

## The Project Gutenberg eBook of In Madeira Place

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# IN MADEIRA PLACE.

**By Heman White Chaplin**

Turning from the street which follows the line of the wharves, into Madeira Place, you leave at once an open region of docks and spars for comparative retirement. Wagons seldom enter Madeira Place: it is too hard to turn them in it; and then the inhabitants, for the most part, have a convenient way of buying their coal by the basket. How much trouble it would save, if we would all buy our coal by the basket!

A few doors up the place a passageway makes off to the right, through a high wooden gate that is usually open; and at the upper corner of this passage stands a brick house, whose perpetually closed blinds suggest the owner's absence. But the householders of Madeira Place do not absent themselves, even in summer; they could hardly get much nearer to the sea. And if you will take the pains to seat yourself, toward the close of day, upon an opposite doorstep, between two rows of clamorous little girls sliding, with screams of painful joy, down the rough hammered stone, to the improvement of their clothing, you will see that the house is by no means untenanted.

Every evening it is much the same thing. First, following close upon the heels of sunset, comes a grizzly, tall, and slouching man, in the cap and blouse of a Union soldier, bearing down with his left hand upon a cane, and dragging his left foot heavily behind him, while with his right hand he holds by a string a cluster of soaring toy balloons, and also drags, by its long wooden tongue, a rude child's cart, in which is a small hand-organ.

Next will come, most likely, a dark, bent, keen-eyed old woman, with her parchment face shrunk into deep wrinkles. She bears a dangling placard, stating, in letters of white upon a patent-leather background, what you might not otherwise suspect,—that she was a soldier under the great Napoleon, and fought with him at Waterloo. She also bears, since music goes with war, a worn accordion. She is the old woman to whose shrivelled, expectant countenance you sometimes offer up a copper coin, as she kneels by the flagged crossway path of the Park.

She is succeeded, perhaps, by a couple of black-haired, short, broad-shouldered men, leading a waddling, unconcerned bear, and talking earnestly together in a language which you will hardly follow.

Then you will see six or eight or ten other sons and daughters of toil, most of them with balloons.

All these people will turn, between the high, ball-topped gate-posts, into the alley, and descend at once to the left, by a flight of three or four steps, to a side basement door.

As they begin to flock in, you will see through the alley gate a dark, thick-set man, of middle age, but with very little hair, come and stand at the foot of the steps, in the doorway. It is Sorel, the master of the house; for this is the *Maison Sorel*. Some of his guests he greets with a Noachian deluge of swift French words and

high-pitched cries of welcome. It is thus that he receives those capitalists, the bear-leaders from the Pyrenees; it is thus that he greets the grizzled man in the blue cap and blouse,—Fidèle the old soldier, Fidèle the pensioner, to whom a great government, far away, at Washington, doubtless with much else on its mind, never forgets to send by mail, each quarter-day morning, a special, personal communication, marked with Fidèle's own name, enclosing the preliminaries of a remittance: "Accept" (as it were) "this slight tribute." "Ah! *que c'est un gouvernement! Voilà une république!*"

Even a Frenchman may be proud to be an American!

Most of his guests, however, Sorel receives with a mere pantomime of wide-opened eyes and extended hands and shrugged-up shoulders, accompanied by a long-drawn "*Eh!*" by which he bodies forth a thousand refinements of thought which language would fail to express. Does a fresh immigrant from the Cévennes bring back at night but one or two of the gay balloons with which she was stocked in the morning, or, better, none; or, on the other hand, does a stalwart man just from the rich Brie country return at sundown in abject despair, bringing back almost all of the red and blue globes which floated like a radiant constellation of hope about his head when he set forth in the early morning, Sorel can express, by his "*Eh!*" and some slight movement, with subtle exactness and with no possibility of being misapprehended, the precise shade of feeling with which the result inspires him.

But there he stops. Nothing is said. Sorel is a philosopher: he has indicated volumes, and he will not dilute with language. One who has fired a little lead bullet does not need to throw after it a bushel of mustard-seed.

The company, as they come in, one by one, wash their hands and faces, if they see fit, at the kitchen sink, and dry them on a long roller-towel,—a device adopted, probably, from the Americans. Then they retire to the room behind the kitchen, and seat themselves at a long table, at which the bear-leaders place themselves only after seeing their animal fed, in the coalhole, where he is quartered.

At the supper-table all is joy, even with the hopeless. Fidèle beams with good-humor, and not infrequently is called on to describe, amid a general hush, for the benefit of some new-comer from "*la belle France*" the quarterly receipt of the communication from Washington: how he stays at home that day, and shaves, and waits at the door for "*la poste*;" how the gray-uniformed letter-carrier appears, hands out a letter "as large as that," and nods smilingly to Fidèle: he, too, fought at "*la Montagne du Lookout*." The amount of the sergeant's pension astonishes them, wonted as they are to the pecuniary treatment of soldiers in the Old World. "*Mais, it is a fortune! Fidèle is a vrai rentier! Ah! une république comme ça!*"

Generally, however, Fidèle contents himself at the evening meal with smiling good-humoredly on everybody and rapidly passing in, under his drooping mustache, spoonfuls of soup, morsels from the long French loaf, and draughts of lager beer; for only the rich can have wine in this country, and in the matter of drink an exile must needs lower his standard, as the prodigal lowered his.

