams I can never forget.

“Somehow, in this confusion, I cannot tell by what means, I was separated from my mother. I think a man took me from her arms, and was going to kill me, when another interfered and prevented him. At all events, I was cut by a sabre on the shoulder, for I have the mark of it still.

“From that hour to this, I never saw my

mother again ; and for many years, I supposed she had been killed in that fray. I have since made out, from a comparison of dates, that it must have been the fatal night of St. Bartholomew, and how she escaped I cannot tell. For my own part, a number of events are mixed up in such confusion in my memory, that I have very little idea of anything, till I found myself following a troop of soldiers, with a drum tied to my back, which I was regularly taught to beat. In this way I went about the country for a few years, till at length, for some reason or other, my services being no longer required, I was discharged, and a good-natured serjeant procured me a situation as errand-boy with a relation of his own, who kept a hair-dresser's shop in the Faubourg St. Honoré. My master taught me his trade ; and in process of time I grew so expert, that I was able to set up for myself ; and by degrees became the most fashionable artist in

my line in the city. I assure you," said the old gentleman, quietly smiling, and tapping his snuff-box, "I have dressed the perruques of some of the greatest men of the age.

"Well, I was living contentedly enough, and was making a very good living of it, when I was one day sent for to wait on a gentleman at the Croix d'Or. Though I carried my tools in my pocket, I always made a point of appearing in the street well dressed; and the servant of the inn, who did not know me, I fancy, took me for a gentleman; so that I was shown into the saloon instead of the bed-chamber, and my client was informed a visitor was waiting to see him.

"This client was your brother, M. Adolphe de la Rive. You may judge of my amazement, when on entering the room, he first stood for a moment as if transfixed by amazement; and then rushing towards me and throwing himself into my arms, he burst

into tears of joy, and poured forth a torrent of mingled congratulations and reproaches that confounded me. The expression of his feelings was so vivid, that for some moments I could not get in a word; but as soon as his excitement was somewhat subdued and he began to interrogate me, I discovered that he was mistaking me for some connexion of his family whom he had been anxiously seeking, and had despaired of finding. But even then, although I assured him of his error, it was with much difficulty I convinced him of it, especially as I could not deny that I was called Philibert; so extraordinary a resemblance he declared he had never beheld, except in the case of twins, whilst the coincidence of name rendered the circumstance still more inexplicable.

“ When, however, I had satisfied him that what I asserted was true, and that, instead of being the Count de Châteauroux, I was only a hair-dresser, he, after some inquiries into

my character and situation, sent for me again; and told me that I had it in my power to do him a great service, and save the life of a most worthy lady, if, for a short time, I would consent to personate the gentleman he had taken me for.

“At first I refused positively; not that I wanted ambition or a taste for being *grand seigneur*; on the contrary, I should have been very glad to have been in reality the Count de Châteauroux or any other Count; but I had a conscience, and I recoiled from the idea of the fraud; besides which, I was by no means insensible to the danger I should incur if I were found out—a catastrophe I thought unavoidable.

“With respect to the danger, your brother promised to hold me harmless, and to dismiss me after a certain period undamaged in person or character; and as regarded my conscientious scruples, he took great pains to convince me, that whilst I should be doing

him and his family a considerable service, I injured nobody. He moreover, promised that if I would listen to his entreaties, I should not only receive a very handsome reward, but that he would take care of my fortunes for the rest of my life—this, he observed, being but common justice, since so long an absence from Paris might possibly ruin my prospects in my present line of business.

“Well, at length, I consented ; and as there was no time to lose, we started for the south ; it being stipulated, both on his side and mine, that we were to take nobody into our confidence, except his sister. For all the rest of the world, even his own family, I was to be the real, *bond fide* Count de Châteauroux ; if we do not adhere scrictly to this precaution, he said, the truth will be sure to ooze out in one direction or another.

For myself, I shut up my shop, and said I was going into the country for a little while ;

and as I had no relations, it was nobody's business to inquire what was become of me.

“As we travelled along the road, your brother, whilst he treated me as if I were really the person whose character I was about to assume, gave me such information and instructions as he thought necessary to enable me to support my part ; and he always declared he had found me a very apt scholar, and that I fully justified the appellation by which I was known in Paris as *The Gentleman Barber*.

“Well, everything went on prosperously enough, till we drew near the end of our journey, and then my courage failed me. I told M. de la Rive, that I was certain I should be detected and exposed ; that he would share the disgrace and infamy of the imposture, and be not only unable to protect me, but himself ; and I entreated him to let

me return and resume my old trade in the Faubourg St. Honoré. But he would not hear of it, though it cost him a great deal of argument, and indeed supplication, to overcome my fears, and win me back to his purpose ; and as I expressed a conviction that the confusion of my countenance would betray me, it was agreed between us that I should bleed myself copiously on the morning we were to arrive at Arles—an operation I was very well able to perform for myself, as I had often done it for others. This would give me an appearance of sickness, and by entitling me to muffle my person, render discovery more difficult.

“ What followed you know—the cheers of the mob, the congratulations of the governor, and other authorities, and the reception given to me by your sister. M. de la Rive had not dared to write the truth to her—and at my first introduction she was entirely deceived.

It was not till we were in the carriage on our way to the chateau, that he ventured to inform her of the real state of the case.

“I was now installed as the Count de Châteauroux ; and I fancy acted my part tolerably well. Your sister and I lived very peaceably together—though we seldom met except at table, or when we drove through the town occasionally to show ourselves, or to repay or receive visits. We conversed with few people, considering that our safety depended much on retirement.

“In spite of my good acting, I was conscious that many persons doubted my identity, especially the servants, who must necessarily be very difficult to deceive under such circumstances ; and I was therefore not the least surprised that De Francœur, who resolutely supported me in public, gave me clearly to understand, when we were alone, that he was fully aware of the substitution.

At first, I imagined him to be entirely actuated by his desire to serve the Countess ; but gradually some doubts arose in my mind with respect to the integrity of his motives. The equivocal position in which I appeared threw him off his guard, and as he took me for an adventurer, he was indifferent to my esteem. For the purpose of maintaining my character, it was necessary that I should occasionally sign papers and transact business with him ; and inexperienced as I was, I fancied I could discern that he was not altogether the disinterested, honest agent that Madame de Châteauroux represented him to me. I even ventured to give her some hints of my opinion ; but, of course, it was hardly to be expected that she would listen to the representations of a person in so equivocal a situation as I was, against a man she had confided in for years. Seeing, therefore, that I did myself harm, and her no good, I

ferbore. My own opinion, however, was rather confirmed than otherwise, by continued observation.

“I suspected that he was in some degree making a tool of me ; and I was often struck by the certainty with which he pronounced on the Count’s death ; he always spoke of him as actually dead ; there was never an *if* in the case ; at least when he was alone with me and off his guard. In the presence of others he was more cautious ; and even with me, after I had once turned suddenly towards him, and inquired how he could be so well assured of a fact that appeared buried in mystery, he changed his tone and spoke of the matter, if at all, hypothetically. Certain strange suspicions did even then occasionally glance across my mind, but they were too vague to justify me in communicating them. Besides, I was not in a situation to become an accuser ; and I felt that I should probably

bring myself and perhaps the Countess and her brother into trouble by my interference, and do no good to anybody.

“However, before I quitted the château finally, I did venture to address a few lines to your brother, recommending M. de Francœur to his surveillance. How he was affected by them, I do not know, as he made no response to that part of my letter.

“I can hardly say whether it was with satisfaction, or the contrary, I learnt at the end of eighteen months that the purpose of the substitution being answered, I was at liberty to depart when I pleased. I was not dismissed, observe; I was only told that I was free, that a certain sum of money would be lodged in Paris for my use, and that a situation had been procured for me in a merchant’s house, which would enable me to rise to affluence and an agreeable position in society, if I conducted myself prudently—

a point on which your brother and sister were pleased to intimate that they entertained no doubt.

“I confess the life I led was in some respects too agreeable to be resigned without regret; but, on the other hand, it was too quiet and inactive to be quite satisfactory to a young man; and my mind had, besides, never become reconciled to the idea of the imposition I was practising. So I resigned my Countship with a good grace; and after privately taking leave of the Countess, I departed in the middle of the night, as the mode most consistent with my assumed character, and without giving any notice of my intention to the servants, carrying with me the warmest assurances of good-will on the part of your brother and sister.

“The promises they made me were amply fulfilled. I had been recommended to the Messrs. Colard as a distant connection of your family. I found, beyond my hopes,

that a junior partnership in the house had been purchased for me ; and it would have been my own fault if I had not prospered.

“ I was not guilty of this treason to myself, or of ingratitude to my benefactors ; I rose rapidly, married well, and, to make a short history of myself, I am now a rich man.”

“ But still,” said M. Adolphe, “ I am in the dark with respect to the motives of your late sudden appearance here, and the source of your augmented suspicions of the agent.”

“ That is the part of my story I am now coming to,” returned the old gentleman. “ About six years ago, business took me to Normandy ; and when in the neighbourhood, I thought I should like to take a peep at the antique city of Rouen, of which I had heard so much. I must tell you, that although I remembered the few circumstances of my infancy I have related to you, I had not the smallest idea of the name of my birthplace,

or of the part of France in which it was situated ; but I had no sooner set my foot in the Cathedral Square of Rouen, than the whole scene seemed to me like a vision of the past—I recalled the very individual houses, and felt sure I could point out the one in which I had lived with my mother. I cannot find words to express the sensations this recognition awakened in me ; but having discovered thus much, you may easily conceive my anxiety to learn more ; and from the circumstance of my father being called *Le Commandant*, my inquiries were greatly facilitated. My own age fixed the date of the year, or nearly so, and I had no difficulty in ascertaining that the commandant of the garrison stationed at Rouen at that period was the Count Joachim de Châteauroux.”

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

ON hearing the unexpected announcement with which we closed our last chapter, M. Eugène very naturally looked somewhat surprised, and not a little disconcerted, and we are afraid a slight suspicion crossed his mind that this story might possibly be part of a plot of the pretender's to possess himself of the estate and title by hereditary right ; at all events, he was about to remind him that the death of the Countess's husband being now established, the property necessarily re-

verted to her family and not to his, when the old gentleman, who probably read his thoughts in his countenance, rendered this warning needless.

“Do not suppose,” said he, “I am come here to lay claim to any property my brother may have left, nor even to his name; although of the relationship I am satisfied. Having secretly taken measures to ascertain the particulars of Count Joachim’s marriage, I have established, beyond a doubt, that he was wedded at Rouen, whilst he commanded the garrison there, to a daughter of a cloth merchant, but that, on account of the lady’s inferior condition, the union was kept secret till the death of his father, when he quitted Normandy, and that she shortly afterwards bade adieu to Rouen, accompanied by her little boy, avowedly to join her husband in the south.

“I cannot entertain the most distant doubt that I am that child, and that I am in fact

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“I cannot entertain the most distant doubt that I am that child, and that I am in fact

the eldest son of that house ; but I have no intention of establishing my claim. As a private gentleman I am rich, and my son, who is a partner in the business from which I have now withdrawn, will be rich after me, whilst my daughters are happily married to respectable professional men. The discovery that I was a Count would possibly disturb their contentment, destroy the agreeable equilibrium which my family affairs now maintain, and would assuredly reduce me at once to straitened circumstances. To be a poor nobleman is a position I am far from aspiring to. The name I have always borne is that of Philibert Petit. The first was the baptismal appellation by which my mother always called me ; the second was given me in the regiment, because I was a child when they picked me up. As Philibert Petit I have lived, and as Philibert Petit I mean to die.

“ But to continue my story. Having thus

ascertained my birth and my near relationship to him whom I had been personating, and whom I may now, I think, venture to call my brother, I naturally felt desirous of learning whether any tidings of his fate had reached Arles. Through my mercantile correspondents, however, I soon ascertained that after my departure all inquiry had ceased, the characteristic mode of my disappearance having been generally accepted as satisfactory proof of my identity with the late lord of the château.

