

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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THE ROSE AND THE KEY.

CHAPTER XXXIX. THOUGH SOME PEOPLE GO HOME, THE BALL GOES ON.

FOR a time neither lady seemed disposed to talk.

Maud's ruminations were exciting and unsatisfactory. She had acted a good deal from impulse, and, as she now, perhaps, secretly thought, neither very wisely nor very kindly. She expected a lecture from Maximilla. She would have preferred combat to her own solitary self-upbraidings. At all events, she quickly grew weary of her reflections, and, turning her eyes to her silent companion in the shadow of her own corner, she said:

"I quite forgot to ask Lady Mardykes who her solemn friend, with the black square beard, is. Did you?"

"Yes—if you mean did I forget; at least, I don't think I had an opportunity. But, to tell you the truth," here Miss Max yawned, "I don't much care. He looks like a foreigner."

"Yes. He has good eyes. There is something quiet and masterly in his air. I saw him afterwards talking to Doctor Malkin."

"Yes, so did I. I can't endure that man," exclaimed Miss Max. "What on earth brings him to a ball, of all places?"

"I don't know, unless he hopes some of the old squires may have an apoplexy at supper," answered Maud Vernon.

"It might have been wiser if he had stayed at home. I dare say Barbara would have had him to tea if he had looked in, and he would have had the advantage of a tête-à-tête," said Maximilla.

"The advantage—what do you mean?" asked Maud.

"Why, Mr. Foljambe told us yester-

day—you must have been thinking of something else—that your mamma will have in the course of the year, I think it was four medical appointments, virtually in her gift; including the supply of medicines to the county jail, which will be given to whatever candidate she supports. And they are altogether worth between eleven and twelve hundred a year, I think he said, and that's the reason why Doctor Malkin is so frequent a visitor just now."

"I should be very glad," said Maud.

"I don't care twopence who gets them," said Maximilla, resignedly. "There is some Doctor Murchison—I think that was the name—who is a rather formidable competitor."

"Did Ethel Tintern dance much to-night?" asked the young lady.

"Not a great deal. I don't think she seemed to care for the ball."

Here came a silence. And after two or three minutes Miss Max said suddenly:

"It strikes me you have been sowing the wind to-night, my dear."

"Sowing the wind! How? What have I done?"

"Come, Maud, you know as well as I what you have been doing. You have treated Mr. Marston very ill; and you have prepared, you may be sure, an animated scene at home. I can tell you, Barbara will be extremely angry; and not without very good reason."

"You mean about Captain Vivian?" said Maud, a little sulkily.

"Of course I mean about Captain Vivian," replied Miss Max.

"Well there's no good in talking about it now. It's done, and I can't help it, and, indeed, I could not have prevented it; and I don't want to talk about it," said Maud, pettishly.

"And what is Mr. Marston to think?"

"What he pleases," Maud answered. "You know what mamma thinks of the Marstons. I think my chance of going to Lady Mardykes' would have been pretty well ended if she heard that I gave Mr. Marston a great many dances, and she will know everything about this ball. It was not my fault, Captain Vivian asking for all those dances. I'm very glad he did. I hope people remarked it. I hope mamma will hear of it. If she does she will think of nothing else, I dare say."

The young lady laughed, and then she sighed.

"Upon my word you are complicating the situation very prettily," said Miss Max.

"I suppose I am doing everything that is wrong and foolish; yet I believe it is best as it is," said the young lady. "I did not want to vex Mr. Marston; and if he has any sense he'll understand perfectly that I did not; and what need I care whether old Lord Hawkshawe, or Mr. Pindles, or Mr. Wylder, or any of the people who intended I should stay all night, dancing with them in that hot room, are pleased or not?"

"Captain Vivian was determined certainly to make the most of his opportunity," observed Miss Max.

And again the conversation flagged, and Miss Medwyn's active mind was employed upon the problem, and busy in conjecturing Captain Vivian's motive.

"Either he wishes to pique Barbara," she thought, "or he means to try his chances of success, in good faith, with Maud. I can quite understand that. But he is not the kind of person Maud would ever like, and I do think she likes Mr. Marston."

Then again she recalled Captain Vivian's sayings and doings that night at Wymering, to try to discover new lights and hidden meanings, to guide her to a right reading of that little episode.

While these two ladies are driving along the moon-lit roads towards Roydon Hall, the festivities of Wymering have lost nothing of their energy.

I shall ask you, therefore, to peep into the ball-room for a few minutes more, where you will find that Captain Vivian has just begged of old Mr. Tintern to introduce him to Miss Tintern. That young lady says to Mr. Tintern, hastily:

"Oh, don't, please!"

But her papa, not hearing, or, at least, not heeding, does present Captain Vivian, who carries off the young lady on his arm.

"If you don't mind, I should prefer not

dancing this time. It is so crowded," says Miss Tintern.

"I'm so glad," says he. "There is a quadrille after this. You must come where we shall be quiet for two or three minutes."

In the recess outside the ball-room, on the lobby at the head of the great staircase, an old-fashioned sofa is placed.

Skirting the dancers, to this he led her. When she had sat down,

"Ethel," he said, "you are very angry—that is to say, very unjust. What have I done?"

"What have you done?" she repeats. "You have placed me in the most miserable situation. How am I to look Maud Vernon in the face again? What will papa think of me? Is not concealment enough? Why should you practise positive deception? I don't like it. I'm entirely against it. You make me utterly miserable."

"Now, Ethel, don't be unreasonable. You must not blame me, for that which neither you nor I can prevent. When the time comes I'll speak out frankly enough. I could not help coming to Roydon. I could not refuse, without a risk of vexing Mr. Dawe very much, and that, for fifty reasons, would never do. I can't tell you all I've suffered, being so near, and unable to contrive a meeting, with scarcely an opportunity even of writing. Don't suppose that the vexation has been all yours; I have been positively miserable, and I knew very well all the ridiculous things that were said; and how they must have pained you. A little patience, a little time."

"I know all that very well, and I have suffered from those strange rumours, and I have suffered to-night. I feel so treacherous and deceitful. I won't be made an accomplice in such things. I hate myself, for hesitating to tell Maud how it really is."

"My dear Ethel, you must not be foolish. Living down here so much in the country, you make too much of trifles. What can it signify my dancing a few dances, more or less, with Miss Vernon? Do you fancy she cares about me, or that any one seriously thinks there can be anything more than that she likes my dancing, and that I admire her diamonds? Why, dancing two or three dances at a ball means absolutely nothing. Every one knows that. There is nothing in it but this—that people won't guess anything of the real state of things. They won't see anything, for instance, in our quiet little talk here."

Miss Buffins here passing by, with her

hand on Captain Bamme's arm, stops, her cheeks flushed and radiant with her triumphs, and remarks what a jolly ball it is, and how hot the room is, and how every one seems to be enjoying it so much, and so she gabbles on. Captain Bamme, smiling, with his mouth open, and his face hot and shining, is not able to get in a word, facetious or complimentary, and Miss Buffins, as she entertains Miss Tintern, is scanning her dress, and estimating its value in detail, while more slyly still, she inspects Captain Vivian.

At length, the crowd setting in a stronger current towards the supper-room, Captain Bamme and his fair charge are hurried away, smiling, towards chickens, tongue, lobster-salad, and those other comforts which the gallant captain loves with a secret, middle-aged affection that quite supersedes the sentimental vanities of earlier years. I think, with all his ostentatious gallantry, just then, the gay deceiver, who is jostling among elbows and shoulders, and bawling to waiters for cold salmon or lobster for this lady with a chivalric self-sacrifice, wishes her all the time, if the truth were known, at the bottom of the Red Sea. But he will return, after he has restored her to her mother, in quiet moments, when people, who know less of life, are busy dancing, and, with a shrewd gourmandise, will task the energies of the waiters, and strip chickens of their liver-wings, crunch lobster-salad, plunge into Strasbourg patés, drink champagne, and, with shining forehead and reckless enthusiasm, leave to-morrow's headache to take care of itself.

CHAPTER XL. LADY VERNON GROWS ANXIOUS.

THE morning after the ball Mr. Tintern was prodigiously uncomfortable. He was now, indeed, quite easy about Lady Vernon's fancied matrimonial designs; but relief at one point is too often accompanied by an acute pressure at another.

Captain Vivian had been audacious, nay, ostentatious, in his devotion to Miss Vernon at the Wymering ball. Whatever his reason, he seemed to wish that people should remark his attentions, and the young lady had certainly shown no unwillingness to permit them.

Next morning, before twelve o'clock, Mr. Tintern was at Roydon Hall, full of the occurrences of the night before.

Mr. Tintern has observed, with satisfaction, that for more than a year his relations with Lady Vernon have been growing

in confidence, and even intimacy. Call when he may, Lady Vernon is never denied to him now.

"Her ladyship is in the library, sir."

"Oh!"

And Mr. Tintern follows the tall footman through the silent, stately rooms, to the door he knows so well.

He is announced, and very graciously received.

"You have come to consult about your projected road, I suppose? And, oddly enough, I had just been looking over the map with Mr. Penrhyn."

"Well, thanks. Yes, any time, you know, that suits you, Lady Vernon, would do for that; but I happened to be passing this way, and I thought I might as well look in and tell you one or two things that struck me last night at the ball. You'll not be surprised, perhaps, but I was, a good deal: it is so unaccountable, except, indeed, on one supposition. I know how you feel about it, but, certainly, it does confirm my very high ideas, Lady Vernon, of your penetration. Only think, I'm going to tell you what I heard from the man himself! Miss Vernon obtained from old Lomax, the keeper of the Old Hall Inn, you know, an order of admission to the gallery of the town-hall for Miss Medwyn and her maid. And with this order Miss Medwyn went; and who do you think with her? Not her maid; by no means; no. It was Miss Vernon, and dressed in some old stuff—such a dress, I'm told, I suppose a lady's-maid would not be seen in it; and Miss Medwyn, I'm assured, tried to dissuade her, and they had a little dispute about it. But it would not do, and so Miss Vernon of Roydon carried her point, and presented herself as Miss Medwyn's servant!"

"It is a continuation of the same vein—nothing new. It only shows how persistent it is," says Lady Vernon, closing her eyes with a little frown, and running one finger tip meditatively to and fro over her finely pencilled black eyebrow.

"Only think," repeats Mr. Tintern, with a little shrug, lowering his voice eagerly, and expanding his hands like a man making a painful exposition, "without the slightest temptation, nothing on earth to make it intelligible."

"I am afraid, Mr. Tintern, it is not very easy to account for all this; upon any pleasant theory I mean."

"I thought it my duty, Lady Vernon, considering the terms of, I may say, confi-

dence to which you have been so good as to admit me, to mention this; and, also, perhaps another circumstance which excited, I may say, very general observation last night at the ball, and I fancy you would prefer my being quite straight and above board in giving you my opinion and the result of my observation."

"Certainly, I shall thank you very much," said the lady, raising her eyes suddenly, and fixing them upon him with a rather stern expectation.

"Well, I believe it is but right to tell you that your guest, Captain Vivian, devoted himself in, I may say, an extraordinary way to Miss Vernon, your daughter. Now, I don't know what that young man's position or expectations may be; but it is of course quite possible he may be in many respects an eligible parti for Miss Vernon. But if he be, perhaps considering all you have been so good as to tell me, don't you think, a—eh? he ought to be a—a—warned, don't you think?"

