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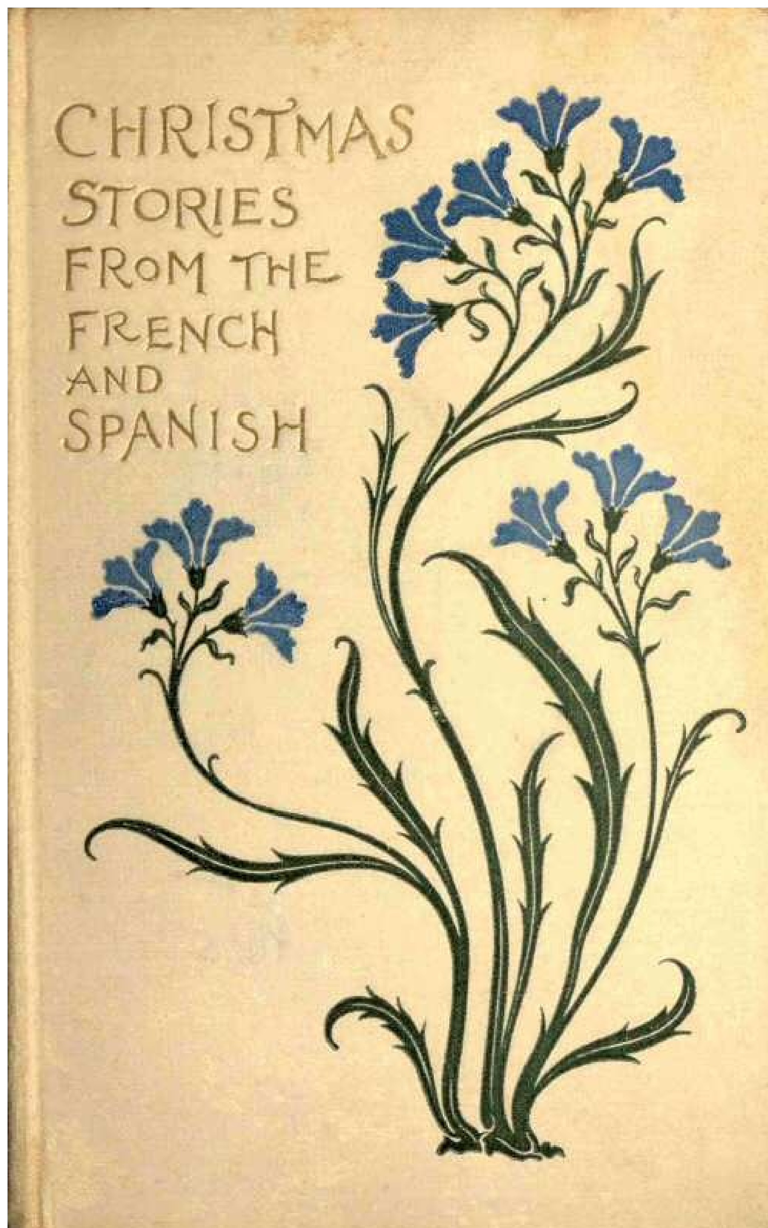

Transcriber's note

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CHRISTMAS STORIES

Christmas Stories

FROM

French and Spanish Writers

BY

ANTOINETTE OGDEN

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CHRISTMAS STORIES.

A BIRD IN THE SNOW.

From the Spanish of Armando Palacio Valdés.

He was born blind, and had been taught the one thing which the blind generally learn,—music; for this art he was specially gifted. His mother died when he was little more than a child, and his father, who was the first cornetist of a military band, followed her to the grave a few years later. He had a brother in America from whom he had never heard; still, through indirect sources he knew him to be well off, married, and the father of two fine children. To the day of his death the old musician, indignant at his son's ingratitude, would not allow his name to be mentioned in his presence; but the blind boy's [Pg 12] affection for his brother remained unchanged. He could not forget that this elder brother had been the support of his childhood, the defence of his weakness against the other boys, and that he had always spoken to him with kindness. The recollection of Santiago's voice as he entered his room in the morning, shouting, "Hey there, Juanito! get up, man; don't sleep so!" rang in the blind boy's ears with a more pleasing harmony than could ever be drawn from the keys of a piano or the strings of a violin. Was it probable that such a kind heart had grown cold? Juan could not believe it, and was always striving to justify him. At times the fault was with the mail, or it might be that his brother did not wish to write until he could send them a good deal of money; then again, he fancied that he meant to surprise them by presenting himself some fine day, laden with gold, in the modest *entresol* in which they lived. But he never dared communicate any of these fancies to his father; only when the old man, wrought to an unusual pitch of exasperation, bitterly apostrophized the absent one, he found the courage to say: "You must not despair, father. Santiago is good, and my heart tells me that we shall hear from him one of these days."

The father died, however, without hearing from his son, between a priest, [Pg 13] who exhorted him, and the blind boy, who clung convulsively to his hand, as if he meant to detain him in this world by main force. When the old man's body was removed from the house, the boy seemed to have lost his reason, and in a frenzy of grief he struggled with the undertaker's men. Then he was left alone. And what loneliness was his! No father, no mother, no relatives, no friends; he was even deprived of the sunlight, which is the friend of all created things. He was two whole days in his room pacing the floor like a caged wolf, without tasting food. The chamber-maid, assisted by a compassionate neighbor, succeeded in saving him from this slow process of suicide. He was prevailed upon to eat. He spent the rest of his life praying, and working at his music.

His father, shortly before his death, had obtained for him a position as organist in one of the churches of Madrid, with a salary of seventy cents a day. This was scarcely sufficient to meet the running expenses of a house, however modest; so within a fortnight Juan sold all that had constituted the furniture of his humble home, dismissed his servant, and took a room at a boarding-house, for which he paid forty cents a day; the remaining thirty cents covered all his other expenses. He lived thus for several months without [Pg 14] leaving his room except to fulfil his obligations. His only walks were from the house to the church, and from the church back again. His grief weighed upon him so heavily that he never opened his lips. He spent the long hours of the day composing a grand requiem Mass for the repose of his father's soul, depending upon the charity of the parish for its execution; and although it would be incorrect to say that he strained his five senses,—on account of his having but four,—it can at least be said that he threw all the energies of his body and soul into his work.

The ministerial crisis overtook him before his task was half finished. I do not remember who came into power, whether the Radicals, Conservatives, or Constitutionals; at any rate, there was some great change. The news reached Juan late, and to his sorrow. The new cabinet soon judged him, in his capacity as an organist, to be a dangerous citizen, and felt that from the heights of the

choir, at vespers or in the solemnity of the Mass, with the swell and the roar from all the stops of the organ, he was evincing sentiments of opposition which were truly scandalous. The new ministers were ill disposed, as they declared in Congress through the lips of one of their authorized members, "to tolerate any form of imposition," so they proceeded with praiseworthy energy to place Juan on the retired list, and to find him a substitute whose musical [Pg 15] manœuvres might offer a better guarantee,—a man, in a word, who would prove more loyal to the institutions. On being officially informed of this, the blind one experienced no emotion beyond surprise. In the deep recesses of his heart he was pleased, as he was thus left more time in which to work at his Mass. The situation appeared to him in its real light only when his landlady, at the end of the month, came to him for money. He had none to give her, naturally, as his salary had been withdrawn; and he was compelled to pawn his father's watch, after which he resumed his work with perfect serenity and without a thought of the future. But the landlady came again for money at the end of another month, and he once more pawned a jewel of the scant paternal legacy; this was a small diamond ring. In a few months there was nothing left to pawn. So the landlady, in consideration of his helplessness, kept him two or three days beyond the time and then turned him out, with the self-congratulatory feeling of having acted generously in not claiming his trunk and clothes, from which she might have realized the few cents that he still owed her.

He looked for another lodging, but was unable to rent a piano, which was a sore trial to him; evidently he could not finish his Mass. He knew a [Pg 16] shopkeeper who owned a piano and who permitted him to make use of it. But Juan soon noticed that his visits grew more and more inopportune, so he left off going. Shortly, too, he was turned out of his new lodgings, only this time they kept his trunk. Then came a period of misery and anguish,—of that misery of which it is hard to conceive. We know that life has few joys for the homeless and the poor, but if in addition they be blind and alone, surely they have found the limit of human suffering. Juan was tossed about from lodging to lodging, lying in bed while his only shirt was being washed, wandering through the streets of Madrid with torn shoes, his trousers worn to a fringe about his feet, his hair long, and his beard unshaven. Some compassionate fellow-lodger obtained a position for him in a café, from which, however, he was soon turned out, for its frequenters did not relish his music. He never played popular dances or peteneras, no fandangos, not even an occasional polka. His fingers glided over the keys in dreamy ecstasies of Beethoven and Chopin, and the audience found some difficulty in keeping time with their spoons. So out he went again through the byways of the capital. Every now and then some charitable soul, accidentally brought in contact with his misery, assisted him indirectly, for Juan shuddered at the thought of begging. [Pg 17] He took his meals in some tavern or other in the lowest quarter of Madrid, ate just enough to keep from starving, and for two cents he was allowed to sleep in a hovel between beggars and evil-doers. Once they stole his trousers while he was asleep, and left him a pair of cotton ones in their stead. This was in November.

Poor Juan, who had always cherished the thought of his brother's return, now in the depths of his misery nursed his chimera with redoubled faith. He had a letter written and sent to Havana. As he had no idea how his brother could be reached, the letter bore no direction. He made all manner of inquiries, but to no effect, and he spent long hours on his knees, hoping that Heaven might send Santiago to his rescue. His only happy moments were those spent in prayer, as he knelt behind a pillar in the far-off corner of some solitary church, breathing the acrid odors of dampness and melting wax, listening to the flickering sputter of the tapers and the faint murmur rising from the lips of the faithful in the nave of the temple. His innocent soul then soared above the cruelties of life and communed with God and the Holy Mother. From his early childhood devotion to the Virgin had been deeply rooted in his heart. As he had never known his mother, he instinctively turned [Pg 18] to the mother of God for that tender and loving protection which only a woman can give a child. He had composed a number of hymns and canticles in her honor, and he never fell asleep without pressing his lips to the image of the Carmen, which he wore on his neck.

There came a day, however, when heaven and earth forsook him. Driven from his last shelter, without a crust to save him from starvation, or a cloak to protect him from the cold, he realized with terror that the time had come when he would have to beg. A great struggle took place in his soul. Shame and suffering made a desperate stand against necessity. The profound darkness which surrounded him increased the anguish of the strife; but hunger conquered in the end. He prayed for strength with sobs, and resigned himself to his fate. Still, wishing to disguise his humiliation, he determined to sing in the streets, at night only. His voice was good, and he had a rare

knowledge of the art of singing. It occurred to him that he had no means of accompaniment. But he soon found another unfortunate, perhaps a trifle less wretched than himself, who lent him an old and broken guitar. He mended it as best he could, and with a voice hoarse with tears he went out into the street on a frosty December night. His heart beat violently; his knees trembled under him. When he tried to sing in one of the central thoroughfares, he found he could not utter a sound. Suffering and shame seemed to have tied a knot in his throat. He groped about until he had found a wall to lean against. There he stood for awhile, and when he felt a little calmer he began the tenor's aria from the first act of "Favorita." A blind singer who sang neither couplets nor popular songs soon excited some curiosity among the passers-by, and in a few minutes a crowd had gathered around him. There was a murmur of surprise and admiration at the art with which he overcame the difficulties of the composition, and many a copper was dropped in the hat that dangled from his arm. After this he sang the aria of the fourth act of "Africana." But too many had stopped to listen, and the authorities began to fear that this might be a cause of disturbance; for it is a well-established fact with officials of the police force that people who congregate in the streets to hear a blind man sing are always prompted by motives of rebellion,—it means a peculiar hostility to the institutions; in a word, an attitude thoroughly incompatible with the peace of society and the security of the State. Accordingly, a policeman caught Juan energetically by the arm and said, "Here, here! go straight home now, and don't let me catch you stopping at any more street corners."

"I'm doing no harm!"

"You are blocking the thoroughfare. Come, move on, move on, if you don't want to go to the lock-up."

It is really encouraging to see how careful our authorities are in clearing the streets of blind singers; and I really believe, in spite of all that has been said to the contrary, that if they could keep them equally free from thieves and murderers, they would do so with pleasure. Juan went back to his hovel with a heavy heart, for he was by nature shrinking and timid, and was grieved at having disturbed the peace and given rise to the interference of the executive power. He had made twenty-seven cents. With this he bought something to eat on the following day, and paid rent for the little pile of straw on which he slept. The next night he went out again and sang a few more operatic arias; but the people again crowded around him, and once more a policeman felt himself called upon to interfere, shouting at him to move on. But how could he? If he kept moving on, he would not make a cent. He could not expect the people to follow him. Juan moved on, however, on and on, because he was timid, and the mere thought of infringing the laws, of disturbing even momentarily the peace of his native land, was worse than death to him. So his earnings rapidly decreased. The necessity of moving on, on the one hand, and the fact that his performances had lost the charm of novelty, which in Spain always commands its price, daily deprived him of a few coppers. With what he brought home at night he could scarcely buy enough food to keep him alive. The situation was desperate. The poor boy saw but one luminous point in the clouded horizon of his life, and that was his brother's return to Madrid. Every night as he left his hovel with his guitar swinging from his shoulder he thought, "If Santiago should be in Madrid and hear me sing, he would know me by my voice." And this hope, or rather this chimera, alone gave him the strength to endure life. However, there came again a day in which his anguish knew no limit. On the preceding night he had earned only six coppers. It had been so cold! This was Christmas Eve. When the morning dawned upon the world, it found Madrid wrapped in a sheet of snow six inches thick. It snowed steadily all day long, which was a matter of little consequence to the majority of people, and was even a cause of much rejoicing among æsthetes generally. Those poets in particular who enjoy what is called easy circumstances spent the greater part of the day watching the flakes through the plate-glass of their study windows, meditating upon and elaborating those graceful and ingenious similes that cause the audiences at the theatre to shout, "Bravo, bravo!" or those who read their verses to exclaim, "What a genius that young fellow is!"

Juan's breakfast had been a crust of stale bread and a cup of watery coffee. He could not divert his hunger by contemplating the beauty of the snow,—in the first place, because he was blind, and in the second, because, even had he not been blind, he would have had some difficulty in seeing it through the patched and filthy panes of his hovel. He spent the day huddled in a corner on his straw mattress, evoking scenes of his childhood and caressing the sweet dream of his brother's return. At nightfall he grew very faint, but necessity drove him into the streets to beg. His guitar was gone. He had sold it for sixty cents on a day of similar hardship. The snow fell with the same persistence.

His legs trembled as they had when he sang for the first time, but now it was from hunger rather than shame. He groped about as best he could, with great lumps of mud above his ankles. The silence told him that there was scarcely a soul on the street. The carriages rolled noiselessly along, and he once came near being run over. In one of the central thoroughfares he began to sing the [Pg 23] first thing that came to his lips. His voice was weak and hoarse. Nobody stopped to listen. "Let us try another street," thought he; and he went down the Avenue of San Jerónimo, walking awkwardly in the snow, with a white coating on his shoulders and water squirting from his shoes. The cold had begun to penetrate into his very bones, and hunger gave him a violent pain. For a moment with the cold and the pain came a feeling of faintness which made him think that he was about to die, and lifting his spirit to the Virgin of the Carmen, his protectress, he exclaimed in his anguish, "Mother, have pity!" And after pronouncing these words he felt relieved and walked, or rather dragged himself, to the Plaza de las Cortes. There he grasped a lamp-post, and under the impression of the Virgin's protection sang Gounod's "Ave Maria." Still nobody stopped to hear him. The people of Madrid were at the theatres, at the cafés, or at home, dancing their little ones on their knees in the glow of the hearth,—in the warmth of their love. The snow continued to fall steadily, copiously, with the evident purpose of furnishing a topic for the local column of the morning paper, where it would be described in a thousand delicate phrases. The occasional passers-by hurried along muffled up to their [Pg 24] ears under their umbrellas. The lamp-posts had put on their white night-caps, from under which escaped thin rays of dismal light. The silence was broken only by the vague and distant rumble of carriages and by the light fall of the snowflakes, that sounded like the faint and continuous rustle of silk. The voice of Juan alone vibrated in the stillness of the night, imploring the mother of the unprotected; and his chant seemed a cry of anguish rather than a hymn of praise, a moan of sadness and resignation falling dreary and chill, like snow upon the heart.

And his cry for pity was in vain. In vain he repeated the sweet name of Mary, adjusting it to the modulations of every melody. Heaven and the Virgin were far away, it seemed, and could not hear him. The neighbors of the plaza were near at hand, but they did not choose to hear. Nobody came down to take him in from the cold; no window was thrown open to drop him a copper. The passers-by, pursued, as it were, by the fleet steps of pneumonia, scarcely dared stop. Juan's voice at last died in his throat; he could sing no more. His legs trembled under him; his hands lost their sense of touch. He took a few steps, then sank on the sidewalk at the foot of the grating that surrounds the square. He sat with his elbows on his knees and buried his head in his hands. [Pg 25] He felt vaguely that it was the last moment of his life, and he again prayed, imploring the divine pity.

At the end of a few minutes he was conscious of being shaken by the arm, and knew that a man was standing before him. He raised his head, and taking for granted it was the old story about moving on, inquired timidly,—

"Are you an officer?"

"No; I am no officer. What is the matter with you? Get up."

"I don't believe I can, sir."

"Are you very cold?"

"Yes, sir; but it isn't exactly that,—I haven't had anything to eat to-day."

"I will help you, then. Come; up with you."

The man took Juan by both arms and stood him on his feet. He seemed very strong.

"Now lean on me, and let us see if we can find a cab."

"But where are you going to take me?"

"Nowhere where you wouldn't want to go. Are you afraid?"

"No; I feel in my heart that you will help me."

"Come along, then. Let's see how soon I can get you something hot to drink."

"God will reward you for this, sir; the Virgin will reward you. I thought I was going to die there, against that grating."

[Pg 26] "Don't talk about dying, man. The question now is to find a cab; if we can only move along fast enough—What is the matter? Are you stumbling?"

"Yes, sir. I think I struck a lamp-post. You see—as I am blind—"

"Are you blind?" asked the stranger, anxiously.

"Yes, sir."

"Since when?"

"I was born blind."

Juan felt his companion's arm tremble in his, and they walked along in silence. Suddenly the man stopped and asked in a voice husky with emotion,—

"What is your name?"

"Juan."

"Juan what?"

"Juan Martínez."

"And your father was Manuel Martínez, wasn't he,—musician of the third artillery band?"

"Yes, sir."

The blind one felt the tight clasp of two powerful arms that almost smothered him, and heard a trembling voice exclaim,—

"My God, how horrible, and how happy! I am a criminal, Juan! I am your brother Santiago!"

[Pg 27] And the two brothers stood sobbing together in the middle of the street. The snow fell on them lightly. Suddenly Santiago tore himself from his brother's embrace, and began to shout, intermingling his words with interjections,—

"A cab! A cab! Isn't there a cab anywhere around? Curse my luck! Come, Juanillo, try; make an effort, my boy; we are not so very far. But where in the name of sense are all the cabs? Not one has passed us. Ah, I see one coming, thank God! No; the brute is going in the other direction. Here is another. This one is mine. Hello there, driver! Five dollars if you take us flying to Number 13 Castellana."

And taking his brother in his arms as though he had been a mere child, he put him in the cab and jumped in after him. The driver whipped his horse, and off they went, gliding swiftly and noiselessly over the snow. In the mean time Santiago, with his arms still around Juan, told him something of his life. He had been in Costa Rica, not Cuba, and had accumulated a respectable fortune. He had spent many years in the country, beyond mail service and far from any point of communication with Europe. He had written several letters to his father, and had managed to get these on some steamer trading with England, but had never received any answer. In the hope of returning shortly to Spain, [Pg 28] he had made no inquiries. He had been in Madrid for four months. He learned from the parish record that his father was dead; but all he could discover concerning Juan was vague and contradictory. Some believed that he had died, while others said that, reduced to the last stages of misery, he went through the streets singing and playing on the guitar. All his efforts to find him had been fruitless; but fortunately Providence had thrown him into his arms. Santiago laughed and cried alternately, showing himself to be the same frank, open-hearted, jovial soul that Juan had loved so in his childhood. The cab finally came to a stop. A man-servant opened the door, and Juan was fairly lifted into the house. When the door closed behind him, he breathed a warm atmosphere full of that peculiar aroma of comfort which wealth seems to exhale. His feet sank in the soft carpet. Two servants relieved him of his dripping clothes and brought him clean linen and a warm dressing-gown. In the same room, before a crackling wood fire, he was served a comforting bowl of hot broth, followed by something more substantial, which he was made to take very slowly and with all the precautions which his critical condition required. Then a bottle of old wine was brought up from the cellar. Santiago was too restless to sit still. He came and went, giving orders, interrupting himself every minute to say,—

[Pg 29] "How do you feel now, Juan? Are you warm enough? Perhaps you don't care for this wine."

When the meal was over, the two brothers sat silently side by side before the fire. Santiago then inquired of one of the servants if the Señora and the children had already retired. On learning that they had, he said to Juan, beaming with delight,—

"Can you play on the piano?"

"Yes."

"Come into the parlor, then. Let us give them a surprise."

He accordingly led him into an adjoining room and seated him at the piano. He raised the top so as to obtain the greatest possible vibration, threw open the doors, and went through all the manœuvres peculiar to a surprise,—tiptoeing, whispering, speaking in a falsetto, and so much absurd pantomime that Juan could not help laughing as he realized how little his brother had changed.

"Now, Juanillo, play something startling, and play it loud, with all your might."

The blind boy struck up a military march. A quiver ran through the silent house like that which stirs a music-box while it is being wound up. The notes [Pg 30] poured from the piano, hurrying, jostling one another, but never losing their triumphant rhythm. Every now and then Santiago exclaimed,—

"Louder, Juanillo! Louder!"

And the blind boy struck the notes with all his spirit and might.

"I see my wife peeping in from behind the curtains. Go on, Juanillo. She is in her night-gown,—he, he! I am pretending not to see her. I have no doubt she thinks I am crazy,—he, he! Go on, Juanillo."

Juan obeyed, although he thought the jest had been carried far enough. He wanted to know his sister-in-law and kiss his nephews.

"Now I can just see Manolita. Hello! Paquito is up too. Didn't I tell you we should surprise them? But I am afraid they will take cold. Stop a minute, Juanito!"

And the infernal clamor was silenced.

"Come, Adela, Manolita, and Paquito, get on your things and come in to see your uncle Juan. This is Juanillo, of whom you have heard me speak so often. I have just found him in the street almost frozen to death. Come, hurry and dress, all of you."