“For my own part, after the lapse of so many years, I could entertain no doubts of his death, and I confess my former suspicions of De Francœur not only revived, but often gave me great uneasiness. I could not help questioning with myself, how far I was justified in my silence and inaction, especially since I found myself a member of the family. Still, on the other hand, the foundation of these suspicions was so unsubstantial, and

would probably appear so visionary to the world in general, that I shrank from stirring in the business. I had not the slightest shadow of proof, nor could I devise any mode by which I could attain any. Thus I deferred moving in the affair from year to year, and had grown pretty well reconciled to my own inaction, when a circumstance happened that suddenly roused me from my indifference.

“ I had often been invited to spend a few days with a friend in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau ; and some business taking me into the country, I resolved to avail myself of the invitation, and spend the night at his house. So I wrote, saying that I proposed arriving to supper provided I heard nothing to the contrary before a certain day. Receiving no letter, I concluded I was expected, and made my arrangements accordingly ; but the distance was greater than I had reckoned on, and as it was nearly

midnight when I drove up to the gate, I was not a little disconcerted to learn from the man who opened the door that his master had been absent from home for some weeks.

“I did not know what to do, for it was a long way to go back to an inn at that late hour; and besides, I was very tired. I suppose I appeared a good deal disappointed, for the man, after a little reflection, said, that if I would alight, he would speak to the *femme de charge*, or housekeeper, and ascertain what could be done for me; so I got off my horse, and was shown into a large saloon hung with family pictures, where my friend, the *concierge*, left me with a single candle, that dimly lighted the apartment.

“I had taken the candle in my hand to examine a portrait of my absent host, when, hearing the door open, I turned round, and saw a respectable-looking woman enter, who, the moment she cast her eyes on me, uttered

a loud scream, and rushed out of the room. Supposing that her fright arose from seeing a stranger where she had not expected to see anybody, I ran after her, begging her not to be alarmed, and assuring her I was a very harmless traveller. But it was some time before I could so far overcome her terrors as to arrive at an explanation of them. She sank into a chair in the hall, crying and sobbing like a child; and every time she lifted her eyes to my face, her emotion burst forth afresh.

“ ‘It is he!’ she said; ‘it is his very self! yes, yes, it is he! it is he!’ ”

“ For some time this was all I could get from her; but, at length, when she was somewhat soothed, I learned what I had indeed began to suspect, namely, that she took me for my brother; and I did not immediately undeceive her. She was now all anxiety to accommodate me, and make me comfortable; and I soon discovered her

to be that Clarice, Madame de Châteauroux's maid, who, with the footman Morel, had disappeared previous to the Countess's arrest. Morel was dead, and she was now my friend's housekeeper.

"You may suppose this was a very interesting discovery; and I not only stayed there that night, but the whole of the following day, for the purpose of conversing with Clarice, whom I found willing enough to tell me all she knew, which indeed was not much; but little as it was, combined with my own previous observations and suspicions, it had a significance for me.

"What had become of the Count she knew no more than the world in general. Both she and Morel, to whom at the time she was privately married, had overheard the quarrel and the Countess's threat, when they parted for the night. Clarice, who slept near her, had also heard her rise from her bed, and go towards her husband's chamber; and she

confessed that her first idea, when in the morning they found the room empty, and the bed stained with blood, was, that she had murdered him. She also admitted that, under the horror and excitement of this suspicion, both herself and her husband had spoken very injuriously of the Countess ; and that, moreover, although various observations and reflections subsequently caused a change in their opinions, they had not had the honesty and courage to withdraw the imputation they had flung upon their mistress, from the apprehension that they might be suspected themselves.

“ ‘ We knew that some people entertained suspicions of the servants,’ she observed, ‘ and M. de Francœur alarmed us very much by different things he said to us on the subject, and we thought my Lady, with her large fortune and great connexions, had a better chance of getting justice than we had. But when we heard that the *marechaussée*

were coming, we were so frightened lest we should be called upon to prove what we had said, that we took flight, and never returned into that part of the country again.'

"The indications of my brother's fate that I extracted by interrogating Clarice were but small; yet I gathered enough to satisfy me that he had not been murdered in the house; for it was utterly impossible the Countess, or any other woman, had she taken his life, could have removed his body without assistance. It would not have been an easy thing for a man to do. Now, not the smallest suspicion attached to any one in the château except it were the Countess and the two people who fled; and of their innocence I felt perfectly assured. Moreover, it seemed pretty clear that the Count had withdrawn himself voluntarily. I ascertained that the great hall-door, which had been locked on the inside when the servants retired, was found only on the latch in the morning, and that

the latch, as well as the ballisters of the stairs, were stained with blood. These stains had been supposed to be from the hand of the murderer; but I thought them much more likely to have proceeded from my brother's, when I learned that some broken glass had been found on the floor of his chamber. Then, although it was true that he had left his cloak and horse behind him, if he were bent on departing secretly, he could not do otherwise; for the horse was locked in the stable, and Morel had himself taken away the cloak. The remainder of his attire had vanished with himself, and, I could scarcely doubt, had been carried away on his own back.

“ Then, I must say, the more I questioned Clarice, the more vivid my impressions became with respect to De Francœur. I learnt from her that on the morning after my brother's disappearance, when the agent arrived to breakfast, he was in a state of such

visible agitation and confusion, that when Madelon, on hearing the great bell ring, came up to the house to know what had happened, she said she was quite terrified because she had seen from M. de Francœur's face, when she opened the gate to him, that something dreadful had occurred. Everybody had remarked his livid paleness and the strange expression of his features; and also how his hand shook and his lip quivered. Moreover, though he had waited long enough to get an appetite, he had not eaten a morsel of breakfast; and when he left the house, the footman observed that, instead of making for the hall-door, he turned in an opposite direction as if he had been a stranger to the locality.

"These symptoms of disturbance, and many other singularities that were subsequently remarked, were attributed to his anxiety about the Count; but I placed another construction upon them, especially when I

learnt from Clarice that he had sought, by various and repeated insinuations, to inspire her and Morel with the apprehension that they would be implicated in the danger if the authorities interfered; and that, in short, though he had never directly counselled them to fly, he it was that had suggested the idea to them. I thought I could discern through the whole of his proceedings the restless interference and the tortuous path of a guilty and anxious mind, desirous that suspicion should affix itself somewhere lest it should float about till it settled on himself, and yet shrinking from the additional horrors of allowing another to suffer for his crime. Still, to come forward with an accusation of this nature against a man whose character had never been impeached, was a very serious undertaking, the more so that my own conviction was, on the whole, rather instinctive than based on evidence; and even were it well-founded, I might not be able to

substantiate the allegation, whilst a failure would, on all accounts, have been extremely painful and embarrassing.

“ I believe, under all these considerations, I should have been tempted to let the matter alone, had I not heard of the impending alliance betwixt the families. That decided me ; I could not permit your son to marry the daughter of an assassin, and it was then I formed the plan I have executed—the success of which has been considerably aided by the frank unsuspicion with which you received me on my arrival. I felt pretty confident that if you would allow me for a few weeks, unquestioned, to pass for the Count, that I could extract the truth from De Francœur, if he were not guilty of my brother’s death, or force him to betray himself if he were ; and the result is as I expected ; for I am satisfied that the discovery of this morning has been planned as a *dernier ressort* to get rid of me altogether

and put you in possession of the property. How it happened that M. de Châteauroux placed himself in his power, and by what means he effected his death, we shall never know unless he confesses ; but I feel satisfied that the motive which impelled him to the act, was the desire to conceal his dishonest appropriations."

It was not without considerable pain that M. de la Rive yielded to the conviction of De Francœur's guilt thus forced upon him. There was an intimacy, approaching to friendship, subsisting between them, and the attachment of his son to the agent's daughter, rendered the matter doubly distressing. He had, however, great reason to rejoice that this last link had not been made faster before the discovery.

The question now arose, what was to be done ? The contents of the basket furnished indisputable evidence that the remains found in the well were those of the Count ; and it

never occurred to them to doubt that De Francoeur had been instrumental to his death. Still, for the sake of his family, M. de la Rive felt great reluctance to accuse him, and entail ineffaceable disgrace on his innocent children. But justice demanded the exposure of so great a criminal; and Philibert Petit enforced it as a duty not to be evaded.

Whilst the two gentlemen were deliberating on this affair at the château, the unhappy agent was suffering tortures of suspense at the farm. He was conscious that he had acted his part badly, and he had read suspicion in M. Petit's face. The veil had fallen from his own for ever—it was laid bare to the world's eye—and he knew that he could never raise his own again to that of an honest man. After some interval, he returned home, where he passed the day and night in inexpressible agonies. The sight of his children, especially of his beautiful daughter, the one beloved by Alexis de la

Rive, tortured his soul. He wished he had courage to rush upon death, but his spirit quailed at the Beyond—there “ what dreams might come !”

We never write these sad records of crime without being disposed to reiterate that, all dread of human vengeance or Divine judgment aside, could wretched man but realize to himself for one moment the hell inalienable that he would thereafter carry in his bosom, no such deeds of guilt could ever be committed. Human vengeance, or even discovery may be eluded, and the Divine judgment may be deterred to the end of a long life, but the fiery curse of an ill conscience is born of the crime—its certain and unfailing offspring—the bitter fruit that surely blossoms, but never dies.

We do not deny that the lives and deaths of some few criminals of the lowest classes, who are steeped in ignorance and obduracy, seem to contradict this assertion ; but these

are strange exceptional cases, on which let no man reckon for his own exemption. They are as strange and exceptional, as the instances we sometimes read of insensibility to physical pain; and one might as well hope to undergo the amputation of a limb without suffering, on the strength of these few precedents, as expect to enjoy peace and holy sleep with the blood of a fellow-creature staining our souls; and although it is true M. de Franceur had not murdered the Count, the circumstance of the case made him feel as guilty of his death as if he had. He had reaped the harvest he had sown; from the hour of the Count's death he had been a miserable man, and not a whit the less miserable for the success with which he had deceived the world. No one ever bore about a secret burden of woe, without feeling how much its weight would be alleviated by sympathy and participation; and the deeper

we need to hide it from our fellow-men, the more inexorably it will press upon ourselves.

It must be a bitter pang to a human being, not sunk into the sloughs of utter corruption, to feel, whilst associated with the virtuous and upright, that every pure soul and friendly face would be turned away from him for ever, could they but read the records inscribed on the black tablets of his own undying memory.

Long years had those eating cares been gnawing at the heart of M. de Franceur, and undermining his constitution. He was not more than fifty years of age, but he looked and felt seventy; and now that the struggle was over and the game irretrievably lost, nature collapsed, and sunk exhausted.

When De la Rive and Philibert Petit rode to the farm on the following morning, for

the purpose of having an interview with the agent, and hearing what he had to say with respect to the events of the preceding day, they learnt that he was so ill that he was unable to leave his bed, and that his wife had sent to Arles for a physician. But no earthly physician could help him. He never rallied, and died on the third day. Before he departed, he made a full confession to a priest; and enjoined him, after he was dead, to communicate the substance of it to M. de la Rive, whom he conjured, for the sake of their past intimacy, to spare his innocent wife and family the horrors of exposure, or the pangs of learning their father's guilt.

It occasioned M. de la Rive as much satisfaction as surprise to learn that De Francœur was less guilty than they had supposed him, and he and Philibert willingly acceded to his dying supplication—the young Alexis

alone being made acquainted with the sad secret; after which his father sent him to travel, whilst he took upon himself to break off the subsisting engagement betwixt him and De Franceur's daughter. Time, absence, and change of scene, at length healed the wounds of the lover; but the poor girl's heart was of softer material, and a slow consumption and a patient death were her share of expiation of her father's guilt, and the sad termination of her true love's course.