"Captain Vivian," she answered, with the fire that comes with excitement in each cheek, "Mr. Dawe tells me, has scarcely four hundred a year, and has no chance of succeeding to anything, unless, indeed, Mr. Dawe should leave him something, which, of course, may never happen. I need not tell you that nothing could be more amazing than any such pretensions. Pray let me know why you suppose them possible."

"The evidence," replied Mr. Tintern, "was patent to every one at Wymering last night. Nothing could be more marked, and I am bound to say, speaking to you, Lady Vernon, what I should hesitate to say to any one else, I say he was received as favourably as he could have hoped. In fact, if he were the greatest muff in England, and he is far from being anything of the kind, he could not have failed to see it, and see it he did."

Lady Vernon was looking down upon the table, following with her pencil's point the lines of her monogram engraved upon the gold plate on the side of her blotting-book, and continuing to do so, with a very black countenance, smiling sourly on the interlacing initials, she said:

"There has been a great deal of duplicity then; I fancied one evening I did see something, but it seemed quite to have died out by next day, and never was renewed—great duplicity; it is morbid, it is not an amiable trait, not attractive, but, of course, we must view it with charity."

"I hope I have done right in telling you, Lady Vernon?" said Mr. Tintern, who was in no haste to see Miss Vernon married, no more indeed than Lady Vernon was.

"Of course, you know, we should all be glad, the whole county I mean, to see her suitably married," he continued, "and suitably in her case would, of course, mean splendidly; and less than that would not, I think, satisfy expectation. But a creature—a—a whipper-snapper like that," he said, with his head on one side, and his hands expanded, and a little shrug in plaintive expostulation, "an adventurer, and I—really for the life of me, I can't see anything to make up for it."

"People see with different eyes, Mr. Tintern," she said, looking on the rings that covered the fingers of her finely formed hand; "and you saw this yourself?"

"I saw it, and you may trust my report. I say there is—I don't say a romance—but a great deal more than a romance, established in that quarter—and—you know, it would amount to this, that the young lady would be simply sacrificed!"

And Mr. Tintern threw back his arms with his hands open, and a look of wild stupefaction, which plainly conveyed the despair in which such a catastrophe would plunge this loyal county.

"But a ball is a kind of thing," said Lady Vernon, meditatively, "at which unreal flirtation is always carried on. You may be looking at this in much too serious a light, Mr. Tintern."

"Oh, pardon me, Lady Vernon. I make every allowance, but this was nothing of the kind. It would be misleading you most unjustifiably if I were to acquiesce in any such supposition."

"Well, you know, it would be, as you say, utterly untenable and monstrous," began Lady Vernon. "And, of course——"

"One moment," he interrupted, lifting his finger suddenly, as something caught his eye outside the window. "I beg pardon a thousand times, but—but—yes—there they are!" exclaimed Mr. Tintern.

He had approached the window, and was pointing, with his extended hand, toward the terrace-walk before the house. "There, there, there, you see; it is, upon my life! Only look. You see, eh?"

He stepped backward a pace or two, a little into the shade.

Lady Vernon watched them darkly as they passed, and what Lady Vernon saw did not please her.

The young lady yielded a flower she had in her fingers to the young gentleman, who placed it in his button-hole over his heart, to which he pressed its stem with an expressive glance at her.

Lady Vernon changed colour a little, and looked down again on the table.

Quite unconscious of being observed at that moment, the young people passed on.

"She has always been perverse and ungovernable, always," said Lady Vernon, with cold bitterness; "and a want of self-restraint induces the violent and hysterical state in which she often is. I leave to other persons the task of explaining her whims and extravagances, her excursion to Cardyllion, and such eccentricities as that of her visit to the gallery last night, dressed as a lady's-maid."

"And a very humble sort of maid too," said Mr. Tintern. "And—what is one to think? I entirely agree with you. What can one say?"

Lady Vernon's large dark eyes, hollow and strangely tired now, were lowered to the little cluster of seals upon the table, with which the tip of her taper finger played softly. There was the same brilliant flush in each cheek, and an odd slight drawing of her handsome lips—a look like that of a person who witnesses a cruel but inevitable operation.

Lady Vernon is too proud to betray to Mr. Tintern the least particle of what she really suffers by the smallest voluntary sign.

It is not the belief that forms the desire, but the desire that shapes the belief. Little originates in the head. Nearly all has its inception in the heart. The brain is its slave, and does task-work. That which it is your interest or your wish to believe, you do believe. The thing you desire is the thing you will think. Men not only speak, but actually think well of those with whom they have a community of interest and profit, and evil of those who stand in their way. Government, by party, proceeds upon this ascertained law of humanity. As a rule, the brain does not lead. It is the instrument and the slave of the desire.

There is another occult force, a mechanical power, as it were, always formidably at the service of the devil and the soul. The inclined plane by which the mind glides imperceptibly from perversion into perjury.

I once heard an attorney of great ability and experience remark: "You may take it as a rule that in every case, if your client says an untruth in support of his own case,

when the time comes for filing his affidavit he will also swear it."

It is the desire that governs the will, and the will the intellect. Let every man keep his heart, then, as he would his house, and beware how he admits a villain to live in it.

Mr. Tintern is a gentleman of sensitive honour and unexceptionable morality. Forty years ago, when duels were still fought, he perforated the Honourable Whiffle Newgate's hat with a pistol-bullet, for daring to call his veracity in question. And did he not proceed criminally against the radical county paper, simply to gain the opportunity of filing his affidavit, and afterwards of undergoing examination and cross-examination in the witness-box, in vindication of his probity?

And does not Lady Vernon walk this world a pattern and a reproach to sinners, and a paragon among the godly?

And, alas! is not the heart of man deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked? Something we can do for ourselves. Not a great deal, but still indispensable. As much as his friends could do for Lazarus. "Take ye away the stone," and when that is done, into the sepulchre enters the miraculous influence—actual life and light, and the voice of power, where before was the silence of darkness.

"It is all very painful, Mr. Tintern, miserably painful," she says faintly, still looking down. And then with a sigh she picks up the pretty little cluster of seals, and drops them into their place in the desk, and shuts it down and locks it.

CHAPTER XLI. LADY VERNON TAKES EVIDENCE.

WHEN Mr. Tintern had taken his departure, with the comfortable feeling that he had done what was right, Lady Vernon sighed deeply.

"Mr. Tintern," she thought, "lives in castles of his own building. He is always thinking of poor papa's will, and the reversion of Roydon, and the money in the funds. If he knew all he would be easy enough respecting them. All the better he doesn't. I can't spare him yet. He is very sensitive about Maud's marrying. He exaggerates, I dare say. I'll see Maximilla; she tells truth. Poor Mr. Tintern can think of nothing but himself. How nervous he has made me! What business has Maud walking out alone with him? I think Maximilla might have prevented that. A selfish world. No, no, no! My God! it can't be. That would make me

mad—quite mad. If I could go back to childhood and die!"

She went to the window, but she did not any longer see Maud and Captain Vivian.

Her clouded dark eyes swept so much of the landscape as was visible from the window in which she stood, in vain.

She touched the bell, and her footman appeared.

"Have you seen Miss Medwyn?"

"Miss Medwyn is in the first drawing-room, my lady."

"Tell Miss Medwyn, please, that I'm coming to her in a moment," said Lady Vernon.

She got up and sighed heavily, with her hand pressed to her heart.

"Barbara, Barbara, you must command yourself. Say what they will, you can do that."

She frowned and shook her head a little, and so seemed to shake off the bewildered look that had settled on her features; and she resumed her usual air and countenance, except that she was very pale; and she walked serenely into the great drawing-room.

"Well, Maximilla, I have just got rid of my tiresome neighbour, Mr. Tintern, who has been boring me about fifty things, and I want you to tell me all about the ball last night, and I was so afraid you might run away before I had locked up my letters."

Miss Max lowered her little gold glasses and the newspaper she had been reading, and looked up from her chair near the window into Lady Vernon's face.

"Well, my dear, it was, I should say—you know it is four years, or five, since I was last at one of your Wymering balls; but I think it was a very good ball, and seemed to go off very spiritedly. There were the Wycombes, and the Heybrokes, and the Forresters, and the Gystans; and Hawkshawe was there." And so she went on with an enumeration interesting to county people, but scarcely so much so to others; and then she went into the events, and the soup, and the ices, and the flirtations, and the gossip of the chaperons. Lady Vernon now and then reviving a recollection, or opening a subject by a question.

"And how did Maud look?" she asked at last, carelessly.

"Perfectly lovely," answered Miss Max, with decision.

"Did she dance?"

"Not a great deal."

"About how many dances do you suppose?"

"I think she said, coming home, two quadrilles and three round dances."

"That was very little."

"Oh, I need not tell you she could have danced everything if she had liked," said Miss Max, complacently.

"To whom did she give the fast dances?" asks Lady Vernon.

"To Captain Vivian."

"Well, but there were three."

"All to Captain Vivian."

"Really? She must have been very rude, then, to other people," said Lady Vernon.

"It can't have pleased them, I fancy. Lord Heyduke, a very good-looking young man, and clever they say, looked so angry. I really thought he'd have been rude afterwards to Captain Vivian and old Lord Hawkshawe."

"That is so foolish of Maud," said Lady Vernon. "She knows nothing, absolutely, about Captain Vivian, except that he is gentleman-like and good-looking. But I happen to know that, over and above his commission, he has not three hundred a year in the world."

"But you know Maud, as well as I do, and that consideration is not likely to weigh with her for a moment," said Maximilla.

"She is so perverse," said Lady Vernon, darkening with great severity.

"Well, Barbara, it isn't all perversity. That kind of impetuosity runs very much in families, and you certainly did not marry for money."

"That is a kind reminder," said Lady Vernon, with a fierce smile. "I beg pardon for interrupting you, but some of my friends (you among them) know pretty well that I have never ceased to repent that one hasty step; and if I was a fool, as you remind me a little cruelly, I'd rather she regarded me in that great mistake of my life, not as an example, but as a warning; and certainly neither you nor I, at our years, should encourage her."

"She is the last person on earth to be either encouraged or discouraged by our opinions—mine, perhaps, I should say," answered Miss Max. "But don't let us quarrel about it, Barbara, for I rather think that upon this point we are both very nearly agreed."

Hereupon she very honestly related her reasons for thinking Captain Vivian very much in love with Maud, and added her opinion that, "unless she likes him, which I don't believe, and has made up her mind not to trifle with him, she ought not to encourage him."

Lady Vernon looked out of the window, and, still looking out, said carelessly :

"And you don't think there is anything in it?"

"I did not say that. I don't think it possible that a young man could be for so long in the same house without being impressed by her; she is so very beautiful. I should not be at all surprised if he were very much in love with her; and you know, my dear Barbara, if he has any ambition, and thinks himself an Adonis, what is likely to follow? As to Maud, my belief is she is not in love with him. I don't think she cares about him; but young ladies are so mysterious, I can only speak on conjecture, and she may—it is quite possible—she may like him. I should be sorry to take it on me to say positively she does not."

"It has set people talking, at all events," said Lady Vernon, carelessly, "and nothing could be more absurd. But, as you say, there may be nothing in it."

"I think, perhaps, it might not be amiss to let her go about a little to friends' houses, and make some visits, and she will soon forget him, if she ever cared about him. I should be delighted to have her, but I have promised so soon to go to Lady Mardykes', and I know she wishes ever so much to have Maud. She saw her at the Tinterns, and liked her so much, and I said I would ask you, and I think she could not visit at a better house. I'm to be with her in a fortnight or less, and I would meet her there. What do you say? Will you let her go?"