The whole family was soon ready, and rushed in to embrace the blind boy. The wife's voice was soft and harmonious. To Juan it sounded like the voice of [Pg 31] the Virgin. He discovered, too, that she was weeping silently at the thought of all his sufferings. She ordered a foot-warmer to be brought in. She wrapped his legs in a cloak and put a soft cushion behind his head. The children stood around his chair, caressing him, and all listened with tears to the accounts of his past misery. Santiago struck his forehead; the children stroked his hands, saying,—

"You will never be hungry again, will you, uncle? Or go out without a cloak and an umbrella? I don't want you to, neither does Manolita, nor mamma, nor papa."

"I wager you will not give him your bed, Paquito," said Santiago, trying to conceal his tears under his affected merriment.

"My bed won't fit him, papa! But he can have the bed in the guests' chamber. It is a great bed, uncle, a big, big bed!"

"I don't believe I care to go to bed," said Juan. "Not just now at any rate, I am so comfortable here."

"That pain has gone, hasn't it, uncle?" whispered Manolita, kissing and stroking his hand.

"Yes, dear, yes,—God bless you! Nothing pains me now. I am happy, very happy! Only I feel sleepy, so sleepy that I can hardly raise my eyelids."

"Never mind us; sleep if you feel like it," said Santiago.

[Pg 32]

"Yes, uncle, sleep," repeated the children.

And Juan fell asleep,—but he wakened in another world.

The next morning, at dawn, two policemen stumbled against a corpse in the snow. The doctor of the charity hospital pronounced it a case of congealing of the blood.

As one of the officers turned him over, face upward,—

"Look, Jiménez," said he; "he seems to be laughing."

[Pg 33]

A CHRISTMAS IN THE FOREST.

From the French of André Theuriet.

Christmas Eve that year was bleak and cold, and the village seemed benumbed. The houses were closed hermetically, and so were the stables, from which came the muffled sound of animals chewing the cud. From time to time the clacking of wooden shoes on the hardened ground resounded through the deserted streets, then a door was hastily opened and closed, and all relapsed into silence. It was evident from the thick smoke rising through the chimneys into the gray air that every family was huddled around its hearth while the housewife prepared the Christmas supper. Stooping forward, with their legs stretched out to the fire, their countenances beaming with pleasure at the prospect of the morrow's festival and the foretaste of the fat and juicy blood-sausages, the peasants laughed at the north wind that swept the roads, at the frost that powdered the trees of the forest, and the ice that seemed to vitrify the streams and the river. Following their example, my friend Tristan and I spent the livelong day in the old house of the Abbatiale at the corner of the hearth, smoking our pipes and reading poetry. At sundown we had grown tired of seclusion and determined to venture out.

[Pg 34]

"The forest must be a strange sight with this heavy frost," said I to Tristan. "Suppose we take a turn through the wood after supper; besides, I must see the sabotiers from Courroy about a little matter."

So we pulled on our gaiters, stuffed our pipes, wrapped ourselves in our cloaks and mufflers, and penetrated into the wood.

We walked along cheerfully over the rugged, hardened soil of the trenches furrowed with deep, frozen ruts. Through the copse on either side we saw mysterious white depths. After a damp night the north wind had transformed the mists and vapors that overhung the branches into a tangle of snowy lace. In the half light of the gloaming we could still distinguish the sparkling needles of the junipers, the frosted puffs of the clematis, the bluish crystallizations of the beech, and the silver filigree of the nut-trees. The silence was broken by the occasional creaking of the frozen limbs, and every now and then a breath of impalpable white dust dampened our cheeks as it melted there.

[Pg 35]

We walked along at a steady pace, and in less than an hour caught sight of the red and flickering glow of the sabotiers' camp pitched on the edge of the forest above a stream that flowed down toward the valley of Santonge. The settlement consisted of a spacious, cone-shaped, dirt-coated hut and a cabin with board walls carefully sealed with moss. The hut answered the combined purposes of dormitory and kitchen; the cabin was used for the stowing away of tools and wooden shoes, and also for the two donkeys employed in the transportation of goods. The sabotiers, masters, apprentices, friends, and children were seated on beech logs around the fire in front of the hut, and their mobile silhouettes formed intensely black profiles against the red of the fire. Three short posts driven into the ground and drawn together at the top formed the crane, from which hung an iron pot that simmered over the coals. An appetizing odor of stewed hare escaped from the tin lid as it rose and fell under the puffs of vapor. The master, a lively, nervous, hairy little man, welcomed us with his usual cordiality.

[Pg 36]

"Sit down and warm yourselves," said he. "You find us preparing the Christmas supper. I'm afraid we'll not sleep over soundly to-night. My old woman is ill. I've fixed her a bed in the cabin where she'll be more comfortable, and warmer on account of the animals. My boy has gone to Santonge to get the doctor. There's no time to be lost. My little girl is kept busy running from the cabin to the hut."

We had no sooner taken our seats around the fire than the snowflakes began to whirl about in the stillness above us. They fell so thick and fast that in less than a quarter of an hour we were compelled to protect the fire with a hurdle covered with sackcloth.

"By my faith! gentlemen," said the sabotier, "you'll not be able to start out again in this storm. You'll have to stay and have your Christmas supper with

us,—and taste of our stew."

The weather was certainly not tempting, and we accepted the invitation. Besides, the adventure amused us, and we were delighted at the prospect of a Christmas supper in the heart of the forest. An hour later we were in the hut, and by the light of a miserable little candle-end we had our Christmas supper, devouring our hare-stew with a sharp appetite and washing it down with a draught of unfermented wine that scraped our throats. The snow fell thicker and thicker, wrapping the forest in a soft white wadding that deadened every sound. Now and then the sabotier rose and went into the cabin, then came back looking worried, listening anxiously for the good woman from Santonge. Suddenly a few metallic notes, muffled by the snow, rose softly from the depth of the valley. A similar sound from an opposite direction rang out in answer, then followed a third and a fourth, and soon a vague confusion of Christmas chimes floated over the forest.

Our hosts, without interrupting the process of mastication and while they passed around the wine-jug, tried to recognize the various chimes by the fulness of the sounds.

"Those—now—those are the bells from Vivey. They are hardly any louder than the sound of the donkey's hoofs on the stones."

"That is the bell of Auberive!"

"Yes; and that peal that sounds like the droning of a swarm of beetles, that's the Grancey chimes."

During this discussion Tristan and I began to succumb to the combined action of warmth and fully satisfied appetite. Our eyes blinked, and before we knew it we fell asleep on the moss of the hut, lulled by the music of the Christmas chimes. A piercing shriek followed by a sound of joyful voices woke us with a start.

It had ceased snowing. The night was growing pale, and through the little skylight we could see above the fleecy trees a faint light in the sky, where a belated star hung quivering.

"It is a boy!" shouted the master, bursting in upon us. "Gentlemen, if you think you would like to see him, why, I should be very glad; and it might bring him luck."

We went crunching over the snow after him to the cabin, lighted by a smoky lamp. On her bed of laths and moss lay the young mother, weak and exhausted, her head thrown back, her pale face framed in by a mass of frowzy auburn hair. The "good woman," assisted by the little girl, was bundling up the new-comer, who wailed feebly. The two donkeys, amazed at so much stir and confusion, turned their kindly gray faces toward the bed, shook their long ears, and gazed around them with wide, intelligent eyes, blowing through their nostrils puffs of warm vapor that hung like a thin mist on the air. At the foot of the bed stood a young shepherd, with a black and white she-goat and a new-born kid.

"I have brought you the she-goat, Ma'am Fleuriot," said he, in his Langrois drawl. "You can have her for the boy as long as you wish."

The goat was baaing, the new-born child wailed, and the donkeys breathed loudly. There was something primitive and biblical about the whole scene.

Without, in the violet light of the dawn, while a distant church-bell scattered its early notes through the air, one of the young apprentices, dancing in the snow to keep warm, sang out at the top of his lungs that old Christmas carol, which seemed then full of new meaning and poetry,—

"He is born, the little Child.
  Ring out, hautbois! ring out, bagpipes!
He is born, the little Child;
  Let us sing the happy news."

THE LOUIS-D'OR.

From the French of François Coppée.

HEN Lucien de Hem saw his last bill for a hundred francs clawed by the banker's rake, when he rose from the roulette-table where he had just lost the débris of his little fortune scraped together for this supreme battle, he experienced something like vertigo, and thought that he should fall. His brain was muddled; his legs were limp and trembling. He threw himself upon the leather lounge that circumscribed the gambling-table. For a few moments he mechanically followed the clandestine proceedings of that hell in which he had sullied the best years of his youth, recognized the worn profiles of the gamblers under the merciless glare of the three great shadeless lamps, listened to the clicking and the sliding of the gold over the felt, realized that he was bankrupt, lost, remembered that in the top drawer of his dressing-table lay a pair of pistols,— the very pistols of which General de Hem, his father, had made noble use at the attack of Zaatcha; then, overcome by exhaustion, he sank into a heavy sleep.

When he awoke his mouth was clammy, and his tongue stuck to his palate. He realized by a hasty glance at the clock that he had scarcely slept a half-hour, and he felt the imperious necessity of going out to get a breath of the fresh night air. The hands on the dial pointed exactly to a quarter of twelve. As he rose and stretched his arms it occurred to him that it was Christmas Eve, and by one of those ironical freaks of the memory, he felt as though he were once more a child, ready to stand his little boot on the hearth before going to bed. Just then old Dronski, one of the pillars of the trade, the traditional Pole, wrapped in the greasy worn cloak adorned with frogs and passementerie, came up to Lucien muttering something behind his dirty grayish beard.

"Lend me five francs, will you, Monsieur? I haven't stirred from this place for two days, and for two whole days seventeen hasn't come out once. You may laugh at me all you like, but I'll bet you my fist that when the clock strikes twelve, seventeen will be the winning number."

Lucien de Hem shrugged his shoulders; and fumbling through his pockets, he found that he had not even money enough to comply with that feature of gambling etiquette known among the frequenters of the establishment as "the Pole's hundred cents." He passed into the antechamber, put on his hat and cloak, and disappeared down the narrow stairway with the agility of people who have a fever. During the four hours which Lucien had spent in the den it had snowed heavily, and the street, one of those narrow wedges between two rows of high buildings in the very heart of Paris, was intensely white. Above, in the calm blue black of the sky, cold stars glittered. The exhausted gambler shivered under his furs, and hurried along with a blank despair in his heart, thinking of the pistols that awaited him in the top drawer of his dressing-table. He had not gone a hundred feet when he stopped suddenly before a heart-rending spectacle.

On a stone bench, near the monumental doorway of a wealthy residence, sat a little girl six or seven years old, barely covered by a ragged black gown. She had fallen asleep there in spite of the bitter cold, her body bent forward in a pitiful posture of resigned exhaustion. Her poor little head and her dainty shoulder had moulded themselves into the angle of the freezing wall. One of her worn slippers had fallen from her dangling foot and lay in the snow before her. Lucien de Hem mechanically thrust his hand into his vest-pocket, but he remembered that he had not even been able to fee the club waiter. He went up to the child, however, impelled by an instinct of pity. He meant, no doubt, to pick her up and take her home with him, to give her shelter for the night, when suddenly he saw something glitter in the little slipper at his feet. He stooped. It was a louis-d'or.

Some charitable soul—a woman, no doubt—had passed there, and at the pathetic sight of that little shoe in the snow had remembered the poetic Christmas legend, and with discreet fingers had dropped a splendid gift, so that the forsaken little one might still believe in the presents of the Child-Christ, and might awake with renewed faith in the midst of her misery.

A gold louis! That meant many days of rest and comfort for the little beggar. Lucien was just about to awaken her and surprise her with her good fortune when, in a strange hallucination, he heard a voice in his ear, which whispered with the drawling inflection of the old Pole: "I haven't stirred from this place for two days, and for two whole days seventeen hasn't come out once. I'll bet you my fist that when the clock strikes twelve, seventeen will be the winning number."

[Pg 45] Then this youth, who was twenty-three years of age, the descendant of a race of honest men,—this youth who bore a great military name, and had never been guilty of an unmanly act,—conceived a monstrous thought; an insane desire took possession of him. He looked anxiously up and down the street, and having assured himself that he had no witness, he knelt, and reaching out cautiously with trembling fingers, stole the treasure from the little shoe, then rose with a spring and ran breathlessly down the street. He rushed like a madman up the stairs of the gambling-house, flung open the door with his fist, and burst into the room at the first stroke of midnight. He threw the gold-piece on the table and cried,—

"Seventeen!"

Seventeen won. He then pushed the whole pile on the "red." The red won. He left the seventy-two louis on the same color. The red came out again. He doubled the stakes, twice, three times, and always with the same success. Before him was a huge pile of gold and bank-notes. He tried the "twelve," the "column,"—he worked every combination. His luck was something unheard of, something almost supernatural. One might have believed that the little ivory ball, in its frenzied dance around the table, had been bewitched, magnetized [Pg 46] by this feverish gambler, and obeyed his will. With a few bold strokes he had won back the bundle of bank-notes which he had lost in the early part of the evening. Then he staked two and three hundred louis at a time, and as his fantastic luck never failed him, he soon won back the whole capital that had constituted his inherited fortune.

In his haste to begin the game he had not even thought of taking off his fur-lined coat, the great pockets of which were now swollen with the rolls of bank-notes, and heavy with the weight of the gold. Not knowing where to put the money that was steadily accumulating before him, he stuffed it away in the inside and outside pockets of his coat, his vest, his trousers, in his cigar-case, his handkerchief. Everything became a recipient. And still he played and still he won, his brain whirling the while like that of a drunkard or a madman. It was amazing to see him stand there throwing gold on the table by the handful, with that haughty gesture of absolute certainty and disdain. But withal there was a gnawing at his heart, something that felt like a red-hot iron there, and he could not rid himself of the vision of the child asleep in the snow,—the child whom he had robbed.

"In just a few minutes," said he, "I will go back to her. She must be there in [Pg 47] the same place. Of course she must be there. It is no crime, after all. I will make it right to her,—it will be no crime. Quite the contrary. I will leave here in a few moments, when the clock strikes again, I swear it. Just as soon as the clock strikes again I will stop, I will go straight to where she is, I will take her up in my arms and will carry her home with me asleep. I have done her no harm; I have made a fortune for her. I will keep her with me and educate her; I will love her as I would a child of my own, and I will take care of her,—always, as long as she lives!"

But the clock struck one, a quarter past, half-past, and Lucien was still there. Finally, a few minutes before two the man opposite him rose brusquely and said in a loud voice,—

"The bank is broken, gentlemen; this will do for to-night."

Lucien started, and wedging his way brutally through the group of gamblers, who pressed around him in envious admiration, hurried out into the street and ran as fast as he could toward the stone bench. In a moment he saw by the light of the gas that the child was still there.

"God be praised!" said he, and his heart gave a great throb of joy. Yes, here she was! He took her little hand in his. Poor little hand, how cold it was! He [Pg 48] caught her under the arms and lifted her. Her head fell back, but she did not awake. "The happy sleep of childhood!" thought he. He pressed her close to his breast to warm her, and with a vague presentiment he tried to rouse her from this heavy sleep by kissing her eyelids. But he realized then with horror that through the child's half-open lids her eyes were dull, glassy, fixed. A distracting suspicion flashed through his mind. He put his lips to the child's mouth; he felt no breath.

While Lucien had been building a fortune with the louis stolen from this little one, she, homeless and forsaken, had perished with cold.

Lucien felt a suffocating knot at his throat. In his anguish he tried to cry out; and in the effort which he made he awoke from his nightmare, and found himself on the leather lounge in the gambling-room, where he had fallen asleep a little before midnight. The *garçon* of the den had gone home at about five o'clock, and out of pity had not wakened him.

A misty December dawn made the window-panes pale. Lucien went out, pawned his watch, took a bath, then went over to the Bureau of Recruits, and enlisted as a volunteer in the First Regiment of the Chasseurs d'Afrique.

Lucien de Hem is now a lieutenant. He has not a cent in the world but his pay. He manages to make that do, however, for he is a steady officer, and never touches a card. He even contrives to economize, it would seem; for a few days ago a comrade, who was following him up one of the steep streets of the Kasba, saw him stop to lay a piece of money in the lap of a little Spanish girl who had fallen asleep in a doorway. His comrade was startled at the poor lieutenant's generosity, for this piece of money was a gold louis.

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A CHRISTMAS SUPPER IN THE MARAIS.

From the French of Alphonse Daudet.

Majesté, a seltzer-water manufacturer of the Marais, has just indulged in a little Christmas supper with a few friends of the Place Royale, and walks home humming. The clock at St. Paul's strikes two. "How late it is!" thinks the good man as he hurries along. But the pavement is slippery, the streets are dark, and then, in this devil of an old neighborhood which belongs to the time when carriages were scarce, there are the greatest number of turns, corners, steps, and posts in front of the houses for the accommodation of horsemen, all of which are calculated to impede a man's progress, particularly when his legs are heavy and his sight somewhat blurred by the toasts of the Christmas supper. M. Majesté reaches his destination at last, however. He stops before a great doorway above which gleams in the moonlight the freshly gilded coat-of-arms, the recently retouched armorial-bearings which he has converted into a trade-mark.

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Former
Hôtel de Nesmond.
Majesté, jr.,
Seltzer-water Manufacturer.

The old Nesmond coat-of-arms stands out, resplendent, on all the siphons of the factory, on all the memoranda and letter-heads.

The doorway leads directly to the court,—a large, sunny court which floods the narrow street with light even at noon, when the portals are thrown open. Far back in this court stands a great and ancient structure,—blackened walls covered with lace-work and embroideries of stone, bulging iron balconies, stone balconies with pilasters, great high windows crowned with pediments, and capitals rearing their heads along the upper stories like so many little roofs within the roof, then above it all, set in the very slate, the mansard dormer-windows, like the round mirrors of a boudoir, daintily framed with garlands. From the court to the first story rises a great stone stairway gnawed and worn green by the rains. A meagre vine dangles along the wall, lifeless and black like the rope that swings from the pulley in the attic; and the whole has an indescribable air of sad grandeur and decay.

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This is the ancient Hôtel de Nesmond. In the broad light of day it has quite a different aspect. The words "Office," "Store," "Entrance to the work-rooms," in bright gilt letters, seem to rejuvenate the old walls and infuse a new life into them. The drays from the railroad shake the iron portals as they rumble through, and the clerks step out on the landing to receive the goods. The court is obstructed with cases, baskets, straw, wrappers, and pack-cloth. One is conscious of being in a factory. But at night, in the death-like stillness, with the winter moon casting and tangling fantastic shadows through the confused intricacy of all these roofs, the old dwelling of the Nesmonds resumes its lordly air. The court of honor seems to expand; the wrought-iron of the balconies looks like fine lace; the old stairway is full of shadows in the uncertain light, of mysterious recesses like those of a cathedral; there are empty niches and half concealed steps that suggest an altar.

On this particular night M. Majesté is deeply impressed with the grandeur of his dwelling. The echo of his own footsteps startles him as he crosses the great deserted court. The stairway seems even broader than usual, and peculiarly heavy to climb. But that is the Christmas supper, no doubt. At the first landing he stops to take breath; he leans on one of the window-sills. So much for living in a historic mansion! M. Majesté is certainly not a poet, oh, no! and still as he gazes around him at this lordly old place, which seems to be sleeping so peacefully under its benumbed, snow-hooded roofs, as he looks down into this grand, aristocratic old court which the moon floods with a bluish light, weird fancies flash through his brain.

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"Suppose the Nesmonds should take it into their heads to come back, eh?"

Just then there is a violent pull at the door-bell. The portal swings open instantly, so brusquely that it puts out the light of the lamp-post in the court. From the shadow of the doorway come rustling sounds and confused whisperings. There seems to be a great crowd wrangling and jostling to get in. There are footmen, a multitude of footmen, coaches with glass panes

glimmering in the moonlight, sedan-chairs swaying lightly between two torches whose long flames writhe and twist in the draught of the doorway. In a second the court is crowded; but at the foot of the stairway the confusion ceases. People alight from the coaches, recognize one another, smile, bow, and make their way up the stairs, chatting softly as though they were quite familiar with the house. There is much rustling of silks and clanking of swords on the landing, and billows of white hair, heavy and dull with powder. Through the faint sound of the airy tread comes a thin, high quiver of voices and little peals of laughter that has lost its vibration. All these people seem old, very old,—eyes that have lost their fire, slumbering jewels that have lost their light, antique brocades that shimmer with a subdued iridescence in the light of the torches, and above it all a thin mist of powder that rises at every courtesy from the white-puffed scaffoldings of these stately heads. In a moment the place seems to be haunted. Torches glitter from window to window and up and down the curving stairways; the very dormers in the mansard twinkle with joy and life. The whole mansion is ablaze with light, as though a great burst of sunset had set its windows aglow.

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"Merciful saints! they will set the house on fire!" thinks M. Majesté; and having recovered from his stupor, he makes an effort to shake the numbness from his legs, and hurries down into the court, where the footmen have just lighted a great bonfire. M. Majesté goes up to them, speaks to them; but they do not answer; they stand there chatting among themselves softly, and not the faintest breath issues from their lips into the freezing shadow of the night. M. Majesté is somewhat put out. He is reassured, however, when he realizes that this great fire with its long straight flames is a most peculiar fire, which emits no heat,—which simply glows, but does not burn. The good man therefore sets his mind at rest, goes upstairs again, and makes his way into the store.

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These stores on the first floor must have been grand reception-halls in their day. Particles of tarnished gold still cling to the angles. Mythological frescos circle about the ceilings, wind round the mirrors, hover above the doorways, vague and subdued, like bygone memories. Unfortunately there are no curtains or furniture anywhere, nothing but baskets, great cases filled with leaden-headed siphons, and the withered limb of an old lilac bush rising in black outline outside the window. M. Majesté enters. He finds the rooms crowded and brilliantly illumined. He bows, but nobody seems to notice him. The women, in their satin wraps, lean on their cavaliers' arms and flirt with ceremonious, mincing graces. They promenade, chat, separate into groups. All these old marquises really seem quite at home. One little shade stops, all of a quiver, before a painted pier-glass; then she glances smilingly at a Diana that rises out of the wood-work, lithe and roseate, with a crescent on her brow.

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"This is I; think of it! And here I am!"

"Nesmond, come and see your crest!" and they laugh immoderately at the sight of the Nesmond coat-of-arms displayed on the wrappers above the name of Majesté, Jr.

"Ha, ha, ha! Majesté! There are some majesties left in France after all, then!"