His object being attained, M. Philibert Petit returned to Paris, content with the station that so strange an accident on one side, and his own good conduct on the other, had combined to place him in; whilst the intimacy thus originated, together with M. de la Rive's conviction that he was really of the blood of Châteauroux, ultimately led to a union betwixt Alexis and his youngest

daughter. So that the grandchildren of Philibert Petit became the heirs and possessors of the estate that had formed the fatal dowry of his unfortunate brother.

II.

THE MORNING VISITOR.

ONE of the features of our time—as of all times, each of which is new in its generation—is the character of its crimes. Every phasis of human affairs, every advance in civilization, every shade of improvement in our material comforts and conveniences, gives rise to new modes and forms—nay, to actual new births—of crime, the germs of which were only waiting for a congenial soil to spring in ; whilst others are but modifications

of the old inventions, accommodated to new circumstances.

There are thus stages in the history of crime indicative of ages. First, we have the heroic. At a very early period of a nation's annals crime is bloody, bold, and resolute. Ambitious princes 'make quick conveyance' with those who stand in the way of their advancement; and fierce barons slake their enmity and revenge in the blood of their foes, with little attempt at concealment, and no appearance of remorse. Next comes the age of strange murders, mysterious poisonings, and life-long incarcerations; when the passions, yet rife, unsubdued by education and the practical influence of religion, and rebellious to the new restraints of law, seek their gratification by hidden and tortuous methods. This is the romantic era of crime. But as civilization advances, it descends to a lower sphere, sheltering itself chiefly in the squalid districts of poverty and wretchedness;

the last halo of the romantic and heroic fades from it ; and except where it is the result of brutal ignorance, its chief characteristic becomes astuteness.

But we are often struck by the strange tinge of romance which still colours the page of continental criminal records, causing them to read like the annals of a previous century. We think we perceive also a state of morals somewhat in arrear of the stage we have reached, and certainly some curious and very defective forms of law ; and these two causes combined, seem to give rise to criminal enterprizes which in this country could scarcely have been undertaken, or, if they were, must have met with immediate detection and punishment.

There is also frequently a singular complication or imbroglio in the details, such as would be impossible in this island of daylight—for enveloped in fog as we are physically, there is a greater glare thrown upon our

actions here than among any other nation of the world perhaps—an imbroglio that appears to fling the narrative back into the romantic era, and to indicate that it belongs to a stage of civilization we have already passed.

How thoroughly foreign and strange to us was the history of Madame Lafarge! How unlike ours were the modes and habits of life it disclosed, and how vividly one felt that it was the tale of another land! So of the Priest Riembauer, noticed in a late number of the "Edinburgh Review," who murdered the woman he had outraged; the details of whose crime were as foreign to us as the language he spoke. To what age or class our present story might be properly assigned, we should be puzzled to determine—the circumstances of the crime being, as far as we know, without precedent, and, we hope, not destined to form one; whilst the boldness of the enterprise on the one hand, and the veil of mystery that still hangs over the motives of the

perpetrator on the other, seem to endue it with the mingled hues of the savage and the romantic. The question, however, we will leave our readers to decide for themselves.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock on the morning of the 28th of February, 1812, that a gentleman presented himself at the door of Mr. Schmidt, an affluent merchant of Leipsic. Being admitted to an interview, he informed Mr. Schmidt that he was from Hamburgh, where, not finding affairs favourable to his objects, he had come to see what could be done in Saxony ; and, describing himself as especially recommended to Mr. Schmidt's good offices, he requested that gentleman's advice with respect to the most advantageous mode of laying out his money.

In the course of this conversation, which lasted upwards of half an hour, Mr. Schmidt opened his desk, and took from it a bill to the amount of one hundred dollars, which the visitor begged leave to inspect. Having

done so, he restored it to the owner, who, whilst returning it to the place whence he had taken it, suddenly sank to the ground, deprived of consciousness. On recovering his senses, he cried to the stranger to assist him ; but the stranger was gone.

When Mr. Schmidt arose from the floor, which he did with much difficulty—for his head was bleeding profusely—he saw the chairs standing about in confusion, and his desk open, and a moment's examination showed him that bills to the amount of three thousand dollars were missing.

By this time his cries had summoned to his aid Vetter, the landlord of the house, and his wife, who, having bound up his bleeding head as well as they could, the unfortunate man, to whom indignation and despair lent strength, rushed into the street, and, making his way to the sheriff's office, there lodged information against the stranger, giving the best description of him he could. Notices

were immediately sent to all the banking-houses in the city, together with the numbers of the missing bills ; but, quickly as this was done, it was too late. The house of Frege and Company had already cashed them.

On learning this, Mr. Schmidt returned home, took to his bed, and, after an illness of some duration, died from the consequences of the wounds in his head, which the surgeons declared had been inflicted with considerable violence, and by a blunt instrument.

Before he expired, he reiterated upon oath the above particulars, adding, that he did not know how or why he had fallen, nor whether the stranger had struck him or not. An idea seems to have prevailed at the time that he had sank to the ground immediately after taking a pinch of snuff from the stranger's box ; but this fact was not positively established. Of the appearance of this ill-omened visitor he could give very little description, except that he believed him to be about forty years of age.

The account given by the bankers was, that between the hours of ten and eleven on the day in question, a stranger had presented himself, requesting cash for the bills, which he duly received, partly in gold, and partly in silver. As far as they had observed, he exhibited no appearance of haste or uneasiness whatever. On the contrary, he had not only counted the money and inspected the various coins with great deliberation, but he had returned some of them, requesting others in their place. With respect to his appearance, both they and Vetter, who had seen him in Mr. Schmidt's office, agreed that he was well dressed, and had much the air of a country clergyman.

This scanty information furnished no clue to the discovery of the assassin. The murdered man was laid in his grave; and after causing much terror and excitement amongst the inhabitants of Leipsic for a time, the story sank into oblivion, and was forgotten, or at least ceased to be talked of.

A year had elapsed, and the month of February had come round again, when one morning a rumour spread through the city that a fearful murder had been committed on the person of an elderly lady of property called Kunhardt. It appeared that Madame Kunhardt had sent out her maid between eight and nine o'clock in the morning to fetch a flask of wine from a house hard by. The girl declared she had not been absent five minutes, and that, on her return, she was met in the entrance-hall by a clergyman, who asked her if she were going out, and whether she should be long. She told him she was now returning; whereupon he went quickly forth at the street door. The girl then ascending to her mistress, heard the old lady's voice crying, "Hanne! Hanne!" and on entering the apartment, she discovered her lying in one corner of the ante-room, with her head bleeding. She told the maid that a stranger, who had brought her that letter,

pointing to one on the floor, had struck her down. On being asked if she knew him, she said she had never seen him before to her knowledge. The letter, stained with blood, proved, on examination, to be addressed to Madame Kunhardt, and purported that she should give the bearer one thousand dollars. It was dated Hohendorf, 24th January, 1813.

The walls and the floor were sprinkled with blood, and from one spot the colouring of the wainscot seemed to be rubbed off.

A Dr. Kunitz, who resided in the same house, said that, just before he heard the maid crying for help, he had seen a middle-sized man, in a dark frock-coat and a black cap, going out at the street door. His coat was marked as if it had been rubbed against the wall.

Of course suspicion fell upon this stranger; the more so as the maid said that the same gentleman had called two days before, and

inquired for her mistress, but had gone away on learning she was engaged with company. The coachman's wife also, who lived in the lower part of the house, had seen the stranger on that occasion, and at his request had directed him to the apartments of Madame Kunhardt. She having business that way herself, had followed him up stairs. Just, however, as they reached the door, Hanne opened it to let in the baker, whereon the stranger turned down stairs again, saying it was a mistake, and went straight out of the house.

Meantime Madame Kunhardt died, and the alarm became very general: people grew extremely shy of receiving morning visitors; and several persons came forward laying claim to the honour of having already been favoured with the attentions of this mysterious stranger; amongst the rest, the wife of Dr. Kunitz, and a Demoiselle Junius, a lady of considerable fortune. But on both of

these occasions circumstances had been adverse to the success of his object.

Presently a rumour began to circulate that the maid had been heard saying that she knew who the assassin was, and that he was a clergyman whom she had often seen whilst living in her last place, with a certain Dr. H——; whereon being called upon to name him, she fixed upon a gentleman, who was immediately arrested; but on being confronted with him, neither she nor any of the witnesses recognised him as the person whose morning visits had become so notorious. This mistake, however, directed attention to another clergyman, who was in the habit of frequenting her late master's house; and Dr. H—— remembered that a friend of his, called Tinius, had slept at his house on the night preceding the murder of Madame Kunhardt; had gone out about eight o'clock in the morning; and had returned at nine, after having read the newspapers, and bought

a book of a person named Rau, which he brought in with him.

Dr. Tinius was a man on whom no shadow of suspicion had ever rested. He was minister of Posenna, an eloquent and far-famed preacher; an author, amongst other things, of his own biography; a man of deep learning; and one of the greatest book collectors in Germany. His library contained not less than sixty thousand volumes.

Nevertheless, strange as the thing seemed, suspicion attached itself to Dr. Tinius; but in so delicate a matter, where the reputation of so eminent a man was concerned, great caution was felt to be requisite. Before they ventured to accuse him, they carried the maid Hanne to Posenna. Tinius, who happened to be just stepping out of his house, turned pale at the sight of her. She declared he was the man, and he was forthwith arrested, and carried to prison.

Nothing could equal the surprise of the citizens of Leipsic at this discovery, nor their horror when further investigations brought to light many other attempted assassinations, besides the successful one of Mr. Schmidt. When we say *brought to light*, we mean produced a universal persuasion that the, till now, respected Dr. Tinius was the criminal; for to this day, although so many years have elapsed since these events occurred, they are shrouded in an impenetrable mystery; and Dr. Tinius still lives, residing at a place called Zeitz, under surveillance. Nor does there appear much reason to hope that the secret will be cleared up by a death-bed confession, old age having hitherto brought with it no appearance of remorse.

At the end of the first year, he was degraded from his clerical office, a ceremony which appears to have been conducted with great solemnity, and given over to the civil power; after which, by his talent and ob-

stinacy, the investigation or trial was spun out nine years more.

The success with which many criminals in Germany seem to elude conviction, frustrate the law, and thus prolong their own lives, forms a very remarkable feature in the criminal records of the country, and appears to indicate something extremely defective in the judicial process: in short, the difficulty of obtaining a conviction seems quite extraordinary; and we find numerous instances of trials extending to ten or more years, where no shadow of doubt could exist as to the guilt of the parties arraigned.

Neither, as regarded Dr. Tinius, has any reasonable motive for these extraordinary assassinations been discovered: the one most commonly suggested is that which romance has attributed to Eugene Aram; namely, an inordinate desire to purchase books. Others believe him to have been actuated by a diabo-

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lical hatred to mankind, more especially to the prosperous portion of it.

He had had two wives, neither of whom lived happily with him ; and there were not wanting persons who declared that he had always inspired them with an inexplicable repugnance ; but this feeling had never been heard of till after the crime.

Dr. Tinius endeavoured to prove an *alibi*, but with very indifferent success ; and it goes far to establish his guilt, that several letters were found in his house of a like nature to the one he had presented to Madame Kunhardt, and addressed to various opulent people in the city, evidently intended for the same atrocious purpose. A hammer, with the handle shortened, so as to be conveniently carried in the pocket, was also discovered ; and it was thought that the wounds on Madame Kunhardt's head had been inflicted with such an instrument.

But amongst the most extraordinary features in this affair, are the numerous letters he wrote to his friends—respectable men, generally clergymen—whilst he was in prison, and the investigation was pending : letters, coolly requesting them to hide this, destroy that, and swear the other, which, whilst they furnish the strongest proof of his guilt, betray at the same time either the entire absence of all moral perceptions on his own part, or else a conviction that these honourable men were in that condition themselves. These letters referred to certain matters connected with the murder of Mr. Schmidt, as well as that of Madame Kunhardt.