"I don't see anything very particular against it at present," said Lady Vernon, thinking. "But you know I have not seen her since her marriage, and all that fraud, I may call it, and violence, on Warhampton's part, has occurred since. I certainly should not have her here, nor any member of that family. But Maud may choose her friends for herself. I need not know them. I have reasons for not caring to send or take her to the Wycombes, or old Lady Heyduke's, or the Frogworths, or the Gystans, and a great many more I could name. I should prefer Lady Mardykes, and your being there at the same time would make me feel quite comfortable about her. We can talk it over, you and I, Max, by-and-bye."

And with a more cheerful countenance she left the room.

Miss Max had a little good-natured mischief in her, and was, if the truth were

spoken, a little disappointed at the equanimity with which haughty, jealous Barbara took the news, the irritating nature of which she had been at no special pains to mitigate.

"She may smile as she pleases," she thought, looking after her as the door closed, "but I am certain she is nettled. I think she likes him, and I'm a little curious to see what she will do."

THE THOUGHTS OF FISHES.

BIRDS and beasts think. Why shouldn't fishes also think?

When a knowing old pointer is sent into the turnip-fields with a shocking bad shot, he soon arrives at his own conclusions. Regarding the sportsman with a look of contempt, he sets him down as a very poor stick on finding shot fired after shot without bringing down a bird, and thinks it is not worth taking the trouble to point any longer for such a muff.

When Jenny Wren has half-finished a nest, she looks at it critically, and thinks to herself, "No, this won't do. The twigs won't support it properly; it will tumble on one side." She begins another, and when that is half done, she looks at it, and after reflection says, "That won't do either. The foundation is good, but the situation is much too exposed. Silly little short-sighted thing that I was, I did not notice the footpath close at hand, on which birds'-nesting schoolboys go to and fro." So she begins a third, and finding it satisfactory in every respect—support, situation, shelter—she finishes it, and fills it with her tiny brood.

In like manner, when you drag the lake in your park, or the pond in your pasture, for the purpose of tasting a dish of stewed carp, you surround your "funny tribes" with a circle of network, till escape from it seems impossible. But look at that fine fellow with his snout just out of the water, smelling at the corks that float your nets. "He thinks he has me," says Cyprinus to himself, "and is settling in his mind with what sauce he will eat me. I think he hasn't me. I wish he may get me!" Then, going back to make a better leap, he makes a rush to the front, clears the net as cleanly as the winning horse at a steeple-chase clears the last hurdle, and, imitating human diplomatists who wish to avoid putting in their appearance, forthwith takes to his bed in the mud.

The psychological faculties of fishes have been underrated, because it has been supposed that they do not sleep, and consequently that if they never sleep they are never very wide awake. True, fishes cannot shut their eyes, but we have heard of people sleeping with one eye open, who were not the stupidest of their race. And surely if any living creature is under the necessity of taking rest in that uncomfortable way, it is a fish. Fishes are friendless in the world; every fish is every other fish's enemy; every fish's mouth is opened against every other fish. How many fishes, not per cent, but per million, die quietly in their beds a natural death? The number must be infinitesimally small, if not an absolute nullity.

The cause of this cruel fate is simple. The sea contains little besides fishes to eat, and, with little else to eat, fish must eat fish. They wage an internecine warfare, more reasonable than the battles of civilised belligerents. To kill men for the sake of eating them, as the New Zealanders and Sandwich Islanders have done from time immemorial, is an explicable, logical, and accountable practice. Such wars have a clear and assignable reason why. But to kill men by hundreds of thousands, only to bury them, or perhaps to leave them to rot unburied, infecting the survivors with pestilence, is absurdity, folly, and wastefulness, peculiar to certain terrestrial bipeds. In the sea nothing is wasted, its inhabitants kill to eat; they do not kill for killing's sake. If a seal take a bite out of one salmon for breakfast, another bite out of another for dinner, and a cut from the middle of a third for supper; if a shark does the same with dolphins and bonitos, there is nothing lost to the general commissariat of the ocean. The remnants serve to feed less active and less powerful members of the marine society; they are the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. Seals and sharks are fish-butchers and sportsmen, who aid the feebler population of the deep with a small supply. True, there are seaweeds to serve as food, but the number of purely herbivorous fishes is small. Seaweeds supply fish-food indirectly by sustaining shell-fish and the like, which become the prey of full-grown fish, and by harbouring animalcules which supply welcome nutriment to the minor fry. Every atom of organised matter in the sea is utilised in one way or another.

A fish's existence ought to be one of intense excitement, a life of ardent pursuit or

desperate flight. The needful intervals of repose are perfectly possible. Even in mountain streams, that leap from rock to rock, there are deep calm pools in which, if clear, you can see trout lying as still as stones. As, in a gale of wind, there are buildings, trees, and banks of earth, behind which shelter can be found, so, in the course of rushing rivers, there are bends and eddies, blocks of stone, and beds of water-weeds, where the wayworn fish, tired with the gymnastic exercises by which he earns his daily bread, may find a temporary resting-place. It may sound paradoxical, but in salt water, quiet is even more easily found than in fresh. However the surface may be lashed by tempests, to reach a calm, the fish has only to descend, and by so doing reaches another means of safety—darkness. It appears that at the bottom of the great deep absolute stillness reigns. Minute shells that sink from the top to the bottom are found to be without the slightest abrasion or injury, and quite unmixed with sand or gravel. There is not current enough in those depths to disturb a particle of down if it could reach them. There is a delicate white-fleshed fish, the ferrat, peculiar to the Lake of Geneva and one or two other Swiss waters, which can only be caught when it comes to the surface, at the season when it takes a fancy to see the world. It passes the rest of the year in strict retirement, at the bottom of those indigo depths. Do we suppose that it cannot sleep there quietly, a week at a time if so disposed, slumbering, perhaps even dreaming a little, undisturbed, except when the great lake trout, the *salmo-ferox*, now and then swoops down upon it, like an eagle from the watery sky, and immediately takes its upward flight with a drowsy ferrat in its hooked under-jaw?

Hunger, one of the prime motives of action in the life of every animated creature, presses, we have seen, with peculiar stress on fishes, and necessarily sharpens their faculties. For most of them, there is nothing to eat but fish; they are ichthyophagous, whether they will or no. They have, at the same time, to catch, and to avoid being caught. It has been said that, in fishes, the brain is too small to allow them a large share of intelligence. But phrenology is scarcely applicable to this division of the animal kingdom. The structure of a fish's brain is quite different in plan to that of a quadruped's; but who can say that it is not wisely adapted to a fish's condition? In man-

malia and birds, the brain presents a homogeneous mass, circumvolved and wound, as it were, round itself, like a ball of thread. The brains of fishes appear to be unwound, and are developed into a series of lobes, like a double string of beads. And then, their brains do not fill their brain-boxes, as ours do. They float in the midst of a sort of jelly. In consequence of this they receive, without injury, a much more violent blow than a bird or a quadruped. The concussion is deadened before it reaches the brain. One favourite way of killing eels is to knock them, not on the head, but on the tail, where, it appears, part of their susceptibilities are centred.

Apropos to which, the tails of eels prove that they are acquainted with at least one of the mechanical powers. M. Le Paute, the conservator of the Bois de Vincennes, one day had the fancy to put a number of tiny eels into an aquarium containing a population of very small salmon. A short time afterwards the eels were all gone. What had become of them? Had the salmon eaten them? It was not unlikely.

To make sure, he put a certain number of each in a bell-glass of water, which he covered with a plate and then reversed, so that the glass of water stood on the plate. By this arrangement all escape seemed prevented. Not so, however. After trying in vain with their heads, the little eels inserted the tips of their tails into the narrow chink between the glass and the plate, and so squeezed themselves out backwards. They knew the consequences of forcing in the thin end of a wedge.

Nor are the senses of fishes blunt, as some suppose. In many their olfactory organs receive impressions by means of four nostrils, instead of the two vouchsafed to the rest of the world. Their eyes are large in proportion to those of birds and quadrupeds. In some the eye is enormously developed, giving the fish a popular name. In the streets of Havre the fish-women cry, not "Dorades," but "Gros yeux, gros yeux!" "Big eyes, big eyes!" The globe-lens of American photographers is copied from a fish's eye. The visual angle of fishes is very great; the eyeball is gifted with such mobility that it can look before or behind, upwards or downwards. There are even fishes which can look two ways at once. The hippocampus's eyes are independent of each other; one eye can ogle a lady hippocampus gracefully sailing to the right, while the other eye jealously surveys the movements of a rival on the left.

A fish's ear is simpler than our own; but the worthies who undervalue it as less perfect, forget the fact that fishes swim in water. Sound travels in air at the rate of about eleven hundred, and in fresh water at the same temperature at nearly five thousand feet per second; in sea-water still more rapidly. That is to say, a fish hears a distant sound more than four times as quickly as we humans do. The sense of taste in fishes is supposed to be dull; but there is no apparent reason why it should be duller than with birds. And yet birds discriminate. The vulture prefers his carrion high, while the eagle stipulates for fresh-slain meat; the hen will leave bread-crumbs for a nice red worm, and the siskin may be taught tricks by tempting it with hempseed. Fishes may taste their food pleasantly, as we sometimes do ours unpleasantly, for a considerable time after they have swallowed it. And if not gastronomers of the purest water, fishes at least enjoy the blessings of a good appetite and an easy digestion. What a comfort to be able, like the cod, to eat a hearty dinner of crabs, shells and all!

As to feeling, people fancy fishes can't feel, simply because they do not scream when hurt. A cod takes his crimping philosophically, and eels are so used to being skinned alive that they rather like it. So say cooks and fishermen. If we gagged our garroters while receiving their due of cat-o'-nine-tails, their silence would lead to a similar inference, namely, that pain was not included in their list of sensations.

That fishes are tameable is notorious, from innumerable examples of carp and gold-fish. The minnow may be easily tamed, so as to come to the surface of the water, and take a worm held between the finger and thumb. The tame codfish of Galway have often been quoted. In the fishponds belonging to the establishment at Concarneau, the turbot supplied there with board and lodging, until it is their turn to travel to the Paris market, recognise their keeper's footsteps. At the whistle which announces their dinner hour, they quit the bottom, in which they lay hid with their eyes and gills only uncovered by mud and sand, and rise to the surface, where, with a rapid and undulating movement, they seize and make off with the portions of fish doled out to them. On the other hand, fishes are more cunning and distrustful the more they are angled for. Experience teaches them to be-ware of the presence of biped enemies. The

fact is certain, indisputable. Parisian anglers are well aware, that the fishes in the Seine and the Marne are much more difficult to catch than those which live in out-of-the-way streams in out-of-the-way departments. Why? Because they are angled for Sunday and working-day, from morning till night, and from night till morning.

Nevertheless, fishes have their weaknesses, as instanced, in the case of the roach, by Monsieur H. De la Blanchère, the author of an interesting little book* which has served as the text of the present discourse. Roach-fishing is a veritable trial, not of strength, but of finesse, between the angler and the angled. When the wind meddles with the business, it is often the angled who gets the best of it, while the angler has his trouble for his pains. It would be too much to assert that the roach is a glutton; but it is only doing him justice to say that he is an epicure. How were his favourite dishes discovered? How? We can only suppose, by some lucky accident. It was at Essones, near Paris, that our author by chance found out a marvellous roachy preparation. His preceptor was a boy belonging to the factory.