While Sorel and his wife and their busy maid fly in and out with *potage* and *rôti*, "*t-r-r-rès succulent*," the history of which we must not pry too deeply into, there is much excited conversation. You see at once that many amusing things happen to one who sells balloons all day upon the Park. And there are varied fortunes to recount. Such a lady actually wished to buy three for fifty cents! Such a "police-er-mann" is to be highly commended; such another looks with an evil eye upon all: he should truly be removed from office. There is a rumor that a license fee is to be required by the city.

All this is food for discussion.

After supper they all sit about the kitchen or in the alley-way, chatting, smoking. She who has been lucky in her sales basks in Sorel's favor. The unfortunate peasant from the Brie country feels the little bullet in his heart, and nurses a desperate resolution to redeem himself on the morrow: one must live.

Sometimes, if you happen to pass there on a warm evening, you may see a young woman, rather handsome, sitting sidewise on the outer basement steps, looking absently before her, straight-backed, upright, with her hands clasped about one knee, with her skirt sweeping away: a picture of Alsace. I have never been able to find out who she is.

One evening there is a little flutter among this brood. A gentleman, at the alley door, wishes to see M. Sorel. M. Sorel leads the gentleman out, through the alley gate, to the front street-door; then, retiring whence he came, he shortly appears from within at the front door, which opens only after a struggle. A knot of small boys has instantly gathered, apparently impressed with a vague, awful expectation that the gentleman about to enter will never come out. Realizing, however, that in that case there will be nothing to see, they slowly disperse when the door is closed, and resume their play.

Sorel ushers the gentleman into the front parlor, which is Sorel's bedroom, which is also the storehouse of his merchandise, which is also the nursery. At this moment an infant is sleeping in a trundle-bed.

The gentleman takes a chair. So does Sorel.

The gentleman does not talk French. Fortunately, M. Sorel can speak the English: he has learned it in making purchases for his table.

"I am an officer of the government," says Mr. Fox, with a very sharp, distinct utterance, "in the custom-house. You know 'customhouse'?"

M. Sorel does not commit himself. He is an importer of toys. One must be on his guard.

Thereupon, a complicated explanation: this street, and that street, and the other street, and this building, and the market, and the great building standing here.

Ah! yes! M. Sorel identifies the building. Then he is informed that many government officers are there. He knew it very well before.

The conversation goes a step farther.

Mr. Fox is one of those officers. The government is at present in need of a gentleman absolutely trustworthy, for certain important duties: perhaps to judge of silks; perhaps to oversee the weighing of sugar, of iron, of diamonds; perhaps to taste of wines. Who can say what service this great government may not need from its children!

With some labor, since the English is only a translucent, and not a transparent medium to Sorel, this is made clear. Still the horizon is dark.

Mr. Fox draws his chair nearer, facing Sorel, who looks uneasy: Sorel's feelings, to the thousandth degree of subdivision, are always declaring themselves in swift succession upon his face.

Mr. Fox proceeds.

"The great officer of the custom-house, the collector—"

"*Le chef?*" interrupts Sorel.

—yes, the *chef* (Mr. Fox seizes upon the word and clings to it),—the *chef* has been speaking anxiously to Mr. Fox about this vacancy: Mr. Fox is in the *chefs* confidence.

"Ah!" from Sorel, in a tone of utter bewilderment.

"We must have," the *chef* had said to Mr. Fox,—“we must have for this place a noble man, a man with a large heart” (the exact required dimensions Mr. Fox does not give); “a man who loves his government, a man who has showed himself ready to die for her; we must have”—here Mr. Fox bends forward and lays his hand upon Sorel's knee, and looks him in the eye,—“we must have—a *soldier!*”

"Ah!" says Sorel, moving his chair back a little, unconsciously, "*il faut un soldat!* I un-'stan',—*le chef* 'e boun' to 'ave one sol'ier!"

Still no comprehension of the stranger's object. Curiosity, however, prompts Sorel at this point to an inquiry: "'Ow much 'e goin' pay 'im?"

Mr. Fox suggests that he guess. M. Sorel guesses, boldly, and high,—almost insolently high,—eight dollars a week: she is so generous, *la République!*

Higher!

"Higher!" Sorel's eyes open. He guesses again, and recklessly: "*Dix dollars par semaine;* you know—ten dollar ever-y week."

Try again,—again,—again! He guesses,—madly now, as one risks his gold at Baden: twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen.

Yes, eighteen dollars a week, and more—a thousand dollars every year.