It appeared that the first intimation he had that he was suspected, was from a letter sent to Posenna by some friend, dated February 17. It informed him of the maid-servant's deposition ; and at the bottom of the page were these words : *Deleatur et igni tradatur ;*

a piece of advice which, strangely enough, he neglected to follow.

The murder of Mr. Schmidt was supposed to be the first successful crime of this bold assassin; though, doubtless, not the first attempted. And a bold enterprise it certainly was: in broad daylight, in a frequented street of a populous city, to introduce himself into the office of an affluent and well-known merchant, and rob him of his life and his money with so much adroitness, that the people in the house heard no disturbance; and with so much self-possession, that he was able immediately afterwards to present himself at a banking-house, and not only coolly demand cash for the stolen bills, but count the money and select his coin with a degree of deliberation and repose of manner that would have been sufficient to disarm suspicion, had any existed.

He does not appear, however, to have been

quite so much at his ease after the murder of Madame Kunhardt. Circumstances there had been less favourable ; and if booty were his object, he had been disappointed. The maid Hanne, to whom he spoke in the hall, asserted that he looked very pale ; as did also the cook at Dr. H——'s. She said that when he returned home that morning his face was ashy white, and his step unsteady ; and that when he entered the parlour, he stood for some minutes with his hand, which visibly shook, resting on the Bible. She had remarked the same symptoms of agitation at table whilst he laughed and joked, and exerted himself to appear cheerful and disengaged ; and although, during his several examinations, the system of obstinate denial he had adopted was never shaken, yet there were moments wherein he betrayed an irrepressible confusion, which he endeavoured to mask by pretending a violent fit of yawning.

Whilst in confinement, he occupied himself

chiefly in writing and corresponding with his acquaintance. When he was released under surveillance, his former congregation, disliking to receive him amongst them, subscribed a sufficient sum to provide him with a domicile elsewhere.

He is described as a middle-sized man, of pale complexion, and black hair, which he wore combed straight down on each side of his head. He was generally wrapt in a blue cloak ; and thus he went about paying these fearful morning visits, with his mysterious snuff-box and deadly hammer in his pocket, biding his opportunity.

The following remarkable passage was found in his autobiography, written *previous* to the occurrence of the events above narrated :

“The fact that it is not customary to publish the histories and motives of living persons, is sufficient to exonerate me for having omitted to treat openly on these

subjects. The picture which I now paint is for posterity. The colours will remain unfaded, and the drawing correct. Many men's thoughts have been laid open to me, and their words and deeds have pronounced judgment upon them ; and, be it longer or shorter, we shall one day stand before the great Judge, where the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and all that is hid in darkness be brought to light. Meantime, I wait my justification in patience, being so accustomed to calumny, that it has ceased to affect me—especially since I observe that it is not *my* honour, but their own, that my enemies injure. To suffer for righteousness' sake is pleasing in the eyes of God and man. I will hold fast the truth that is in Jesus, fight the battles of my God unto the death, and rest my hopes on the promise of the dying saint: 'So, my son, shall the Lord fight for thee.' "

III.

THE TWO MISS SMITHS.

IN a certain town in the West of England, which shall be nameless, there dwelt two maiden ladies of the name of Smith; each possessing a small independence, each residing, with a single maid-servant, in a small house, the drawing-room floor of which was let, whenever lodgers could be found; each hovering somewhere about the age of fifty, and each hating the other with a restless and implacable enmity. The origin of this

aversion was the similarity of their names each was Miss C. Smith, the one being called Cecilia, the other Charlotte—a circumstance which gave rise to such innumerable mistakes and misunderstandings, as were sufficient to maintain these ladies in a constant state of irritability and warfare. Letters, messages, invitations, parcels, bills, were daily mis-sent, and opened by the wrong person, thus exposing the private affairs of one to the other; and as their aversion had long ago extinguished everything like delicacy on either side, any information so acquired was used without scruple to their mutual annoyance. Presents, too, of fruit, vegetables, or other delicacies from the neighbouring gentry, not unfrequently found their way to the wrong house; and if unaccompanied by a letter, which took away all excuse for mistake, they were appropriated without remorse, even when the appropriating party felt

confident in her heart that the article was not intended for her; and this not from greediness or rapacity, but from the absolute delight they took in vexing each other.

It must be admitted, also, that this well-known enmity was occasionally played upon by the frolic-loving part of the community, both high and low; so that over and above the genuine mistakes, which were of themselves quite enough to keep the poor ladies in hot water, every now and then some little hoax was got up and practised upon them, such as fictitious love-letters, anonymous communications, and so forth. It might have been imagined, as they were not answerable for their names, and as they were mutual sufferers by the similarity—one having as much right to complain of this freak of fortune as the other, that they might have entered into a compact of forbearance, which would have

been equally advantageous to either party ; but their naturally acrimonious dispositions prevented this, and each continued as angry with the other as she could have been if she had had a sole and indefeasible right to the appellation of *C. Smith*, and her rival had usurped it in a pure spirit of annoyance and opposition. To be quite just, however, we must observe that Miss Cecilia was much the worse of the two ; by judicious management Miss Charlotte might have been tamed, but the malice of Miss Cecilia was altogether inexorable.

By the passing of the Reform Bill, the little town wherein dwelt these belligerent powers received a very considerable accession of importance ; it was elevated into a borough, and had a whole live member to itself, which, with infinite pride and gratification, it sent to parliament, after having extracted from him all manner of pledges, and loaded him with all manner of in-

structions as to how he should conduct himself under every conceivable circumstance ; not to mention a variety of bills for the improvement of the roads and markets, the erection of a town-hall, and the reform of the systems of watching, paving, lighting, &c., the important and consequential little town of B——.

A short time previous to the first election—an event which was anticipated by the inhabitants with the most vivid interest—one of the candidates, a country gentleman who resided some twenty miles off, took a lodging in the town, and came there with his wife and family, in order, by a little courtesy and a few entertainments, to win the hearts of the electors and their friends ; and his first move was to send out invitations for a tea and card party, which, in due time, when the preparations were completed, was to be followed by a ball. There was but one milliner and dressmaker

of any consideration in the town of B——, and it may be imagined that on so splendid an occasion her services were in great request—so much so, that in the matter of head-dresses, she not only found that it would be impossible, in so short a period, to fulfil the commands of her customers, but also that she had neither the material nor the skill to give them satisfaction. It was, therefore, settled that she should send off an order to a house in Exeter, which was the county town, for a cargo of caps, toquets, turbans, &c., fit for all ages and faces—“such as were not disposed of to be returned;” and the ladies consented to wait, with the best patience they could, for this interesting consignment, which was to arrive, without fail, on the Wednesday, Thursday being the day fixed for the party. But the last coach arrived on Wednesday night without the expected boxes; however, the coachman brought a message for Miss Gibbs, the milliner,

assuring her that they would be there the next morning without fail.

Accordingly, when the first Exeter coach rattled through the little street of B——, which was about half-past eleven, every head that was interested in the freight was to be seen looking anxiously out for the deal boxes ; and, sure enough, there they were—three of them—large enough to contain caps for the whole town. Then there was a rush up stairs for their bonnets and shawls ; and in a few minutes troops of ladies, young and old, were seen hurrying towards the market-place, where dwelt Miss Gibbs—the young in pursuit of artificial flowers, gold bands, and such-like adornments—the elderly in search of a more mature order of decoration.

Amongst the candidates for finery, nobody was more eager than the two Miss Smiths ; and they had reason to be so, not only because they had neither of them anything at all fit to be worn at Mrs Hanaway's party,

which was in a style much above the entertainments they were usually invited to, but also because they both invariably wore turbans, and each was afraid that the other might carry off the identical turban that might be most desirable for herself. Urged by this feeling, so alert were they, that they were each standing at their several windows when the coach passed, with their bonnets and cloaks actually on—ready to start for the plate!—determined to reach Miss Gibbs's in time to witness the opening of the boxes. But "who shall control his fate?" Just as Miss Cecilia was stepping off her threshold, she was accosted by a very gentlemanly-looking person, who, taking off his hat, with an air really irresistible, begged to know if he had "the honour of seeing Miss Smith"—a question which was of course answered in the affirmative.

"I was not quite sure," said he, "whether I was right, for I had forgotten the number ;

but I thought it was sixty," and he looked at the figures on the door.

"This is sixty, sir," said Miss Cecilia; adding to herself, "I wonder if it was sixteen he was sent to," for at number sixteen lived Miss Charlotte.

"I was informed, madam," pursued the gentleman, "that I could be accommodated with apartments here—that you had a first floor to let."

"That is quite true, sir," replied Miss Cecilia, delighted to let her rooms, which had been some time vacant, and doubly gratified when the stranger added, "I come from Bath, and was recommended by a friend of yours, indeed probably a relation, as she bears the same name—Miss Joanna Smith."

"I know Miss Joanna very well, sir," replied Miss Cecilia; "pray, walk up stairs, and I'll show you the apartments directly. (For," thought she, "I must not let him go out of the house till he has taken them, for

fear he should find out his mistake.) Very nice rooms, sir, you see—everything clean and comfortable—a pretty view of the canal in front—just between the baker's and the shoemaker's; you'll get a peep, sir, if you step to this window. Then it's uncommonly lively; the Exeter and Plymouth coaches, up and down, rattling through all day long, and indeed all night too, for the matter of that. A beautiful little bed-room, back, too, sir—Yes, as you observe, it certainly does look over a brick-kiln; but there's no dust—not the least in the world—for I never allow the windows to be opened: altogether, there can't be a pleasanter situation than it is."

The stranger, it must be owned, seemed less sensible of all these advantages than he ought to have been; however, he engaged the apartments: it was but for a short time, as he had come there about some business connected with the election; and as Miss Joanna had so particularly recommended him

to the lodging, he did not like to disoblige her. So the bargain was struck: the maid received orders to provision the garrison with bread, butter, tea, sugar, &c., whilst the gentleman returned to the inn to despatch Boots with his portmanteau and carpet-bag.

“ You were only just in time, sir,” observed Miss Cecilia, as they descended the stairs, “ for I expected a gentleman to call at twelve o’clock to-day, who I am sure would have taken the lodgings.”

“ I should be sorry to stand in his way,” responded the stranger, who would not have been at all sorry for an opportunity of backing out of the bargain. “ Perhaps you had better let him have them—I can easily get accommodated elsewhere.”

“ Oh dear, no, sir; dear me! I wouldn’t do such a thing for the world!” exclaimed Miss Cecilia, who had only thrown out this little inuendo by way of binding her lodger to his bargain, lest, on discovering his mis-

take, he should think himself at liberty to annul the agreement. For well she knew that it *was* a mistake: Miss Joanna of Bath was Miss Charlotte's first cousin, and, hating Miss Cecilia, as she was in duty bound to do, would rather have sent her a dose of arsenic than a lodger, any day. She had used every precaution to avoid the accident that had happened, by writing on a card, "Miss Charlotte Smith, No. 16, High Street, B——, *opposite the linendraper's shop*;" but the thoughtless traveller, never dreaming of the danger in which he stood, lost the card, and, trusting to his memory, fell into the snare.

Miss Cecilia had been so engrossed by her anxiety to hook this fish before her rival could have a chance of throwing out a bait for him, that, for a time, she actually forgot Miss Gibbs and the turban; but now that her point was gained, and she felt sure of her man, her former care revived with all its

force, and she hurried along the street towards the market-place, in a fever of apprehension lest she should be too late. The matter certainly looked ill; for, as she arrived breathless at the door, she saw groups of self-satisfied faces issuing from it, and, amongst the rest, the obnoxious Miss Charlotte's physiognomy appeared, looking more pleased than anybody.

“Odious creature!” thought Miss Cecilia; “as if she supposed that any turban in the world could make her look tolerable!” But Miss Charlotte did suppose it; and, moreover, she had just secured the very identical turban that, of all the turbans that ever were made, was most likely to accomplish this desideratum—at least so she opined.