One fine morning he had taken his place at the foot of some old poplars, which form a tuft of verdure at one of the bends of the little stream. A lad, in the traditional schoolboy's blouse, with a wide-awake countenance and hair dishevelled like a misty comet, came and sat himself down without ceremony at a few paces' distance. Forthwith, he threw into the water a primitive line fastened to the end of a rod, which might have been a French beanstick snatched in haste from the paternal haricot garden.

The amateur stared sullenly while the young rogue was filling his bag with roach after roach, and casting a knowing look now and then at the elaborate baits and diverse worms, unsuccessfully employed by his fellow-fisherman. Every minute, a roach swung in mid-air, and after describing a graceful curve was dancing on the grass.

Every angler—every man of common human feeling—will guess that, from that moment, our angler's most ardent wish was to know what potent bait the boy employed. After every catch, he took out of his pocket a flat and thin piece of some white substance, off which he tore a little bit and then returned the rest to its hiding-place.

Curiosity was stretched to the utmost; but dignity kept curiosity in check. For no earthly consideration would the baffled inquirer have asked his vanquisher for information, so vexed and humiliated was he at finding a child checkmating him with so little ceremony. Chance—the good genius of fishermen—at last came to his assistance. His young friend caught sight of a passing playmate, and shouted:

"He! 'sidore! He! Tell m'man to make me a pancake. Mine is finished."

The secret was out. The instant that a pancake was mentioned, the answer to the enigma was given. Our fisherman slyly stepped into a cottage hard by, and found the good woman, busy preparing the roach's pastry.

"By St. Peter—the patron of fishermen—I have it!" the enlightened amateur exclaimed with delight. "Nevertheless, I am bound to consider whether I ought to divulge the secret and rob myself of its sole possession, for the benefit of the angling fraternity. There is matter here for ample reflection; but generosity before egotism. All men are brothers, and it is as well to be influenced by that fact in a matter of such vital importance. Here then is the receipt! Stir a little water into a large tablespoonful of flour, add a pinch of salt; pour this paste into a frying-pan slightly greased. Let it fry till it is set, white not brown. Turn it, let the other side fry white. Serve hot, and carry it off in your waistcoat-pocket."

With a pancake manufactured by the mother, the angler returned and unblushingly entered into competition with the son. To what unscrupulous acts will not human passion lead! He soon showed the poor lad that, thanks to the pancake, he knew as much about roach-fishing as he did—perhaps more. His conscience, however, was not quite easy, so he atoned for his treachery by presenting the lad with some Limerick hooks. Then, packing up his traps, he strolled back to his lodging, and after supping off roach, slept the sleep of the just.

The roach practises a system of mutual instruction. On the banks of the Loir—please not to confound le Loir with la Loire—there stands an abbey. Opposite the abbey, in the midst of the meadows, some cold springs of purest water break out, and uniting, hasten to join the Loir in a broad, shallow, chilly stream which is known in the neighbourhood as the Gué-Froid, the Cold Ford, and is the resort of whole shoals of magnificent roach. Now fish have their perversities, as well as men; and not a

* *L'Esprit des Poissons*, par H. De la Blanchère. Paris, P. Brunel, éditeur, 31, Rue Bonaparte. 1870.

single angler, for miles round about, could ever get a fish to take a hook in the Gué-Froid. One June morning, M. De la Blanchère resolved to try, employing a mode of fishing unknown in those parts, and consequently unknown to the fish of the place.

Every kind of fishing was practised there except fly-fishing, which determined him to make the experiment, with a fine kitchen blue-bottle stuck on the barb of his hook. Scarcely had it touched the water before one, two, three, ten, twenty, fifty roach, passed, one after the other, into his basket, until it made his shoulders ache. He returned as proud as—well, Lucifer. But nobody would believe he had caught *that* in the Gué-Froid.

The only way to convince the incredulous, was to take them with him, one by one, and by revealing the secret, enable them to have the same success, which was what he did.

The first time, he and his friend had a less abundant catch than when he tried the trick alone. Nevertheless, the sport was not bad. They each of them took some thirty roach. Everybody was now convinced, as well they might be.

Next day, he returned to the Gué-Froid with fourteen companions. He got six roach; nobody else got anything.

The day after, twenty anglers went to work. Everybody's share was—exactly nothing at all. The roach had completed their education.

All fish, therefore, are not absolute fools. But we should know much more about fish than we do if every angler were a savant, which would become oppressive to the reading public, or if every savant were an angler, which might be harder lines on fishes than they really deserve.

AN EVENING AT MOPETOWN.

THERE is a class of persons who live by their wits, and whose condition seems, above all others, deserving of pity. These are the poor wanderers who entertain us, who spend their lives posting wearily from country town to country town, dragging along the few traps with which they set up their show. Some are highly prosperous: have made friends and connexions, and can always confidently rely on plenty of patronage. But there are other poor stragglers who creep into Mopetown on their first visit; who secure the "Rooms" at the Mechanics' Institute with as fluttering a heart as

though they were throwing dice; and who, according to the rules of such places, are obliged to deposit a sum for hire and gas, before they can open the doors. With these it is often a perfect lottery: heads, meaning a small fortune of two pounds ten: tails, beggary, and forfeiture of the meagre properties and stock.

We have all of us, through various accidents, been forced to stay at various Mopetowns, up and down the kingdom—a place of two or three straggling streets winding up a hill, to where the railway station is planted. It is sometimes in the South, sometimes in the North; but wherever it lies, we are sure to see on the railway arch, or the gloomy blue stone wall that skirts the road, the "posters" of these jocund "entertainers" whose whole life is given up to coaxing a rough and churlish public to be amused. No more dismal life can be imagined than that of these unhappy beings, whose very appearance is utterly opposed to their professed calling, and who ruefully bear about with them such jovial miscellanies as the *Wallet of Wit*—*Mirth and Momus*—*Two Hours of Shakespearean Vagaries*, and the like. The more florid and gorgeous the programmes that greet us as we trundle into Mopetown, the more desponding do they leave us; though in the flamboyant and exciting pictures of flying horses, and noble gymnasts, who seem like inferior mythological heroes (and indeed we have seen frescoes of inferior merit), there is, it is true, always something dashing and noble.

Once being forced to remain a night at Mopetown, I found on the table of the Dolphin coffee-room a number of little programmes, note-paper size, setting forth an entertainment for that very night. I give it "textually," as our distracted neighbours across the Channel would say:

THE ROOMS, MOPETOWN.

Under distinguished patronage. For two nights only.

MRS. MOUNTAIN,

Formerly preceptress in the family of Sir JAMES SADDLETREE, Bart., whose youthful family she had the honour of grounding in the refining branches of education, will give

TWO READINGS,

The first from Shakespeare's Masterpiece,

KING JOHN!

As read by her at Saddletree, during Christmas, 1847, in presence of Sir James Saddletree, Bart., and family, of the High Sheriff, and an élite party of guests. This noble play has been specially prepared—all indecencies removed—while the characters of King John, Constance, Falconbridge, and Hubert, will be called up before the spectator in a life-like manner by

MRS. MOUNTAIN.

Mrs. Mountain will take the opportunity of introducing her daughter,

MISS THEODORA MOUNTAIN,

Who will recite the soul-stirring

CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE!

With other pieces.

Places may be secured at the Rooms, where also may be seen the testimonial referring to Mrs. Mountain's connexion with Sir James Saddletree, Bart.

* ** Carriages to set down with the horses' heads towards Pump-lano. And gentlemen are requested to give their coachmen instructions accordingly.

Grotesque as was this bill of fare, and probable as it was that the performance would correspond to this odd promise, I yet felt a sort of uneasiness that it was too late to secure a place, and that my money might be refused at the doors. Hurriedly setting out, I made my way to the "Rooms"—a new, staring, plastery, uncomfortable place, too obviously, like such places all the kingdom over, groaning under a load of debt, and presenting a most unprosperous appearance. I entered up spacious steps, into a white, illuminated roominess, which is another characteristic of such places. My footsteps echoed, and the sense of desertion was almost painful. The entertainment must have begun. "No, I was quite in time," I was assured by the person who took money.

It was the "smaller hall," with glaring white walls, white gallery, deal smelling floor, and a vast crowd—not of people, alas! but of pale, spindly cane-bottomed chairs, clustered together helplessly, like lean geese. On the front row—the "reserved seats"—sat the clergyman and his wife—the sole tenants of that sacred enclosure. In the seats of the second dignity were a severe-looking father and mother, and a governess; while in the "body of the hall," as it was entitled, half a dozen homely and honest-looking folk clung convulsively to the barrier, which separated them from the nobler portion of the area, and seemed to be too scared by the hollow sound of their own footsteps to move about. There were three or four stray people looking down from the gallery, as from a deck. As I entered, every head was screwed round to survey me. The rostrum or platform was flanked by two new deal doors, unpainted by reason of the exhausted state of the funds of the concern, and a sort of sepulchral or sacrificial table, with one candle, was set out in the centre. The look of that gaunt and deserted platform affected me with the strangest mixture of feelings: the meagrely ascetic air, the general bareness, forcibly suggested the block and scaffold—an impending surgical

operation—a severe pass examination. The time for commencing was past by some minutes, when there entered, with noisy and decisive tread, a tall, officer-like man, who looked round ruefully at the prison-like desolation into which he had entered. A soft whisper, which the vast echoes of the room enlarged into loud speech, was borne to us from behind, to the effect that this was "Captain Spinner." It was getting more and more desolating; we grew impatient, as did the sole stick and umbrella present, which feebly protested. At last one of the deal doors opened.

A tall and rather pretty young girl led in a severe-looking elderly lady, with a front of grey curls fixed at each side of her head, much as "winkers" are on a horse. She carried her book in her hand, and surveyed the audience with an air of disdainful severity. The clergyman and his wife, who had, by-the-bye, the air of "orders," applauded in a friendly but patronising way. But she would not relax her severity. The tall young girl, who was dressed in white, with a broad blue ribbon of the Garter across her, came forward to address us, in a quiet, composed manner.

"My mamma wishes me to say," were her words, "that she is about to read the tragedy of King John, exactly as she read it at Saddletree, in the year 1847, before a distinguished audience. My mamma also wishes me to state that everything improper or indelicate has been removed, and that there will be nothing heard to-night that could bring a blush into the cheek of the youngest child present."

It was impossible to laugh, she said this with such earnestness and sincerity, though the officer grinned, and stared through his glass. Then the young lady sat down in a chair at the side, while her mamma deliberately wiped her tortoise-shell glasses, and finding much difficulty in arranging the light, at last placed the candle between herself and the book, and, after a severe look round, began her task.

Poor soul! It was one low "mumble," very slow and deliberate, much as she would have read out a domestic letter, and was quite inaudible in the gallery. After a quarter of an hour of this murmuring, a blunt voice came from the gallery, "Speak up, marm, please!" and filled us all with consternation. It proceeded from an honest-faced operative, leaning on his elbows, and utterly indifferent to the concentrated gaze of the half-dozen faces in the select rows now turned full on him.

The old lady stopped. Her daughter rose and came forward.

"My mamma," she said, softly, "is suffering from a cold to-night, and is forbidden by the physicians to exert herself in the level passages. As the occasions of the tragedy require it, she will endeavour to do justice to the grand scenes illustrated by the genius of Mrs. Siddons and her brother the late John Philip Kemble."