And there is no end of merriment, of mincing coquetries. Little trills of laughter rise like the notes of a flute in the air. Some one exclaims suddenly,—

"Champagne! champagne!"

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, indeed, champagne. Come, Countess, what say you to a little Christmas supper?"

They have mistaken M. Majesté's seltzer-water for champagne. They naturally find it somewhat flat. But these poor little ghosts have such unsteady heads! The foam of the seltzer-water somehow excites them and makes them feel like dancing. Minuets are immediately organized. Four rare violinists provided by Nesmond strike out with an old melody by Rameau, full of triplets, quaint and melancholy in its vivacity; and you should see the pretty little grandmothers turn slowly and bow gravely in time with the music.

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Their very finery seems freshened and rejuvenated by the sound, and so do the waistcoats of cloth-of-gold, the brocaded coats and diamond-buckled shoes. The panels themselves seem to awake. The old mirror, scratched and dim, which has stood encased in the wall for over two hundred years, recognizes them all, glows softly upon them, showing them their own images with a pale vagueness like a tender regret.

In the midst of all this elegance M. Majesté feels somewhat ill at ease. He is huddled in a corner, and looks on from behind a case of bottles. But gradually the day dawns. Through the glass doors of the store one can see the court growing light, then the top of the windows, then all one side of the great parlor. Before the light of day the figures melt and disappear. The four little violinists alone are belated in a corner; and M. Majesté watches them evaporate as the daylight creeps upon them. In the court below he can just see the vague form of a sedan-chair, a powdered head sprinkled with emeralds, and the last spark of a torch that a lackey has dropped on the pavement, and which blends with the sparks from the wheels of a dray, rumbling in noisily through the open portals.

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THE PRINCESS AND THE RAGAMUFFIN.

From the Spanish of Benito Pérez Galdós.

I.

Pacorrito Migajas was a great character. He stood a trifle over two feet from the ground, and had just turned his seventh year. His skin was tanned by the sun and the wind, and his wizened face suggested a dwarf rather than a child. His eyes, adorned with long eyelashes that looked like black wires, were full of vitality and resplendent with mischief. His mouth was amazing in its ugliness; and his ears, strangely like those of a faun, seemed to have been attached to his face, rather than to have grown there. He was dressed in a shirt of every possible shade of grime, and a pair of patchwork trousers upheld by a single suspender. In the winter he wore a coat which he had inherited from his grandfather. The sleeves had been cut off at the elbow, and Pacorrito considered it a handsome fit, as overcoats go. A rag which aspired to be a muffler was wound like a snake round and round his neck, and on his head he wore a cap which he had picked up at the Rastro. He had little use for shoes, which he considered in the light of a hindrance, neither did he wear stockings, having a great aversion to the roughness of the threads.

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Pacorrito's ancestors could not have been more illustrious. His father, accused of having attempted to make his way into a house through the drain, went to Ceuta for a change of climate, and died there. His mother, a great lady who for many years kept a chestnut-stand in the Cava de San Miguel, had also fallen somehow into the hands of the authorities, and after much ado with judges and notaries, had repaired to the Alcalá jail. Pacorrito had one sister, but this last relative had deserted her post at the tobacco factory and flown to Sevilla in amorous pursuit of an artillery officer. Up to the present she has not returned.

Migajas was therefore alone in the world, with no protection but that of God, and no guide but his own will.

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II.

The pious reader need not fancy that Pacorrito was in the least daunted or disturbed at finding himself alone; not he. In his brief career he had had occasion to study the ways of the world, and he knew a thing or two about the fraud and vanity of life. He filled himself with energy and confronted the situation like a hero. He was on excellent terms with numerous persons of his age and quality, and even with bearded men, who seemed disposed to protect him, so by dint of push he got the better of his sad condition.

He sold matches, newspapers, and lottery tickets,—three branches of industry which, if intelligently pursued, might certainly be productive of honest gain. And so it happened that Pacorrito was never in want of a penny or so to assist a friend in need, or to treat his acquaintances of the fair sex.

He was spared all domestic worries, all household cares and exigencies. His palaces were the Prado in summer, and the portals of the *Casa Panadería* in winter. By nature he was frugal and wisely inimical to the pomps of the world. He slept anywhere, ate whatever he found, just as the birds do, and suffered no anxiety on this score, because of the religious submissiveness that filled his soul, and his instinctive faith in that mysterious Providence which deserts no one, great or small. One might be apt to conclude from this that Migajas was happy. It seems natural enough that he should be. He was deprived of relatives, it is true, but he enjoyed the precious boon of liberty. As his wants were few, the fruit of his labor kept him in plenty, and he was not indebted to any one for anything. His sleep was disturbed neither by cares nor ambition. He was poor but contented; his body was destitute, but his spirit was rich in peace. Well, in spite of all this, my lord Pacorrito was unhappy. Why? Because he was in love,—over ears in love, as they commonly say.

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Yes, sir, this very Pacorrito, who was so small, so ugly, so poor, and so alone, loved. Inexorable law of life, which permits no being, whatever his condition, to elude the despotic yoke of love! With a mind free from impure

thoughts, our hero loved. He loved with a dreamer's idealism, yet at times he felt that ardent fire which set the blood boiling like the very devil in his veins. The object of his thoughts aroused every variety of sensation in his volcanic heart. He had days of sweet Platonicism, like Petrarch, then again, he was warm and impetuous, like Romeo. And who, pray, had inspired Pacorrito with this terrible passion? No less a person than a great lady who wore silk and velvet gowns, beautiful furs and gold eyeglasses,—a great lady with flaxen ringlets that fell on her alabaster neck, and who had been known to sit at the piano for three days in succession.

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III.

Who was this celestial beauty, and how came Migajas to make her acquaintance? This is how it happened: Our hero's mercantile operations extended over a great part of one of the streets opening into the Puerta del Sol,—a busy thoroughfare lined with beautiful shops, the show-windows of which are resplendent at night, and display all the marvels of industry. One of these stores, which is kept by a German, is always full of exquisite trifles and novelties. It is the great bazaar of childhood, both juvenile and adult. During the Carnival it is hung with grotesque masks; in Holy Week it is filled with figures of saints and pious images. At Christmas and New Year's it is all Bethlehem mangers and Christmas-trees, laden with toys and magnificent presents.

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Pacorrito's mad passion began when the German filled his show-window with the most enchanting collection of richly dressed ladies that Parisian fancy could conceive. Almost all of them were two feet tall. Their faces were of highly refined wax, and the crimson of fresh roses could not equal the glow of their chaste cheeks. Their immobile eyes of blue glass shone with a splendor surpassing that of the human pupil. Their hair of softest crimped wool could with greater justice be compared to the rays of the sun than that of most great ladies; and the strawberries of April, the cherries of May, and the coral from the deep seas were ugly things compared to their lips. Their good breeding and deportment were such that they never stirred from the spot where they were placed. They merely creaked the wooden joints of their knees, their shoulders, and their elbows, when the German sat them at the piano or made them raise their eyeglasses to look out into the street. Otherwise they were no trouble whatever, and no one had ever heard them say, "This month is mine."

There was one among them,—what a woman! She was the tallest, the most lithe, the most beautiful, the most sympathetic, the most elegant,—in a word, the greatest lady of them all. She was no doubt a person of high degree, judging from her grave, grand manner and that patronizing air which was so becoming to her.

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"Grand woman! She is the paragon!" thought Pacorrito the first time he saw her, and for a whole hour he stood before the show-window, rooted to the sidewalk.

IV.

Pacorrito had reached the state of emotional excitement, the delirium peculiar to heroes of romance. His brain boiled; writhing, stinging serpents wound themselves around his heart; his mind was a volcano; he despised life; he longed for death; he soliloquized; he gazed at the moon; he soared beyond the seventh heaven. Many a time had night overtaken him in a melancholy ecstasy before the show-window, oblivious to everything, oblivious to his very business interests. It might be well to state at once that our good Migajas met with no rebuff. I mean that his mad passion was to a certain extent reciprocated. Who can measure the intensity of a heart of tow and sawdust? The world is full of mysteries. Science is vain and will never penetrate the depths of things. Who will draw the line defining the exact sphere of the inanimate? Where does the inanimate begin? Down with the pedant who stands before a stone or a cork and says, "Thou hast no soul." God alone knows the true dimensions of the invisible limbo, wherein rests all that which does not love.

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Pacorrito was quite sure of having stirred his lady's pulse. She gazed at him, and without moving a muscle, opening her mouth, or winking an eye, she spoke soulful things to him, now sweet as hope, now sad like the prescience of tragic events. This naturally fanned the flame that burned in our friend's heart, and his daring imagination conceived dramatic plans of conquest, and even of matrimony.

One night the faithful lover repaired punctually to the tryst. The lady was seated at the piano, her hands suspended over the keys, and her divine face turned to the street. The ragamuffin and she exchanged glances; and what passion, what idealism, in that look! Sighs and tender thoughts were following one another, when an event occurred which clipped the thread of this sweet communion and shattered at one blow the happiness of both lovers. It was one of those sudden catastrophes that inflict a mortal wound and lead to suicides, tragedies, and other lamentable things.

A hand proceeding from the interior of the shop was thrust into the show-window; it caught the lady by the belt and disappeared with her within. Pacorrito's amazement was followed by a sense of misery so intense that he longed to die there and then. To see the object of his love vanish as though she had been swallowed by the insatiable grave, to be unable to rescue her or follow her, were it to the bottomless pit, ah, here was a blow which was beyond human endurance!

Migajas was about to drop on the sidewalk. He thought of suicide; he invoked God and the Devil.

"They have sold her!" he muttered hoarsely; and he pulled his hair and scratched his face and kicked, and as he did so he dropped his matches, his lottery tickets, and his newspapers. Worldly interests, you are not worth a sigh!

V.

After a time, when he had recovered from his violent emotion, he glanced toward the interior of the store and saw two or three grown persons and several little girls talking with the German. One of these little girls held in her arms the lady of his thoughts. He felt like rushing upon them frantically, but he forbore, for it occurred to him that his appearance was not in his favor, and that there would be every chance of his getting a sound drubbing and being handed over to the police. He stood rooted to the threshold, meditating upon the horrors of the slave-trade, upon this heinous Tyrolese institution wherein a few dollars decided the fate of honest creatures, exposing them to the savage destructiveness of ill-bred children. Human nature appeared to him in all its baseness. Those who had purchased the lady left the shop and entered a luxurious carriage. And how they laughed, the wretches! Even the wee fellow, the most petted and spoiled of them all, no doubt, took the liberty of pulling the unfortunate doll by the arms, although he had the greatest quantity of toys appropriate to his age and for his own exclusive enjoyment. The grown persons, too, seemed satisfied with the new acquisition.

While the footman stood by to receive orders, Pacorrito, who was a person of heroic and daring resolutions, conceived the idea of swinging behind the carriage. This he did with that agility peculiar to the ragamuffin when he wishes to take a ride across the city.

Stretching his neck to the right, he saw the arm of the lady who had been sacrificed to lucre sticking out of the window. This rigid arm and its pink fist spoke forcibly to his imagination, calling to him through the rumble of the wheels:

"Save me, save me, my Pacorrito!"

VI.

Under the archway of the great dwelling before which the carriage stopped, Pacorrito's illusion vanished. A servant informed him that if he soiled the flagstones with his muddy feet, he would have his back-bone broken. Migajas retired before this overwhelming argument, but from that instant his heart was filled with a scorching thirst for vengeance. His fiery nature impelled him forward into the night of the unforeseen, into the arms of his fortune. His soul was well fitted to noisy and dramatic adventures, so what should he do but make a compact with those who removed the garbage from the house where his beloved lived enslaved; and by this means—which may not have been altogether poetical, but which revealed the shrewdness of a heart as big as the top of a pine-tree—he found his way into the palace. How his heart throbbed as he went up the stairs and into the kitchen! The thought of being near her confused him so that more than once his basket fell from his hand, spilling its contents down the steps. But nowhere could he see his lady-love. He often heard the screams of children at play, but nothing more.

The servants, because he was so little and so ugly, played many a trick

upon him. One alone, who seemed more compassionate than the rest, gave him sweetmeats. One cold morning the cook, through pity or through sheer wickedness perhaps, gave him a draught of wine that was as biting and fiery as the very devil. The ragamuffin felt a warm and delightful current run through his whole body while hot vapors rose to his head. His legs trembled; his limp arms fell beside him in voluptuous abandon. A stream of playful laughter rose from his heart and gurgled from his lips; and Pacorrito held on to the wall with both hands to keep from falling. A vigorous kick somewhat modified his mirth, and he left the kitchen. His brain was topsy-turvy. He had no idea where his steps were leading him. He ran along staggering and laughing, first over cold tiles, then over smooth boarded floors, then over soft, warm carpets. Suddenly he caught sight of an object on the floor. He stood petrified for a second; then he uttered a roar of pain and fell upon his knees. Heavens! There, stretched before him like a corpse, with a crack through her alabaster brow, a broken arm, and dishevelled locks, was the lady of his thoughts.

For a moment our hero was speechless. His voice was smothered in his throat. He pressed the cold body to his heart and covered it with burning kisses. The lady's eyes were open, and she gazed with melancholy tenderness at her faithful lover, for she lived, in spite of her wounds. Pacorrito knew it by the singular light of her calm blue eyes, that emitted little flames of love and gratitude.

"Señora, let me know who reduced you to this sad condition!" he exclaimed in pathetic and anguished tones. His pain was soon followed by a burst of rage, and he thought of the great revenge he would take upon the perpetrators of the iniquity. Just then he heard footsteps approaching, so he tucked the lady under his arm and started on a run. He went down the stairs, crossed the court, and broke into the street. He could scarcely be said to be running; he was flying, like a bird that has stolen grain, heard a report, and feeling itself unhurt, determines to put the greatest possible distance between itself and the gun. He ran past one, two, three, ten streets, till he thought he was far enough away to be in safety, and then stopped to rest, laying the object of his insensate tenderness upon his knees.

VII.

Night came upon him, and he welcomed with delight the soft shadows that hid the daring act and protected his love. He examined her injured body carefully, and concluded that the wounds were not serious, although one might have seen her brain, had she had one, through the opening in her skull, and the sawdust of her heart poured out in copious streams through the rents in her breast. Her gown was in shreds, and part of her hair had been dropped in the hasty flight. His soul overflowed with sorrow when he realized that he had not the money with which to meet the situation. As he had given up his business, naturally his pockets were empty, and a loved woman, particularly if she is in poor health, is a source of unlimited expense. Migajas laid his hand sadly upon that part of his rags wherein he had habitually kept his coin, but nothing was there.

"At this critical moment," thought he, "when I need a house, a bed, a world of doctors and surgeons, an abundance of food, a bright fire and a dressmaker, I have nothing—nothing!"

But as he was very tired, he laid his head upon his idol's body and fell asleep like an angel.

Then a great miracle took place. The lady began to revive, and finally rising to her feet, showed Pacorrito a smiling countenance. The wound had disappeared from her noble brow; her lithe form was without a rent, her gown neat and whole. On her curled and perfumed locks she wore a coquettish hat trimmed with minute flowers,—in a word, she stood before him in all her beauty just as he had known her in the show-window.

Migajas was dazzled, stupefied, dumb. He fell on his knees and worshipped her as people do a divinity. Then she took the ragamuffin by the hand, and in a voice clear, pure, and sweeter than the song of the nightingale, she said to him,—

"Pacorrito, follow me! I want to show you my gratitude, and tell you of the sublime love with which you have inspired me. You have been loyal, constant, generous, heroic; you have rescued me from the power of those Vandals that tortured me. You deserve my heart and my hand. Come, follow me! Do not be foolish; do not think you are inferior to me because you are in rags."

Migajas gazed at the lady's elegant, luxurious attire and said sadly, "My lady, where can I go in this dress?"

The lady did not answer; she merely led Pacorrito by the hand into a mysterious region of shadows.

The ragamuffin soon found himself in a grand parlor brilliantly illumined and filled with beautiful objects. The first moment of bewilderment passed, he distinguished a thousand different figures and statuettes, like those that peopled the shop in which he had seen his beloved for the first time. What greatly surprised him was to see all the fine ladies who in shimmering gowns had occupied the show-window with his friend come forth to meet them. His lady accepted their homage with grave and ceremonious courtesy. She seemed to belong to a higher caste than they. Her queenly manner, her proud though not haughty bearing, suggested dominion. She immediately presented Pacorrito. For his part he was much confused and grew redder than a poppy when the princess, taking his hand, said,—

"Allow me to present to you the Señor Don Pacorrito de las Migajas, who will honor us with his presence to-night."

The wings of his heart drooped, as they say, when he compared the luxury that surrounded him with his own poverty, his rags, his bare feet, his torn trousers upheld by a single suspender, and his coat-sleeves cut off at the elbow.

"I can divine your thoughts," said the princess, aside. "Your dress is not the most appropriate for a celebration like this. As a matter of fact, you are not presentable."

"Señora, that deuced tailor of mine," stammered Migajas, "has been false to his word, and—"

"Never mind; we will dress you here," said the noble lady.

The valets in this strange mansion were tiny and very comical monkeys. Wee parrots of the kind known as perricos acted as pages, to say nothing of a great number of paper birds. They immediately set to work to repair, as far as it was possible, Pacorrito's unfortunate appearance. They slipped his feet into a pair of tiny gilded match-boxes that made the most stylish boots; they cut a neck-cloth for him out of half a little red paper lantern and turned an osier flower-pot into a sort of pastoral hat which they trimmed elaborately with flowers. As Pacorrito had never been decorated, they took a metal plate from an elegant Kepi and hung it around his neck, by way of a decoration, and also a match-box, which was round and looked like a watch, and the cut-glass stopper of a small bottle of perfumery. The paper birds conceived the happy thought of putting an ivory paper-cutter in his belt, to figure as a sword or dagger. Thanks to these and numerous other inventions for concealing his tatters, our friend looked so handsome that no one would have recognized him. As he caught sight of himself in the mirror-top of a work-box, he swelled with pride. He was radiant.

VIII.

The ball now began. A number of canaries from their respective cages sang waltzes and *habaneras*. The cornets and the clarionets too were very skilful in pressing their keys all by themselves; the violins pinched their own strings; and the trumpets blew into each other. Migajas thought this music was entrancing. It is unnecessary to say that the princess danced with him. The other ladies found partners among the officers of the army and the sovereigns who had left their horses outside. Among these were Prince Bismarck, the Emperor of Germany, and Napoleon. Migajas was beside himself with pride and excitement. It would be impossible to describe the emotions of his soul as he dashed into the dizzy whirls of the waltz with his beloved in his arms. Her soft breathing and an occasional stray lock of her golden hair caressed his cheek, tickling him gently and producing a strange intoxication. A loving glance or a little sigh of fatigue would every now and then put a climax to his madness.

Suddenly the monkeys appeared and announced supper. This caused a great commotion. Migajas rejoiced greatly, for with no prejudice to the spiritual character of his love, the poor little fellow was very hungry.

IX.

The dining-hall was superb and the table exquisite. The china was of the

very finest manufactured for dolls, and a multitude of bouquets showed their colors and scattered their fragrance from egg-stands and thimbles. Pacorrito sat at the princess's right. They began to eat. The parrots and paper birds waited upon them with such order and rapidity that they seemed like soldiers drilling before their general. The dishes were delicious. Everything was raw, or at all events cold. Migajas was rather pleased with the supper at first, but he was soon surfeited. The menu was as follows: bits of sponge cake, turkeys smaller than birds, which one could swallow at a mouthful, gilt-heads no bigger than almonds, a rich supply of hemp-seed, a pâté of bird-seed à la Canaria, bread-crumb à la perdigona, a fricassée of pheasants' eyes with a sauce of wild mulberries, a salad of moss, delicious sweetmeats, and every possible variety of fruit, harvested by the parrots from the tapestries where they were embroidered, the melons being as small as grapes and the grapes as small as lentils. During the supper the company chattered ceaselessly,—all but Migajas, who, being short of wit, sat there and said never a word. He was confused in the presence of so many gold-corded and uniformed generals. He was amazed, too, at finding so much loquacity and frolicsomeness in these great men, who had stood stiff and dumb in the show-window as though they were made of clay.

The one known as Bismarck, in particular, never stopped to draw breath. He said the wildest things imaginable, pounded the table with his fist, and threw bread balls at the princess. He flung his arms about most marvellously, just as though a string were attached to their hinges, and somebody under the table had hold of it.

"What fun I am having!" said the chancellor. "My dear princess, when a man spends his life adorning a mantel-piece in the cheerful company of a clock, a bronze figure, and a pot of begonias, he really needs recreation; and at a festival like this he lays in a supply of mirth for the year."

"Ah, happy, a thousand times happy, they whose only duty consists in adorning mantelpieces!" said the lady, in melancholy tones. "It may be wearisome, but you do not at least suffer as we do,—we whose lives are a prolonged martyrdom; we, the toys of the small men. It would be impossible for me to make you understand, Prince Bismarck, what we suffer when one pulls our right arm, another our left; when this one cracks our head, that one quarters us or leaves us in the water to soak, or rips us open to find out what is inside of us!"

"I can imagine it," said the chancellor, opening his arms and clapping them together several times.

"How unfortunate!" said Espartero and two of the emperors at once.

"I was the least unfortunate of all," said the lady, "for I found a friend and protector in the valorous and faithful Migajas, who managed to save me from the barbarous torture."

Pacorrito blushed to the very roots of his hair.

"Valorous and faithful!" repeated all the dolls, in admiring chorus.

"And therefore to-night, when our Genius Creator permits us to come together for this great celebration, I chose to honor him by bringing him with me and offering him my hand as a sign of alliance and reconciliation between the lineage of dolls and that of well-bred, compassionate children."

X.

At this Prince Bismarck looked at Pacorrito with an expression of such malignity and sarcasm that our illustrious hero was filled with wrath. At the same instant this wretch of a chancellor aimed a bread ball at Migajas, and fired it so accurately that the bridegroom came near being blinded for life. But Migajas was a prototype of prudence and circumspection, so he controlled his feelings and was silent. The princess threw him a glance of love and gratitude.

"What fun I am having!" repeated the chancellor, clapping his wooden hands together. "Before it is time to resume our place beside the clock and listen to its unceasing tic-tac, let us fathom the depths of pleasure and intoxication,—let us be happy! If the Señor Pacorrito would favor us by calling the daily paper, we might laugh a little."

"The Señor de Migajas," said the princess, kindly, "did not come here to make us laugh. But there is no reason why we should not enjoy hearing him call out the paper or even matches if he is willing to do so."

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The ragamuffin could find no words with which to answer his beloved. He was sorely incensed at the proposition, which he judged to be a fling at his dignity and decorum.