Poor Miss Cecilia! Up stairs she rushed, bouncing into Miss Gibbs's little room, now strewn with finery. “Well, Miss Gibbs, I hope you have something that will suit me?”

“ Dear me, mem,” responded Miss Gibbs, “ what a pity you did not come a little sooner. The only two turbans we had are just gone—Mrs. Gosling took one, and Miss Charlotte Smith the other—two of the beautifullest—here they are, indeed—you shall see them ;” and she opened the boxes in which they were deposited, and presented them to the grieved eye of Miss Cecilia.

She stood aghast ! The turbans were very respectable turbans indeed ; but, to her disappointed and eager desires, they appeared worthy of Mahomet the Prophet, or the Grand Sultana, or any other body, mortal or immortal, that has ever been reputed to wear turbans. And this consummation of perfection she had lost ! lost just by a neck ! missed it by an accident, that, however gratifying she had thought it at the time, she now felt was but an inadequate compensation for her present disappointment. But there was no remedy. Miss Gibbs had nothing fit to

make a turban of; besides, Miss Cecilia would have scorned to appear in any turban that Miss Gibbs could have compiled, when her rival was to be adorned with a construction of such superhuman excellence. No! the only consolation she had was to scold Miss Gibbs for not having kept the turbans till she had seen them, and for not having sent for a greater number of turbans. To which objurgations Miss Gibbs could only answer: "That she had been extremely sorry, indeed, when she saw the ladies were bent upon having the turbans, as she had ordered two entirely with a view to Miss Cecilia's accommodation; and, moreover, that she was never more surprised in her life than when Mrs. Gosling desired one of them might be sent to her, because Mrs. Gosling never wore turbans; and if Miss Gibbs had only foreseen that she would have pounced upon it in that way, she, Miss Gibbs, would have taken care she should never have seen it at all," &c., &c., &c.,—all

of which the reader may believe, if he or she choose.

As for Miss Cecilia, she was implacable, and she flounced out of the house, and through the streets, to her own door, in a temper of mind that rendered it fortunate, as far as the peace of the town of B—— was concerned, that no accident brought her in contact with Miss Charlotte on the way.

As soon as she got into her parlour, she threw off her bonnet and shawl, and plunging into her arm-chair, she tried to compose her mind sufficiently to take a calm view of the dilemma, and determine on what line of conduct to pursue — whether to send an excuse to Mrs. Hanaway, or whether to go to the party in one of her old head-dresses. Either alternative was insupportable. To lose the party—the game at loo, the distinction of being seen in such good society—it was too provoking; besides, very likely people would suppose she had not been invited; Miss

Charlotte, she had no doubt, would try to make them believe so. But then, on the other hand, to wear one of her old turbans was so mortifying—they were so very shabby, so unfashionable—on an occasion, too, when everybody would be so well-dressed! Oh, it was aggravating—vexatious, in the extreme! She passed the day in reflection—chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancies; recalling to herself how well she looked in the turban—for she had tried it on; figuring what would have been Miss Charlotte's mortification if she had been the disappointed person—how triumphantly she, Miss Cecilia, would have marched into the room with the turban on her head—how crest-fallen the other would have looked; and then she varied her occupation by resuscitating all her old turbans, buried in antique band-boxes deep in dust, and trying whether it were possible, out of their united materials, to concoct one of the

present fashionable shape and dimensions. But the thing was impracticable: the new turban was composed of crimson satin and gold lace, hers of pieces of muslin and gauze.

When the mind is very much engrossed, whether the subject of contemplation be pleasant or unpleasant, time flies with inconceivable rapidity; and Miss Cecilia was roused from her meditations by hearing the clock in the passage strike four, warning her that it was necessary to come to some decision, as the hour fixed for the party, according to the primitive customs of B——, was half-past seven, when the knell of the clock was followed by a single knock at the door, and the next moment her maid walked into the room with—what do you think?—the identical crimson and gold turban in her hand!

“What a beauty!” cried Susan, turning it round, that she might get a complete view of it in all its phases.

“ Was there any message, Sue ?” inquired Miss Cecilia, gasping with agitation, for her heart was in her throat.

“ No, ma’am,” answered Sue ; “ Miss Gibbs’s girl just left it ; she said it should have come earlier, but she had so many places to go to.”

“ And she’s gone, is she, Susan ?”

“ Yes, ma’am, she went directly—she said she hadn’t got half through yet.”

“ Very well, Susan, you may go ; and remember, I’m not at home if anybody calls ; and if any message comes here from Miss Gibbs, you’ll say I’m gone out, and you don’t expect me home till very late.”

“ Very well, ma’am.”

“ And I say, Susan, if they send here to make any inquires about that turban, you’ll say you know nothing about it, and send them away.”

“ Very well, ma’am,” said Susan, and down she dived to the regions below.

Instead of four o'clock, how ardently did Miss Cecilia wish it were seven; for the danger of the next three hours was imminent. Well she understood how the turban had got there—it was a mistake of the girl—but the chance was great that, before seven o'clock arrived, Miss Charlotte would take fright at not receiving her head-dress, and would send to Miss Gibbs to demand it, when the whole thing would be found out. However, no message came: at five o'clock, when the milk-boy rang, Miss Cecilia thought she should have fainted; but that was the only alarm. At six she began to dress, and at seven she stood before her glass in full array, with the turban on her head. She thought she had never looked so well; indeed, she was sure she had not. The magnitude of the thing gave her an air, and indeed a feeling of dignity and importance that she had never been sensible of before. The gold lace looked brilliant even by the

light of her single tallow candle ; what would it do in a well-illuminated drawing-room ! then the colour was strikingly becoming, and suited her hair exactly—Miss Cecilia, we must here observe, was quite grey ; but she wore a frontlet of dark curls, and a little black silk skull-cap, fitted close to her head, which kept all neat and tight under the turban.

She had not far to go ; nevertheless, she thought it would be as well to set off at once, for fear of accidents, even though she lingered on the way to fill up the time, for every moment the danger augmented ; so she called to Susan to bring her cloak, and her calash, and her overalls, and being well packed up by the admiring Sue, who declared the turban was “without exception the beautifullest thing she ever saw,” she started ; determined, however, not to take the direct way, but to make a little circuit

by a back street, lest, by ill luck, she should fall foul of the enemy.

“ Susan,” said she, pausing as she was stepping off the threshold, “ if anybody calls, you’ll say I have been gone to Mrs. Hanaway’s some time ; and, Susan, just put a pin in this calash to keep it back, it falls over my eyes so that I can’t see.” And Susan pinned a fold in the calash, and away went the triumphant Miss Cecilia. She did not wish to be guilty of the vulgarity of arriving first at the party ; so she lingered about till it wanted a quarter to eight, and then she knocked at Mrs. Hanaway’s door, which a smart footman immediately opened, and, with the alertness for which many of his order are remarkable, proceeded to disengage the lady from her external coverings—the cloak, the overalls, the calash ; and then, without giving her time to breathe, he rushed up the stairs, calling out, “ Miss Cecilia Smith ;” whilst

the butler, who stood at the drawing-room door, threw it open, reiterating, "Miss Cecilia Smith;" and in she went. But, O reader! little do you think, and little did she think, where the turban was that she imagined to be upon her head, and under the supposed shadow of which she walked into the room with so much dignity and complacence. It was below in the hall, lying on the floor, fast in the calash, to which Susan, ill-starred wench! had pinned it; and the footman, in his cruel haste, had dragged them both off together.

With only some under-trappings on her cranium, and altogether unconscious of her calamity, smiling and bowing, Miss Cecilia advanced towards her host and hostess, who received her in the most gracious manner, thinking, certainly, that her taste in a head-dress was peculiar, and that she was about the most extraordinary figure they had ever beheld, but supposing that such was the

fashion she chose to adopt—the less astonished or inclined to suspect the truth, from having heard a good deal of the eccentricities of the two spinsters of B——. But to the rest of the company, the appearance she made was inexplicable ; they had been accustomed to see her ill dressed, and oddly dressed, but such a flight as this they were not prepared for. Some whispered that she had gone mad ; others suspected that it must be accident—that somehow or other she had forgotten to put on her head-dress ; but even if it were so, the joke was an excellent one, and nobody cared enough for her to sacrifice their amusement by setting her right. So Miss Cecilia, blessed in her delusion, triumphant and happy, took her place at the whist table, anxiously selecting a position which gave her a full view of the door, in order that she might have the indescribable satisfaction of seeing the expression of Miss Charlotte's countenance when she entered the

room—that is, if she came ; the probability was, that mortification would keep her away.

But no such thing—Miss Charlotte had too much spirit to be beaten out of the field in that manner. She had waited with patience for her turban, because Miss Gibbs had told her, that, having many things to send out, it might be late before she got it ; but when half-past six arrived, she became impatient, and despatched her maid to fetch it. The maid returned, with “Miss Gibbs’s respects, and the girl was still out with the things ; she would be sure to call at Miss Charlotte’s before she came back.” At half-past seven there was another message, to say that the turban had not arrived ; by this time the girl had done her errands, and Miss Gibbs, on questioning her, discovered the truth. But it was too late—the mischief was irreparable—Susan averring, with truth, that her mistress had gone to Mrs. Hana-

way's party some time, with the turban on her head.

We will not attempt to paint Miss Charlotte's feelings—that would be a vain endeavour. Rage took possession of her soul; her attire was already complete, all but the head-dress, for which she was waiting. She selected the best turban she had, threw on her cloak and calash, and in a condition of mind bordering upon frenzy, she rushed forth, determined, be the consequences what they might, to claim her turban, and expose Miss Cecilia's dishonourable conduct before the whole company.

By the time she arrived at Mrs. Hanaway's door, owing to the delays that had intervened, it was nearly half-past eight; the company had all arrived; and whilst the butler and footmen were carrying up the refreshments, one of the female servants of the establishment had come into the hall,

and was endeavouring to introduce some sort of order and classification amongst the mass of external coverings that had been hastily thrown off by the ladies ; so, when Miss Charlotte knocked, she opened the door and let her in, and proceeded to relieve her of her wraps.

“ I suppose I’m very late,” said Miss Charlotte, dropping into a chair to seize a moment’s rest, whilst the woman drew off her boots ; for she was out of breath with haste, and heated with fury.

“ I believe everybody’s come, ma’am,” said the woman.

“ I should have been here some time since,” proceeded Miss Charlotte, “ but the most shameful trick has been played me about my—my—Why—I declare—I really believe — ” and she bent forward and picked up the turban—the identical turban, which, disturbed by the maid-servant’s manœuvres,

was lying upon the floor, still attacked to the calash by Sukey's unlucky pin.

Was there ever such a triumph? Quick as lightning, the old turban was off and the new one on, the maid with bursting sides assisting in the operation; and then, with a light step and a proud heart, up walked Miss Charlotte, and was ushered into the drawing-room.

As the door opened, the eyes of the rivals met. Miss Cecilia's feelings were those of disappointment and surprise. "Then she has got a turban too! How could she have got it?"—and she was vexed that her triumph was not so complete as she had expected. But Miss Charlotte was in ecstasies. It may be supposed she was not slow to tell the story: it soon flew round the room, and the whole party were thrown into convulsions of laughter. Miss Cecilia alone was not in the secret; and as she was suc-

cessful at cards, and therefore in good humour, she added to their mirth, by saying that she was glad to see everybody so merry, and by assuring Mrs. Hanaway, when she took her leave, that it was the gayest party she had ever seen in B——.

“ I am really ashamed,” said Mrs. Hanaway, “ at allowing the poor woman to be the jest of my company ; but I was afraid to tell her the cause of our laughter, from the apprehension of what might have followed.”

“ And it must be admitted,” said her husband, “ that she well deserves the mortification that awaits her when she discovers the truth.”