Sorel wipes his brow. A thousand dollars in one year! It is like a temptation of the devil.

Sorel ventures another inquiry. The *chef* of the customhouse, esteeming the old sol'iers so highly, is an old sol'ier himself,—is it not so? He has fought for his country? Doubtless he has lost an arm. And Sorel instinctively lets his right arm hang limp, as if the sleeve were empty.

No; the *chef* was an editor and a statesman in the time of the war. He had greatly desired to go to fight, but his duties did not permit it. Still, he loves the old soldier.

Another advance in the conversation, this time by Mr. Fox.

The government, it seems, has now awakened, with deep distress, to the fact that one class of her soldiers she has hitherto forgotten. The government—that is, the *chef* of the customhouse—had this very morning said to Mr. Fox that this class of old soldiers must be brought forward, for trust and for honor. "We must choose, for this vacant place," the *chef* had said,—here Mr. Fox brings his face forward in close proximity to Sorel's astonished countenance,—“we must have, not only an old soldier, but—a *Frenchman!*”

"Ah!"

"Such a soldier lives here," says Mr. Fox; "is it not true? So brave, so honest, so modest, so faithful! Ready to die for his country; worthy of trust and worthy of reward!"

"*Mais!*" with amazement. Yes, such a sol'ier lives here. But can it be that monsieur refers to our Fidèle?

Precisely so!

Whereupon Sorel, hard, hairless, but French, weeps, and embraces Mr. Fox as the representative of the great government at Washington; and, weeping and laughing, leads him downstairs and presents him to Fidèle and to the bear-leaders, and opens a bottle of weak vinegar.

Such an ovation as Fidèle receives! And such a generous government! To send a special messenger to seek out the old sergeant in his retirement! So thoughtful! But it is all of a piece with its unflinching care in the past.

Fidèle begins, on the spot, to resume something of his former erectness and soldierly bearing; to shake off the stoop and slouch which lameness and the drawing about of his "*musique*" have given him. He wishes to tell the story of Lookout Mountain.

As Mr. Fox is about to go, he recollects himself. Oh, by the way, one thing more. It is not pleasant to mingle sadness with rejoicing. But Mr. Fox is the reluctant bearer of a gentle reproach from the great government at Washington. Her French children,—are they not just a little remiss? And when she is so bountiful, so thoughtful!

"*Mais—how you mean?*" (with surprise.)

Why,—and there is a certain pathos in Mr. Fox's tone, as he stands facing Sorel, with the gaze of a loving, reproachful friend,—why, how many of the Frenchmen of this quarter are ever seen now at the pleasant gatherings of the Republicans, in the wardroom? The Republic, the Republicans,—it is all one. Is that quite kind to the Republic? Should not her French children, on their part, show filial devotion to the fond government?

"*Mais,*" M. Sorel swiftly explains, "they are weary of going; they understand nothing. One sits and smokes a little while, and one talks; then one puts a little ticket into one's hand; one is jammed into a long file; one slips his ticket into a box; he knows not for whom he is voting; it is like a flock of sheep. What is the use of going?"

Ah! that is the trouble? Then they are unjustly reproached. The government has indeed neglected to guide them. But suppose that some officer of the government—Mr. Fox himself, for instance—will be at the meeting? Then can M. Sorel induce those good French citizens to come?

Induce them! They will be only too ready; in fact, at a word from M. Sorel, and particularly when the news

of this great honor to Fidèle shall have spread abroad, twenty, thirty, forty will go to every meeting,—that is, if a friend be there to guide them. At the very next meeting, *monsieur* shall see whether the great government's French children are neglectful!

Whereupon the great government, in the person of Mr. Fox, then and there falls in spirit upon the neck of her French citizen-children, represented by Sorel and Fidèle, and full reconciliation is made.

Yes, Mr. Fox will come again. M. Sorel must introduce him to those brave Frenchmen, his friends and neighbors; Mr. Fox must grasp them by the hand, one by one. Sorel must take him to the *Société des Franco-Américains*, where they gather. The government wishes to know them better. And (this in a confidential whisper) there may be other places to be filled. What! Suppose, now, that the government should some day demand the services of M. Sorel himself in the custom-house; and, since he is a business man, at a still larger salary than a thousand dollars a year!

"Ah, *monsieur*" (in a tone of playful reproach), "*vous êtes un flatteur, n'est ce pas?*" You know,—I guess you giv'n' me taffy."

Such a hero as Fidèle is! No more balloons, no more carting about of "*ma musique*;" a square room upstairs, a bottle of wine at dinner, short hours, distinction,—in fine, all that the heart can wish.

I have been speaking in the present: I should have spoken in the past.

It was shortly after Fidèle's appointment—in the early autumn—that I first made his and Sorel's acquaintance.

I was teaching in an evening school, not far from Madeira Place, and among my scholars was Sorel's only son, a boy of perhaps fourteen, whom his father had left behind, for a time, at school in France, and had but lately brought over. He was a shy, modest, intelligent little fellow, utterly out of place in his rude surroundings. From the pleasant village home-school, of which he sometimes told me, to the *Maison Sorel*, was a grating change.