"Let him dance!" shouted the chancellor, impertinently; "let him dance on the table! and if he refuse to do so, I move that he be stripped of the fine clothes we dressed him in, and be left ragged and barefooted as he was when he came."

Migajas felt all his blood rush to his heart. He was blind with rage. "Do not be cruel, my dear prince," said the princess, smiling; "leave him to me. I will take it upon myself to dispel the storm that is rising within our good Migajas here."

A loud peal of laughter greeted this reply, and all the dolls, and the most celebrated generals and emperors of the world, simultaneously fell to pounding one another's heads like the Punch and Judy puppets.

"Make him dance! make him call matches!" they clamored.

Migajas felt faint. The sentiment of dignity was so powerfully developed in him that he would have died rather than have gone through the suggested degradation. He was just about to reply when the malignant chancellor, pulling a long thin straw from a work-basket and wetting the end of it in his mouth, [Pg 82] drove it into Pacorrito's ear with such a quick movement that the latter did not realize the familiarity of the act until he had suffered the nervous shock produced by tricks of this sort.

Blind with rage, he put his hand to his belt and drew the paper-cutter. The ladies shrieked and the princess fainted; but the enraged Migajas, far from being pacified by this, seemed to be growing more and more infuriated, and rushing upon his insolent adversary, he began to deal blows right and left. The air was filled with yells, threats, and imprecations. The parrots croaked and the very birds moved their paper tails in sign of panic.

Nobody laughed now at the daring Migajas. A few moments later the chancellor might have been seen going about gathering up his arms and legs (a strange case which cannot be explained), and all the emperors were noseless. They gradually, however, with a little glue and a great deal of innate skill, mended one another,—a rare advantage, this, of puppet surgery. The princess, having recovered from her swoon through the virtue of smelling-salts, administered by her pages in a filbert-shell, called the ragamuffin aside, and leading him to her private apartments, spoke as follows:—

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XI.

"Most illustrious Migajas, what you have just done, far from lessening my love for you, has only increased it, for you have given evidence of indomitable valor by your easy triumph over this swarm of scoffing puppets, the most despicable class of beings on earth. The tender sentiments that bind me to you move me to propose that you become my husband with no further delay."

Pacorrito fell on his knees.

"As soon as we are married, the emperors and chancellors will all venerate you as they do me, for I must tell you that I am queen of this division of the world. My titles are not usurped; they are transmitted by the divine law of puppets established by the Supreme Genius that created us and governs us."

"My lady," Migajas said, or tried to say, "my happiness is so great that I cannot express it."

"Very well, then," said the lady, with great majesty, "since you are willing to become my husband, and consequently prince and lord of this puppet kingdom, I must inform you that in order to do so you will have to renounce your human personality."

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"I do not exactly grasp your Majesty's meaning," said the ragamuffin.

"You belong to the human race. I do not. Our natures being different, we cannot unite. There is but one way. Give up your humanity. It is the easiest thing in the world, believe me. It is only necessary that you will it. Now, answer me. Pacorrito, son of man, will you be a puppet?"

The peculiar nature of this request set the ragamuffin to thinking for a few seconds.

"And what does this thing of being a puppet consist in?"

"You will be like me. Our nature is perhaps nearer perfection than yours. We are to all appearances devoid of life, but we live, believe me. To the imperfect senses of man we lack movement, words, affection, but this is far from being the case. You have had an opportunity of judging how we move, how we speak, and how we feel. Our fate, for the present at least, is not a very happy one. We are the toys of your children, and even your men, but as a compensation for this disadvantage we are eternal."

"Eternal!"

"Yes; we live forever. When these wicked children of yours break us, we rise with a new life out of our destruction, and are born anew, describing a mysterious and everlasting circle from the shop to the children, from them to the Tyrolese factory, and thence to the shop again through the ages everlasting."

"Through the ages everlasting!" repeated Migajas, absorbed.

"It is not always rose-color with us; but, on the other hand, you see, we do not know death, and then our Genius Creator permits us to meet at certain great festivals to celebrate the glory of our race, as we have done to-night. We cannot elude the laws of our being,—it is not given us to enter the reign of humanity, although men can easily enter ours, and in fact have very often been known to become puppets."

"A most extraordinary thing!" exclaimed Pacorrito, full of amazement.

"You know the requirements of puppet initiation. I have nothing more to say. Our dogmas are very simple. Now, meditate upon it, and answer my question, Will you be a doll?"

The princess's attitude was that of a priestess of antiquity. Pacorrito was captivated.

"I want to be a doll," declared the ragamuffin, resolutely.

The princess then proceeded to trace diabolical characters in the air, and to utter great words which Pacorrito had never heard before, and which were neither Latin, Chinese, nor Chaldean. He concluded that they were Tyrolese. When this was consummated, the lady threw her arms about Migajas, saying,—

"Now you are my husband. I have the power of marrying, and also of receiving neophytes into our Great Law. My darling little prince, may you be blessed through time everlasting!" And the whole court of figures entered, singing, "Through time everlasting!" to the accompaniment of canaries and nightingales.

XII.

They all promenaded through the parlors in couples. Migajas gave his arm to his royal consort.

"What a pity," said she, "that our hours of pleasure should be so brief! Soon we shall have to return to our places."

His Serene Highness, Migajas, from the moment of his transformation, had begun to experience the queerest sensations. The strangest of these consisted in his having lost the sense of taste and the notion of food. All he had eaten lay within him as though his stomach had been a basket containing a thousand pasteboard viands which he did not digest, which had no substance, weight, taste, or nourishment. Moreover, he was no longer master of his movements, and was compelled to keep time when he walked, which was a difficult thing to do. He felt himself growing hard, as though he were being turned to bone, wood, or clay. He thumped himself, and behold! his body resounded like porcelain. His clothes, too, had grown hard, and were in every respect precisely like his body.

When he found himself alone with his little wife and clasped her to his bosom, he experienced no human or divine sensation of pleasure,—nothing but the harsh shock of two hard, cold bodies. He kissed her cheek; it was frozen. In vain did his hungry spirit call upon nature. Nature in him was what it is in a piece of pottery. He felt his heart throbbing like the machinery of a watch. His thoughts alone survived; the rest was all unfeeling matter.

The princess seemed very happy. "What is the matter, my love?" said she, observing Pacorrito's expression of distress.

"I am weary, bored, bored to death, my dear," said the lover, gaining

assurance.

"You will get accustomed to it. O happy hours! If this lasted much longer, we could not endure it!"

"Does your Highness call this happiness?" observed Migajas. "What coldness, what emptiness, what rigidity!"

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"The after-taste of human things still lingers in your soul, and you are still a slave to the views of your depraved human senses. Pacorrito, I shall have to implore you to control these paroxysms, or you will be the demoralization and destruction of every living doll."

"Life! life! blood! heat!" shouted Migajas, in despair, gesticulating like a maniac. "What is happening to me?"

The princess clasped him to her bosom, and kissing him with her red, waxen lips, exclaimed:

"You are mine, forever, forever, through time everlasting!"

Just then they heard a great commotion, and the sound of many voices crying,—

"It is time! it is time!"

The clock struck twelve, and all had disappeared, princess, palace, dolls, and emperors. Pacorrito was left alone.

XIII.

He was left alone in the most complete darkness. He tried to scream, but he was voiceless. He made frantic attempts to move, but he could not; he had turned to stone.

He waited in anguish. Day dawned at last; and Pacorrito had resumed his old appearance, but strange to say, he was all of one color, and apparently all [Pg 89] of one substance,—his hands, his arms, his rags, his hair, and even the newspapers which he held in his hand.

"There is no doubt about it," said he; "I have turned into a stone."

Before him he saw a great sheet of plate-glass, with some letters on it, running backward. Around him was a multitude of statuettes and fancy ornaments.

"Horror! I must be in the show-window!"

A clerk took him carefully in his hands, and having dusted him, put him back in his place.

His Serene Highness looked down upon the pedestal on which he stood, and saw a card with the figures $12.00 upon it.

"Good heavens! I am worth a treasure! That, at least, partially consoles one."

And the people stopped on the other side of the plate-glass to admire the wonderful bit of clay statuary representing a ragamuffin selling matches and newspapers. Everybody praised the artist, and laughed at the droll expression and bungling figure of the great Migajas, while he in the inmost recesses of his clay repeated in anguish,—

"A puppet! a puppet! forever! through time everlasting!"

A TRAGEDY.

From the Spanish of Antonio Maré.

It was a great city in the far North, a gloomy city with pointed roofs that seemed to have been carved out of the fog. The birds that hurried past it on their journey south said to themselves that it looked like a forest of steeples. Under one of these pointed roofs lived two young people whom the coldness of emigration had huddled together in a closer intimacy. They were very unconscious of the fog, and it never occurred to them that the city looked like a forest of steeples; in fact, they never thought of the city at all, and would scarcely have been surprised if they had heard it spoken of as an orange grove,—for they were lovers. The little nest they had built themselves under the pointed roof was bright with the sunshine that came from them; and the few people who entered there became intoxicated with a strange aroma of tenderness that surged to their brains like the fumes of old wine, in sweet reminiscences or disturbing suggestions.

It would not be perfectly correct to say that these young people lived entirely alone; and had they not been so absorbed in each other, living that life of double selfishness peculiar to lovers, they could scarcely have helped feeling a soft blue gaze fixed upon them, evening after evening, as they took their accustomed places before the hearth.

On the mantel-piece which overhung the hearth was a small black marble clock, a statuette of Psyche with butterfly wings made of plaster, a little Italian shepherd of very primitively tinted clay, and a bisque vase. Now, this vase was the gem of the drawing-room. On its bosom was painted a running stream that broke into cataracts here and there over glossy brown stones. Its pitch was amazingly abrupt. It started at the brim of the vase and disappeared under it. On its banks, far away in a misty perspective of pink and violet trees, were a number of shadowy little shepherdesses, some carrying tender lambs, others dancing the minuet, but all very blithe and merry. At some distance from them, and at the very front, where the cataract roared its loudest, stood a much larger shepherdess in clear relief, thrusting herself boldly forward as though she meant to leap from the parental vase, to which she was bound only by the tip of her flowered skirt and the heel of her slippered foot. She held her crook high in the air as if to balance herself in her flight. In her other hand was a wreath of corn-flowers, with which she shaded a pair of dreamy blue eyes that gazed in perpetual wonder at the world below. Her sisters were simple little things, who were content to play with a lambkin all day long in the sun, or dance the minuet under the trees, but who had absolutely no ideas. Now, this particular little shepherdess had not only ideas, she had thoughts, and what was more, she was conscious of them. It was not to be wondered at that all things fell in love with each other in this peculiar little room; nor was it surprising that most things fell in love with the little shepherdess. The wonder was that she, on the other hand, fell in love with nothing. This superiority of thought was very isolating, and her aloneness would have been unendurable but for the gratifying nature of its cause. The clock was an unpleasant neighbor,—childless and critical, which sometimes means the same thing. Its conversation invariably took the form of a colloquy, stiff with rules, bristling with maxims; besides, having gone through life measuring out time, it had reached that stage of indiscriminate scepticism which is the greatest possible damper on the open-mindedness of others.

There was the little clay shepherd, to be sure, who was very well thought of by the community at large. The shepherdess liked him,—certainly she liked him,—and she sometimes spoke her thoughts to him, but she never could have loved him, had the drawing-room been the Desert of Sahara and he its only other inhabitant. She was always perfectly frank with him whenever he broached the subject.

"In the first place, I do not believe that you are really in love," she said to him kindly; "you only think you are, because everybody else seems to be. Reflect a little, and I am sure you will agree with me,—for my part, I have given it a great deal of serious thought. The air seems full of thrills for all of you lately, but you should be very careful; a thrill is a dangerous prism through which to look at life." And to herself she said, "Poor little fellow! he thinks he can build a bonfire out of two straws."

She could not associate love with his healthy plumpness. He was even-

tempered, and had an occasional idea, but no theories; he wanted things without longing for them; his love was tender but not invariably delicate. She felt the fault to be in his head rather than in his heart; he always acquiesced, but seldom understood.

[Pg 95] On the table in the centre of the room was a Chinese mandarin, who was also in love with the little shepherdess, but she absolutely abhorred him. To her mind he was coarse and repulsive, in spite of his wealth. His jokes never amused her. Still he was a humorist, and had a way of wobbling his head and poking out his tongue that threw the whole drawing-room into convulsions of laughter. Poor little shepherdess! Well, she did what we all do under similar circumstances. She built herself a world of her own,—a little intellectual laboratory into which she dragged bits of careful observation to be submitted to the tests of her theories. So, poised like a sparrow on a twig, she continued to peer over the edge of the mantel-piece, where she saw quite enough to set her thinking.

Her master and mistress were a source of constant study to her. Late in the evening, when he sat on a broad, low chair before the fire, and she on the floor resting her head against his knees, the little shepherdess's eyes fairly glowed with concentrated attention. "So that must be love," she thought, as she made a note of something indefinable that quivered on their lips, or trembled on their eyelids and made them droop. "I wonder how they feel! I wish I knew!" She was watching her mistress with peculiar interest one night, [Pg 96] when she saw her slip her hand into her husband's coat-pocket, and draw out an envelope with no stamp upon it. This she held for a second or two, undecided as to whether she would read its contents. She looked up inquiringly at her husband, then with a quick movement thrust it back unopened, and laughingly threw her arms about his neck to drive away the unpleasant impression. "That is a grave mistake," thought the little shepherdess. "Why should there be anything that he should not want her to know? As a principle, it is wrong. It is because people build their love on illusions that they fear revelations. Why are they so cowardly? I do not believe the truth to be as black as it is painted. We should love, knowing,—that is the way. There must be such a thing. Oh, when I love—" and her eyes grew misty at the very thought, and the lace on her little bodice rose and fell.

The days came and went, and found her growing ever more dainty, and more thoughtful too. At last she opened her blue eyes, one Christmas Eve, upon what struck her at first as something alarming. It was midnight; and a stealthy sound of creaking boots awoke her from her first sleep and in the very midst of a wonderful dream. Her little heart was beating very fast. At first she thought it might be a burglar who had heard of her cleverness and [Pg 97] her philosophies, and who had broken into the house to steal her away, but in a second a match was struck and she understood her mistake. Her master stood before her in the middle of the room. She saw him tiptoe to the door, close it tightly, then stand listening for a moment before lighting the gas. What could he be so mysterious about? She rubbed her eyes and watched him attentively. She soon discovered that he held a bundle under his arm, and she smiled to herself knowingly. "A Christmas present," she said; and she leaned so far forward that she almost tipped off the mantel-piece. Her master sat down, laid the package on his lap, and cut the strings with his penknife; then he removed the wrappings as noiselessly as possible. Though the little shepherdess had entirely recovered from her alarm, she began to experience a sensation entirely new to her. She felt as though there were a tight band around her waist that kept her from breathing freely. Her head grew hollow; and a sickened sense of misery—physical and mental anguishes writhing and knotting themselves in the pit of her stomach—made her feel strangely faint. What could this mean? Was it a foreboding? When the last wrapping was carefully laid aside, she opened her eyes with a great effort and looked upon [Pg 98] the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. On the little table directly opposite her, stood a figure about eight inches high,—exquisite, dazzling! "A prince!" she thought at first; for he was richly dressed, had a noble air, and on his short dark curls he wore a crown. But no; he was not a prince.

As she looked at him again she realized that his crown was made of laurels; then she saw too that he held a violin in his hand. He was something greater than a prince; he was an artist. The master stood off and looked at him with beaming joy, and the little shepherdess felt her admiration increase with corroboration. Then he drew from his pocket a pink wax taper, which he fitted into the laurel crown. When it was lighted it shed a soft radiance. "What a beautiful idea!" thought the shepherdess; "that is the halo of art, glorifying, transfiguring everything." The master then blew out the light, and smiling complacently, reached up to the chandelier. Just as he was about to turn out the gas, the little artist looked up and saw the shepherdess,—one long look of surprise and eagerness; their glances met, and in that look they understood

each other. Through the darkness of that whole night he played her beautiful strains of dreamy music that opened to her visions of blue skies and balmy orange groves; for he came from Italy, where the very air must be heavy with poetry and love, she thought. He told her wonderful tales with his violin. He alternately flooded her mind with moonlight and fairies, or peopled her fancy with vague forms of sorrow that filled her little breast with sobs. What a rapturous night that was! A bewitched moonbeam that peered in through a broken slat in the blind lay there entranced. In the pauses of the music the plaster wings of the little Psyche quivered audibly. As for the shepherdess, something had permeated her soul like a subtile essence, and opened one by one great vistas of feeling of which she had never dreamed even in the boldest flights of her imaginings. All her senses seemed suddenly to have grown exquisitely acute. "What a bursting heart there must be behind it all!" she thought. "What a fund of sentiment! What must he feel who, with a stroke of his bow, can change the aspect of the world! It is he! It is he at last!"

Christmas morning dawned upon the world. The first rays of light that penetrated into the drawing-room brought with them the muffled sound of carriages hurrying over the snow, and the occasional shout of a belated reveller mingling with the faint murmur from groups of early church-goers. But what was this to the little shepherdess? The day that had dawned for her was more momentous than Christmas. She was almost surprised to find that it was not a dream. No, there he stood; and he smiled at her with the eager smile of those who meet again after a separation.

"You look as though you were about to take flight, you beautiful, blue-eyed thing. Fly down to me. I will catch you in my arms," he said, at which the little shepherdess blushed crimson. "Perhaps you do not love me now that you see me in the light of day."

She was just about to answer something very clever about not fearing revelations because she had all her life scorned illusions, when the door suddenly opened, and her master entered on tiptoe. He walked over to the table, stood looking at his purchase with satisfaction for a few seconds; then taking it up in his hand, he discovered that the pink taper did not fit tightly enough into the little laurel crown. In moving the figure, it was apt to topple first to one side, then another. So he stood it down, and twisting the upper part carefully, he screwed it off, crown and taper, from the pretty head, and carried them both into the next room. During this incident a thought flashed through the little shepherdess's mind, and like a flash too she determined to execute it. She pulled her left foot with a jerk, and gave a little tug at her gown, and there she stood on the edge of the mantel-piece, free. She threw a hasty glance at the little shepherd, who looked on with a parched throat; it is even possible that she smiled a kindly smile upon the black clock. Then she gathered her skirts with both hands and jumped down. It was a supreme moment. The lovers stood looking into each other's eyes.

"My precious one," he said, "you are mine at last. I have waited for you through the ages, and you have come!"

And the little shepherdess, stepping up on a book, held her wreath of corn-flowers over his head.

"I have no laurels to bring you," she said, "but I will crown you with my trusting love." And she rose on her tiptoes and leaned forward to lay her corn-flowers on his brow. But what was it? Why did she start, and then lean farther forward and look again? What could she have seen to make her eyes grow suddenly dim,—those clear eyes that meant to see everything?

The fact of it was that under the laurels it was all hollow, hollow down to his belt. Where his heart should have been, she saw a little dust that exhaled a musty odor, and the wings of several dead flies. Her brain reeled. Was this all, then? And the music, where had the wonderful music come from, or was the music all? This was the shepherdess's last speculation. She felt the book sinking beneath her little feet; she grasped her crook nervously; then there was a blank in her thoughts; she tottered, and crash! she fell and broke into a thousand pieces at the feet of her lover. At first he felt that he would die too. Then he composed himself, and when he came to understand how it had all happened, he shrugged his shoulders. "Women are all alike," said he. "They fancy they are thinking when they are only brooding. They want to be analytical, and they are only cavilous." And he tuned his violin, while his eyes rested on the little plaster Psyche.

THE THREE LOW MASSES.

From the French of Alphonse Daudet.

I.

Two truffled turkeys, did you say, Garrigou?"

"Yes, my reverend, two great, glorious turkeys stuffed with truffles. I ought to know something about it, considering I helped stuff them myself. I thought their skins would crack while they were roasting, they were stretched so tight—"

"Merciful Saints! And I'm so fond of truffles too! Hurry there, Garrigou, hand me my surplice. And what else did you see in the kitchen besides the turkeys?"

"Oh, all sorts of good things. Ever since twelve o'clock we have been plucking pheasants, hoopoes, hazel-hens, and heath-cocks. From the pond they brought in eels, gold-fish, trouts, and—"

"About how big were the trouts, Garrigou?"

"Oh, about so big, my reverend; simply enormous—"

"Holy Fathers! I can just see them. Did you put the wine in the vases?"

"Yes, my reverend, I filled them; but mercy! that isn't anything like the wine you'll have later, after midnight Mass. You ought to see the dining-hall at the castle,—all the decanters glittering with the many-colored wines, and the silver, the plate, the chased centre-pieces, the flowers, the candelabrum; I don't suppose there has ever been such a Christmas supper! The Lord Marquis has invited all the lords of the neighboring estates. There will be over forty at the table, leaving out the bailiff and the notary. Ah, my reverend, you are very lucky to be invited! The smell of the truffles haunts me now, simply from having sniffed at those turkeys,—meuh!"

"Come, come, my child, let us beware of the sin of greediness,—particularly on the night of the Nativity. Hurry off now and light the tapers, and ring the first call for Mass; it will soon be midnight, and we can't afford to lose time."

This conversation occurred one Christmas night in the year of our Lord sixteen hundred and something, between the reverend Dom Balaguère, formerly prior of the Barnabites, and present chaplain of the Sires of Trinquelague, and his little clerk, or rather what he believed to be his little clerk Garrigou,—for let me tell you that the Devil on that particular night had assumed the round face and uncertain features of the young sacristan, the better to lead the reverend father into temptation and make him commit a great sin of greediness. So while the would-be Garrigou (hem! hem!) rang out the chimes with all his might from the seigniorial chapel, the reverend father was slipping on his chasuble in the little vestry; and as his imagination was somewhat excited by Garrigou's gastronomic accounts, he repeated mechanically as he got into his vestments,—

"Two roast turkeys, gold-fish, trouts about so big!"

Without, the night wind blew, and scattered the music of the bells. Gradually lights began to pierce the gloom along the roads of Mount Ventoux, on whose summit the old towers of Trinquelague reared their mighty heads. The neighboring farmers and their families were on their way to the castle to hear midnight Mass. They climbed the mountain singing gayly, in little groups of five or six,—the father ahead carrying the lantern, the women following, wrapped in great dark cloaks under which the children snuggled to keep warm. In spite of the cold and the advanced hour of the night, all these good people walked along merrily, cheered by the thought that a great supper was awaiting them as usual, below, in the castle kitchens, after Mass. Every now and then, on the rough declivity some fine lord's coach, preceded by torch-bearers, showed its glimmering window-panes in the moonlight; or then a mule trotted along shaking its bells; or again, by the light of their lanterns wrapped in mist, the farmers recognized their bailiff and hailed him as they passed.