In homage to these illustrious names the umbrella and stick involuntarily made noise—also in indignant protest at the interruption. The operative was awe-stricken; though I fancy he must have referred the allusion to the "level passages," to the approaches of the building. After this episode the old lady resumed her task, in rather a lower voice than before.

It began to grow rather depressing. Twenty minutes more went by; the clergyman fell asleep. Suddenly, with an audible yawn of impatience, the officer rose, and tramped steadily and leisurely down the hall, throwing down the umbrella, which projected at an angle. But the reproof he received was masterly. The reader stopped deliberately, wiped her glasses, and followed his retreating form with her eyes all down the hall, until it disappeared through the furthest doorway. She then resumed. We dared not budge, she had us so completely under her despotism. But, by the time we reached the conclusion of the first act, it was apparent that things could not be protracted further, and, after a little whispering, the young lady came forward.

"My mamma bids me say that she is too exhausted to repeat any more of Shakespeare's tragedy of King John, or go beyond the level passages to-night. Her physicians have warned her against working up the exciting scenes of this great tragedy. With your permission we will proceed to the second part of the performance."

At this news we all re-settled ourselves in our places, making the attenuated legs of the cane-bottomed chairs scream on the new floor. The relief was something delicious: the clergyman woke up, and we looked forward to something refreshing. After arranging her blue ribbon, and receiving many directions from the elderly lady, who was regarding us severely, with her glasses ready for action, the young lady came forward.

"My mamma," she said, "wishes me to recite for you a poem which she composed

at Stalybridge. The merchants at Stalybridge, when my mamma was taken ill there, were very kind to us; and to put on record her sense of their goodness, my mamma wrote the following lines."

The severe old lady here pulled her daughter to her, and whispered for a minute, nodding and frowning.

"And my mamma wishes me to add, that they were afterwards published in the Stalybridge Mercury, and much admired."

She then delivered eight or ten stanzas, of which the following, or nearly the following, was a specimen:

Merchants of Stalybridge! Stalybridge merchants!

Kindly and excellent men.

Hearts full of feeling, as full as your purses,

Lavish, again and again!

The world it is cold—as empty as cold,

Ungrateful and hollow to see.

Though ne'er we may meet, I shall never forget,

How kindly you've acted to me.

Merchants of Stalybridge!

Merchants of Stalybridge!

Stalybridge merchants!

At the third stanza, and when the burden recurred, "Merchants of Stalybridge, Stalybridge merchants!" a sort of hysterical merriment came on me, and I felt that, if the burden came again—which it must do—exposure of a disgraceful order would take place. It did recur: and I disgraced myself. The tortoise-shell glasses were instantly levelled—it seemed like an order for the police to remove me—I grew red in the face, exploded once, and while the young lady paused, rose abruptly and fled.

SEA SONG.

CALL not the old life back, oh sea,
In the grave where it lies there let it be,
Wake not the pale ghost up for me;
Call not the dead love back.

Bid not the tranquil pulses throng,
To tumult and passion, fret and wrong,
Hush the sad memories in thy song,
Call not the dead love back.

Was not its brief life full of pain,
Of weary waiting and struggle vain?
Bid it not waken to weep again,
Call not the dead love back.

Lurid and bright was its morning ray,
Fierce was the glare of its noontide sway,
Cold o'er its death closed the gloaming grey,
Call not the dead love back.

There let it lie in its fatal charm,
With its closed eye and its folded palm;
There let it lie in its solemn calm,
Call not the dead love back.

Sing of the upwards glorious power,
Sing of the present's harvest hour,
Sing of the future's golden dower,
Call not the dead love back.

Sing on, sing on, in thy mighty chime,
Of the world to come and its joys sublime,
But, oh! in the terrible name of Time,
Call not the dead love back.

Sing of the work that is waiting still,
For the earnest hand and the steady will,
Of the great crusade against want and ill,
Oh sea, call nothing back.

MAY-DAY AMONG THE MULES.

It had been an old promise that I should, before finally leaving the south of France, spend a May-day at Oloron for the purpose of seeing the great mule fair held there. Accordingly, on the 30th of April, 1868, we started from Pau, stopping to lunch at Belair, so celebrated for its beautiful view of the neighbouring mountains. While waiting at the inn up drove a Pau acquaintance in the person of the Marquis de Cherizet, out of whose pony-carriage was lifted a square box, which proved to contain a poor little bearing of about a month old, whose mother had been shot and itself captured, the day before, in the mountains near Urdos : and very sulky and strange the poor little orphan looked, as we peered at him through the bars, which confined him to his extemporised prison.

From Belair to Oloron the drive is very beautiful, and it was enlivened by the freaks and antics of the mules we passed, whose owners were bringing them from all parts for the sale of next day, for by far the greater number of these animals seen in Spain, and called Spanish, are in reality reared on the French side of the Pyrenees.

At the old-fashioned inn we were welcomed by the five spinster sisters, joint hostesses of the Hôtel Soustalot, who have not yet abandoned the gracious old custom of attending in person, to welcome the coming, and speed the parting guest. We declined the rooms first offered to us, perceiving that being over the portail which formed an archway over the road, all the mules and muleteers would have to pass underneath, on their way from the Basse to the Hauteville, where the fair was to take place next day ; and their incessant tramping throughout the night would be but a bad preparation for a hard day's sight-seeing ; so we took up our quarters in a queer little excrescence of a room, built out from the house, so as to have three windows and three aspects, commanding respectively the river, the ridge on which the oldest part of the town is built, and a steep bank with an escarped road thronged by a grotesque procession of Spaniards in their strange costumes, Béarnais peasants in their more sober dresses, horses, mules, donkeys, pigs, and

sheep. I could watch this dissolving view from the window through a light green screen, formed by a young plane-tree which grew just before it. Oloron is quite the town of plane-trees, which grow everywhere, forming most delectable shady boulevards and allées, their curiously blistered trunks giving a sickly yellow green tint to the chequered sunlight. At this time of the year they afford shelter to innumerable nightingales, who in this country sing as much by day as by night, and keep up what our pretty little waitress (who, I suppose, thought nothing could be charming but herself) called a "villain tapage."

The table d'hôte dinner followed, the cuisine and service, though extremely simple, being clean and quite sufficiently good. The five sisters officiate as waitresses, an arrangement which must go far towards rendering their hôtel profitable. The repast was somewhat dull. A lady would appear to be an unusual apparition, and the effect of my presence seemed to depress the company, chiefly composed of commis-voyageurs, to a point fully justifying Sir Walter Scott's remark on the invariable stupidity of their English brethren. Silently the meal progressed ; the only talker being, fortunately for me, my immediate neighbour, whom I found an intelligent and pleasant man, and who afterwards procured us useful information as to an expedition we were planning to make in the Val d'Aspe.

The following morning we breakfasted at eight o'clock on tea and trout, before mounting the zigzag road, in company with strings of mules and pigs, to the Hauteville. The day was roasting hot, but the little plane-planted Place was a delightful refuge from the rays of the sun. Thus early there was no crowd within its precincts, and I could observe at leisure the curious scene. Encircling the wall, and crowding over it, were innumerable heads of mules, donkeys, horses, and ponies, many deep, forming a queer, fantastic kind of setting to the green oval Place. There was remarkably little struggling or movement. Their places once taken, the patient beasts stood gazing longingly with their soft brown eyes into the cool, shady plane grove, giving but small sign of life, save by the switching of their tails and the twitching of their long ears. The owners hovered near, sat on the wall, or bestrode the animals, but at this stage there appeared to be but little business doing. The fair lasts three days.

Imagine what a reign of obstinacy, a three days' mule and pig fair! These last appeared to give the most trouble, and their grunting remonstrances against the coercion they were subjected to, were very vehement in the neighbouring street.

The shouts of the public cheese-weigher, however, took my attention from the doleful complaints of the pigs, and I watched with some interest the operation by which each mountaineer ascertains, for the sum of one sou, the precise weight of his store of cheese. The contents of the cradle in which the cheeses are carried, duly weighed and ticketed, and the sou paid, a presiding sergent de ville presents him with a corresponding certificate; and off he marches to another quarter to dispose of his goods as he best may.

A doleful whining bleat, close by, betrayed some unfortunate black and white lambs lying in groups under the trees, ready for sale. Each small beast formed a tiny triangle, his luckless little legs being tied together at an angle with his outstretched head and tail; each woolly coat was marked by the owner in some fantastic way or colour. I never saw so ghastly an effect, as that produced by smearing with blue the eyes of the black lambs.

A really very pretty little pony was offered to me for sixty francs, which would have been worth at least four times that amount in England.

A good-natured limonadière lent me a chair, and while I was drinking some of her lemonade, I was violently assaulted by a small gipsy urchin to whom I had been rash enough to give a handful of bon-bons earlier in the day. He poked his brown little fist into my "poca," and on its being ejected, he proceeded to abuse and to cuff me, with all his five-year-old strength. That filthy, half-naked, unkept Bohemian family formed a strong contrast to their surroundings, and presented precisely the foil wanted by an artist's eye to the well-dressed, prosperous crowd. There was the old hag of a grandmother, her wrinkles black with dirt, grabbing with her long horny fingers at her impish grandchildren, as they darted mischievously in and out among the bystanders, while the handsome mother looked on with the expression of a wild beast, half silly, half savage, unable or unwilling to check her young barbarians as they audaciously filched nuts and plums from the stalls.

About twelve o'clock luncheon groups began to form, and something like society

to be enjoyed by the fair-goers. Here half a dozen peasants discussed their business and their cold omelette, seated in a row on the wall, only interrupted by the necessity of administering gentle raps on the smooth moist nose of a pertinaciously hungry mule, who totally disregarded such abusive remonstrances as "Enfant gâté tais-toi." Spaniards lounged on the sunny south wall, or crowded the windows of surrounding cabarets, whence they had a good view of their prospective purchases. Mountaineers wearing wide shady bérêts, looking, in their huge peaked bernouses, and with their long hair streaming over their shoulders, like figures out of Stothard's Canterbury Pilgrims, relieved guard, so as to allow their bright-fichued womenkind to rest and refresh themselves, after their weary watching of the mules. Tenderly and affectionately many petted the beasts they hoped so soon to lose.

Miniature carters and drovers, in and below their teens, herded together in this spare hour to narrate their adventures and to compare their fairings. As one glanced at their strongly marked features and square-built little forms, be-béreted and be-bloused precisely like their elders, as they stood cracking their whips with mimic force, one remarked how truly the Basque and Béarnais child is father to the man. Swarthy well-dressed girls flocked into the Plane Place to see whether there was any prospect of dancing. This, I was told by my friend the lemonade vender, would depend on whether "suffisamment de jeunesse" assembled. I conclude this did not prove the case, as there were no signs of a ball when we left the Hauteville, at twelve o'clock. We sauntered through the crowded town before returning to the inn, and greatly admired some of the mules and horses, especially two young bays, which would make beautiful ladies' horses a year hence. The moment we were observed to look at a horse, his owner or groom would commonly produce a crumpled piece of paper, which proved to be a certificate from the Haras, telling his pedigree and age.

The Spanish costumes disappointed me in number and brilliancy. One farmer, indeed, I saw so well and cleanly dressed, that I coveted his long mauve sash, so difficult to find in France, where the orthodox colour for sashes is red or green. Touching it with one hand, and holding my purse in the other, I offered to buy it; but he marched away, either offended or not understanding my meaning.