He was always waiting for me at the schoolroom door, and was always the last one to speak to me at closing. Perhaps I reminded him of some young usher whom he had known when life was more pleasant.

If, however, the *Maison Sorel* chafed Auguste, it was not for lack of affection on his father's part Sorel often came with him to the door of the school-room; and every night, rain or shine, he was there at nine to accompany him home. It was in this way that I first came to know Sorel; and whether it was from some kindness that Auguste may have thought I showed, or because I could talk a little French, Sorel took a great liking to me. At first, he and Auguste would walk with me a few blocks after school; then he would look in upon me for a few minutes at the law-office where I was studying, where I had a large anteroom to myself; finally, nothing would do but that I should visit him at his house. I had always been fond of strolling about the wharves, and I should have liked very well to stop occasionally at Sorel's, if I could have been allowed to sit in the kitchen and hear the general conversation. But this was not sufficient state for "M. le maître d'école." I must be drawn off upstairs to the bedroom parlor, to hear of Auguste's virtues. Such devotion I have seldom seen. Sorel would have praised Auguste, with tears in his eyes, for hours together, if I would have stayed to listen.

He had many things to show in that parlor. He had gyroscopes: and he would wind them up and set half-a-dozen of those anti-natural tops spinning straight out in the air for my diversion. There were great sacks of uninflated balloons, and delicate sheet-rubber, from which Sorel made up balloons. There were other curious things in rubber,—a tobacco-pouch, for example, in perfect outward imitation of an iron kilogramme-weight, with a ring to lift it by, warranted to create "immense surprise" among those who should lift it for iron; tobacco-pouches, too, in fac-simile of lobsters and crabs and reptiles, colored to nature, which Sorel assured me would cause roars of laughter among my friends: there was no pleasanter way, he said, of entertaining an evening company than suddenly to display one of these creatures, and make the ladies scream and run about. He presented me, at different times, with a gyroscope, a kilogramme-weight and a lobster with a blue silk lining.

As time ran on, and, in the early winter, I began practice, Sorel brought me a little business. He had to sue two Graeco-Roman wrestlers for board and attach their box-office receipts. Some Frenchman had heard of a little legacy left him in the Calvados, and wanted me to look up the matter.

Fidèle, too, came to me every quarter-day, to make oath before me to his pension certificate, and stopped and made a short call. He had little to say about France. His great romance had been the war, although it seemed to have fused itself into a hazy, high-colored dream of danger, excitement, suffering, and generous devotion. Tears always rose in his eyes when he spoke of "*la république?*"

In those first days of practice, anything by the name of law business wore a halo, and I used to encourage Sorel's calls, partly for this reason and partly for practice in talking French with a common man. I hoped to go to France some day, and I wanted to be able then to talk not only with the grammatical, but with the dear people who say, "I guess likely," and "How be you?" in French.

Moreover, Sorel was rather amusing. He was something of a humorist. Once he came to tell me, excitedly, that Auguste was learning music: "*Il touche au violon,—mais—'e* play so *bien!*" And Sorel's eyes opened in wonder at the boy's quickness.

"Who teaches him?" I asked. "Some Frenchman who plays in the theatre?"

"*Mais*, no," Sorel replied, with a broad drollery in his eye; "*un professeur d'occasion!*" It was a ruined music-teacher, engaged now in selling balloons from Madeira Place, who was the "*professeur d'occasion.*"

One day Sorel appeared with a great story to tell. Auguste, it seemed, had wearied of home, and was determined to go to sea. Nothing could deter him. Whereupon M. Sorel had hit upon a stratagem. He had hunted up, somewhere along the wharves, two French sailors with conversational powers, and had retained them to stay at his house for two or three days, as chance comers. It was inevitable that Auguste should ply them with eager questions,—and they knew their part.

As Sorel, entering into the situation now with all his dramatic nature, with his eyes wide open, repeated to me some of the tales of horror which they had palmed off upon innocent Auguste as spontaneous truth, I



could see, myself, the rigging covered with ice an inch thick; sailors climbing up ("Ah! *comme ils grimpent,—ils grimpent!*") bare-handed, their hands freezing to the ropes at every touch, and leaving flesh behind, "*comme* if you put your tongue to a lam'post in the winter." I could see the seamen's backs cut up with lashes for the slightest offences; I tasted the foul, unwholesome food. I think that Sorel half believed it all himself,—his imagination was so powerful,—forgetting that he had paid in silver coin for every word of it. At any rate, the ruse had been successful. Auguste had been thoroughly scared and had consented to stay at home, and the most threatening cloud of Sorel's life had blown over.