"Good-night, good-night, Master Arnoton!"

"Good-night; good-night, my children!"

It was a clear night; the stars seemed brightened by the cold; the wind was nipping; and a fine sleet powdered all these cloaks without wetting them, just in order to preserve the tradition that requires Christmas to be white with snow.

On the very crest of the mountain the castle appeared like a goal, with its huge mass of towers and gables, the chapel steeple rising straight into the blue-black sky, while a thousand little lights moved rapidly hither and thither, blinking at all the windows, and looking, against the intense black of the building, like the tiny sparks that glimmer in a pile of burnt paper.

After passing the drawbridge and the postern, in order to reach the chapel, one had to cross the first court, crowded with coaches, footmen, sedan-chairs, and bright with the flame of torches and the glare from the kitchens. One could hear the clicking of the spits, the rattling of pots, the tinkling of crystal and silver, as they were laid out for the banquet; and above it all floated a warm vapor smelling of roasted meats and the pungent herbs of complicated sauces, which made the farmers, as well as the chaplain, the bailiff, and everybody say,—

"What a good supper we shall have after Mass!"

II.

Ding, ling, ling! Ding, ling, ling!

Midnight Mass has begun. In the chapel of the castle, which is a miniature cathedral, with intercrossed arches and oaken wainscoting up to the ceiling, all the tapestries are hung, all the tapers lighted. What a crowd of people, and what sumptuous costumes! Here, in one of the carven stalls that surround the choir, sits the Sire of Trinquelague, clad in salmon-colored silk, and around him all the noble lords, his guests. Opposite them, on velvet fall-stools, kneel the old dowager Marchioness, in a gown of flame-colored brocade, and the young lady of Trinquelague, wearing on her pretty head a great tower of lace puffed and quilled according to the latest fashion at the court of France. Farther down the aisle, all dressed in black, with vast pointed wigs and cleanly shaven chins, sit Thomas Arnoton the bailiff, and the notary, Master Ambroy, two sombre spots amid the high colors of silks and brocaded damasks. Then come the fat major-domos, the pages, outriders, the stewards, Dame Barbe with her great bunch of keys dangling from her side on a ring of fine silver. On the benches in the rear is the lower service,—butlers, maids, the farmers and their families. And last of all, far back against the doors, which they discreetly open and close, come the cooks, between two sauces, to catch a little whiff of the Mass, bringing with them into the bedecked church, warm with the light of so many tapers, odoriferous suggestions of the Christmas supper.

Can it be the sight of these crisp white caps that diverts the reverend father's attention? Or is it not rather Garrigou's bell?—that fiendish little bell that tinkles away at the foot of the altar with such infernal haste, and seems to be saying,—

"Come, come, let us hurry! The sooner we despatch the service, the sooner we go to supper."

The fact of the matter is that at every peal from this little devil of a bell, the chaplain forgets his Mass and allows his mind to wander to the Christmas supper. He evokes visions of busy kitchens, with ovens glowing like furnaces, warm vapors rising from under tin lids, and through these vapors, two superb turkeys, stuffed, crammed, mottled with truffles. Or then again, he sees long files of little pages carrying great dishes wrapped in their tempting fumes, and with them he is about to enter the dining-hall. What ecstasy! Here stands the immense table, laden and dazzling with peacocks dressed in their feathers, pheasants spreading their bronzed wings, ruby-colored decanters, pyramids of luscious fruit amid the foliage, and those wonderful fish that Garrigou spoke of (Garrigou, forsooth!) reclining on a bed of fennel, their pearly scales looking as if they were just from the pond, and a bunch of pungent herbs in their monster-like nostrils. This beatific vision is so vivid that Dom Balaguère actually fancies that the glorious dishes are being served before him, on the very embroideries of the altar-cloth, and instead of saying *Dominus vobiscum*, he catches himself saying the *Benedicite*.

With the exception of these slight mistakes the worthy man rattled off the

service conscientiously, without skipping a line, or omitting a genuflection, and all went well to the end of the first Mass. For you must know that on [Pg 110] Christmas the same officiating priest is obliged to say three Masses consecutively.

"So much for one!" thought the chaplain, with a sigh of relief; and without losing a second, he motioned his clerk, or him whom he believed to be his clerk, and—

Ding, ling, ling! Ding, ling, ling!

The second Mass has begun—and with it Dom Balaguère's sin. "Come, let us hurry!" says Garrigou's bell, in a shrill, devilish little voice, at the mere sound of which the unfortunate priest pounces upon the missal and devours its pages with all the avidity of his over-excited brain. He kneels and rises frantically, barely sketches the sign of the cross and the genuflections, and shortens all of his gestures in order to get through sooner. He scarcely extends his arms at the Gospel, or strikes his breast at the *Confiteor*. Between him and his little clerk it is hard to tell who mumbles the faster. The words, half uttered between their teeth,—for it would take them too long to open their lips every time,—die out into unintelligible murmurs,—

Oremus—ps—ps—ps—

Meâ culpa—pâ—pâ—

Like hurried vintagers crushing the grapes in the mash-tuns, they both splashed about in the Latin of the service, spattering it in every direction.

[Pg 111] "Dom—scum!" says Balaguère.

"Stutuo!" responds Garrigou, while the infernal little bell jingles in their ears like the sleigh-bells that are put on stage-horses to hasten their speed. You may well imagine that at such a rate a Low Mass is soon rattled off.

"So much for the second," says the panting chaplain, with scarlet face, in a full perspiration; and without taking time to breathe, he goes tumbling down the altar steps, and—

Ding, ling, ling! Ding, ling, ling!

The third Mass is under way. Only a few minutes stand between them and the supper. But alas! as the time approaches, Dom Balaguère's fever of impatience and greediness increases. His vision grows more and more vivid; the fish, the roasted turkeys, are there before him; he touches them; he—great Heavens!—he breathes the perfume of the wines and the savory fumes of the dishes, and the frantic little bell calls out to him,—

"Hurry, hurry! Faster, faster!"

But how on earth can he go faster? His lips barely move; he has given up enunciating altogether,—unless, forsooth, he chooses to cheat the Lord, and swindle him out of his Mass. And that is just what he is doing, the wretched man! Yielding first to one temptation, then another, he skips one verse, then [Pg 112] two; then the Epistle being very long, he omits part of it, skims over the Gospel, passes the Creed unnoticed, skips the *Pater*, hails the preface from afar, and thus with a skip and a jump plunges into eternal damnation, followed by that infamous Garrigou (*Vade retro, Satanas!*), who seconds him with marvellous sympathy, upholds his chasuble, turns the pages two at a time, jostles the lectern, and upsets the vases, while the little bell rings constantly, ever faster and louder.

It would be impossible to describe the bewildered expression of the congregation. Compelled to follow, mimicking the priest, through this Mass, of which they can make neither head nor tail, some stand while others kneel, some sit while others stand; and all the phases of this singular service are jumbled together along the benches in the greatest confusion of varied postures. The Christmas star on the celestial road, journeying toward the little manger yonder, grows pale at the very thought.

"The abbé reads too fast; it is impossible to follow him," whispers the old dowager Marchioness, whose voluminous head-dress shakes wildly. Master Arnoton, with his great steel spectacles on his nose, loses his place every minute and fingers his Prayer-Book nervously. Still, at heart all these good [Pg 113] people, whose minds are equally bent upon the Christmas supper, are not at all disturbed at the idea of following Mass at such breakneck speed; and when Dom Balaguère, facing them radiantly, exclaims in a thundering voice, "Ite missa est," the response, "Deo gracias," is so unanimous, joyous, and spirited, that any one might take it for the first toast of the supper.

III.

Five minutes later the assembled lords, and the chaplain among them, had taken their seats in the great hall. The castle, brilliantly illumined, echoed with songs and laughter; and the venerable Dom Balaguère drove his fork resolutely into a capon's wing, drowning the remorse for his sin in the savory juice of meats and the soothing draughts of old wine. He ate and drank so heartily, the dear good man, that he died of a spasm that very night, without even having had time to repent. By morning he reached heaven, where the thrills of the past night's ecstasies lingered still in the air, and I leave you to imagine how he was received.

"Get thee gone, thou wretched Christian!" said Saint Peter; "thy sin is great enough to wipe out the virtues of a lifetime! Ah, so thou wouldst swindle us out of a Mass! Very well, then, three hundred Masses shalt thou say, nor shalt thou enter into Paradise until three hundred Christmas Masses have been celebrated in thine own chapel, and in the presence of all those who sinned with thee and through thee."

And this is the true legend of Dom Balaguère, as it is told in the land of the olive-tree. The castle of Trinquelague has long ceased to exist; but the chapel stands erect on the crest of Mount Ventoux, in a clump of evergreen oaks. The wind sways its unhinged door; the grass grows over the threshold; there are nests in the angles of the altar, and on the sills of the high ogive windows, whose jewelled panes have long since disappeared. Still, it seems that every year at Christmas supernatural, mysterious lights hover among the ruins; and on their way to midnight Mass and the Christmas supper, the peasants see this spectre of a chapel lighted by invisible tapers, which burn in the open air, even in the wind and under the snow. You may laugh if you will, but a wine-dresser of the district, named Garrigue, a descendant of Garrigou, no doubt, has often told me that on one particular Christmas night, being somewhat in liquor, he had lost his way on the mountain somewhere near Trinquelague, and this is what he saw: until eleven o'clock nothing. Everything was silent and dark. Suddenly at midnight the chimes rang out from the old steeple,—strange, uncanny chimes, that seemed to be ringing a thousand miles away. Soon lights began to tremble along the road, and vague shadows moved about. Under the portal of the chapel there were sounds of footsteps and muffled voices:—

"Good-night, Master Arnoton!"

"Good-night, good-night, my children!"

When they had all gone in, my wine-dresser, who was a courageous fellow, crawled up to the door and there beheld a most marvellous spectacle. All these good shadows sat around the choir in the ruined nave just as though the benches were still there. There were fine ladies in brocades and lace head-dresses, lords gayly bedizened, peasants in flowered coats like those our grandfathers wore, all of them dusty, faded, weary. Every now and then, some night-bird, an habitual lodger in the chapel, awakened by all these lights, began to flutter about the tapers, whose flames rose erect and vague as though they were burning behind a strip of gauze. Garrigue was particularly amused at a gentleman with great steel spectacles, who constantly shook his huge black wig, upon which perched one of these birds with entangled claws and beating wings.

A little old man with a childlike figure knelt in the centre of the choir and frantically shook a tiny bell which had lost its voice, while a priest clad in old-gold vestments moved hither and thither before the altar repeating orisons of which not a syllable could be heard.

Who could this have been but Dom Balaguère, saying his third Low Mass?

THE POET'S CHRISTMAS EVE.

From the Spanish of PEDRO A. DE ALARCÓN.

In a beautiful corner of Andalusia
Lies a smiling valley.
God bless it!
For in that valley
Have I friends, loves,
Brothers, parents.
(*El Látigo.*)

I.

GOOD many years ago, for I was then only seven, my father came to me in the twilight of a winter's day, when the three *Ave Marias* had been repeated to the sound of the church-bells, and said solemnly, "You need not go to bed with the chickens to-night, Pedro; you are a big boy now, and you ought to have supper with your parents and your older brothers. This is Christmas Eve."

I shall never forget the delight with which I heard these words. I was not going to bed until late! I cast a glance of commiseration and contempt upon my younger brothers, and instantly fell to composing a description, to be delivered at school on my return after Twelfth Night, of this my first adventure, my first lark, the first dissipation of my life.

II.

It was already *las Ánimas*,[1] as they say in our village.

[1] A certain hour of the evening, when the ringing of bells admonishes the faithful to pray for the souls in purgatory.

Our village! Ninety leagues from Madrid, a thousand leagues from the world, nestling in a fold of the Sierra Nevada! I can almost fancy I see you, brothers, father, and mother!

A huge oak log whistled and crackled in the fireplace. We all sat together under the vault of the chimney. My two grandmothers, who spent that night with us, presiding over the household ceremonies, occupied the corner seats; my father and mother sat next to them, the rest of the place being occupied by the children and servants; for on such an occasion we all represented the home, and it seemed fitting that one fire should warm us all. I remember, however, that our men remained standing, and that our maids squatted or knelt. Their respectful humility forbade their occupying a chair. The cats slept in the centre of the circle, their tails turned to the fire. An occasional snowflake came fluttering down the chimney,—that elfin road,—and the wind moaned in the distance and spoke to us of the absent, the poor, the wayfarers. My father and my eldest sister played on the harp, and I accompanied them, to their distress, on a drum which I had contrived that very evening out of a broken water-jug.

Do you know the song of the Aguinaldos, which is sung in the villages that lie east of the Mulhacem? Well, that was the music that constituted the concert. The maid-servants took it upon themselves to render the vocal parts, and they sang couplets to this effect:—

"To-night is Christmas eve;
To-morrow is Christmas day.
Maria, fetch the jug of wine;
Let's be merry while we may."

And all was happiness and merry-making. Rusks, butter-cakes, pastes of nuts and honey, sweetmeats made by the nuns, rosoli, and cherry brandy were

freely passed around. There was much talk of going to midnight Mass, to the Nativity play at dawn, to see the Bethlehem manger which we boys had [Pg 120] constructed in the tower, and also of making sherbet out of the snow that carpeted the court.

Suddenly in the midst of all this merriment I was struck by the deep meaning of these words, sung by my paternal grandmother:—

> "Christmas comes,
> Christmas goes;
> But soon we all shall be of those
> Who come back—never!"

In spite of my tender age this couplet chilled my heart. All the melancholy horizons of life seemed to have been unfolded before me in a flash. It was a burst of intuition, unnatural at my age; it was a miraculous prescience, the herald of the ineffable tedium of poetry; it was my first inspiration. I saw and understood at a glance, with marvellous lucidity, the inevitable fate of the three generations present. It occurred to me that my grandparents, my parents, and my brothers were like a marching army whose vanguard was stepping into the grave, while the rearguard had not yet left the cradle; and these three generations represented a century; and all past centuries had been alike, and ours would disappear as they had done, and so would the centuries unborn.

> "Christmas comes,
> Christmas goes."

[Pg 121] Such is the implacable monotony of time, the pendulum oscillating in space, the indifferent repetition of events, in contrast with the brevity of our pilgrimage in this world.

> "But soon we all shall be of those
> Who come back—never!"

Horrible thought! Cruel sentence, the definite meaning of which was like a summons to me,—death beckoning me from the shadows of the future. Before my imagination a thousand Christmas Eves filed by, a thousand hearths were extinguished, a thousand families that had supped together ceased to exist,—other children, other joys, other songs, lost forever; the loves of my grandparents, their antiquated mode of dress, their remote youth, the memories thereof that crowded upon them; my parents' childhood, the first Christmas celebration in our home, all the happiness that had preceded me! Then I could imagine, I could foresee, a thousand more Christmas Eves recurring periodically and robbing us of our life and hope,—future joys in which we should not all take part together, my brothers scattered over the earth, my parents naturally dying before us, the twentieth century following upon the nineteenth! The live coals turned to ashes,—my vanished youth, my [Pg 122] old age, my grave, my posthumous memory, then the complete oblivion of me, the indifference, the ingratitude of my grandchildren, living of my blood, and who would laugh and enjoy while the worms profaned the skull in which these very thoughts were now conceived.

The tears gushed from my eyes. I was asked why I was crying, and as I did not know or at least could not have defined the reason even to myself, my father concluded that I was sleepy, and I was accordingly sent to bed. Here was another motive for weeping, and so it happened that my first philosophical tears and my last childish ones were mingled. That night of insomnia which I spent listening to the joyous sounds of a celebration from which I had been excluded for being too much of a child, as my parents believed then,—or too much of a man, as I realize now,—was perhaps the bitterest of my life.

I must have fallen asleep at last, however, for I cannot remember whether the projects of going to midnight Mass, the Nativity play, and making sherbet out of the snow in the court fell through or not.

III.

Where is my childhood?

I feel as though I had just been relating a dream.

[Pg 123] The world is wide, after all! My paternal grandmother, the one who sang the couplet, died a long time ago. On the other hand, my brothers have married and have children. My father's harp, unstrung and broken, has been thrown among the cast-off furniture. It has been many a Christmas Eve since I had supper at home. My village has disappeared from the ocean of my life like

the islet which the mariner leaves behind him.

I am no longer the same Pedro, the child, that focus of ignorance, curiosity, and anguish trembling on the threshold of life. I am nothing short of a man, an inhabitant of Madrid, comfortably settled in life, proud of my independence as a bachelor, a novelist, and a volunteer in the great orphanage of the capital, with whiskers, debts, and loves.

When I compare myself now, my perfect freedom, my broad life, the immense scene of my operations, my early experience, standing as I do revealed, tuned like a grand piano on the night of a concert; when I compare myself with all my boldness, my ambitions, my contempts, with the little chap that played the drum fifteen years ago on Christmas Eve in a remote corner of Andalusia,—I smile, I even laugh aloud, with the feeling that it befits me, while my lonely heart sheds pure tears of infinite melancholy, which it carefully hides from view. Holy tears! May Providence frank you to the home where my father is growing old!

IV.

Well, what shall it be?—for, as the boys sing in the streets,—

> "Christmas Eve! Christmas Eve!
> This is surely no night for sleep!"

Where shall I spend the evening? Fortunately I can choose; let me see.

This is the 24th of December, 1855. We are in Madrid. We know the waiters of all the cafés by name. We are hand in glove with the most applauded poets of the day, the demi-gods of provincial amateurs. We frequent theatres and see plays from the inside, as it were. The great actors and singers shake our hand behind the scenes. We penetrate into the editor's rooms and are initiated in the alchemy which produces newspapers. We have seen the type-setter's fingers stained with the lead of words, and the fingers of the author stained with the ink of thoughts. We have free access to one of the tribunes of Congress, credit at the hotels; there are social gatherings that appreciate us, and tailors that endure us.

We are happy! Our youthful ambition is satisfied. We can enjoy this night. We have conquered the world. Madrid is ours. Madrid is our home. A cheer for Madrid! And you, provincial youths, who at nightfall on an autumn day, sad and lonely, unearth and air your impotent longing for the capital,—you who feel yourselves to be poets, musicians, painters, orators, who despise your village, who will not speak to your parents, who weep with ambition and dream of suicide,—burst with envy, all of you, as we are now bursting with pleasure.

V.

Two hours have passed. It is nine o'clock. I have money; where shall I take supper? My friends, more fortunate than I, will smother their loneliness in the clamor of an orgy. "Night is of wine," they said to me only a few moments ago; but I would not be of them. It has been some time now since I crossed this red sea of youth dry-footed.

"Night is of tears," I said to them.

Those who compose our social gatherings are at the theatre. The people of Madrid celebrate the Nativity of our Lord by listening to the ranting of actors.

A few homes in which I am almost a stranger have offered me alms out of their domestic warmth in the form of an invitation to dinner,—for the old-fashioned supper has gone out of style. But I would not accept. That is not what I want. What I long for is the Paschal feast, the Christmas Eve supper, my home, my relatives, my traditions, my memories, the former joys of my soul, the religion that was taught me when I was a child.

VI.

Ah, Madrid is an inn. On a night like this we come to know what Madrid is. Our capital is a floating population, heterogeneous, exotic, which can only be compared to the population of a free port, of a jail, of an insane asylum. Travellers journeying toward a future, to the fantastic kingdom of ambition, halt here as well as those who are journeying back from misery, from crime.

Beauty comes here to marry, or to sell herself, the landed proprietor to squander his wealth, the literati for glory, the deputy to become a minister, the worthless man for a government office. The savant, the inventor, the comedian, the giant, the dwarf, the man with an anomaly in his soul or in his body, the monster with seven arms and three noses as well as the philosopher with double sight, the charlatan, the reformer, the man who creates melodies, and the man who counterfeits bank-notes,—all spend some period of their life in the great inn. Those who attain notoriety, those who find a purchaser, those who have grown rich at the expense of themselves, become in time the innkeepers, the landlords, the masters of Madrid, and forget the land of their birth. But we, the wayfarers, the lodgers,—we realize to-night that Madrid means exile, that Madrid is a bivouac, a prison, a purgatory. For the first time in the year we feel that neither the café, the theatre, the casino, nor the hotel is our house. More than that, we realize that our house is not our home.

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VII.

The home—that sacred abode of the patriarch, of the Roman citizen, of the feudal lord, of the very Arab; the holy arch of the Penates, temple of hospitality, and altar of the family—has completely disappeared in our great modern centres. The home survives in the provinces alone. There our house is our own. In Madrid it is generally the landlord's. In the provinces our house shelters us for twenty, thirty, forty years at least. In Madrid one moves every month, or at least every year. Our home has a physiognomy of its own, which never varies, ever kindly and sympathetic. It grows old with us; it bears the impress of our lives; it preserves our footprints. In Madrid the exterior changes every leap year; the apartments are arrayed in new garments; that furniture is sold which our contact had consecrated. At home the whole edifice is ours: the grassy court, the poultry-yard filled with chickens, the high, cheery terraces, the deep well,—the children's terror,—the monumental tower, the broad cool, vine-covered summer-house. Here we occupy a half-flat, paper-lined, and divided into mean apartments, with no view of the sky, no sun, no air. There we have that neighborly affection, something between friendship and relationship, which binds together all the families of one street. Here the man who moves about noisily above our heads is unknown to us, neither do we know the man who dies beyond the partition of our alcove, and whose death-rattle disturbs our sleep. Our provincial home is a cluster of memories, of local attachments: here the room in which we were born, there the room where our brother died; here the empty hall in which we played as children, there the study in which we wrote our first verses. On the chapter of a column, in the trough of an old ceiling, swallows have built their nests, and every year the faithful couple fly over from Africa to hatch a new brood. In Madrid all this is unknown. And the hearth, that consecrated stone, cold in summer, cold in our absence, but warm and friendly during the happy winter evenings when all the children are brought together and grouped about the old people,—for the colleges have their vacations, the married daughters bring their little ones home on a visit, and the absent ones, the prodigal sons, come back to the heart of the family,—where, tell me, where is this hearth in the houses of the capital? Can we call a French mantel-piece, made of marble, bronze, and iron, a hearth, that which one can buy at a store, at wholesale or retail, and can even hire, if need be? The French mantel-piece is the symbol of home in a great city. People of Madrid, that is your hearth,—a hearth subject to the changes of fashion, a hearth which is sold when it is old, which can be moved from room to room, from street to street, and which can even be pawned in an emergency.

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VIII.

I wandered through a street. Far above my head, from a high story, my grandmother's prophetic couplet floated down to me amid the shock of glasses, the rattle of dishes, and the merry laughter of girls.