We came upon a fine old Norman church now used as a warehouse for lamb-skins. This, however, is not the profanation it at first sight appears. The altar above, in a Roman Catholic country, constitutes the consecrated part of a church, and this being removable at pleasure, leaves the church, so to speak, disconsecrated. The hides of lambs are prepared and made into gloves, which are here honestly sold as gants d'Agneau, but which I recognised as being the same sort of glove bought by poor deluded folk at Pau and Bayonne, as kid. Other articles of commerce here are linen, crimson sashes, checked fichus, and iron. A large number of young men and women are employed at Oloron in wool-stapling. The shops are unpretending but good, and arranged with taste. The porcelain tiles largely sold here form a very pretty feature in the shop windows. A less pleasing merchandise is wicker traps, much resembling the bottoms of baskets, made here for sale, as we were told, among Spaniards. We begged to know what could be entrapped by such clumsy means, and were assured that they were invaluable for insertion in beds to secure immunity from bugs! The necessity for such contrivances does not give a pleasant impression of our Spanish neighbours. Having walked about long enough, we returned to the inn to lunch, and then drove to St. Christau de Lurbe, a small watering-place lately brought into notice by its new proprietor, the Comte de Barrante. The five miles drive along a natural terrace shaded by oak and beech is lovely. From it we could see the first part of the road to the Val d'Aspe, running along an almost parallel crest. We overtook numbers of peasants returning on their donkeys to Lurbe and neighbouring villages, with their purchases made at the grande foire; including lambs, who would certainly rejoice when they had attained the end of their journey. Each miserable little quadruped was squeezed down into one end of the long striped purse-like market bag, used by the Béarnais peasant. This was slung through the girths of the donkey, and out of the slit mouths at each end, the poor little beasts' heads protruded and peered piteously, close to the dangling and spurred heels of the riders. The modern St. Christau consists of a cluster of houses and buildings connected with the establishment, and has a very park-like appearance. It is prettily laid out with walks and avenues, and is for a small watering-place one of the most attractive I have seen in the Pyrenees. The only large

buildings are an hôtel kept by a Spaniard, and two bath houses. There are, besides Comte de Barrante's own pretty chalet, two smaller ones for letting.

The Commandery of the Knights Hospitallers of St. Christau was situated in ancient times between Lurbe and Eysus, and was closely connected with the monastery of St. Christine, of which the ruins may still be seen from Urdos.

This religious house was either founded or re-established about the year 1126, by Gaston the Fourth, Vicomte de Béarn. His father it was who rebuilt the town and cathedral of Oloron, or, as it was anciently called, Illurona, or Civitas Elloroneusium. A worthy son of this same Centulle the Fourth, Gaston's first thought on returning from the Crusades was to benefit Béarn by spending his newly-acquired riches in founding and endowing various religious establishments. Not only at the siege of Jerusalem had Gaston distinguished himself, but he had proved himself so valuable an ally to Alphonse le Bataillant, King of Navarre and Arragon, in his conquest of Saragossa, that King Alphonse conferred on him the title of "Segnor in Saragoza." By this elevation Gaston also acquired the title of first "Ricombre" of Saragossa; a dignity which, it would appear, raised the possessor to a position little short of equality with the king. The children of the "Ricombres" bore the name of "Infants," and the chevaliers in their service of "Cavalieros de Honor;" and the king in return for their services was obliged to take counsel with the "Ricombres" in every important matter of government. Gaston spent ten years in his "Ricombrerie," at Saragossa, before returning to his native Béarn. To none of his new foundations did he so especially devote himself as to the monastery of St. Christine, whose position on the summit of the highest mountain, commanding the entrance to the Port d'Aspe on the road to Jaca and Saragossa, gave it great importance. It afforded a blessed refuge to pilgrims, merchants, and peasants, surprised by winter storms in these dangerous passes. The neighbouring commandery had a monastery attached to it in connexion with that of St. Christine, both of which assumed the arms of the Knights of St. Christau, viz., a white pigeon with a cross in its beak. The following legend is told as the origin of these armorial bearings. The workmen who were employed to build the monastery were baffled in several attempts to lay the foundations, owing to

the special difficulties presented by the soil, and position of the site first chosen. No better fortune attended the second and third venture, and the builders were in despair, when one morning they perceived a white pigeon bearing a cross in its beak. They pursued the bird, which perched on a box-tree, but though it flew away on their near approach, they found in the branches the cross it had left. They took this as a good omen, and proceeded successfully to lay the foundations on the spot where the tree had stood. On the altar was carved the blessed sign and its winged bearer, which later became also the convent arms.

A somewhat similar story to that of Prince Bladud's discovery of the virtues of the Bath waters, is told of the St. Christau springs. The discoverer is supposed to have been a neatherd who lived about the year A.D. 1300, and to have belonged to the despised race of Cagots, who, whatever the origin of their much discussed name may have been, appear, at all events, to have been descendants of those who were suspected of being sufferers from the introduction of leprosy into Béarn, by the crusaders on their return from the East. The then governors of the country made all possible efforts to isolate those afflicted, or supposed to be afflicted, by this horrible disease. Separate houses, and in the churches separate doors and bénitiers, effected this object in life, while in death they were condemned to lie in special cemeteries. One law restricted their employment to out-of-door trades, such as shepherding, thatching, and cutting wood. It was one of these humble shepherds who, dwelling in a cabin close to St. Christau, used to water his animals at the neighbouring source, and also take it for his own use. He found his malady gradually disappearing, which he attributed to the effects of the sparkling fountain. This he made known to his fellow-sufferers, and its fame spread until Cagots flocked from all parts to profit by it. The particular spring—for there are five in all, frequented by these poor creatures—still retains the name it then acquired of "eau des ladres," or "des dartres."

Owing to the miserable prejudices of the Béarnais, they shunned the resort of the Cagots to their own loss, and it was long before the general public benefitted by these waters, which are now used both for drinking and bathing in cases not only of skin disorders, but also of intermittent fever, rheumatism, asthma, &c. &c.

It would be hard to say whether we

found the "grande foire," or the day after the fair, which we spent in the Val d'Aspe, the more enjoyable. The early part of the drive on leaving Oloron, was indeed scarcely so picturesque as that of St. Christau, but it perhaps enhanced the marvellously beautiful scenery into which we emerged on reaching Asaspe. There the Basque country begins, and from this point the views continue increasing, if possible, in picturesqueness and beauty, till Urdos is reached. The mountains, it is true, are less bold and rugged than in other of the Pyrenean gorges, but they are so distributed and thrown about, as to present an infinitely greater variety of tints, while they charm by the very contrast they offer to the better known excursions.

A gradual ascent along a capital road follows the course of the Gave d'Oloron, which is crossed at Escob, after passing the rugged Pène or Bolt, near which a Latin inscription, cut in the rock, commemorates the making of this road by the Romans under Valerius. Passing through Sarrance we still follow the line of the Gave to Bédous. The colour of the water is a pretty soft brown, like the ground of a cameo, or the liquid shadow of Dante's *Lethé*, "*Bruna, bruna, sotto l'ombra perpetua*," quite different from the beautiful beryl tint of the other Gaves of the Pyrenees. While the horses were being changed at Bédous, we breakfasted at the tidy little inn, two Basque farmers making conversation for us the while. They told us of a compatriot, an English clergyman of good family, who has adopted this beautiful country as his own, married a mountain beauty, and, entirely giving up his profession and native land, settled in the half Protestant village of Osse, near Bédous, where he divides his time between cultivating a little "propriété," fishing, and painting the lovely scenery by which he is surrounded. The singular isolated French Protestant community of Osse consists of about thirty families, who have preserved their faith for ages in the midst of their Roman Catholic neighbours. The two churches are equally ancient, and there is no rivalry nor enmity on the part of the majority towards the small Protestant minority; on the contrary, intermarriages are not uncommon nor objected to by the priests, showing how curiously tradition and habit will induce tolerance, as well as the contrary. Some years ago we spent a morning in the village of Osse, lionised by the pasteur, but as it lies somewhat off the main road, and we were anxious to push on

to Urdos, we were unable on this occasion to visit it, or to see the very ancient and curious Roman church at Accous, "Aspa Luca." Here the Pyrenean Burns, Despourrius, was born, and an obelisk is erected to his memory.

Briskly our Bédous horses trotted up the valley, obedient to the howls and shrieks of the energetic "cocher," who never for one minute subsided into silence. Indifferent to his somewhat paralytic whip, the steeds were attentive to his voice, which, when for a moment not required to exhort them, went off into a wild kind of chant, and again, without a moment's pause, relapsed into yells of encouragement.

As we left the Bassin de Bédous, we passed from one magnificent defile to another, and threaded the narrow streets of Aign and Etsaut—streets so narrow that to pass another vehicle would have been absolutely impossible. The story occurred to our minds in which such a perplexing case is suggested to that most charming of elderly heroines, the "my lady" of Mrs. Gaskell, who, after much consideration, thus solved the problem: "The youngest creation must back." Fortunately, it was not necessary for us to resort to this aristocratic but inconvenient process, nothing of nobler creation than mules appearing to impede our progress.

The roadside walls were hung with lamb-skins in process of drying, ready for making into gloves. We now approached the last defile, leading to the foot of the fort of Urdos, or Portalet, which commands and bars the entrance to the valley, by the magnificent road made by the great Napoleon, to facilitate the conveyance of timber for ship-building from the neighbouring forests. The fort of Portalet, though in its way unique, reminds one of Gibraltar and Ehrenbreitstein. It is hewn in the natural rock, within the shoulder of an almost perpendicular hill, the façades only and the domed roofs to the innumerable long passages being formed of masonry, which is battlemented and flanked by bartizan turrets. Loopholes and embrasures for cannon are pierced in the face of the fortress. But the exterior gives the spectator no idea of the extent and number of the galleries, stairs, and batteries excavated in its interior. They remind one more of the intricate construction of the architect bee, or some such ingenious insect, than of anything else. More than ten years were occupied in forming this gigantic outpost of

France, which is capable of holding three thousand men. A zigzag road conducts, by a succession of stages, to the fort, which is at a height of five hundred feet, overlooking a precipice, which is connected, by a drawbridge spanning the abyss, with the rock on which the fort stands. The destruction of this bridge would, of course, be an easy matter to the garrison, should it be wished to interrupt communication between France and Spain. Only one company of soldiers is stationed at Urdos, and this is changed every six months.

Though the main part of the regiment was quartered at Pau, remarkably little intercourse appeared to be kept up with these exiles in the solitary fort. The officers, we presume, receive newspapers and letters, but the men were in utter ignorance of recent news, not even having heard of the late successes of the English army in Abyssinia. They took a lively interest in Pau news, especially in hearing what music their band, of which they are justly proud, had been playing lately. It has been quite a pleasure to us since our trip to Urdos to forward to these poor billiardless, paperless Frenchmen our local Pyrenean journal. That they appreciate such resources is evident from the extensive use made of a library provided for the garrison by the kindness of the sous-préfet, and for which the monthly subscription amounts to one sou per member. A private soldier who accompanied us in our inspection of the fort was deep in Mrs. Gaskell's novel, *Nord et Sud*. We were amused at meeting our old friend in French disguise in this out-of-the-way corner of the world. The reader informed us he found it the more interesting because of the recent agitation in France on the subject of strikes.