Usually, however, Sorel and I talked politics; and to our common pleasure we generally agreed. Sorel knew very little about the details of our government, and he would listen to me with the utmost eagerness while I practised my French upon him, explaining to his wondering mind the relations of the States to each other and to the general government, and the system of State and Federal courts. He was very quick, and he took in the ingenious scheme with great facility. Then he would tell me about the workings of government in the French villages and departments; and as he read French papers, he had always something in the way of news or explanation of recent events. I have since come to believe that he was exceedingly well informed.

The most singular thing about him to me was how he could cherish on the one hand such devotion as he plainly did, to France, and on the other hand such a passionate attachment to the United States. In truth, that double patriotism is one of the characteristic features of our country.

I could lead him, in twenty minutes, through the whole gamut of emotion, by talking about Auguste, and then of politics. It was irresistible, the temptation to lead him out. A word about Auguste, and he would wipe tears from his eyes. A mention of Gambetta, and the bare idea filled him with enthusiasm; he was instantly, in imagination, one of a surging crowd, throwing his hat in the air, or drawing Gambetta's carriage through the streets of Paris. I had only to speak of Alsace to bring him to a mood of sullen ugliness and hatred. He was, I have no doubt, a pretty good-tempered man; he was certainly warm-hearted; his apparent harshness to his balloon-vendors was probably nothing more than necessary parental severity, and he was always ready to recognize their successes. But I have never seen a more wicked and desperate expression than an allusion to Alsace called up in his face and in his whole bearing. Sometimes he would laugh, when I mentioned the severed province; but it was with a hard, metallic, cruel laugh.' He felt the loss as he would have felt the loss of a limb. The first time I brought up the topic, I saw the whole bitter story of the dismembering of France.

There was another subject which called out that same bitter revengeful look, and that cruel nasal laugh,—the royalist factions and the Bonapartists. When we spoke of them, and I watched his face and heard his soulless laughter, I saw the French Revolution.

But he could always be brought back to open childish delight and warmth by a reference to the United States. Our government, in his eyes, embodied all that was good. France was now a "*république*," to be sure, and he rejoiced in the fact; but he plainly felt the power and settled stability of our republic, and he seemed to have a filial devotion toward it closely akin to his love for Auguste.

How fortunate we were! Here were no *Légitimistes*, no *Orléanistes*, no *Bonapartistes*, for a perpetual menace! Here all citizens, however else their views might differ, believed, at least, in the republic, and desired to stay her hands. There were no factions here continually plotting in the darkness. Here the machinery of government was all in view, and open to discussion and improvement Ah, what a proud, happy country is this!" *Que c'est une république!*"

I gathered enthusiasm myself from this stranger's ardor for the country of his adoption. I think that I appreciated better, through him, the free openness of our institutions. It is of great advantage to meet an intense man, of associations different from your own, who, by his very intensity and narrowness, instantly puts you at his standpoint. I viewed the United States from the shores of a sister republic which has to contend against strong and organized political forces not fully recognized in the laws, working beneath the surface, which nevertheless are facts.

One acquaintance leads to another. Through Sorel, whose house was the final resort of Frenchmen in distress, and their asylum if they were helpless, not only Fidèle, but a number of other Frenchmen of that neighborhood, began to come to me with their small affairs. I was the *avocat* who "speak French." I am afraid that they were surprised at my "French" when they heard it.

There was a willow-worker from the Pas-de-Calais, a deformed man, walking high and low, and always wanting to rise from his chair and lay his hand upon my shoulder, as he talked, who came to consult me about the recovery of a hundred francs which he had advanced at *Anvers* to a Belgian tailor upon the pledge of a sewing-machine, on consideration that the tailor, who was to come in a different steamer, should take charge of the willow-worker's dog on the voyage: the willow-worker had a wife and six children to look after. This was a lofty contest; but I had time then. I found a little amusement in the case, and I had the advantage of two or three hours in all of practical French conversation with men thoroughly in earnest. Finally, I had the satisfaction of settling their dispute, and so keeping them from a quarrel.

Then there was a French cook, out of a job, who wanted me to find him a place. He was gathering mushrooms, meanwhile, for the hotels. One day he surprised me by coming into my office in a white linen cap, brandishing in his hand a long, gleaming knife. He only desired, however, to tell me that he had found a place at one of the clubs, and to show, in his pride, the shining blade which he had just bought as his equipment.

But the man who impressed me most, after Sorel, was Carron. He first appeared as the friend of the cook,—whom he introduced to me, with many flourishes and compliments, although he was an utter stranger himself. Carron was a well-built and rather handsome man, of medium height, and was then perhaps fifty years of age. He had a remarkably bright, intelligent face, curling brown hair, and a full, wavy brown beard. He kept a rival boarding-house, not far from Sorel's, in a gabled wooden house two hundred years old, which was anciently the home of an eminent Puritan divine. In the oak-panelled room where the theologian wrote his famous tract upon the Carpenter who Profanely undertook to Dispense the Word in the way of Public Ministration, and was Divinely struck Dumb in consequence, Carron now sold beer from a keg.