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> "Christmas comes,
> Christmas goes;
> But soon we all shall be of those
> Who come back—never!"

"Here," thought I, "is a home, a hearth, with almond soup and a gilt-head, which I could buy for four dollars!" Just then a woman came up to me, begging. She had two children, one in her arms wrapped in her ravelled shawl, the other clinging to her hand. Both were crying; I thought the mother was crying too.

IX.

I do not know how I happen to be in this café. The clock strikes midnight, the hour when the Christ was born. I am here, alone, in a boisterous crowd. I have fallen to analyzing my life since I left my father's roof, and for the first time I am horror-stricken at the painful struggle of the poet in Madrid,—a struggle in which so much affection, so much peace, is sacrificed to a vain ambition.

I have watched the bards of the nineteenth century writing the local; I have watched the Muse, scissors in hand, making clippings; I have seen men who in other ages would have written a national epic busily patching up editorials to rehabilitate a party and earn fifty dollars a month.

Poor children of God! Poor poets! Antonio Trueba, to whom I dedicate this article, says,—

"I have found so many thorns on my journey that my heart aches, my soul aches!"

And so much for my present Christmas Eve!

Then I travel back, in thought, through the bygone years. I am surely missed at home to-night; and my mother shivers when the wind moans in the chimney, as though those moans were my dying sighs. And she says to the neighbors, "In such a year, when he was with us," or, "I wonder where he is now!"

Ah, I cannot bear this! I wave you a farewell from my soul, dear ones! I am ambitious; I am an ingrate, a bad brother, a bad son! How can I explain it? A supernatural force leads me on, whispering, "Thou shalt be!" The voice of damnation that spoke to me in my very cradle. And what, pray, am I to be, poor wretch that I am?

"Soon we all shall be of those
Who come back—never!"

Ah, I do not want to go! I shall not go! I have struggled too hard to fail. I shall return. I will triumph in life and in death. Is there to be no compensation for the infinite anguish of my soul?

X.

It is very late, and that couplet of the dead still rings in my brain,—

"Christmas comes,
Christmas goes;
But soon we all shall be of those
Who come back—never!"

"Yes, yes; other Christmas Eves will come," thought I, as a child; and I dreamed of the future and built castles in the air. I saw myself the centre of a family, as yet unborn, in the second twilight of life when the flowers of love come to fruit. That storm of love and tears which wrecks me now was passed; my head was at rest in the lap of patience, crowned with the melancholy flowers of the last, true affections. I was a husband, a father, the support of a home, of a family.

The flame of an unknown hearth sparkled in the distance, and in its vacillating light I saw strange beings that made me throb with pride; they were my sons. Then I wept, and I closed my eyes to prolong the vision of that reddish light and the prophetic apparition of the unborn. The grave was near; my locks were gray. But what of that? Would not half of my life remain in these children of love? Would not half of my soul remain with their mother? In vain did I try to recognize this wife, who was to share the twilight of my life. This future companion whom God holds for me sat with her back to me. I could not see her face. I looked for the reflection of her features in the faces of my sons, but the light from the hearth began to fail.

When it was out I still saw her, because I felt the warmth of her in my soul. I murmured:

"Christmas comes,
Christmas—"

And I was asleep, perhaps dead.

I TAKE SUPPER WITH MY WIFE.

From the French of Gustave Droz.

IT was Christmas Eve, and a devilishly cold night. The snow fell in great flakes, which the wind beat against the window-panes. The distant chimes reached us, confused and faint through the heavy, cottony atmosphere. The passers-by, muffled in their cloaks, glided along hurriedly, brushing by the walls of the houses, bending their heads before the wind. Wrapped in my dressing-gown, I smiled as I drummed on the window-pane, smiled at the passers-by, at the north wind and the snow, with the smile of a happy man who is in a warm room with his feet in a pair of flannel-lined slippers which sink into a thick, soft carpet.

My wife sat in a corner of the hearth with a great piece of cloth before her which she cut and trimmed off; and every now and then she raised her eyes, which met mine. A new book lay on the mantel-piece awaiting me, and a log in the fireplace whistled as it spit out those little blue flames which tempt one to poke it.

"There is nothing so stupid as a man trudging along in the snow. Is there?" said I.

"Sh-h-h!" said my wife, laying down her scissors. Then she stroked her chin thoughtfully with her tapering pink fingers, slightly plump at the extremities, and looked over very carefully the pieces she had just cut out.

"I say that it is absurd to go out into the cold when it is so easy to stay at home by the fire."

"Sh-h-h!"

"What the deuce are you doing that is so important?"

"I—I am cutting out a pair of suspenders for you;" and she resumed her task. Her hair was coiled a little higher than usual; and where I stood, behind her, I could just see, as she leaned over her work, the nape of her neck, white and velvety. Innumerable soft little locks curled there gracefully, and this pretty down reminded me of those ripe peaches into which we drive our teeth greedily. I leaned nearer to see and—kissed my wife on the neck.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Louise, turning suddenly around.

"Madame!" and we both burst into a laugh.

"Come, come; on Christmas Eve!"

"Monsieur apologizes?"

"Madame complains?"

"Yes; Madame complains. Madame complains of your not being more moved, more thrilled by the spirit of Christmas. The ding-ding-dong from the bells of Notre Dame awakens no emotion in you; and when the magic-lantern went by under your very window, you were perfectly unmoved, utterly indifferent. I watched you attentively, though I pretended to work."

"Unmoved? Indifferent? I? When the magic lantern went by! Ah, my dear! you judge me very severely, and really—"

"Yes, yes; laugh if you will. It is nevertheless true that the pretty memories of your childhood are lost."

"Come, my pet, would you like me to stand my boots in the fireplace to-night before I go to bed? Would you like me to stop the magic-lantern man and go and get him a sheet and a candle-end, as my mother used to do? I can almost see her as she handed him the sheet. 'Be careful you don't tear it, now,' she would say; and we all clapped our hands in the mysterious obscurity. I remember all those joys, dear; but, you see, so many things have happened since. Other pleasures have obliterated those."

"Yes, I understand,—the pleasures of your bachelorhood! Come, now, I am sure this is the first Christmas Eve that has ever found you by your own fireside, in your dressing-gown and without a supper, because you always had

supper; that goes without saying—"

"Why, I don't know—"

"Yes, yes; I wager you always had a supper."

"Well, perhaps I did, once or twice, although I scarcely remember; I may have had supper with a few old friends. And what did it all amount to? Two pennies' worth of chestnuts and—"

"And a glass of sugar and water."

"Well, just about. Oh, it was nothing much, I can assure you! It sounds great at a distance. We talked awhile, and then we went to bed."

"And he says all that with the straightest face! You have never breathed a word of these simple pleasures to me."

"But, my dear, what I tell you is the absolute truth. I remember once, however, at Ernest's, when I was in rather high spirits, we had a little music afterwards—Will you push me that log? Well, never mind; it is almost midnight, and time for all reasonable people to—"

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(Louise, rising and throwing her arms around me.) "Well, I don't choose to be reasonable, and I mean to eclipse the memory of those penny chestnuts and all that sugar and water!" (Pushing me hastily into my study, and locking the door.)

"What the deuce is the matter with you, my dear?" I cried from the other side of the partition.

"Give me ten minutes, no more. Your paper is on the mantel-piece; you have not seen it to-night. You will find the matches in the corner."

Then I heard the rattle of china, the rustle of silky stuffs. Could my wife have gone crazy? At the end of about ten minutes she unlocked the door.

"Don't scold me for shutting you out," said she, embracing me. "Look at me. Have I not made myself beautiful? See! My hair just as you like it, high, and my neck uncovered. But my poor neck is so extremely shy that it never could have displayed itself in the broad light, if I had not encouraged it a little by wearing a low-necked gown. After all, it is only right to be in full-dress uniform at a supper with the authority."

"What supper?"

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"Why, our supper. My supper with you, of course. Don't you see my illumination and the table covered with flowers and good things to eat? I had it all ready in the alcove; but, you see, to push the table before the fire and make something of a toilet, I had to be alone. I have a big drop of old Chambertin for you. Come, Monsieur, come to supper; I am as hungry as a bear! May I offer you this chicken-wing?"

"This is a charming idea of yours, my love, but I really feel ashamed of myself,—in my dressing-gown."

"Take it off, sir, if you are uncomfortable, but do not leave me with this chicken-wing on my hands. Wait a minute; I want to wait upon you myself." And rising, she swung her napkin over her arm and pulled up her sleeve to her elbow. "Isn't that the way the waiters do at the restaurants, tell me?"

"Exactly. But stop a moment, waiter; will you permit me to kiss your hand?"

"I haven't time," she said, smiling, and she drove the corkscrew bravely into the neck of a bottle. "Chambertin!—a pretty name. And, besides, do you remember, before we were married—*sapristi*, what a hard cork!—you told me you liked it on account of a play by Alfred de Musset?—which you never gave me to read, by the way. Do you see those little Bohemian glass tumblers that I bought especially for to-night? We will drink each other's health in them."

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"And his too, eh?"

"The heir's, you mean? Poor little love of an heir, I should think so! Then I shall hide the two glasses and bring them out again this day next year, eh, dear? They will be the Christmas-supper glasses, and we will have supper every year before the hearth, you and I alone, until our very old, old age."

"Yes; but when we shall have lost all our teeth—"

"Never mind; we shall have nice little soups, and it will none the less be very sweet. Another piece for me, please, with a little jelly, thank you."

As she held out her plate to me, I caught a glimpse of her arm, the pretty

contours of which disappeared in the lace.

"What are you looking up my sleeve for instead of eating?"

"I am looking at your arm, dear. You are exquisitely pretty to-night; do you know it? Your hair is wonderfully becoming, and that gown—I had never seen that gown before."

"*Dame!* When a person starts out to make a conquest!"

"You are adorable!"

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"Are you quite sure that I am adorable to-night, charming, ravishing?" Then, looking at her bracelet attentively, "In that case I don't see why—I don't see—"

"What is it that you don't see, dear?"

"I don't see why you don't come and kiss me."

And as the kiss was prolonged, she threw her head back, showing the double row of her pretty white teeth, exclaiming between her peals of laughter,—

"Give me some more *pâté*! I want some more *pâté*! Take care! You are going to break my Bohemian glass, the fruit of my economy! There is always some disaster when you try to kiss me. You remember at Madame de Brill's ball, two nights before we were married, how you tore my gown while we were waltzing in the little parlor?"

"Well, but it is very difficult to do two things at once,—keep time with the music and kiss your partner."

"I remember when mamma asked me how I tore my gown, I felt that I was blushing up to the roots of my hair. And Madame D., that old yellow witch, said to me with her lenten smile, 'What a brilliant color you have to-night, my child!' I could have choked her! I said I had caught my gown on a nail in the door. I was watching you out of the corner of my eye. You were twirling your mustache, and you seemed quite vexed. You keep all the truffles for yourself, —how nice of you! Not that one; I want that big black one there,—in the corner. Well, after all, it was none the less very wrong, because—no, no, don't fill my glass; I don't want to get tipsy—because if we had not married (that might have happened, you know; they say that marriages hang by a thread), well, if the thread had not been strong enough, here I was left with that kiss on my shoulder,—a pretty plight!"

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"Nonsense! It does not stain."

"Yes, sir, it does; I beg your pardon, but it does stain, and so much so that there are husbands, I am told, who spill their blood to wash out those little stains."

"I was only jesting, dear. Heavens! I should think it did! Fancy! Why—"

"Ah, I am glad to hear you say so. I like to see you get angry. You are just a wee bit jealous, tell me, are you not? Well, upon my word! I asked you for the big black one, and you are quietly eating it!"

"I am very sorry, my love; I beg your pardon. I forgot all about it."

"Yes, just as you did when we were being married. I was obliged to touch your elbow to make you answer yes to Monsieur the Mayor's kind words!"

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"Kind words?"

"Yes, kind words. I thought the mayor was charming. No one could have been more happy than he was in addressing me. 'Mademoiselle, do you consent to take this great big ugly little man who stands beside you for your lawful—' [Laughing with her mouth full.] I was about to say to him, 'Let us understand each other, Monsieur; there is much to be said for and against.' Heavens! I am choking! [Bursts into great peals of laughter.] I was wrong in not making some restrictions. There! I am teasing you, and that is stupid. I said yes with my whole heart, I assure you, my darling, and the word was only too weak. When I think that all women, even the bad ones, use that same word, I feel ashamed of not having invented a better one. [Holding up her glass.] Here is to our golden wedding!"

"And here is to his christening, little mother!"

In an undertone: "Tell me, dear, are you sorry you married me?"

(Laughing.) "Yes. [Kissing her on the shoulder.] I think I have found the stain. Here it is."

"Do you realize that it is two o'clock. The fire is out. I am—you won't laugh? Well, I am just a little dizzy!"

"That was a famous *pâté*!"

"A famous *pâté*! We will have a cup of tea in the morning, eh, dear?"

THE YULE LOG.

From the French of Jules Simon.

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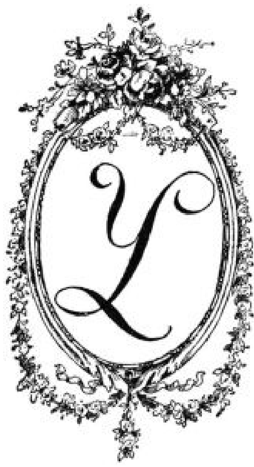

Yesterday was my birthday. A number of friends who have never seen me wrote to congratulate me upon having reached the age of eighty. They are mistaken; I am not as old as all that. I can readily understand that a few years more or less make very little difference to them, but they certainly make all the difference in the world to me. I am still far from the dignity of an octogenarian; yet I confess that I am very old, and at my age one likes to recall one's early childhood. It is a very well-known fact that old people,—it seems that I am old, which makes me furious, and I really believe that I should scarcely realize it, if people did not take particular pains, out of pure kindness, of course, to remind me of it every moment,—it is a well-known fact, I say, that old people recall the first scenes of their life with marvellous accuracy. [Pg 148] I have often heard Chevreul speak of having been present on the Place de la Révolution at the very moment when Louis XVI. was executed. His nurse had carried him there, the wretch! He neither saw nor understood anything; but he remembered the words of a *garde nationale* who scolded the woman for having brought a child to such a place. "He delivered there and then a perfect sermon on the subject," he used to say, "and I remember every word of it." But let us not speak of tragedies.

I want to take you with me to Brittany, not without having first warned you against myself, however. You must not take me too literally when I describe the customs of that country. My descriptions are absolutely faithful, but they represent Brittany as it was from 1815 to 1830. I went back there this summer after an absence of half a century, and I recognized nothing but the scenery. The men are all civilized, and far more Parisian than I. In order to re-classify them I should have been compelled to drive them back to their national dress, that they so foolishly gave up.

I will take you back, therefore, to the year 1822; and you would not doubt it for an instant if you could follow me into my father's study. The walls were [Pg 149] papered with Republican money. He had obtained it in exchange for cash; and when it turned out to be as worthless as waste paper, he determined that it should be of some use to him anyway. I fancy that its usefulness consisted in reminding him of the fragility of human things. The walls were also decorated with portraits of the royal family, from the King down to M. de Villèle, all tacked on with pins. But these portraits were not to be relied upon, for when they were turned upside down, they represented, by some ingenious combination, the Ogre of Corsica, the King of Rome, and the Empress Marie Louise. They were suited to all tastes and all opinions.

This extraordinary study was situated on the first floor,—for our house had a first floor, differing thus from the other houses of the borough, which had nothing but a ground floor. It also had a slate roof, which filled me with legitimate pride. It looked out upon the street which circled the graveyard; and I will say at once, to be sincere, that there was no other street in St. Jean Brévelay. This view and this neighborhood will not strike you, with your modern ideas, as very attractive; but in Brittany we like graveyards,—I might even say that we like sadness. And then in this graveyard stood the church,—an imposing church, I can assure you, with a vault upon which hell was [Pg 150] faithfully represented on one side and heaven on the other. Near our window there was also a great fir, which was worth a whole forest in itself, and which sheltered a formidable number of crows. If, however, in spite of this double attraction one found no pleasure in contemplating the view from that side, we had another façade to resort to,—a façade opening upon an immense and magnificent garden. There you might have looked down upon a patch of cabbage, a patch of French beans, of peas, of carrots, and of potatoes. We had flowers too,—so many flowers, so many vegetables, and so much fruit, that we made gratuitous distributions of them every Sunday. Besides our apple-trees, the branches of which bent under the weight of the fruit, we had pear-trees, cherry-trees, and plum-trees. My father, who had travelled considerably, particularly through the South, prided himself upon his enterprising spirit. Every year when the plums had been picked, he collected them in great piles; from these piles the best were chosen, put upon a species of riddles, and the riddles were laid in the sun. This was with a view to making prunes. The plums rotted in a few days; the birds and other animals ate them; and soon there was nothing left but the stones. These were then thrown into the street, where we used to pick them up, in order to make piles and stick a little flag in [Pg 151] the top. The next year my father proceeded to make prunes in precisely the

same manner.

We were very proud of our rose-bushes, which furnished roses for the altars, and of our apple-trees, from which we obtained a most excellent cider. We had our wine-press, our kneading-trough, our oven, and our laundrying basins. We had pastures for our cows, wheat-fields, fields of buckwheat and of rye. We sowed just enough to supply our wants. There was no mill in our village, so we were compelled to send our grain to Pontécouvrant. When it was ground, it was brought back and made into very good rye bread for our daily use. We also made a great loaf of wheat bread once a week, which we used for the soup.

Every morning my father started out, gun on shoulder,—for in those days there were no rural constables nor gendarmes (the gendarmes were at Plumelec), and one could hunt all the year round. He came in at noon for dinner, and at six o'clock for supper. My greatest delight consisted in running to meet him and looking into his game-bag. I never found any game in it, but it often contained a big trout or some fine eels. We eventually discovered that the hunt was a mere pretext, and that his real passion was fishing. He was extremely taciturn, as all of his children have been after him, and I believe that to be one of the essential qualities of an angler.

During dinner he never breathed a word. In the evening at supper he described the events of the day, when he had been lucky. We took our meals in the kitchen, which was vast and cleanly. There were twenty of us at table, and sometimes more, owing to the legendary Breton hospitality. The table formed a long rectangle. My mother occupied one end of it with my sisters and myself; my father sat at the other end alone; while the two long sides were reserved for the servants. These were no less than twelve in number: the gardener, the ploughman, the shepherd, the stable-boy, and the maid-servants. This will no doubt give you the impression of the household of a wealthy farmer or a country gentleman. Not at all. In the beautiful borough of St. Jean Brévelay there was neither butcher, baker, nor grocer. The only merchants that I ever saw there were a mercer and a tavern-keeper. One was compelled to send to Vannes, seven leagues away, for everything, or else live like Robinson Crusoe on his island.

I have learned since that the ploughman, who was our first man, earned only thirty francs a year. I leave you to judge of the rest. It was a poor country, and one could enjoy all the comforts which it afforded with an income of twelve hundred francs a year. One of our chief pleasures consisted in the care of our garden. My mother had a little bed in which roses, tulips, pansies, and daisies grew in abundance. She was particularly fond of mignonette and honey-suckle. The hedge around our kitchen-garden was covered with honey-suckle, elder, and a whole family of sweet-smelling creepers, over which our bees hovered and buzzed. There was seldom a day when we did not walk around the garden once, and that was quite a journey. We had another habit which I do not understand as well, and which consisted in walking around Colas' field every day after dinner; that is, at one o'clock. We first went down a hollow road where the mud was not wanting when it had rained. The flowers were not wanting there either in summer; we walked under a real vault of them. This road led to the blacksmith's shop, where I always found something to admire,—the great bellows, the incandescent iron, the sparks flying from the furnace like joyous fireworks. Next to the blacksmith's shop stood Marion's house,—the last house at the end of the village. Marion was a girl of twenty who had lost her mother when she was eighteen. Everybody had advised her to go into service; but she had preferred to engage herself to my mother as a seamstress, by the year. Her house —"Marion's house," as it was always spoken of—belonged to her. It was not a great dowry. It consisted of two rooms under a thatched roof, and a little yard where she raised her chickens. She had been warned against the dangers of living alone at her age, and in a comparatively isolated place; but she was a fearless girl and somewhat unsociable. She had discovered, I do not know where,—in one of the neighboring farms, perhaps,—a widow who was only too happy to occupy one of her rooms gratuitously, and who was a companion and a protection to her when she came home after her day's work.

Colas' field began at Marion's door. It was surely not what one would call beautiful. We walked straight before us, and got back to our starting-point at the end of an hour without having seen anything but apple-trees and furrows. On Sunday when this task had been accomplished, we found Marion in her yard among her chickens, waiting to go to vespers with us. I always took her hand, and she told me stories of Poulpiquets.

I led a joyful life. My mother, too, seemed happy. Her chief occupation lay in nursing the sick, and her heaviest expense in providing them with broth and drugs; the latter were sent for to the druggist's at Bignan. I had never

[Pg 155] seen a doctor until I went to Lorient to enter school. Whenever she had a perplexing case, she called my father into consultation. As he had been a soldier, nothing surprised him. His method was to bleed. He one day undertook to vaccinate the entire population, and succeeded in doing so by offering five cents to all those who consented to honor him with their trust. This philanthropic operation must have made a great hole in the household budget.

We had a library which contained fully twenty volumes. My sisters spent their time in taking them from my mother's room, and my mother in taking them from their hands. There were,—"Celina, or, The Child of Mystery and of Love;" "Alexis, or, The Wooden Cottage;" "The Helmet and the Square Cap, or, Both suited him." We also had, "The Evenings at the Château," by Madame de Genlis, "The Yellow Tales," and "Robinson Crusoe." I was of course not permitted to touch the novels. I was allowed "Robinson Crusoe," "The Yellow Tales," and "The Evenings at the Château," of which permission I availed myself eagerly, for I was ever a great reader. "Robinson Crusoe" particularly delighted me, and I read it three or four times a year. I had also a tender feeling for "Celina," which I only half understood. In the first place, it [Pg 156] represented the forbidden fruit; and in the next place, it had pictures. I never got to the *dénouement*, because my mother, seeing that I was incorrigible, resolved to burn the *cuerpo del delito*.

If I add that in rummaging through the closets and wardrobes I had found "L'Esprit des Lois" and an odd volume of the "Political and Philosophical History of the Two Indies," and that I read them, you will no doubt believe that I am trying to make myself out an infant prodigy. It was quite the reverse, for I preferred the Abbé Raynal to Montesquieu, and what I was most charmed with in the Abbé Raynal was some absurd rant about a mistress called Catchinka, whom he had lost, and who in some remarkable way formed a part of the Philosophical History of the Two Indies. This strange library produced a veritable chaos in my poor little brain, over which floated "Robinson." It was the genuine "Robinson" too,—a translation of the work of Daniel Defoe, which, as every one knows, contains as many sermons as it does events.