This airy bracing place must be the best possible change for the soldiers who have suffered from the bad fever, which has of late infested the unhealthy barracks at Pau. It was touching to hear with what gratitude and feeling the men spoke of the devotion and death of a sister of charity at Pau, who had especially taken under her charge sick soldiers, from whom she eventually caught her fatal illness. *Sœur Félicité* was a lady by birth, but devoted herself and her fortune to the alleviation of those who, like her own dearly loved brother, were in the service of their country.

"She nursed me through the fever, and saved my life," said one man to me; "and ungrateful it seemed for me to be here, breathing this fine air and to be growing

stronger every day, while she was dying of infection and bad air. I was not even present at her funeral, the saint! Ah! but she understands all that now, without doubt!"

Such talk whiled away the time as I sat in the concierge's quarters, while the rest of the party inspected the fort more fully than I was able to do, not feeling inclined to go down by subterranean passages to the bed of the Gave, only to remount before descending the zigzag road to meet our carriage. I amused myself by watching the chivalrous attentions paid by the soldiers to the concierge's niece, the only specimen of the fair sex inhabiting this desolate stronghold. Much inclined, apparently, to give herself airs, the Queen of Urdos must infallibly be spoilt for any other sphere in which her subjects may be fewer, and their devotion more divided.

We reluctantly took leave of Urdos in all its rugged beauty, and descended to the road, where the carriage was awaiting us on its return from the village of Urdos, about a mile distant, where the horses, and doubtless the melodious Jehu also, had been refreshed.

The Marquis de Cherizet's bear cub was caught on a mountain near Urdos. We have heard lately that the poor little fellow has been presented to the Jardin des Plantes at Paris, having proved sulky and intractable at Pau. In the month of June we saw a magnificent bear-skin offered for sale in one of the Pyrenean villages, which turned out to be that of the father of this cub, killed close to Urdos, as he, poor beast, was prowling about, regardless of his own safety, in search of his wounded wife with her little one.

We returned at a great pace to Bédous, where we again picked up our own horses. We had, in the morning, overtaken Spaniards leading, driving, or riding home their newly bought mules; and we now met strings of the handsome sleek skittish brutes going to Spain with their bizarre and dirty-looking owners. Pretty as the groups were, the eye almost wearied of the endless and confused procession of frisky beasts, especially as they seriously retarded our return by their pranks and meanderings; acquaintance with their new masters being so recent as to make numbers of them, loose as they were, more than half inclined to turn round, and follow our carriage back to Oloron. We returned late to a solitary dinner, and were glad to go to bed after our long day in the mountains.

Before leaving the following day, the third of the fair and the principal day for pleasure purposes, we took a stroll in the Place of the Basse Ville, among the booths, gambling-tables, ménageries, &c., which were thronged by peasants and townsfolk. I gambled at the china and glass rotatory table, and won once out of three times, but instead of gaining the imposing candlestick which had been offered to bribe me, I was put off with a lop-sided salt-cellar. This I presented to a juvenile bystander, who seemed quite overwhelmed with the magnitude of the gift.

We recognised some old Caunterets faces in the crowd, among others that of a fur dealer who for three weeks persisted in trying to cheat us into buying black fox-skins with artificial brushes. Here we were fortunate in finding and buying a fine specimen with a good brush, and its own!

We bought two trifling photographs of Oloron, but could get none of beautiful Urdos, which would be so good a subject for photography. That Oloron and Urdos, which are within such easy reach of Pau, should be but little known by our erratic country people, is singular. That it is so, is proved by the fact that at none of the numerous photograph shops at Pau could I get a single view, taken in or near the Val d'Aspe. An Oloron tradesman, who combines a little photographing with his many other vocations, and who migrates in the summer to Caunterets, promised to take for me some views of the valley and fort. For the nonce I was obliged to content myself with buying some trifling fairings as souvenirs of a previous pleasant visit to Oloron. Certainly, it was necessary to get up a little romance to enhance the value of these bagatelles, for the intrinsic worth of the wicker fish (whose interior is intended, I cannot say calculated, to contain knitting-needles, to be inserted at the nostrils) and of the grim specimen of jewellery I chose, scarcely recommends them as the vrais bijoux, the loquacious vender represented them to be!

PLOGARRIAN.

IN SEVEN CHAPTERS. CHAPTER VI.

WITH the exception, perhaps, of the coast of Norway, there is not so wild, so dreary, so savage a seaboard in Europe as that of the coast of Brittany. Generally the ocean seems to put off some at least of the terrors of its grandeur, its might, and its loneliness when it comes to meet the

land. On the iron-bound shores of Finisterre and the Côtes du Nord it is not so. There it seems, as if the ocean had impressed all its character on the land, instead of receiving any modification from it.

And the parish of Tregastel, to which Delaroche had been sent, is situated on the wildest part of this wild coast. The population, among whom he was summoned to labour, seemed to bear, in every part of their character, the same impress as that which marked the inanimate world around them. They are a sombre people, as the sky above them is sombre. They are marked by that species of wild melancholy, which seems to be the characteristic of the lonely promontories and seaworn bays they inhabit. Though a moral race, as regards many of the matters with which the immorality of other peoples is concerned, they are not, or were not, an easy people for their spiritual pastors to deal with. The nature of the coast is one terribly fatal to ships, and the Bretons of the coast are, or were, inveterate wreckers. And the practice very naturally leads, as it is easy to understand, to lawlessness of all sorts, and often to crimes of the darkest character. Then, again, strange as it may seem to the reader of the present age in England, at the date of the events here narrated—in the early part of the present century, that is to say—Christianity had by no means altogether yet succeeded in substituting itself for the old Druidical paganism! And this, also, it may readily be believed, did not tend to facilitate the task of a Christian priest.

Nevertheless, the Bretons are a very religious people. They are not like the inhabitants of some more smiling lands, disposed to live in, and for, the visible, to the neglect of the invisible. The sombre and severe scenery around them, which has fashioned their characters in its own similitude, has made it impossible that this should be the case. For the inhabitant of the Breton coast there are voices in every wailing wind that sweeps his rocky shore; there are the outlines of forms in the mists that so frequently environ him; there are tokens in the drifting clouds; and warnings of sinister import in the dull roar of the waves, which are for ever scooping the echoing caverns, or carving the rocks into fantastic shapes and grim likenesses. Whether Pagan or Christian, the mind of the Breton is saturated with superstitions, and they are all of a gloomy kind.

It so happened, as if to make the initia-

tion of the young curé into his new duties on this wild coast, and amid these wild people, yet more dreary and weird in all its accompaniments than it might otherwise have been, that he arrived in his parish in the winter. He arrived in the winter, and it is difficult to make a reader, who has never visited that coast, realise the exceeding desolation of the spot that was assigned to him as a habitation, even in summer.

Far protruding into the sea stretches a long, narrow promontory, which gives more or less of shelter to a small, scattered village of fishermen's huts, situated on the shore at the promontory's base. But the land, as is very frequently the case, rises rapidly from this base, and rises even more and more till the furthestmost point of the promontory is reached. The village is the village of Tregastel; but the church, which so poor a collection of dwellings could hardly claim to have in its immediate vicinity, rather than at any other spot in the wide-spread parish, is built—in accordance with the long, lingering feeling, which once prompted men to worship on high places—on the high ground at the end of the promontory. And, as according to old, and, probably, still orthodox ideas, the priest's daily business lay more with the church than with the congregation, the habitation provided for him stood away from all the other dwellings of the little village, by the side of the church.

It was a very humble little dwelling, sturdily built and strong, however, with very thick walls; for stone, if nothing else, is abundant in Tregastel. And it was roofed with huge slabs of the same material, the extreme massiveness of which had served to save the labour of splitting them, and still served to secure the little homestead from being unroofed by the terrible blasts that often sweep all that coast, and especially the exposed headlands of it. Some little shelter was obtained in one direction from a huge, naked rock, which formed the culminating point of the promontory, and lay there, on the highest point of another naked block of granite, which thrust out its bald head above the thin soil. The shelter thus obtained might have seemed to a man of nervous temperament less desirable than unmitigated exposure to the wind. For the huge mass, weighing many hundred tons, was a rocking stone, of which there are several among the colossal masses which have been tossed in weird confusion upon this coast, as if they were the monstrous fragments of an antediluvian world; and

in certain gales, when the hurricane was strong enough, and chanced to blow with all its force exactly on the right spot, the huge, dumb monster, with the weight of ages on its head, might be seen to nod visibly. But it had continued to nod for more hundreds of years than man's records could tell, and had never fallen yet; so that the little parsonage had every right to consider the rocking stone among the friendly forces of nature rather than among those with which it and its inhabitants had to contend.

And these were many in that wild winter time. The parish was, though small in the number of souls which made up its population, yet large in its territorial extent. And the summons that calls the priest to the bedside of a perhaps dying parishioner is one that brooks not either neglect or delay. For may not the eternal weal or woe of a human soul be hanging in the balance?

To do them justice, very few soldiers of Rome's black army are ever slack to obey those calls to arms. And assuredly the Reverend Jean Delaroche was not likely to be one of these, let the call come when and where it might.

It was about mid-winter, when he had been in his cure only two or three months, that a summons of this kind reached him under circumstances that might have made many a man not so alert to obey it as he might otherwise have been.

The day had been rainy, but without wind. But as the sun went down, a wind began to blow from the north-west, which soon sent the great billows tumbling in upon the coast, in masses that broke upon the distant rocks with a dull sound like the report of cannon. It is the north-west wind that blows, when Ocean is in the mind to throw a prize or two upon the coast for the benefit of his Breton children; and, doubtless, on many a headland there were eyes looking out into the storm, that night, to watch for any such blessing that Heaven might please to send. Well, if there were no contrivances in action; such, for example, as a cow, with her head tied down to her knee, and a lantern fixed to her horn, so that, when she should be driven along the shore, the movement of the light might resemble that of a ship's lantern fixed to a mast, and induce unhappy mariners to imagine that a vessel was there safely plunging the waves, and that the deadly shore must yet be far off, and so might entice them to their destruction on the rocky coast. Well, if no such aids to the

beneficent purposes of Heaven were resorted to!

It was about an hour before midnight, that Delaroche was awakened by a knocking against the window-pane of the room in which he slept, and voices outside the window.

On rising from his sleep, and going to the window, he was accosted by a young man, who asked if he were Monsieur le Curé, "because," continued the voice, "if so, your reverence must come, if you please, to le Père Morvenec, who is dying."

"Le Père Morvenec! Where does he live?" asked the curé, to whom the name was unknown, and who had not yet been long enough in his parish to have made acquaintance with such of his more distant parishioners as were not church-goers.

"At Tresneven, on the other side of the bay," replied the first speaker.

"At Tresneven!" exclaimed Delaroche; "why it is three hours' journey at the least! How am I to get there at this time of night? I will dress myself directly. Come round to the door that I may let you in out of the storm."

Hurrying to the door the curé admitted two men, evidently fishermen—him who had spoken, and an older man, apparently under the authority of the younger.

"How am I to make such a journey as that?" said the curé, again shutting the door, not without an effort of strength against the driving wind and rain.

"We must cross the bay," said the young fisherman. "Tresneven is a good three hours or more from here to go round by land; but we may cross the bay in half an hour, if we have luck."

"Did you come that way?"

"Yes; our boat is under the lee of the rock yonder beneath the moving stone."