It was plain at a glance that his present was not of a piece with his past I could not place him. His manners

were easy and agreeable, and yet he was not a gentleman. He was well informed, and evidently of some mental training, and yet he was not quite an educated man. After his first visit to me, with the cook, he, too, occasionally looked in upon me, generally late in the afternoon, when I could call the day's work done and could talk French for half an hour with him, in place of taking a walk. He was strongly dramatic, like Sorel, but in a different way. Sorel was intense; Carron was *théâtral*. He was very fond of declamation; and seeing from the first my wish to learn French,—which Sorel would never very definitely recognize,—he often recited to me, for ear practice, and in an exceedingly effective way, passages from the Old Testament. He seemed to know the Psalms by heart. He was a good deal of an actor, and he took the part of a Hebrew prophet with great effect. But his fervor was all stage fire, and he would turn in an instant from a denunciatory Psalm to a humorous story. Even his stories were of a religious cast, like those which ministers relate when they gather socially. He told me once about a priest who was strolling along the bank of the Loire, when a drunken sailor accosted him and reviled him as a lazy good-for-nothing, a *fainéant*, and slapped his face. The priest only turned the other cheek to him. "Strike again," he said; and the sailor struck. "Now, my friend," said the priest, "the Scripture tells us that when one strikes us we are to turn the other cheek. There it ends its instruction and leaves us to follow our own judgment." Whereupon, being a powerful man, he collared the sailor and plunged him into the water. He told me, too, with great unction, and with a roguish gleam in his eye, a story of a small child who was directed to prepare herself for confession, and, being given a manual for self-examination, found the wrong places, and appeared with this array of sins: "I have been unfaithful to my marriage vows.... I have not made the tour of my diocese."

Carron had an Irish wife (*une Irlandaise*), much younger than he, whom he worshipped. He told me, one day, about his courtship. When he first met her, she knew not a word of French, and he not a word of English. He was greatly captivated (*épris*), and he had to contrive some mode of communication. They were both Catholics. He had a prayer-book with Latin and French in parallel columns; she had a similar prayer-book but in Latin and English. They would seat themselves; Carron would find in his prayer-book a sentence in French which would suit his turn, on a pinch, and through the medium of the Latin would find the corresponding passage in English in Norah's prayer-book and point it out to her. Norah, in her turn, would select and point out some passage in English which would serve as a tribute to Carron's charms, and he would discover in his prayer-book, in French, what that tribute was. Why should we deem the dead languages no longer a practical study, when Latin can gain for a Frenchman an Irish wife!

Carron, as I have said, puzzled me. He had not the pensive air of one who has seen better days. He was more than cheerful in his present life: he was full of spirits; and yet it was plain that he had been brought up for something different. I asked him once to tell me, for French lessons, the story of his life. With the most charming complaisance, he at once consented; but he proceeded in such endless detail, the first time, in an account of his early boyhood in a strict Benedictine monastery school, in the south of France, as to suggest that he was talking against time. And although his spirited and amusing picture of his childhood days only awakened my curiosity, I could never persuade him to resume the history. It was always "the next time."

He seemed to be poor: but he never asked a favor except for others. On the contrary, he brought me some little business. A *Belge* had been cheated out of five hundred dollars; I recovered half of it for him. A Frenchman from *le Midi* had bought out a little business, and the seller had immediately set up shop next door; I succeeded in shutting up the rival. I was a prodigy.

After a time I was told something further as to Carron's life. He had been a Capuchin monk, in a monastery at or near Paris. The instant that I heard this statement, I felt in my very soul that it was true. My eye had always missed something in Carron. I now knew exactly what it was,—a shaved crown, bare feet, and a cowl.

It was the usage for the brethren of his order to go about Paris barefoot, begging. They were not permitted by the *concierges* to go into the great apartment hotels. But "Carron, *il est très fin*," said my informant; "you know,—'e is var' smart." Carron would learn, by careful inquiry, the name of a resident on an upper floor; then he would appear at the *concierge's* door, and would mention the name of this resident with such adroit, demure, and absolute confidence that he would be permitted at once to ascend. Once inside, he would go the rounds of the apartments. So he would get five times as much in a day as any of his fellows. A certain amount of the receipts he would yield up to the treasury of the monastery; the rest he kept for himself. After a while this came to be suspected, and he quietly withdrew to a new country.

There was not the slightest tangible corroboration of this story. It might have been the merest gossip or the invention of an enemy. But it fitted Carron so perfectly, that from the day I heard it I could never, somehow, question its substantial truth. If I had questioned it, I should have repeated the story to him, to give him an opportunity to answer. But something warned me not to do so.

Fidèle held on well at the custom-house, and I think that he became a general favorite. No one who took the old soldier by the hand and looked him in the eye could question his absolute honesty; and as for skill in his duties,—well, it was the custom-house.