But what I liked better than "Robinson," better than "Celina," better than my garden, better than the eternal walks around Colas' field, was the church service on religious holidays, the "pompous grandeur of its ceremonies." Yes, the "pompous grandeur,"—I will not retract. Since then I have seen St. [Pg 157] Peter's, the cathedrals of Cologne and Toledo, and, I believe, all the finest churches in the world; yet I never attended service anywhere without recalling the poor little church of St. Jean Brévelay. The difference between the palace of a king and the thatched cottage of a peasant is far greater than that between the august basilica and the poor little tottering chapel of a Breton village. May the artists forgive me, but a church, however poor and small, is none the less a church. Four bare walls, a wooden cross upon a table, windows so covered with dust that they scarcely let the light in,—all these things speak to the soul of meditation and of prayer.

I do not know what the population of St. Jean Brévelay was. It could not have been over two hundred; but on Sunday the people came to High Mass from the four corners of the parish, which was vast and populous. The farmhouses and thatched cottages all emptied themselves at the first glow of dawn. You could see the families making their way to the borough along every known road—the men leading the way in silence, the women following in noisy talk among themselves. They at first scattered through the graveyard, every family stopping to say a prayer at the family tomb. Then the friends and relatives came together in groups, and the men made more than one escape [Pg 158] to the tavern. At the last call for High Mass they all rushed to the church doors, pushing, jostling, crowding one another, until the building was filled from end to end. The graveyard—I might say the borough—was now a perfect desert. The men, standing, and pressed close together, occupied all the front part of the nave; the women, kneeling, filled the rear. All, without exception, took part in the singing. The common serpent was unknown to us; but with our voices alone we managed to make a formidable noise. The people were happy to be there, not because, as Voltaire says, "High Mass is the opera of the poor," but because, as the Christian Church says, religion is the consolation of the afflicted. The rector delivered his sermons in Low Breton, and they were never anything but a paraphrase of this word of the Gospel, Love one another. And surely they loved one another, those uncultured folk. They did not know how to read, but they knew how to love. They understood gratitude too. My mother was almost an object of worship.

The great festival of the year, after that of Saint Louis, was Christmas. The King first and God next, such is the order of precedence under all

governments. It is possible that our poor peasants would have reversed that order had they been able to do so.

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I must say, in order not to give them more praise than they deserve, that what they liked best about Christmas was the midnight Mass,—a sorry enjoyment for you city-bred people, who are fond of your comforts. But what is a sleepless night to a peasant? Even when they had to plod along through the mud or the snow, not an old man, not a woman hesitated. Umbrellas were then unknown at St. Jean Brévelay, or at least ours was the only one that had ever been seen there, and it was naturally the object of much surprise and admiration.

The women caught up their skirts with pins, threw a plaid kerchief over their head-dresses, and started out bravely for the parish church in their wooden shoes. Sleep, forsooth! Who could have slept even had he wanted to? The chimes began the night before immediately after the evening Angelus, and were repeated every half-hour until midnight. The hunters, in order to contribute to the general beatitude, kept up a steady firing. My father furnished the powder. It was a universal and deafening clamor. The small boys took part in it too, at the risk of maiming themselves, whenever they could lay their hands on a gun or a pistol.

The vicarage was a short half-league from the borough. The rector came over on his nag, which the *quinquiss* (the beadle) led by the bridle. A dozen peasants escorted him, firing their pistols in his ears all the while. But this did not disturb him in the least, for he was an old Chouan with the death of many a Blue on his conscience,—withal, the kindest and most compassionate of men since the king had returned and he had become a priest.

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On that night great preparations were made at home. Telin-Charles and Le Halloco measured the fireplace and the kitchen door with as much earnestness and importance as though they had not known their dimensions by heart for many years. The question was to bring in the Yule log and to have it as large as possible.

A great tree was felled for the purpose; four oxen were harnessed; and the log was dragged to the house. It took eight or ten men to lift it, and to carry it in. It would scarcely fit in the fireplace. Then it was adorned with garlands; it was propped and stayed by the trunks of young trees; and an enormous bunch of wild-flowers, or rather of live plants, was placed on top of it. The long table was removed from the kitchen. We took our light meal standing. The walls were hung with white table-cloths and sheets, just as they are at Corpus Christi; and upon them were pinned numerous drawings done by my sister Louise and my sister Hermine,—the Virgin, the Christ-Child, etc. There were inscriptions too, "Et homo factus est!" All the chairs were removed to make as much room as possible for our visitors, who were not accustomed to sitting on anything better than their heels. One chair was left for my mother and one for my Aunt Gabrielle, who was treated with much deference on account of her eighty-six years.

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She was the one, my children, for stories of the Terror! Everybody around me knew many such stories, for that matter,—my father particularly, if he had only chosen to speak. He had been a Blue; and his obstinate silence was no doubt due to prudence in a part of the country that was so full of Chouans.

The confusion was such in the kitchen, with everybody wanting to be useful, to carry in branches of fir, of broom, and of holly; the noise was so deafening on account of the hammering of nails and the rattling of pots and kettles; and then there came such a clamor from without,—ringing of bells, firing of guns, songs, conversations, and clatter of wooden shoes,—that it seemed like the din of a fair at the very climax of its animation. At half-past eleven the cry, "Eutru Person! Eutru Person!" ("The rector! The rector!") resounded all along the street. It was taken up in the kitchen, and all the men started out immediately. The women alone remained with the family. When the rector reached our door, there was a moment of profound silence. He dismounted. It was I who had the honor of holding his nag by the bridle; that is, I was supposed to do so, but somebody else always did it for me. Heaven knows there was no need of holding the poor beast anyway.

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M. Moizan walked up three steps to the landing, turned toward the crowd that stood below him, hat in hand, removed his own hat, and said, after making the sign of the cross, "*Angelus Domini* nuntiavit Mariæ." A thousand voices responded.

When the prayer was over, he entered the house, spoke cordially to my father and mother, to M. Ozon, the mayor, who had just arrived from Pénic-Pichon, and to M. Oillo, the blacksmith, who was also the justice's clerk. Then he proceeded to the benediction of the Yule log.

My father and mother stood on the left-hand side of the hearth. Those women whom their importance or their intimate terms with the family permitted to remain in the sanctuary, which in this case means the kitchen, knelt in a semi-circle around the hearth. The men were crowded together in the hall, the door of which was left open, and they overflowed into the street as far as the graveyard. Every now and then a woman who had been detained by some domestic care cleft the crowd and came forward to where the others were kneeling.

Aunt Gabrielle, arrayed in her mantle, which always bespoke a solemn occasion, knelt in the middle of the semi-circle, directly in front of the Yule log, with a holy-water basin and a branch of box beside her. She started a hymn which all the assistants repeated in chorus.

I have forgotten the words of that hymn, and I really regret it. The air was monotonous and plaintive, like all those that were sung at our firesides. However, it contained a crescendo at the moment of the benediction which generally sent a shiver through me, producing what is commonly known as goose-flesh.

Aunt Gabrielle had just reached that part of the hymn on the 25th of December, 1822, when I became aware of a strange confusion among the male voices outside. The women either stopped singing entirely, or sang out of time and tune; the voices chased after one another, scarcely sustained themselves, and seemed stifled by a sudden emotion. My mother's hand, which held mine, trembled for a moment, then grew firm by a great effort of her will. Her voice rose, soared above the voices of the others, who, realizing at once that they had wandered inopportunely, hurried back to the fold, and so the hymn ended in good order after this surprising interruption. What had happened? Something very simple indeed. A young woman had made her way through the crowd, had entered the kitchen, and apparently anxious to remain unnoticed, had fallen on her knees at a little distance from the others, and buried her face in her hands. I recognized her at once. It was Marion, my favorite, the best seamstress on the place, and the prettiest girl in the borough. I would surely have run forward to kiss her but for the solemnity of the occasion, which forbade my leaving my place or making a noise. She was weeping bitterly. Why are you weeping, my sweet Marion? I was wild to have the ceremony end, that I might find out from her. All the other girls seemed embarrassed. My mother alone, whom I looked full in the face, appeared calm; but her face lied,—I knew it by the trembling of her hand.

After the benediction of the Yule log it was the custom for all the women present to kiss my mother before proceeding to the church. They came up in good order, one after another; and in spite of their number, which amounted to some thirty or forty, this formality only required a few minutes. I think that my mother yielded to it rather in spite of herself, for she was an extremely reserved woman; but all these kind souls would have believed that the laws of the universe had been reversed if this part of the ceremony had been left out.

As mistress of ceremonies, and on account of her great age, Aunt Gabrielle opened the march.

Now, Aunt Gabrielle was a character. She was the living repertory of folk-songs, legends, and customs. People came from everywhere to consult her when they wanted to know how such and such a thing should be done. Perhaps you believe that etiquette is peculiar to palaces. Most assuredly not. In my day a wedding had more than a thousand equally important formalities. My good aunt, who was the oracle of these forms, had never made use of them for herself.

She was an old maid, born at Belle-Isle-en-Mer under Louis XV., and was a distant cousin of ours. We have relationships in Brittany which can be expressed in no language, they are so remote. My father, who never thought of himself until everybody else had been provided for, had brought out a whole tribe of poor relatives with him to St. Jean Brévelay. I think, however, that Aunt Gabrielle was an exception. She gave more than she received. She was our cook, I beg you to believe, and a most excellent one too. She was active, laborious, always equal to the expedients of her profession, always bright and contented, full of delicate attentions for everybody, particularly for Marguerite (my mother), her best beloved; but my good mother was everybody's best beloved. I have never in my life known a woman to be so universally cherished.

Aunt Gabrielle had only two faults: she spoiled children horribly, and she gave the poor whatever she could lay her hands on. It often happened that after a too liberal distribution of supplies among her beggars, she would set before us at dinner a dish so ridiculously out of proportion to the requirements of our appetites that she would herself burst into a laugh as she

looked at it. We all joined in the laugh, which seemed to make us forget how hungry we were. She was the factotum of the house, and was just as exacting and despotic as she was kind.

On that night she was greatly excited; and when she came up to kiss my mother, instead of folding her in her arms as she was in the habit of doing, she whispered something to her with an expression of importance and anger.

"Calm yourself, Gabrielle; calm yourself," my mother said to her several times, and I felt her hand tremble.

"No, my dear, I cannot help it! And if you do not choose to do it, I will do it myself."

"You will do nothing of the sort," said my mother. "And you will remember that I am the mistress in my own house."

She pushed her gently, that the others might move along; but Aunt Gabrielle joined the women who were going out, several of whom stopped to speak to her. They were all making gestures of indignation as they looked at poor Marion, who had withdrawn into the darkest corner of the hall, and there stood with her head down and her face turned away from them.

Finally they seemed to have taken a resolution, and they moved toward her as though to drive her away; but they were stopped by these few words, uttered in a low tone, and at which all the conversations ceased at once.

"Come to me, Marion."

Marion started as though she meant to spring forward; but she checked herself and crossed the room slowly with hesitating steps. My mother kissed her on both cheeks just as she had kissed the others. I realized that she was performing what she considered a duty, and that she too greatly disapproved of my poor friend.

Gabrielle held up her arms in horror.

"Do not dare to come to work to-morrow!" she cried aloud; "for you will never work for us again. I discharge you; do you understand?"

She understood but too well. It was as though she had just heard her death-sentence. There was no house but ours where she could find work as a seamstress, and to discharge her was like condemning her to starvation.

My mother's voice was heard again, low, but full of gentle firmness.

"To-morrow Marion's work will be taken to her at her own house."

"I will not be the one to take it," cried Aunt Gabrielle, whose words produced a murmur of approbation.

"Then I will take it myself," said my mother, "if I can find no one to obey me."

Marion had disappeared.

There were only a few women left; their cheeks were aglow with anger. The resin candles had been put out. The room was lighted by the Yule log only, which blazed in the fireplace.

"Let us go and pray God," said my mother, slipping her arm through that of Gabrielle, who protested and submitted at the same time, and kissed my mother fully ten times before we reached the church.

The church was dazzling, for the simple reason that as there was no way of lighting it, no lamps of any description, every faithful was requested to bring a light with him. There were surely a thousand persons in the building, which represented a thousand lights. I will confess that these were neither lamps nor tapers nor even vulgar tallow candles. They were mere wax lighters, which singly you may despise as you please, but which, multiplied thus, formed a luminous floor under the dark vault: when you looked down, it was joyous, dazzling; and when you looked up, it was appalling. The altar fairly glittered. All of our candles figured there in addition to those which belonged to the church. There was just room enough between the lights for the chalice and the missal. The rector was arrayed in a fine scarlet chasuble, a bit worn and faded, which had survived the Revolution. The mayor occupied the seat of honor, wearing the dress of the Breton peasant,—blue vest embroidered in red and yellow silk, with a splendid sun in the middle of the back. Beside him sat the deputy mayor, M. Adelys, the miller of Kerdroguen; and both wore white silk sashes which covered their breasts and stomachs. The blacksmith was there too in his quality of justice's clerk, wearing the black gown and cap of the magistracy. M. de la Goublaye, the justice and chevalier of Saint Louis,

had been detained in his château of Keriennec by the gout. But we had a corporal of gendarmery opposite the altar and two gendarmes on either side with yellow shoulder-belts. Plumelec, where they lived, would have gladly enough kept them at home on such an occasion, but St. Jean Brévelay was the chief town of the canton.

At the appearance of the celebrant the corporal cried out,—

"Gendarmes, hands to your sabres!" Whereupon the music, consisting of a fife and a drum, filled the church. That was the supreme moment of my life. I conquered sleep so as not to miss it. I thought of it through the whole year. You will not wonder, therefore, when I tell you that I forgot all about Marion from midnight until about two o'clock.

Everything was over by two o'clock. The fife and drum had escorted the priest to the rectory; the *quinquiss* had put out the lights on the altar; and as all the faithful had blown upon their meagre luminaries the church was completely dark. In a few moments it was deserted, and not a sound was to be heard save that of the swaying pendulum. On the other hand, the graveyard was crowded. If it happened to be raining or snowing too hard, the people took refuge in the houses; but they gave this proof of weakness only when they could no longer hold out. The taverns were overflowing with customers. Some people stood a little table out at their door, and upon it they placed a loaf, a *cervelas*, and numerous bottles of cider, thus defrauding, in connivance with the authority, the tax on consumable commodities. At three o'clock the bells rang for the Mass of the Aurora.

After the ceremony our people came for us and awaited us at the church door with a huge red cotton umbrella, which did us as much honor as the same utensil does a Roman cardinal. We were also provided with an extra pair of wooden shoes half filled with warm ashes. We hastened home, exchanging courtesies with all, but stopping with no one; for there was a Christmas supper in our kitchen,—a supper to which all our friends were invited, and besides them all the servants who had been present at the blessing of the Yule log.

During midnight Mass the great kitchen table had been replaced by boards laid as evenly as possible upon props. These were covered by a cloth of dazzling whiteness,—the pride of my poor mother, who used to bleach it on the grass of our meadow. On this occasion we had candles on the table,—real candles, of seven to the pound, which were sent for a week beforehand to Vannes. We considered our menu decidedly sumptuous. We had buckwheat pancakes, accompanied by numerous pots of cider and the most delicious butter. After that, we were helped to a porringer of the very worst chocolate that was ever manufactured by a country grocer. We tried to convince ourselves that this course was excellent. It had to be served on that day, and to be drunk, and to be praised, but then we had the pleasure of feeling that we should not be called upon to repeat the sacrifice for a year. We also had a home-cured ham and rye bread. Everybody stood up during the *Benedicite*, then those who found room on the benches sat down; the others helped themselves over the heads of these privileged ones, and took their share out into the street with them.

The assailants succeeded one another until the table was cleared. Everybody was cheerful and contented; there was never a man who forgot himself. These peasants, who had had no breeding, were by nature well-bred. Then they all loved one another in that country of poor people; and, above all, —may I be allowed to say it? the thought is so pleasing to me in my old age,—they all loved us.

I never remained until the end. I merely stepped in to get a peep at the beautiful celebration and to fill my eyes and my imagination with it. On the night to which I refer I managed to stay down longer than usual. I looked for Marion everywhere. There were others, too, who were looking for her. My mother's conduct had been criticised and rather disapproved of; for those were simple folk, virtuous themselves and pitiless to others. If Marion had been brutally discharged, they would have applauded. Now they believed her to be forgiven; and they felt her forgiveness to be in a measure an encouragement to vice. Aunt Gabrielle had found time to speak to the rector, to excuse Marguerite, she said; but without realizing it she had merely expressed her disapprobation. I not only remember all these details after sixty-five years, but I remember the room in which the scene took place. I can even evoke the faces and the attitudes,—the saintly protectress, somewhat moved, but very resolute; the rector, restless and anxious; Gabrielle and her confederates, pitiless in their censure. Although not a word had been uttered in my presence concerning the nature of Marion's fault, I had understood it all, thanks to "Celina," no doubt. It is useless to state which side my heart was

on. The priest was anxious above all things to preserve in our parish those rigid customs for which we were famed.

"A moral plague must be treated just like a physical plague, with heroic remedies," said he.

"We must be charitable," said my mother. "Our God is a God of charity."

The priest was of the opinion that the sinner should not under any [Pg 174] consideration be allowed to come back to the house and work among the maid-servants.

"Why, of course not; I never thought of such a thing," said my mother, in that sweet voice of hers that reached one's soul. "We must make this an example, a warning for our girls. I will see to that, never fear. I am just as anxious about it as you are. She will live alone with her child. I did not care to crush her under the weight of a public anathema, nor would I be so inexorable as to condemn her to mendicity or debauch, that is all. I said to my poor Gabrielle, who is so ungovernable to-night," she added, smiling, "that I would take her work myself if I found nobody to obey me; but that is not exactly what I meant. What I meant was this: I will go to her myself; I will go every day. I will assume, or rather encroach upon your rights. I will exhort, I will preach to her; I will make her see that she is among sisters whom her conduct has grieved, but among sisters, nevertheless."

She said all this with kindness, simplicity, and firmness.

The priest lifted his broad-brimmed hat from his head. "I uncover my white hair before you, Madame," said he, in a loud voice, "and I pray God to bless [Pg 175] the task that you have undertaken for his sake. My children, Marion will come back and work among you when she has made atonement for her fault. Until then I leave her entirely in your mistress's hands. If she does not lead her back to the path of virtue, we priests will have to give it up. Our Latin will not help us out of it."

This very mild pleasantry excited much admiration, as everything did that fell from those venerable lips.

For my part I was delighted, having a confused impression that we had gained a great victory; and I ran off to bed after having kissed my mother with unusual tenderness.

THE MULE AND THE OX.

From the Spanish of Benito Pérez Galdós.

I.

he poor little one had ceased to moan; she turned her head slightly and stared with wide eyes at those who stood around her bed; her breath came fainter, fainter, until it stopped altogether. She was dead. The guardian angel uttered a deep sigh, unfolded his wings, and flew away.

The poor mother could not believe in the reality of so much sorrow; still Celinina's exquisite face was growing diaphanous and yellow, like wax; her limbs were cold; and her body finally became rigid and hard like that of a doll. Then the mother was led away from the alcove, while the father, the nearest relatives, two or three friends, and the servants performed the last duties toward the dead child.

They dressed her in a beautiful gown of lawn that was as white and as sheer as a cloud, and covered with frills and laces that looked like foam. They put on her shoes, which were white too, and whose soles showed that they had taken but few steps. They braided her lovely dark chestnut hair, and arranged it gracefully about her head, intertwining it with blue ribbons. They tried to find fresh flowers, but the season was too far advanced, and there were none to be had; so they made her a wreath of artificial ones, selecting only those which were beautiful and which might have been mistaken for real blossoms just from the garden. Then a very repulsive man brought a box, just a trifle larger than the case of a violin, lined with blue silk and elaborately adorned with white satin and silver braid. Celinina was laid in it: an exquisite soft pillow was placed under her head, so that her position might not seem strained; and when she had been carefully and tenderly fixed in her funereal couch, they crossed her little hands, tied them together with a ribbon, and slipped a bunch of white roses between them,—roses so artistically fashioned that they seemed to be the very children of Spring.

The women threw gorgeous draperies over a table, adorned it like an altar, and laid the coffin upon it. They arranged other altars, too, after the manner of church canopies, with fine white curtains, gracefully caught back on either side. They brought a great quantity of saints and images from other rooms, which they disposed with great art in symmetrical groups, forming a sort of funereal court around the departed angel. They also brought in, without losing a moment, the great candelabrum from the parlor, and lighted several dozen tapers, which shed their mournful glow upon Celinina. Then they kissed the child's frozen cheek again and again, and their pious task was done.

II.

From the other end of the house, from the depths of the bedrooms, came the moans of a man and a woman, the heart-rending lamentations of the parents who could not be convinced of the truth of those aphorisms about angels in heaven, administered by friends as a sort of moral sedative on these occasions. They believed, on the contrary, that this world is the proper and natural habitation for angels; nor could they admit the theory that the death of a grown person is far more lamentable and disastrous than that of a child. Mingled with their grief was that profound pity which the death-agony of an infant always inspires, and to them there was no sorrow in life like that which was tearing their very vitals. A thousand memories and painful visions struck at their hearts like so many daggers. The mother's ears rang with Celinina's lispings,—that enchanting baby-talk that gets everything wrong, and converts the words of our language into delicious philological caricatures, which caricatures, flowing from rosy mouths, are the tenderest and most affecting music to a mother's heart.

Nothing so characterizes a child as his style,—his spontaneous mode of expression, the art of saying everything with four letters, his prehistoric grammar, which is like the first sobbing of the words at the dawn of humanity, his simple rules of declension and conjugation, innocent corrections of the languages which usage has legitimatized. The vocabulary of a child of three, like Celinina, is the real literary treasure of a family. How could her mother ever forget the little pink tongue that said "wat" for hat, and called a bean a "ween"! No matter where she turned, the good woman's eyes were sure to fall

upon some of the toys with which Celinina had cheered the last days of her life; and as these were the days that preceded Christmas, the floor was strewn with little clay turkeys on wire legs, a Saint Joseph that had lost both hands, a manger in which lay the Christ-Child, like a little pink ball, a wise man from the Orient mounted upon a proud, headless camel. What these poor little figures had endured during the past few days, dragged here and there, made to assume this or that posture, was known only to God, the mother, and the pure little spirit that had taken its flight.