Poor Miss Cecilia *did* discover the truth, and never was herself again. She parted with her house, and went to live with a relation at Bristol ; but her spirit was broken ; and, after going through all the

stages of a discontented old age—ill temper, peevishness, and fatuity—she closed her existence, as usual with persons of her class, unloved and unlamented.

IV.

THE TILE-BURNER AND HIS FAMILY.

IN the early part of last century, there lived near the town of Pont de l'Ain, in the South of France, a brick and tile-burner, named Joseph Vallet. Joseph was an industrious man, skilful in his profession, and his bricks and tiles were in great request in the neighbourhood. No man does well in life without exciting the envy and the enmity of mean-spirited persons about him, and Joseph was not exempted from the common

fate. He had a few evil-wishers, and among these was M. Frillet, who had no other reason for hating Vallet than that he was a rival in trade. Vallet's bricks and tiles commanded a better market than those of Frillet, and that was enough. This hostility of Frillet might have been of little consequence in ordinary circumstances. He possessed, however, the power as well as the inclination to torment his rival; being the king's Attorney-General for the district, a function which rendered him a dangerous enemy to a poor man.

Some time in 1705, a peasant named Dupler, a neighbour of Vallet's, died in what were alleged to be suspicious circumstances. He had been seen one night somewhat intoxicated in the company of Vallet, who, it was said, had given him a blow, which led to his illness and death. How this rumour arose no one could tell; but having become public, the Attorney-General made a

rigorous investigation into the subject. He failed, however, to criminate Vallet in the affair; and it finally appeared that Dupler had died a natural death. Vallet fortunately suffered nothing in character from this attempt to injure him; nobody doubted his innocence. He married, and had a family, and his trade flourished as before.

Nineteen years had elapsed, and the story of Dupler had been long forgotten, when Joseph Sevos and Antoine Pin, two persons of loose character and intemperate habits, disappeared, after having been seen the previous evening—February 19, 1724—in a state of inebriety. They were nowhere to be found; and when a week elapsed without their making their appearance, the question arose, what had become of them?

After some inquiry, it was found that Pin had gone to Dombes and enlisted—a thing he had often threatened to do. But of

Sevos there were no traces. This was the more strange, seeing he was in good circumstances, and was the possessor of a small property. Some thought Pin must have made away with his companion; but others combated this idea, under the impression that if Pin had committed murder, he would have fled no one knew whither, instead of enlisting as a soldier.

While public curiosity was on the stretch to discover what had become of Sevos, a rumour was propagated that all was not right with the family of Vallet the tile-burner. It was said they were very much discomposed, as if conscious of having committed a grievous crime. The report spread rapidly through the country, and the Attorney-General, Frillet, lost no time in inquiring into the facts. The result of his investigations was, that on the 19th of August, 1724, he filed an information to the effect that, "On Sunday evening, the 19th of February,

Joseph Sevos, after eating and drinking in Vallet's house, had suddenly disappeared, and has never since been heard of. That further, according to general belief, he had been murdered in the tiler's house, and buried under the stove; but that afterwards the body had been raised, and consumed in the kiln."

Upon this information proceedings were commenced by the authorities at Pont de l'Ain, and witnesses summoned. The first person was a man called Vaudan. He averred that, on the night of the 19th of February, having been to Mastalion, he was returning by Vallet's house, about three hours before daylight, when he heard a great noise, and clearly distinguished the words, "Help! help! I will confess everything! Forgive me this once, and spare my life!" Whereupon a voice, which he knew to be Joseph Vallet's, answered, "We want no more confessing; you must die!" This

sort of dialogue continuing some time, the witness became alarmed ; but, anxious to hear the end of it, he hid himself behind a bush, whence he distinctly heard the blows that were given to the victim. Suddenly, however, all became still ; and presently afterwards the door of the house opened, and Vallet, accompanied by his wife and two sons, came out, bearing a dead body, which they carried to the brick-kiln, and there buried, heaping a quantity of wood over the spot to conceal it. He added, that three or four days afterwards he made a pretext to call on Vallet at the brick-kiln, in order to see if he could recognise the place ; but, from what he observed, he concluded that the body had been removed ; and he had since learned that the murdered person was Joseph Sevos ; and that on Good Friday the Vallets had consumed the body in the furnace.

There were several other witnesses exa-

mined ; but on close inquiry, it appeared that they had received their information from Vaudan. However, the presumption appeared so strong against the Vallets, that their arrest was decreed, and executed with all the aggravated circumstances that so unnatural a crime seemed to justify. A brigade of mounted police, followed by a mob of the lowest class, proceeded to the tile-burner's house, and, amidst hooting and howling, dragged away the whole family to Pont de l'Ain, and shut them up in prison.

It happened that at this time Vallet was ill. He was suffering from a violent fever, accompanied by ague fits. Nevertheless, he was placed in a miserable dungeon, and loaded with irons ; and his wife and sons were exposed to equally harsh and unjustifiable treatment. With not less injustice, his house was given up to pillage ; the authorities neither took an inventory of his goods nor set a seal upon them. For eleven

days the doors stood open, and the neighbours, quite willing to second the law, helped themselves to what they liked. On the twelfth, it occurred to the Attorney-General that the premises should be searched for the clothes of the murdered man; but by this time it was useless to search for anything. The chests were broken open; the clothes, linen, &c. carried away, and doubtless the clothes of Sevos with them. Francisca, Vallet's sister, owned to having removed two bundles of her brother's property, in order to save them from the plunderers; but she declared that nothing belonging to Sevos or any other stranger was in them. She was, however, forced to produce them; and though nothing was found in them but what she had said, she was cast in the costs of the proceedings against herself, and fined twelve livres.

Whilst these things were going on, there was a party who looked on the whole affair

with dissatisfaction. They ventured to express doubts of the guilt of the Vallets, and protested against treating them with so much severity ; whilst Antoine Pin, who was assuredly not free from suspicion, was allowed to range the world at pleasure. At last the matter got so public, that it reached Paris ; it was talked of at Court, and furnished a subject for the *salons* ; and as the fine ladies and gentlemen became curious to learn the truth of the business, orders were forwarded to Dombes to arrest Antoine Pin, and send him forthwith to Pont de l'Ain.

No sooner did the fugitive find himself in prison, than he volunteered a full confession. He said that nobody knew better than he the particulars of poor Sevos's murder ; and that he was resolved, be the consequences what they might, that he would disclose the whole truth.

“ On the evening of the 19th of February,” said he, “ I and Sevos were drinking in

Vallet's house, when Sevos took it into his head, being drunk, to reproach Vallet with being the cause of Dupler's death; whereupon, in a rage, Vallet took up a heavy tin can that stood upon the table, and struck Sevos such a blow on the head with it, that he fell backwards to the earth, crying, 'Mercy, mercy! Take all my money, but spare my life!' But Vallet saying, 'Don't talk to me of mercy!' continued to strike him, whilst his wife, with a fire shovel, also lent her assistance. Even Philippe, the eldest boy, joined in the murderous work; and amongst them, they soon put an end to poor Joseph Sevos: young Pierre the while standing sentinel at the door to keep off intruders. Vallet, when he saw that he had killed Sevos, wanted me to strike him too," continued Pin, "lest I should be a witness against him; but I would not. When Sevos was dead, they carried him to the kiln, and there buried him, covering the place with a heap of wood;

and on Good Friday they dug up the body and burned it. I know this, because on that day I called at the kiln, and not only smelt the burning, but saw the burnt bones in the furnace. Vallet told me that if ever I said a word about the matter, he would serve me as he had served Sevos; but, at the same time, I must own he behaved very handsomely to me in the business, paying my silence liberally both with wine and money."

This testimony chimed in wonderfully with that of Vaudan; and although the dead body was not forthcoming, that circumstance had little weight, when its disappearance was so well accounted for, and when the story was confirmed by the utter impossibility of finding any traces of Joseph Sevos as a living person. The Vallets, however, persisted in denying the whole affair; they declared themselves innocent, and founded their defence on two circumstances. The first was, that, as they asserted, on the day after

the disappearance of Sevos, blood was found in his bed, upon his pillow, on the bedclothes, and on the floor of his room, proving decisively that he had been murdered in his own house, and affording a strong presumption that Antoine Pin was the murderer. The second was, that on the night in question Pierre Vallet, who, according to the evidence admitted, had been so useful a coadjutor in the business, had in fact been absent from home, having slept at the house of his schoolmaster at Poncin, in the same bed with two other boys.

Strange to say, the authorities refused to investigate the truth of these allegations. On the contrary, they maintained that, being accused by two person of the crime, the strongest suspicion attached to Joseph Vallet, and that his guilt was rather aggravated than otherwise by his attempt to shift the load from his own shoulders to those of Antoine Pin—an attempt in which he had entirely

failed; and the Attorney-General holding, therefore, the crime proved against him, demanded that sentence of death should be passed against the father, whilst confession should be wrung from the mother and sons by the rack. The jurisdiction of Pont de l'Ain, instead of complying with his request, condemned the whole family to the rack; whereupon Frillet, dissatisfied with a decision which gave the tile-burner a chance for his life, appealed to the parliament or high court of Dijon; who forthwith issued an order transferring the prisoners to their own fortress; whither they were removed, followed by the hootings and execrations of the excited multitude.

It was soon perceived that the authorities of Dijon meant to treat the matter with more earnestness and impartiality than those of Pont de l'Ain had done. They began by admitting the guilt of Vallet and his family, which they considered established beyond a

doubt ; but they looked upon Antoine Pin as in all probability equally guilty, and therefore to be treated as a criminal, and not as a witness, as had been hitherto the case. They alleged, in support of this opinion, his bad character, his suspicious flight, his avowed presence at the murder, which he not only made no attempt to prevent, but had since concealed ; and they also dwelt on certain conditions he had made when he entered the regiment at Dombes, all tending to his own security in case of being pursued. In hopes of eliciting the truth, he was put to the rack ; but the torture he endured did not alter his testimony ; it only recalled one additional circumstance—namely, that Vallet had given him a louis-d'or to entice Sevos to his house on the day in question.

The fate of the Vallet family seemed now decided ; and their case was the more hopeless, that by this last avowal Pin had brought himself under the arm of the law ; but now,

when least expected, conscience, that irrepressible witness, awoke and spoke for them. No sooner had he returned to his cell, than the thoughts of destroying a whole family by his perjury overpowered him. He passed a night of sleepless anguish, and when the morning dawned, he requested that some person qualified to receive his confession might be sent to him. One of the barristers engaged in the cause was immediately despatched to the prison, and Antoine Pin made the following narration :

He confessed that his life had been a series of crimes, and that at length, in 1722, he had fallen upon young Philippe Vallet on the high road, and, without being recognised by the boy, had robbed him of his money and clothes. Sevos, however, hidden behind a bush, had witnessed the crime, and had frequently reminded him that he had it in his power to bring him to the scaffold any day he pleased. He had shown no

signs of an intention to do it, but nevertheless the threat disturbed Pin, and he never ceased wishing to get rid of so troublesome an acquaintance.

On the 19th February, they had gone together to Vallet's house, where they drank and chatted for some time. Sevos, he said, liked idling and drinking as well as he did: they repaired to various wine-houses after leaving Vallet's, in the last of which they sat till past midnight. There it was, that, in a state of maudlin intoxication, Sevos pulled a bag out of his pocket, containing about forty dollars in silver, and exhibited the money to Pin, who was immediately seized with a desire to get possession of the booty, and at the same time relieve himself of a dangerous witness, who might turn against him some day when he least expected it. With this view, he accompanied Sevos home, and when they got to the door, he represented that although they had drunk a great deal,

they had had nothing to eat, and proposed getting something for supper. Sevos said he was hungry too ; whereupon Pin went to the house of Michel Morel, whom he knocked up, and from whom he procured a loaf, which he carried back to Sevos's, having on the way slipped into the house of his own father, and armed himself with a hatchet, which he hid under his coat.