But he was not saving much money. He was free to give and free to lend to his fellow-countrymen; and, moreover, various ways were pointed out to him by Mr. Fox, from time to time, in which an old soldier, delighting to aid his country, could serve her pecuniarily. The republic,—that is, the Republicans,—it was all one.

One afternoon, late in summer, Fidèle appeared at my office. He seldom visited me, except quarterly for his pension affidavit. As he came in now, I saw that something had happened. His grisly face wore the same kindly smile that it had always borne, but the light had gone out of it. His story was short. He had lost his place. He had been notified that his services would not be needed after Saturday. No reason had been given him; he was simply dismissed in humiliation. There must be some misunderstanding, such as occurs between the warmest friends. And was not the great government his friend? Did it not send him his pension regularly? Had it not sent a special messenger to seek him out, in his obscurity, for this position; and was he not far better suited to it now than at the outset?

In reply to questions from me, he told me more about Mr. Fox's first visit than I had hitherto known. I asked him, in a casual way, about the ward-meetings, and whether the French citizens generally attended them. No,

they had been dropping off; they had become envious, perhaps, of him; they had formed a club, with Carron for president, and had voted to act in a body (*en solidarité*).

Then I told Fidèle that I knew no way to help him, and that I feared his dismissal was final. He could not understand me, but went away, leaning on his cane, dragging his left foot sidewise behind him, with something of the air of an old faithful officer who has been deprived of his sword.

He had not been gone more than an hour, when the door opened again, and Carron looked in. Seeing that I was alone, he closed the door and walked very slowly toward my desk,—erect, demure, impassive, looking straight forward and not at me, with an air as if he were bearing a candle in high mass, intoning, as he came, a passage from the Psalms: “*Je me ré-jourirai; je partagerai Sichem, et je mesurerai la vallée de Succoth. Galaad sera à moi, Manassé sera à moi.... Moab sera le bassin où je me laverai et je jetterai mon soulier sur Édom.... Qui est-ce qui me conduira dans la ville forte? Qui est-ce qui me conduira jusqu'en Édom?*” (I will rejoice; I will divide Shechem and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine; Ma-nasseh is mine.... Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe.... Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me into Edom?)

Carron propounded the closing inquiry with great unction; his manner expressed entire confidence that some one would be found to lead him into the strong city, to lead him into Edom.

I had lost something of my interest in Carron since I had heard the story of his Parisian exploits; but I could not help being amused at his manner. It portended something. He made no disclosure, however. Whatever he had to tell, he went away without telling it, contenting himself for the present with intimating by his triumphal manner that great good fortune was in the air.

On Saturday afternoon, as I was about closing my desk,—a little earlier than usual, for it was a most tempting late September day, and the waves of the harbor, which I could just see from my office window, called loudly to me,—Sorel appeared. I held out my hand, but he affected not to see it, and he sat down without a word. He was plainly disturbed and somewhat excited.

Of course I knew that it was his old friend's misfortune which weighed upon him; he was proud and fond of Fidèle.

I seated myself, and waited for him to speak. In a moment he began, with a low, hard laugh: “*Semble que notre bon Fidèle a sa démission: you know,—our Fidèle got bounced!*”

Yes, I said, Fidèle had told me so, and I was very sorry to hear it.

“*Evidemment*” (this in a tone of irony) “*il faut un homme plus juste, plus loyale, que le pauvre Fidèle!* (You know,—they got to 'ave one more honest man!) *Bien!* You know who goin' 'ave 'is place?”

I shook my head.

Sorel laid down his hat, and wiped his brow with his handkerchief. Then he went on, no longer speaking in French and then translating,—his usual concession to my supposed desires,—but mostly now in quasi-English: “*Mais, you thing this great gouvernement wan' hones' men work for her, n'est-ce pas?*”

“The government ought to have the most honest men,” I said.

“*Bien.* Now you thing the *gouvernement* boun' to 'ave some men w'at mos' know the business, *n'est-ce pas?*”

“It ought to have them.”

Sorel wiped his brow again. “Now, w'ich you thing the mos' honestes' man,—Fidèle, or— *Carron?* W'ich you thing know the business bes',—Fidèle, w'at been there, or Carron, w'at ain' been there?”

“Fidèle, of course.”

“Then tell me, w'at for they bounce' our Fidèle, and let Carron got 'is place?” and he burst into a harsh, resonant, contemptuous laugh. In a moment he resumed: “Now,” he said, “I only got one more thing to ax you,” and taking his felt hat in his hands, he held it on his knees, before him, and stooping a little forward, eyed me closely: “You know w'at we talk sometimes, you an' me, 'bout our French *république*—some *Orléanistes*, some *Légitimistes*, some *Bonapartistes?* You merember 'ow we talk, you and me?”

I nodded,

“We ain' got no *Orléanistes*, no *Bonapartistes*' *ici*, in this *gouvernement*, *n'est-ce pas?*”

I intimated that I had never met any.