"It is not a nice night for the job, is it?" said the curé, who was all the time dressing himself as hastily as he could.

"No, your reverence; it is not a pretty night to cross to Tresneven in; nor a pretty night to die in. And le Père Morvenec won't last till morning."

"Now, I am ready!" said the curé, finishing his toilet by throwing a large black serge cloak around him; "I must call my servant to shut the door behind us, if she can manage to do it."

It took some minutes to wake the old woman, who was the curé's sole domestic and fellow-inhabitant of his lonely parsonage, and make her understand the errand on which he was bound.

"Le Père Morvenec!" grumbled the old woman. "Oh, his time is come, is it? So that's what all the hubbub is about, then? It is a tough job your reverence will have of it, I can tell ye."

Delaroche supposed that the "hubbub" alluded to the waking up of himself and his old servant; and that the "tough job" was the crossing of the bay in the stormy night. Had he been a resident of longer standing on the Breton coast he might have understood that the "hubbub" alluded to was the storm, which the old Breton woman imagined to be caused by the passing of a soul, which if all tales were true, was called away to a specially heavy reckoning; and that the "tough job" was the struggle that he (the curé) was to engage in with the Evil One.

"Good-night, Mère Corven," he said, turning from the door, and crossing himself with a short muttered prayer as he proceeded to follow his conductors to their boat.

"Are you the son of Monsieur Morvenec?" he asked of the younger man, who had hitherto been the sole speaker.

"No, your reverence. Le Père Morvenec has no son, or I should not be here to-night on such an errand as this. It is not a pleasant one, *ma foi*. But it was a job that a Christian man could not refuse."

"It is a nasty night to be out, certainly."

"Oh pour ça! It isn't that I mind a cupful of rain. I have crossed the bay in worse weather than this. But I had rather have one of your reverence's cloth with me in the boat to-night, than any two of the best seamen in Brest. Allez!"

"You think that God's servant brings a blessing with him, my friend?" said the curé.

"No doubt, your reverence," returned the young fisherman, reverently lifting his broad-brimmed round-crowned hat, while the wind blew across his face the long and abundant hair that fell upon his shoulders—"no doubt, your reverence! But to-night there are evil things about, that you can better battle with than we poor laymen. I saw the Tregastel stone nod three times to the menhir* on Arvan Head as I

came up from the boat. And the voices of the spirits were calling, and shrieking, and wailing, and laughing in the caves of Guirec, as we passed Guirec rocks, enough to make the sweat run off you, saving your reverence's presence. They were calling to the poor soul of old Père Morvenec. But, please God, your reverence will baulk 'em yet if we can get to him in time; but he won't last till morning, that's very sure! I never heard the voices in Guirec caves howling that way that it did not betoken death near!"

They were in the boat by this time, and Delaroche inquired of his conductors if he could be of any use in lending a hand. The young man asked him if he could hold hard the rope attached to the corner of the sail, after it had been passed round a belaying-pin. It would add very much to their safety, he said, if that could be so held, ready to be let go at a word, instead of being fastened to the side of the boat.

And thus they went dashing on through the black waves. Nothing but practised skill and perfect knowledge of the locality, joined to unhesitating intrepidity, could have navigated the boat safely in such a sea, and amid the rocks of such a coast. From the bottom of the bay came out a long point of dangerous low-lying rocks, partially dividing the bay into two portions. These were the dreaded Guirec rocks. And there, as the boat passed them, not without difficulty, the "voices" in the caves hollowed out of them were heard rising above the roar of the wind, and amid the ceaseless exertion and activity required for the navigation of the boat, both the fishermen contrived to kneel for a minute, while they crossed themselves, and muttered a hasty prayer.

The boat reached Tresneven in safety in less than an hour after they had left Tregastel Point, and the curé was conducted forthwith to a house, which was evidently by far the best in the place, and at once taken by a middle-aged woman, whom the young man addressed as Madame Morvenec, and who asked the curé if he would refresh himself with a mouthful of brandy before going to his duty, to the bedside of his dying parishioner.

Delaroche needed not the voices in the caves of Guirec, nor the mystic nodding of the Tregastel stone to its old neighbour the menhir upon Arvan Head, to convince him that the man before him was really dying. He was very much older than the wife with

* The tall, upright stones found in many parts of Brittany are so called. They were objects of Druidical worship; and the superstitious reverence, still paid to them by the people, is one of the still lingering remnants of the old religion. The clergy in many cases, finding it impossible to prevent the people from paying reverence to these stones, have placed crosses on the top of them, in order, as it were, to filch for the profit of a mere holy faith, the worship intended for a very different divinity.

whom Delaroche had just spoken, and it was plain that his hour had come. Very plain, too, shortly it became that le Père Morvenec's soul was fully as ill at ease as his body, and that his shrift would not be a short or a light one.

Of what passed between the dying man and his confessor nothing would of course have ever been known, had it not been that the first thing which the latter enjoined on his penitent for his soul's weal, when he had heard his confession, was that an open avowal should be made to the same effect, made indeed to him the priest, but made not "in confession." To recount the story, therefore, accurately, in the exact order in which the facts became known to those who preserved the memory of them in the record from which this narrative is taken, it should be said, that the confession was made; and that the priest then, not without considerable difficulty, induced his penitent—who, despite the ominous voices did not die that night, nor till late the following night—to request him, the curé, to put down in writing the substance of what he had confessed, as regarded one special transaction, which written document he signed in the presence of his wife, and of the young man who had brought the priest across the bay.

Having explained this, however, the substance of Père Morvenec's confession may be told, just as if it had been overheard by the writer.

There was one matter only respecting which the old man's conscience was troubled. He admitted, in reply to the priest's questioning, that he had no doubt been guilty of many a small matter, not quite according to either law or gospel, in the course of many and many a winter night's work on the coast, when the wind was inshore and the harvest of the coast was to be had for the gathering. But the curé failed to enable him to see or feel, that there was any need of great repentance for doing in such matters what everybody else did. Besides, all such matters had been confessed as they had occurred in regular course, and he had never known a Breton priest who thought much harm of them. But there was one thing that did lie heavy on his heart, and which, till the present moment, he had never confessed, though it had happened from twenty to five-and-twenty years ago.

He had been tempted by a man, a gentleman, a seigneur, one whom he had known very well, and in whose company he had often been engaged in some of these not

exactly legal matters of which his reverence seemed to make so much. He was a gentleman, though, for all that, and noble into the bargain, and the possessor of a fine estate—the possessor of a fine estate by means of the assistance and the crime of him, Daniel Morvenec!

This was what had happened, and what he had done. The man who had tempted him—the seigneur—had had an elder brother, who had died, leaving one child, a boy, who, of course, if he had lived, ought to have inherited the estate. But Monsieur Gregoire had come to him, and had proposed that the infant, a child between one and two years of age, should be delivered to him, and that he, Morvenec (and at this point of his confession the old man wiped the big drops of perspiration from his brow), should take care that the boy was never heard of more. "But I have no blood—not that boy's blood—upon my soul! I am not his murderer! though the look of him has haunted me from that day to this. Why does he come looking at me out of the dark, on nights like this? I did not kill him. If he died, it was by God's hand—by the waves of the sea; and it is God's hand that makes them swell and flow—God's hand, your reverence, is it not?"

"And your part in the deed? What was that? What did you do with the child?" asked the priest.

"I received him from the hands of a woman in a back street in Rennes, whither I had gone for that purpose, and I brought him hither, and I carried him down to Guirec, and hid him in the caves till night-fall; and then I took him in a boat out to the rock called the Chien, and I left him there. I did not raise my hand against him," whined the old man again, in deprecation of the horror which he thought that his confession had caused in the priest, for the latter had started from the chair, in which he had been sitting by the bedside, at the mention of the Chien rock, and was pacing up and down the little chamber with disordered steps.

"I did not raise a finger against the child. I did not hurt him, Monsieur le Curé," whimpered the wretched old man again.

"Daniel Morvenec!" said the priest, solemnly mastering his agitation, and returning to his seat by the side of the bed—"Daniel Morvenec, is the Chien rock covered at high water?"

"In rough weather and at high tides it

is covered, Monsieur le Curé," said the shivering sinner.

"And was it such weather, or such a state of the tide, on the night when you carried the child thither, and left him on the rock?" asked the priest again.

"The night was such another night as this! May God be merciful to my soul!" groaned the dying man.

"The rock, then, would of a surety be covered and swept by the waves?" again demanded the priest.

"Not for three hours after I left the child there—not for three hours at least," urged the old man, eagerly. "You see, Monsieur le Curé, it was not I who took the life of the child; it was the hand of God!"

The priest heaved a deep sigh, and remained silent a few minutes; while the dying man lay trembling all over, and his teeth audibly striking each other, while the roar of the wind, and the beating of the sea on the rocks close at hand, made a wailing and dismal music, which seemed to the passing sinner like accusing voices from out of the long past, and to the priest like dim, returning memories of a consciousness long since overlaid by the events of later years.

"Are you able to tell the year and the day of the year on which you left the child on the Chien rock?" the latter said at length.

"The day is too well fixed in my heart for me ever to forget it, Monsieur le Curé," the old man replied. "It was on the 9th of September, now a day or two more than twenty-three years and five months ago."

Again there was a pause of silence in the chamber. The priest stepped across the floor of the little room to a prie-dieu underneath a crucifix on the opposite wall, no uncommon article of furniture in the bedroom of a Breton peasant, and there, with clasped hands and bowed head, he remained in earnest prayer—or thanksgiving, perhaps—for some minutes. He, too, had that same date well fixed in his mind. For good Captain Morel, before leaving him at Rouen, had thought it right then to let him know all that he, the captain, knew about the manner in which he had fallen into his hands. He gave him a carefully drawn statement, which had been prepared at the time, setting forth how, on the 9th of

September, in that same year to which Morvenec referred, the Belle Louise, outward bound, had been driven out of her course; and how his boat's crew, having been sent on shore, on the coast of the Côtes du Nord, for fresh vegetables, had, in pulling off, by God's mercy seen a child upon the rock of the Chien, where, in another hour the sea would be raging, and had brought off the child to his ship. At length, rising from his knees, the priest turned and stood at the foot of the sick man's bed, and said slowly and with solemn voice:

"Daniel Morvenec, God has been very merciful to you. It is vain to strive to deceive your own heart, still worse, to seek to deceive Him by the pretence that your hand was not lifted against the child. In thought and intention you were a murderer!"

Morvenec groaned heavily, and visibly trembled from head to foot as he lay in the bed.

"But God, in His infinite mercy," continued the priest, "has saved you from the consummation of the crime you purposed. If you are truly repentant of the intention to do that wicked deed, God grants that you may die without the weight of murder on your soul. For the child, whom you left to the mercy of the waves on the Chien rock, still lives. He still lives to forgive you in his own person for the deed, as fully as I, if you truly repent and make such restitution as is yet in your power, pronounce to you the forgiveness of God."

It is needless to describe the difficulty the curé had, in bringing the mind of the dying man to comprehend and believe the statement of the circumstances as they had really occurred, and still more so to follow the good priest through his efforts to make his penitent understand the meaning and the spiritual value of restitution, and to show him that the restitution which it was still in his power to make, consisted of such a full and duly attested confession (not made under the seal of the sacrament of the confessional) as would avail to cause tardy right and justice to be done.

It is sufficient for the purpose of this narrative to state that such a witnessed confession was made and signed, and that Daniel Morvenec died in the course of the following night.