Meanwhile Sevos, overcome by liquor, had lost sight of his hunger, and declared his intention of going immediately to sleep, requesting Pin to pass the night with him, to which the latter consented ; and just as the unfortunate host was stepping into bed, Pin, who was standing behind him, brought down the hatchet with tremendous force upon his head. “ O, God ! I'm killed ! ” were the only words that passed the lips of the victim, before he sunk to the earth, bathed in his blood. “ After rifling his pockets, I carried the

body on my back to the stable," continued he, "where I covered it with manure; and then feeling that Bresse was no safe nest for me, I started for Dombes, and enlisted as a soldier." He added, that, before he quitted the house, he tried, without much effect, to efface the traces of his crime. "This is the truth," said he, "and the whole truth. I had neither aiders nor abettors: no one living was in my confidence; and the Vallets, father, mother, and sons, are innocent of the whole affair."

On being asked why, if this were the case, he had persisted in accusing the Vallets, he answered that his first intention when he was arrested was to confess the truth, but he had changed his mind; adding, that Vaudan, the first witness against the Vallets, was a good-for-nothing scoundrel, on whose testimony no reliance whatever could be placed; and that, if they secured him, they

would learn what weighty reasons he had for giving false evidence.

As Pin persisted in this story, without waiting to investigate the matter further, he was at once condemned, on his own confession, to be broken on the wheel. He fully admitted the justice of his sentence; and the only request he made was, to be permitted to see the Vallets before he died; which being granted, he threw himself at their feet, reiterating his assertions of their innocence, and entreating their pardon. He seemed really penitent; and, great as were his crimes, the earnest desire he evinced in the midst of his tortures to vindicate the guiltless and promote the ends of justice, won him the pardon and pity even of the injured Vallets.

Thus died Antoine Pin: and when he was dead, the authorities bethought themselves of searching the stable for the body, and of verifying his story by ascertaining what traces

of the crime had been found about the house by those who first entered it after the disappearance of Joseph Sevos. But with respect to the house, the bed was gone, the place had been scoured, and nobody seemed able or willing to give any accurate account of what had been observed. Then with regard to the body, which Pin said he had hidden in the stable under a heap of manure, there was not only no body, but not a single bone to be found, nor any appearance to justify the suspicion that a body had ever been there.

Here was a puzzle! But Antoine Pin was silenced for ever, and who was to unravel the mystery? Perhaps Vaudan, whom he had arraigned: but as Pin was gone, if he did not choose to tell the truth, there was nobody to confront him. However, not knowing what else to do, they arrested Vaudan. He persisted in what he had said; "what he had heard he had heard;" and his

evidence was true to a tittle. He felt it his duty to confess to the judge that his character was not unstained; he had *once* in his life committed a dishonest act—stolen three oxen and a filly from his master. The ingenuousness of this needless avowal told much in his favour. Well-nigh at its wits' end, the court was at length induced to call for the records of the whole case, as it had been tried at Pont de l'Ain. On looking over the papers, they found such strange informalities, so many unaccountable erasures, and so many equally unaccountable interpolations, that the affair took quite a new turn; and that which nobody had yet dared to suggest, began to be shrewdly suspected—namely, that the Attorney-General, Frillet, had been playing a part in the drama, which as little comported with his reputation as with his office. A scrutiny ensued; and the result was, the complete justification of the Vallet family. Not only had every witness against them been either

deceivers, or themselves deceived, but the evidences in their favour had been kept back or suppressed. It even came out, and was satisfactorily proved, that distinct traces of the murder had been found in Sevos's room and that several persons had sworn to facts before Frillet himself. Nay, not only so, but even traces of blood were still distinctly visible on the floor; and the instrument with which Antoine Pin said had committed the murder was discovered in the house.

Considering how very inexpert these officials appear to have been in extricating from falsehood, it is fortunate that seems to have been something in the nature of their dungeons that disposed people to confession. No sooner did Vaudan find himself alone in prison, than he declared his intention of clearing up the whole affair. He said that his testimony was false from beginning to end; adding, that the officer who

moned him as a witness, had desired him to wait upon the Attorney-General as soon as the examination was over, and relate to him all that had passed.

The Parliament of Dijon, who, when they had got a criminal, seem to have proceeded with uncompromising diligence, lost no time in passing sentence on Vaudan, who was forthwith conducted to the scaffold, and died asserting the innocence of the Vallets. The real motive of this injudicious haste, which in this case and many others rendered the discovery of truth so difficult, was the fulness of the prisons. No sooner were they satisfied of a man's guilt, than they put him out of the way, to make room for the next comer; frequently thereby not only committing great injustice, but depriving themselves of the most important testimony.

Vaudan was executed on the 5th of October, and on the 12th an order was issued for placing another prisoner on the rack. This was a man called Maurice, who had made himself exceedingly busy in the whole affair. in the case of Sevos as well as of Dupler, and

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on whom suspicion had at length rested. The moment Maurice felt the thumb-screws, he avowed himself a false witness, in the pay of the Attorney-General, who was the originator of the whole cabal against the Vallets. He had desired him to revive the story of Dupler. Maurice declared that he had at first resisted, but that the threats and promises of Frillet had at length prevailed. He added that the Attorney-General had two assistants in the affair ; namely, Torrillon, and a forester called Mallet, who had given themselves extraordinary trouble to bring in such witnesses as suited the great man's purpose.

On the 13th, the day after he had made this confession, Maurice was executed ; and he also died maintaining the innocence of the Vallets.

They had now put three persons out of the world on account of this affair : one for the murder, and two for perjury. But where was the greatest criminal of all ? Where was the Attorney-General Frillet ? He, the suborner, the worse than murderer, the persecutor of the innocent, the betrayer of his

office and his oath, the ten times guilty—he was at large, ‘going to and fro upon the earth, and walking up and down on it,’ like his great prototype! And where were the Vallets? They were still in prison! Three persons had died declaring their innocence; every witness against them had been convicted of perjury or delusion; not a single circumstance remained uncontradicted that could in any way connect them with the deaths of either Dupler or Sevos; their justification was indisputable, clear, and triumphant; the whole accusation was proved to be the fruits of a cabal, the offspring of envy and malice: at least, if it were not, what had Vaudan and Maurice died for? And yet, on the 13th of October, Frillet was at large, and the Vallets were in prison!

However, they were at length restored to liberty, with a recompense of 500 francs (about £20), which Maurice had been made to pay as an expiation: at the same time measures were taken for arresting Frillet and his two abettors, Torrillon and the forester; but the Attorney-General was too well in-

formed of what was going on to allow himself to be taken. He fled into Savoy, and found refuge in a cloister, where the arm of the law could not reach him.

In the meantime the prosperity of the Vallets was destroyed. Their healths had been injured, their money had gone to the lawyers, their house had been plundered, and everything belonging to them, except the bare walls, had either disappeared or been knocked to pieces. The old man had to begin the world again. It was up-hill work ; but he did his best, and in time partially recovered his former position.

Several years had thus elapsed, and the Vallets had fought through the worst of their difficulties, when one day, Pierre, the youngest son, being on business at a town called Bourg, met, as he was walking through the market-place—who? why, JOSEPH SEVOS ! At first he thought it was a phantom of the imagination ; but on a nearer approach, he became satisfied that the person he looked upon was no other than he, whose disappearance had caused so much trouble. Perceiving

himself to be recognised, Sevos attempted to escape in the crowd ; but Pierre promptly followed, and had the satisfaction of seizing and bringing him before a magistrate, of whom he demanded that both himself and the resuscitated man should be held in custody till the mystery could be investigated. The reserve and equivocations with which Sevos sought to baffle inquiry, suggesting a suspicion that he was not altogether innocent ; he was accordingly removed to Dijon ; but even there, it was not till he was threatened with the rack that the truth was elicited from him.

“ On the 19th of February, 1724,” said he, “ Antoine Pin and I went out for a day’s drinking ; and when the wine-houses were all closed, we went together to my house, where I invited him to sleep. I undressed, and was about to step into bed, when I received a violent blow upon the head. I fell to the ground, exclaiming that I was killed ; and as I did not stir again, no doubt Pin thought I was. However, I was only stunned. He

then rifled my pockets, in which I had about forty dollars, and afterwards dragged me to the stable, and covered me with manure. There I lay and listened till I heard Pin go away ; then I went back to the house, and fastening the door, I stanchd the blood that flowed from my head as well as I could with old rags. In the morning I bound it up, and bethought me what I should do ; but the fear of Antoine so entirely overcame me, that I durst not leave the house, nor even open the door ; and for two whole days and nights I sat there, listening for his return, which I momentarily expected. However, he came no more ; and on the third I ventured, before the day had well broken, to slip out ; and I managed, without being seen by anybody, to reach the Attorney-General's, and to him I related what had happened. He listened to my story with attention, and, after some consideration, he advised me to quit the place. ' Pin,' said he, ' is a villain, who will stick at nothing ; and if he finds out you are alive, he will never stop till he

has completed his work. Take my advice, and leave this as fast as your legs can carry you, and the farther you go the better.' ”

Sevos was a timid and weak man : to be once murdered he thought was enough. The advice of so influential a person as Frillet, one who must necessarily understand the case so well, was not to be neglected. He fled, and never stopped till he thought himself far out of the reach of his enemy. Accident had at length brought him to the market of Bourg, where Pierre Vallet met him.

The agreement between this story and that of Antoine Pin, was sufficient to insure its acceptance as far as it went ; but it was generally believed that Joseph Sevos, timid as he was, had been influenced by something more than fear to abandon his native place and his little property. The Attorney-General's empty-handed recommendation was not likely to have induced a man to condemn himself to exile for such a length of time. However, whether from the apprehension of suffering the legal penalty, as a party in the plot, or from

the dread of the great man's vengeance, Sevos could not be brought to any further confession. On this occasion the rack was spared, the desire for a further revelation not being sufficiently strong on the part of the authorities to induce them to have recourse to it.

As soon as the news of Sevos's reappearance reached Frillet, he quitted his sanctuary, and loudly arraigned the Parliament of Dijon, not only for their proceedings against himself, but also for having broken Antoine Pin upon the wheel for the murder of a man who was proved never to have been murdered at all. In spite of this, however, they arrested him, and instituted investigations, which led to the conviction of several other persons as parties in the conspiracy of which he had been the contriver : and now that the tide was apparently turning against him, there was no telling how far the tongue of Joseph Sevos might have been loosed, had he not, just at this juncture, most unexpectedly died in prison. Nevertheless, so strong was the evidence against Frillet, that he was condemned to death, and his property mulcted to

the amount of 8,000 livres, for the benefit of the Vallet family.

Great was the joy of the people at this decision ! Nine hours had the Parliament of Dijon sat before they could agree upon the sentence. The whole town had been in commotion for days ; and all seemed anxious for the execution of a man who had proved himself such an oppressor. This vengeful feeling was doomed to be disappointed. The sentence of death against Frillet was commuted by the King into banishment for ten years. He received the intimation with an affectation of pious gratitude ; for he seems to have been as great a hypocrite as a sinner. But it was the will of God, whose justice and mercy he had outraged, that he should not profit by the corruption that had spared his life. On the day appointed for his quitting the prison, that life was required of him by a Judge incorruptible. He expired suddenly as they were throwing open the gates to set him free. His coadjutors in crime suffered various degrees of punishment, and the injured Vallets received the 8,000 livres.

Perhaps a more extraordinary case of criminal jurisprudence than this is not on record, nor one that exhibits a more frightful picture of the effrontery with which the strong dared to oppress the weak, or of the carelessness, precipitance, and contempt for the most ordinary principles of justice with which, at one period, the judicial proceedings of France were conducted.

V.

THE BRIDE'S JOURNEY.

CHAPTER I.