“Now,” he proceeded, with an increased bitterness in his tone and his hard smile, “I use' thing you one good frien' to me, *mais*, you been makin' fool of me all that time!”

“You don't think any such thing,” I said.

“You know,” he went on, “who bounce our Fidèle?”

“No.”

Sorel received my reply with a low, incredulous laugh. Then he laid his hat down on the floor, drew his chair closer, held out his finger, and, with the air of one who shows another that he knows his secret he demanded:—

“*Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un 'Boss'?*”

I sat silent for a moment, looking at him, not knowing just what to say.

“*Mais*,” he went on, “all the *Américains*” (they were chiefly Irish) “roun' my 'ouse been tellin' me, long time, 'Le Boss goin' bounce Fidèle.' Me, I laugh w'en they say so. I say, 'Le Boss? *C'est un créature d'imagination, pour nous effrayer,*' you know, *make us scart* 'C'est un loup-garou,' you know,—w'at make 'fraid li'l chil'ren. That's w'at I tell them. I thing then you would n't been makin' fool of me.’

“They don't know what they are talking about,” I said. “How can they know why Fidèle is removed?”

“*Mais*, you jus' wait; I goin' tell you. I fin they do know. Fidèle take he sol'ier-papers, an' he go see *le chef*” (here Sorel rose, and acted Fidèle). “Fidèle, 'e show 'is papers to *le chef*; 'e say, 'Now you boun' tell me why *le bon gouvernement*, w'at 's been my frien', bounce me now.' 'E say *le chef* boun' to tell 'im,—*il faut*



*absolument!* 'E say 'e won' go, way if *le chef* don' tell 'im; an' you know, no man can't scare our Fidèle!"

"Very well," I said; "what did the collector, the *chef* tell him? Fidèle is too lame, I suppose?"

"*Mais, non,*" with a suspicious smile. "*Le chef*, he mos' cry,—yas, sar,—an' 'e say 'e ain' got no trouble 'gainst Fidèle; *la république*, she ain' got no trouble 'gainst Fidèle. 'E say 'e di'n want Fidèle to go; *le gouvernement*, she d'n want 'im to go. *Mais*, 'e say, 'e can't help hisself; *le gouvernement*, she can't help herself. Yas, sar. Then Fidèle know w'at evarybody been tellin' us was true,—'e 'Boss,' 'e make 'im go!" And Sorel sat back in his chair.

"Now, I ax you one time more," he resumed: "*qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un 'Boss'?*"

What could I say! How could I explain, offhand, to this stranger, the big boss, the little boss, the State boss, the ward boss, the county boss, all burrowing underneath our theoretical government! How could I explain to him that Fidèle's department in the custom-house had been allotted to a Congressman about to run for a second term, who needed it to control a few more ward-meetings,—needed, in the third ward caucus, those very French votes which Carron had been shrewd enough to steal away and organize! What could I say to Sorel which he, innocent as he was, would not misconstrue as inconsistent with our past glorifications of our republic! What did I say! I do not know. I only remember that he interrupted me, harshly and abruptly, as he rose to go.

"You an' me got great *pitié*, ain' we," he said, "for *notre France, la pauvre France*, 'cause she got so many folks w'at *tourbillonnent sous la surface,—les Orléanistes les Bonapartistes*; don' we say so? *Mais, il n'y en a pas, ici*,—you know, we ain' got none here; don' we say so? We ain' got no *factionnaires* here! *Mais non!*" Then, lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper: "*Votre bonne république,*" he said,—"*c'est une république du théâtre!*"

He had hardly closed the door behind him, when he opened it again, and put in his head, and with his hard, mocking laugh, demanded, "*Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un 'Boss'?*" And as he walked down the hall, I could still hear his scornful laughter.

He never came to see me again. I sometimes heard of him through Carron, who had succeeded to Fidèle's position and had elevated a considerable part of his following: for several weeks they were employed at three dollars a day in the navy-yard, where, to their utter mystification, they moved, with a certain planetary regularity, ship-timber from the west to the east side of the yard, and then back from the east side to the west. You remember reading about this in the published accounts of our late congressional contest.

Though Sorel never visited me again, I occasionally saw him: once near the evening-school, when I went as a guest; once in the long market; once in the post-office; and once he touched me on the shoulder, as I was leaning over the street railing, by the dock, looking down at a Swedish bark. Each time he had but one thing to say; and having said it, he would break into his harsh, ironical laugh, and pass along:—

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un 'Boss'?*"

And Fidèle?

Still, if you will go to Madeira Place at sunset, you may see the cap and blouse come slowly in. Still the old sergeant sits at the head of the table. But his ideal is gone; his idol has clay feet. No longer does he describe to new-comers from France the receipt of his pension. All the old fond pride in it is gone, and he takes the money now as dollars and cents.

In the conversation, however, around the table the great government at Washington is by no means forgotten. Sometimes Sorel tells his guests about the Boss.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IN MADEIRA PLACE \*\*\*

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