⁴ IN the year 1809, when the French were in Prussia, M. Louison, an officer in the commissariat department of the imperial army, contracted an attachment for the beautiful Adelaide Hext, the daughter of a respectable but not wealthy merchant. The young Frenchman having contrived to make his attachment known, it was imprudently reciprocated by its object; we say imprudently, for the French were detested by her father, who declared that no daughter of his should ever be allied to one of the invaders and occupants of his beloved country. Thus

repulsed, M. Louison had the good sense not to press his suit, and proceeded to Vienna, where he was installed in a lucrative office suitable to his wishes and abilities. Here, however, he could not altogether relinquish the expectation of being one day married to the fair Adelaide Hext, with whom he continued to correspond.

After the lapse of a few months, the aspect of affairs underwent a material change. Hext lay, as he supposed, and as the doctors told him, on his deathbed, and, pondering on the probable destitution of his family, he repented of his rash vow, and stated to Adelaide that he should no longer oppose her wishes. M. Louison, procuring leave of absence for a few days, was speedily on the spot, and, with as little loss of time as possible, was united to the daughter of the seemingly dying merchant. As, in such circumstances, it would have been cruel for Madame Louison to leave the bedside of her aged parent, it was arranged that she should remain till the period of his decease, and then join her husband, who, in the meanwhile, was compelled to

return to Vienna. The old man, however, recovered as soon as his son-in-law departed, and he now almost wished the marriage were undone; but as that was impracticable, he, with as good a grace as possible, saw his daughter set out on her journey to Dresden, whence she was to be escorted to Vienna by M. de Monge, a friend of her husband.

Nothing occurred to interrupt the journey of Madame Louison, for the intermediate country was tranquil, and she had the happiness of arriving safely under the roof of her husband's friend. This person, who held a situation of trust under the Prussian Government, connected with the establishments for popular education, was one of those who will act conscientiously in all situations of life, until they encounter an irresistible temptation to error. Such was the present occasion. Overcome with the beauty of his unsuspecting guest, he basely attempted to divert her affections from her husband, and Adelaide had not been many hours in his house, before she ardently wished she had encountered alone the perils of her journey rather than

accept the protection of De Monge. His attentions assumed a character that alarmed her, and when he found himself repulsed, he sought by calumny to undermine her confidence in the man she had married. But she repelled his insinuations with scorn, forbade him her presence, and insisted on being allowed to depart alone: then he had recourse to threats, declaring that he would accuse her to her husband of the very crime he vainly sued her to commit, till finding his menaces no more efficacious than his supplications, he condescended to other means of detaining her under his roof, beginning by feigning repentance, and an earnest desire to conform to her wishes in all respects.

“ You refuse to travel with me,” said he; “ and I feel that you are justified in so doing. I will not attempt to accompany you, but you must forgive me for saying I cannot permit you to go alone. The roads are not secure. However quiet we are here, I know that, in many parts, the country is in a state of great disturbance, and you might encounter difficulties and dangers of a nature

you little anticipate! Wait but a few days and I will engage to find you a safe and suitable escort."

Alarmed by the representation of these unknown perils, Madame Louison consented to defer her departure, whilst De Monge abstained from any open demonstration of the sentiments he had previously evinced. But she discerned the constraint he put upon himself; he could not recover her confidence, and her situation became daily more and more unpleasant. Under these painful circumstances Adelaide was detained upwards of a month under the roof of De Monge, whose wife, being an invalid confined to her chamber, had no suspicion of her husband's treachery, whilst Madame Louison was deterred both by delicacy and compassion from acquainting her with what had occurred. But at length the promised escort not presenting itself, and wearied out with anxiety and expectation, she determined to set out alone, without making known her intentions; a resolution to which she was pushed by the alarming circumstance of finding the frag-

ment of a letter in her husband's handwriting, which had evidently been addressed to herself under cover to De Monge, and by him suppressed.

Whether or not her host became aware of her resolution, remains uncertain; but one day, when her arrangements were nearly completed, after being absent some hours, he entered the room congratulating her on having at length heard of a party about to start for Vienna with whom she might securely travel.

"They are an Italian and his wife," said he, "called Mazzuolo. He is the steward and she the housekeeper of the Marchese del Montebello, who has summoned them to join him in Vienna. He seems an agreeable person, and you could not have met with a better opportunity. They start on Tuesday if that will suit you."

Adelaide, much relieved, said it would suit her perfectly, and cheered by the prospect of escaping from her present annoyances and of soon seeing her husband, she dismissed her fears and became cheerful and happy.

On the evening preceding the day fixed for her departure, De Monge said to her, "I have been talking to Mazzuolo about your journey, and he begged me to warn you not to be surprized at seeing his wife in male attire. In the present state of the country he thinks it safer, as travelling with two women and only one man to protect them, might expose you to annoyance."

Madame Louison approved of the precaution, and she bade good-night to her host hoping it was the last time she should ever have the pain of seeing him, although at the same time she had secretly determined never to mention to anybody what had happened, unless some necessity for doing so should arise. But so evident was his agitation when he took leave of her that she felt half inclined to tell him of her resolution, and, indeed, was only deterred by the apprehension that he might put a false construction on her forbearance and interpret it in his own favour, when in fact she was wholly actuated by the desire to defend her husband from the dangers of a quarrel.

So she retired to her room, leaving him, as she believed, in all the agonies of his guilty fears; for his cheeks were deathlike, his eyes were distended with a wild expression of horror, the hand he extended to her was cold and clammy, and his white lips moved as if he would speak though no sound issued from them. As she closed the door he sank into a chair, his two arms fell listlessly by his side, and he had all the appearance of a man overcome by hopeless despair.

He had indeed undergone a fearful struggle, and had arrived at a dreadful climax! Led astray by strong passions and weak principles, he had imperilled not only his reputation, but his position and his very means of subsistence, for he was well aware that the circumstances of the case once made public, the best hope that remained to him would be to fall by the sword of the man he had injured. A prey to passion on the one hand and terror on the other, his sentiment for Adelaide had become a strange mixture of love and hatred. He idolized her beauty, but he trembled at her power to injure him ;

and whilst he ardently longed to press her to his arms, he as ardently wished some thunder-bolt would come to his aid and strike her dead at his feet.

Beset by these contending feelings he had detained her from day to day, hoping he knew not what, when one night at the theatre he fell in with Mazzuolo, a man who had formerly been a courier, but who having by some acts of dishonesty lost the confidence of his employers, had fallen, step by step, till he had no resource left but to live by swindling. He had even been suspected of crimes of a blacker die, but there existing no evidence sufficient to convict him, he was still at large, pursuing his vocation of preying upon the public. Now it happened that De Monge, who was bred to the law, had formerly been consulted by Mazzuolo in his difficulties, and had had good opportunity of knowing his real character. He was well aware that the hands of the Italian were not unstained by blood, and that there was no crime of which he was not capable. The sight of the means to do evil often suggests

evil thoughts, and the sight of Mazzuolo suggested to De Monge a wicked way out of his embarrassment. A conference ensued, the subject was broached with caution—a handsome sum was tendered, and it was intimated that the lady's wardrobe contained articles of considerable value. Mazzuolo was not slow to comprehend the hint. He said it would suit him very well to undertake the journey, only stipulating that his wife dressed in male attire and a lad he could rely on, should accompany them. The bargain was struck and Adelaide naturally fell into the snare: of course it was never intended that she should reach Vienna.

De Monge had certainly now a fair prospect of escaping from his difficulties; but he was not sufficiently hardened in guilt to take such a stride into crime, without dreadful pangs of conscience, and even of pity. There she was—so young, so beautiful, so unsuspecting! He was beset by a thousand horrors and a thousand relentings; his breast was a seat of war, wherein a good and evil spirit fought out their deadly fight; but,

alas ! he had committed himself to Mazzuolo, and the evil prevailed. Whilst Madame Louison slept in peace, he passed a painful night of agony ; and when the morning dawned he retired to his chamber, having resolved to spare himself the horror of seeing his victim depart.

At an early hour the carriage arrived, and Adelaide, who had not before seen her travelling companions, was handed into it by Mazzuolo, with all the deference her appearance demanded. She wore a black velvet bonnet, a Chantilly veil, a crimson silk pelisse, profusely trimmed with sables, a boa of the same costly material ; and over all, as the weather was cold, she threw a green velvet cloak, lined with rich furs.

Mazzuolo and his wife augured well of the contents of her heavy trunks.

As they drove away from the door, she felt grateful to De Monge for his non-appearance. It was proper, it was delicate. Under other circumstances, his absence would have augured a want of good breeding ; but, considering the relation in which they stood,

she thought his forbearance highly commendable : her spirits rose, she cast her cares behind her, and prepared to make herself agreeable to her companions, whose appearance rather pleased her than otherwise. Mazzuolo was a fine-looking, dark man, and his wife extremely pleasing and prepossessing.

The length of the journey, the dangers of the road, and the goodness or badness of the inns they should have to rest at, formed the subjects of conversation for the first hour or two. The stage was very long, and it was eleven o'clock before they reached their first relay of horses, by which time the young traveller had decided that she had much reason to be satisfied with her escort. The Italian was polite and entertaining ; he had travelled a great deal, and was full of anecdote ; and being naturally lively and garrulous, the design he entertained of taking away the life of his charge did not prevent his making himself agreeable to her in the meantime. With his well-seared conscience, he neither felt nervous

nor saturnine at the prospect of what was before him—why should he indeed?—for the only part of the prospect he fixed his eye upon was the gain; the little operation by means of which it was to be acquired, he did not think very seriously of; besides, he did not intend to perform it himself.

When they stopped to change horses, a lad of about seventeen years of age, named Karl, nephew of Mazzuolo's wife, came to the carriage door: he seemed to have been waiting for them. Mazzuolo spoke to him aside for some minutes, and when they started again, the youth mounted in front of the carriage. The Italian said he was a lad they had engaged to look after the luggage, and be useful on the journey. He was, in fact, one who was hired to do any piece of work, good or bad. He possessed no moral strength, could be easily led by the will of his employers; and, in short, was a very useful ally. He had a broad, fair, stolid German face; and, from the glimpse she had of him, Adelaide thought she had seldom seen a more

unprepossessing-looking person ; his manners were coarse and unpolished, and his dress shabby.

The first day's journey passed agreeably enough. When they arrived at their night's station, Mazzuolo having handed out the ladies, bade them go up stairs and order supper, whilst he and Karl looked to the putting up of the carriage. Agostina, or Tina, as her husband commonly called her, insisted very much on having a room for Adelaide adjoining her own, alleging as her reason that they were answerable for her safety. The bride thanked her for her caution, but added, laughingly, that she did not think she had much to fear. It was some time before the two men joined them ; and then they sat down to supper, the lad Karl acting as waiter. As he stood behind his aunt's chair, and exactly opposite Adelaide she observed that his eyes seldom wandered from her face. Rude as he was, her beauty seems to have impressed him. When supper was over, being fatigued, she retired to her

room; and then the party that remained closed the door, and bidding Karl sit down and eat his supper, they held a council on her fate.

Mazzuolo opened the conference by mentioning that he had already given the lad a hint of what was expected of him, and Tina asked him if he thought he was equal to the undertaking. Karl said he did not know; whereupon they encouraged him with promises of a handsome share of the booty, telling him also that they would stand by him, and help him if necessary. But the question was, how was the thing to be done, and where? Whether on the road by day, or in the night when they stopt? In either case, there were difficulties: many parts of the road they had to pass were extremely lonely, and fit for the purpose; but then how were they to get rid of the postilion? And as they had a fresh one at every stage, there was no time to win him to their purpose. Then, at the inns, the obstacles were also considerable, especially as the houses were generally small.

Tina suggested, that whenever the bride dropt out of the party, she had only to resume her female attire, and the people would never miss her. "Karl can take my place in the carriage," she said, "and I Madame Louison's. Thus we shall appear to be as many as we were; and there will be no discrepancy with the passport." The hint was approved; but, after an hour's discussion, they found it impossible to conclude upon any plan: the execution of their projects must be left to chance and opportunity—all they had to do was, to be prepared to seize upon the first that offered.

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