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All this broken statuary was imbued with Celinina's very soul,—clothed with a peculiar sad light, which was the light from her, as it were. The mother trembled from head to foot as she gazed at them, and she felt that the wound had been dealt to her innermost being. Strange association of things! How all these broken pieces of clay seemed to weep! They seemed so grieved, so full of intense sorrow, that the sight of them was scarcely less bitter than the spectacle of the dying child herself, who with appealing eyes begged her parents to take the pain away from her burning head. To the mother nothing could have been more pathetic than that turkey with its wire legs, which in its frequent changes of posture had lost its crest and its bill.

III.

The mother's grief was surely intense, but the father's affliction was still more profound. She was transpierced with sorrow,—his pain was aggravated by the stings of remorse. This is how it came about. It will no doubt seem very childish to some people; however, let them bear in mind that nothing is more open to childishness than a deep, pure sorrow, free from any touch of worldly interests or the secondary sufferings of unsatisfied egoism.

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From the very first and all through her illness Celinina's mind was filled with dreams of Christmas,—of the poetic celebration supremely delightful to children. We all know how they long for the joyful day, how crazed they are by the feverish yearning for presents and Bethlehem mangers, by the thought of how much they will eat, by the prospect of satiating themselves with turkey, sponge-cake, candied almonds, and nut-pastes. Some little ones ingenuously believe that were they only allowed to do so, they might easily stow away in their stomachs all the displays of the Plaza Mayor and the adjacent streets.

Celinina in her intervals of relief gave her whole soul to the engrossing theme. Her little cousins, who came to sit with her, were older than she, and had exhausted the entire fund of human knowledge with regard to celebrations, presents, and Bethlehem mangers. The poor child's fancy and her longing for toys and sweets accordingly grew more and more excited as she listened to them. In her delirium, when the fever dragged her into its oven of torture, her prattle was of the things that preyed upon her mind; and it was all about beating drums and tam-tams, and singing Christmas carols. The darkness of her brain was peopled with turkeys, crying, gobble! gobble! and chickens that said, peep! peep! mountains of nut-pastes that reached up to the skies, forming a *guadarrama* of almonds, Bethlehem mangers full of lights, and in which there were fifty thousand million figures at the very least, great bouquets of sweetmeats, trees laden with as many toys as can be conceived by the most fecund Tyrolese imagination, the pond of the Retiro filled with almond soup, red gilt-heads looking up at the cooks with coagulated eyes, oranges falling from the skies in far greater quantities than the drops of water during a rainstorm, and thousands and thousands of other inexpressible prodigies.

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IV.

Celinina was an only child; and when she was taken ill, her father's uneasiness and anxiety knew no limit. His business called him away during the day, but he managed to run in every now and then to see how the little invalid was. The disease pursued its course with treacherous alternatives, giving and withdrawing hope.

The good man had his misgivings. The picture of Celinina, lying in her little bed crushed with pain and fever, never left his mind for a moment. He was heedful of everything that might cheer her and brighten the gloom of her suffering, so every night he brought home with him some Christmas present, something different every time, scrupulously avoiding sweets, however. One day he brought a flock of turkeys, so cleverly made, so lifelike, that one fairly expected to hear them gobble. The next night he drew one half of the Holy Family from his pockets, then again a little Saint Joseph, the manger and the portico of the Bethlehem stable. Once it was a superb drove of sheep driven

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by proud shepherds, and later on he brought some washerwomen washing their clothes, and a sausage-maker selling sausages, and two Magi, one black and the other with a white beard and a golden crown. What did he not bring? He even brought an old woman very indecorously spanking a small boy for not knowing his lesson. From what she had heard her cousins say about the requirements of a Bethlehem manger, Celinina knew that hers was incomplete, and this for want of two very important figures,—the Mule and the Ox. Of course she had no idea of the significance of the Mule or the Ox; but in her thirst for absolute perfection of composition, she asked her solicitous father again and again for the two animals, which seemed to be about the only things that the good man had left in the toy shops. He accordingly promised to bring them, and took a firm resolution not to come home without both beasts; but it happened that on that day, which was the 23d, he had an accumulation of things to do. Besides, as luck would have it, the drawing of the lottery took place just then, he was notified of having won a lawsuit, not to speak of the arrival of two affectionate friends who managed to keep in his way all the morning; so he came home without the Mule or the Ox.

Celinina was greatly disappointed when she found that he had not brought her the two jewels that were to complete her treasure. The good man was about to repair his fault immediately, but just then the doctor came in. Celinina had grown considerably worse during the day; and as his words were far from comforting, nobody thought of mules or oxen.

On the 24th the poor father resolved not to leave the house. For a brief moment, however, Celinina seemed so much better that her parents were wild with hope, and the father said joyously,—

"I am going right out to get those things."

But it was not a moment before Celinina fell into an intense fever, just as a bird, wounded in its upward flight through the pure regions of the air, drops swiftly to the ground. She tossed about, trembling and suffocating in the hot arms of her disease, that tightened around her and shook her violently as if to eject her life. In the confusion of her delirium, on the broken waves of her thoughts, like the one thing saved from a cataclysm, floated the persistent yearning, the idea of that longed-for mule and that sighed-for ox.

The father rushed out of the house like a madman, then suddenly, "This is no time to think of figures for a Bethlehem manger," thought he; and running here and there, climbing stairs and ringing door-bells, he succeeded in getting seven or eight doctors, whom he took home with him. Celinina should be saved at any cost.

V.

But apparently it was not the will of God that the seven or eight disciples of Æsculapius should interfere with the orders he had given, so Celinina grew worse and worse, struggling with indescribable anguish, like a bruised butterfly quivering with broken wings on the ground. Her parents bent over her with wild anxiety, as though they expected to detain her in this world by

the power of their will, as though they expected to arrest the rapid course of human disorganization, and breathe their own life into the little martyr, who was exhaling hers in a sigh.

From the street came the thumping of drums and the jingling of tambourines. Celinina opened her eyes; and with an appealing look and a few solemn words, which seemed already the language of another world, she asked her father for that which he had failed to bring her. The father and mother, in their distress, thought of deceiving her; and with the hope of casting a ray of happiness through the misery of this supreme moment they handed her the turkeys, saying, "Look, my darling, here are the little mule and the little ox."

But Celinina, even at the point of death, was conscious enough to know that turkeys can never be anything but turkeys; and she pushed them away gently. From that time on she lay still with her great eyes fixed on her parents, and her little hand on her head to show them where the terrible pain was. That rhythmical sound which is like the last vibration of life gradually grew fainter and fainter, until it was hushed entirely, like the machinery of a clock that has stopped, and the dainty little girl was only an exquisite scrap of matter, inert, cold, and as white and transparent as the sublimated wax that burns on the altars.

Now you understand the father's remorse. To bring his little Celinina back

to life he would have scoured the face of the earth and collected all the oxen and all the mules upon it. The thought of not having satisfied this innocent desire was the sharpest and coldest blade that pierced his heart. Vainly did he appeal to his reason; of what account was his reason? He was quite as much of a child as the little one asleep in the coffin, for he gave greater importance to a toy just then than to anything else on earth or in heaven.

VI.

The moans of despair at last died away in the house, as if grief, piercing its way into the very depths of the soul, which is its natural dwelling-place, had closed after it the windows of the senses, so as to be alone and luxuriate in itself.

This was Christmas Eve; and while stillness reigned in the home so recently visited by death, from all the other houses and from the streets of the city came the joyous roar of rude musical instruments and the clamorous voices of children and adults singing the advent of the Messiah. The shouts [Pg 189] from the flat above could be heard in the very parlor where the dead child lay; and the pious women who sat with her were perturbed in their sorrow and their devout meditation. On the upper floor many small children, with a still greater number of large ones, happy papas and mammas, excited aunts and uncles, were celebrating Christmas and were going mad with delight before the most admirable Bethlehem manger that was ever dreamed of and the most luxuriant tree that ever grew toys and sweetmeats, and which bore on its limbs a thousand lighted tapers. The parlor ceiling seemed to shake under the great commotion; the poor little corpse quivered in its blue coffin; and all the lights in the room oscillated as though they wished to proclaim that they too were somewhat tipsy. Two of the good women retired; one alone remained, but her head felt very heavy, no doubt because she had lost so much sleep on the preceding nights; so after a little her chin sank on her breast and everything melted from her consciousness.

The lights continued to waver, although there was no draught in the room. One might have believed that invisible wings were fluttering about the altar. The lace on Celinina's gown rose and fell; and the petals of her artificial flowers betrayed the passage of a playful breeze, or the soft touch of tender [Pg 190] hands. Just then Celinina opened her eyes. They filled the room with bright inquiring glances cast down and up and around her. She instantly unclasped her hands, the ribbon that bound them together offering no resistance; and closing her little fists, she rubbed both eyes as children do when they awake. Then with a quick movement, and without the slightest effort, she sat up, and looking upward at the ceiling, she began to laugh,—a peculiar inaudible laugh apparent to the eyes alone. The one sound that reached the ear was the rapid beating of wings, as if all the doves of the earth were flying in and out of the death-chamber, brushing their feathers against the walls and ceiling. Then Celinina rose to her feet, stretched out her arms, and two short white wings sprouted from her shoulders. They flapped and beat for a few seconds; then she rose in the air and disappeared.

In the parlor everything remained as it was; the lights glowed on the altar, pouring copious streams of melted wax on the *bobeches*. The images all stood in their places without moving an arm or a leg or unsealing their austere lips. The good woman was plunged in a profound sleep which must have been a special blessing to her. Nothing had changed, except that the little blue coffin had been left empty.

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VII.

What a royal celebration at the home of the Señores of —— to-night! The house is filled with the thunder of drums. Children cannot be made to understand that they might enjoy things a great deal more if they only omitted the infernal noise of the warlike instrument. But this is not all. In order that no human tympanum may be left in condition to perform its natural functions the next day, they have added to the drum the thumping of the *zambomba*,—that hellish contrivance whose sounds were intended to reproduce the growls of Satan. The symphony is completed by the tambourine, which, like the rattling of old tin pans, would irritate the most placid nerves; and still this discordant hubbub without rhythm or melody, more primitive than the music of savages, is inspiriting and cheerful on this particular night, and bears something of a distant likeness to a celestial choir.

The Bethlehem manger is not a work of art to the adults; but to the children the figures are so beautiful, there is such a mystic expression on

their countenances and so much propriety in their costumes, that they scarcely believe them to be the work of human hands, and are inclined to lay it all to the industry of a certain class of angels who make a living by working in clay. The entrance of the stable, carved out of cork, and imitating a partly ruined Roman arch, is a dream of beauty; and the little river made of looking-glass, with its green spots representing aquatic growths and the moss of its banks, seems really to be rippling along the table with a soft murmur. The bridge over which the shepherds are coming is a masterpiece. Never before was pasteboard known to look so exactly like stone,—a striking contrast this to the works of our modern engineers, who build bridges of stone, that look exactly like pasteboard. The mountain that rises in the centre of the landscape might be taken for a scrap of the Pyrenees; and its exquisite cottages, a trifle smaller than the figures, and its mimic trees with little limbs of real foliage are far more real than Nature.

But the most attractive, the most characteristic figures are those on the plain,—the washerwomen washing clothes at the stream; the chicken and turkey tenders driving their flocks before them; then an officer of the civil guards taking two scamps off to jail; gentlemen riding in luxurious carriages, brushing past the camel of the Magi; and Perico, the blind man, playing on the guitar to a little group of people through which the shepherds have elbowed their way on their return from their worship at the manger. A tram-car runs along from one extremity of the landscape to the other, just exactly as it does in the Salamanca quarter; and as it has wheels and real tracks, it is kept going from east to west, much to the surprise of the black Magi, who cannot make out what sort of a machine it can possibly be.

The arch opens upon a beautiful square, in the centre of which stands a little glass aquarium. A short distance away a newsboy is selling papers, and two Majos are dancing prettily. The capital pieces of this marvellous people of clay, those upon which all eyes are centred, are the fritter-vender and the old woman selling chestnuts on the street corner; and the children fairly split their sides at the sight of the small ragamuffin, who holds out a lottery ticket to the old chestnut woman, while with the other hand he quietly pilfers her nuts.

In a word, there is no Bethlehem manger in all Madrid that can be compared to this one; for this is one of the great homes of the capital, and the parlors are crowded with the best-bred and most beautiful children to be found within a radius of twenty streets.

VIII.

And how about the tree? The tree is composed of oak and cedar limbs. The solicitous friend of the family who expended no small amount of patience and ingenuity in its construction declares that a more finished and perfect piece of work never left his hands. It would be impossible to count the presents that dangle from its branches. According to the computation of a small boy present, they are more numerous than the grains of sand on the seashore. There are sweetmeats nestling in shells of frilled paper, mandarins which are the wee babes of the oranges, chestnuts draped in mantillas of silver paper, tiny boxes containing bonbons of homœopathic proportions, figures of every variety, on foot and on horseback,—in a word, everything that God ever created with a view to its being perfected later on by the confectioner or sold by Scropp, has been put here by hands which are as liberal as they are skilful. This tree of life is illumined by such an abundance of little wax tapers that according to the testimony of a four-year-old guest there were more lights there than the stars in heaven. The delight of this youthful swarm is not comparable to any human sentiment. It is the ineffable joy of the celestial choirs in presence of the Supreme Good and Supreme Beauty. They are almost reasonable in their overflowing satisfaction; and they stand half perplexed in a seraphic ecstasy, with their whole soul in their eyes, anticipating all that they are going to eat, floating like angels of heaven in the pure ether of sweet and delicious things, in the perfume of flowers and cinnamon, in the increate essence of youthful greediness and play.

IX.

But they are suddenly startled by a sound which does not proceed from them. They all look up at the ceiling; and as they see nothing there, they all look at one another again and begin to laugh. A great rushing sound is heard, —the rustle of wings as they brush against the walls and strike the ceiling. Had they been blind, they might have believed that all the doves from all the

dovecots in the universe had gotten into the parlor. But they saw nothing; that is, no wings, absolutely none. What they did see, however, was phenomenal and inexplicable enough in itself. All the figures of the Bethlehem manger began to move; they were all very quietly being changed around. The tram-car [Pg 196] made an ascension to the very pinnacle of the mountain; and the Magi walked straight into the river on all fours. The turkeys passed under the arch and entered the stable without saying by your leave; and Saint Joseph stepped out in a state of perplexity, trying to make out what could be the cause of such extraordinary confusion. Then a number of figures were very coolly tumbled off on the floor. At first they had been moved about very carefully, but suddenly there was a great stir, then a perfect hurly-burly, in which a hundred thousand busy hands seemed eager to turn every thing topsy-turvy. It was a miniature of the universal cataclysm. Its secular cement giving way, the mountain was levelled; the river changed its course; and scattering the broken bits of mirror from its bed, it overflowed the plain disastrously. The very roofs of the cottages were sunken in the sand. The Roman arch trembled as though it were beaten by fierce winds; and as a number of little lights went out, the sun was obscured, and so were the luminaries of the night. In the midst of the general stupor that such a phenomenon naturally produced, some of the little ones laughed wildly, while others cried. A superstitious old lady said, "Don't you know who is doing all this? Why, the dead children who are in [Pg 197] heaven and whom Father God permits to come down on Christmas Eve and play with the Bethlehem mangers."

After a little it was all over; the rushing sound of beating wings grew fainter and fainter. Many of those who were present proceeded to investigate the damages. One gentleman said,—

"Why, the table has been broken down and all the figures have been upset?" Then everybody began to pick up the figures and put them in their places. After counting them over and identifying them, it was found that some were missing. They looked everywhere, and looked again, but to no effect. There were two figures wanting,—the Mule and the Ox.

X.

Just a little before dawn the disturbers were on the road to heaven, as merry as crickets, frisking and skipping about among the clouds. There were millions and millions of them, all beautiful, pure, divine, with short white wings beating faster than those of the swiftest birds on earth.

This white swarm was greater than anything that the eye can focus in visible space, and it spread over the moon and the stars, and the firmament seemed filled with little fleecy clouds.

[Pg 198] "Hurry, hurry, my dears!" said a voice among them; "the first thing you know it will be day, and Grandpapa God will scold us for being late. If the truth must be told, the Bethlehem mangers this year are not worth a penny. When I recall those of former times—" Celinina was one of this merry throng, but as this was her first experience in those altitudes, she felt somewhat giddy.

"Come over here," one of them cried to her; "give me your hand, and you will fly straighter—but what is that? What have you there?"

"'Em's my sings," said Celinina, pressing two rude little clay figures to her bosom.

"Listen, my dear, throw those away. It is very evident that you are just from the earth. Let me tell you how it is. Although we have all the toys we want in heaven,—eternal and ever-beautiful toys,—Grandpapa God lets us go down on Christmas Eve just to stir up the Bethlehem mangers a little. You needn't think they are not having a glorious time in heaven too to-night; and for my part, I believe they send us off on account of our being so noisy. But Grandpapa God lets us go down into the houses only on condition that we take away nothing, and here you have pilfered this!"

These weighty reasons did not seem to impress Celinina as they should [Pg 199] have done, for pressing the animals more closely to her bosom, she merely repeated,—

"My sings,—'em's my sings."

"Listen, goosy," continued the other; "if you don't do what I tell you, you'll get us all into trouble. Fly back and leave them, for they are of the earth, and on the earth they should remain. Don't be foolish; you can go and be back in less than a minute. I'll wait for you on this cloud."

Celinina was at last convinced and started off to restore her theft to the earth.

XI.

This is how it came to pass that Celinina's corpse, that which had been her visible self, was found the next morning holding two little clay animals instead of the bunch of artificial flowers. No one could solve the mystery, not even the women who kept watch, nor the father, nor the mother; and the beautiful little girl, for whom so many tears were shed, went down into the earth clasping the Mule and the Ox in her cold little hands.

SOLANGE, THE WOLF-GIRL.

From the French of Marcel Prévost.

All that afternoon we had walked through the forest, stick in hand, our bags slung over our shoulders, through that magnificent forest of Tronsays, which covers one half the St. Amand country, and one half of Nevers. The little village of Ursay, squatting on the bank of the Cher, in the rent of the valley which cuts through the centre of the forest, was our last halting-place for the day. We dined with an old friend, the modest doctor of five or six neighboring communes; and after dinner we sat musing on the stoop, with our cherry pipes between our lips.

The shadows fell around us, over the dense blue mass of forest that encircled the horizon with all the solemn slowness of night in June. The sky was streaked with flights of swallows. The nine o'clock Angelus scattered its notes with intervals of silence from the height of a snuffer-like steeple which emerged from among the roofs. From distant farms came the barking of dogs calling and answering one another.

A woman, still young, in a red woollen skirt and a white linen shirt, came out of a house near by, and walked down toward the river. With her left arm she pressed a baby against her bosom. A little boy held her other hand, and gave his in turn to a still smaller brother. When they reached the bank of the Cher, the young woman sat upon a great stone; and while the two boys, hastily undressed, were paddling and splashing about like ducks in the stream, she nursed her last-born.

One of our party, who was a painter, said, "There is a picture that would be popular at the Salon. How splendidly built and well-lighted that woman is! And what a pretty bright spot that red skirt forms in the blue landscape!"

A voice behind us called out,—

"The girl you see there, young men, is Solange, the wolf-girl." And our host, who had been detained by a consultation, came out to join us. As we asked him who was this wolf-girl, and how she had come by so strange a nickname, he told us this story,—

"This Solange, the wolf-girl, whose real name is Solange Tournier, wife of Grillet, was the prettiest girl in the whole Tronsays country about ten years ago. Now, of course, working in the fields as she does, and having had five children, she looks hardened and worn. Still, considering her thirty years, she is handsome enough, as you see. At the time of the adventure whence she derived her strange nickname she was living with her parents, who were farmers of the Rein-du-Bois, some fifteen kilometres from here. Although very poor, she was much sought by all the boys, even by the well-to-do; but she accepted the addresses of only one,—a certain Laurent Grillet, on whom she had set her heart when she was a wee bit of a girl, when the two kept the sheep together in the neighborhood of Rein-du-Bois.

"Laurent Grillet was a foundling, who had nothing in the world but his two arms for a fortune. Solange's parents felt no inclination to add poverty to poverty, especially as the girl had so many wealthy suitors.

"So Solange was forbidden to see her friend. Naturally, the girl never failed at a tryst. Living in the same commune, with the forest at hand, they never lost an opportunity of meeting there. When the father and mother Tournier realized that scoldings and blows were of no avail, they determined upon a radical step. Solange was accordingly sent out to work at Ursay, on the model farm of M. Roger Duflos, our deputy.

"Perhaps you think our two lovers ceased to see each other. Not in the least. They now met at night; they slept no more. After nightfall they both left the farms where they were employed and started toward each other; and then they remained together until nearly dawn in the maternal forest, the accomplice of their young love.

"This was in 1879. In this manner the summer and autumn went by. Then came the winter, and a fierce winter it was. The Cher carried ice-drifts, and finally froze from bank to bank. The Tronsays forests, covered with snow, were bent like the weak supports of an overladen roof. The roads were almost impassable. The forest, deserted by man, was gradually being reconquered by beasts. It was soon invaded by wolves, which had neither been seen nor heard

of since the Terrible year.

"Yes, sir, wolves! They haunted the isolated farms around Lurcy-Lévy and Ursay. They even ventured into the streets of St. Bonnet le Désert,—a little village in the heart of the forest on the banks of a pond. It reached such a point that men were organized into bands to beat the woods. A reward of fifty francs was offered for the head of a wolf.

"Neither winter nor wolves, however, daunted Solange and Laurent, or interfered with their nocturnal meetings. They continued their expeditions in the face of a thousand dangers. This was the dead season in the fields, the time when the land lies fallow. Every night Laurent left Lurcy-Lévy, a gun over his shoulder, and penetrated with a lively step into the black and white forest. Solange, on the other hand, started from Ursay at about nine o'clock, and they met near a glade some three kilometres from here, traversed by a road, and known as the Découverte.

"It so happened that one night, which, by the way, was Christmas Eve, Laurent Grillet, as he reached the rendezvous, slipped on the hardened snow and fell, breaking his right leg and spraining his right wrist. Solange tried to raise him, but could only drag him to a great elm, against which she propped him, after wrapping him in her own cloak.

"'Wait for me here, my poor Laurent,' said she; 'I will run to Ursay for the doctor, and get him to come for you in his carryall.'

"She started off, but had not reached the first turn in the road when she heard a report and the cry, 'Help!'

"She ran back and found her friend in an agony of pain and fear, his trembling hand on the gun which lay beside him. She said, 'What is it, Laurent? Was it you who fired?'

"He answered, 'It was I. I saw a beast about the size of a large dog, and with great red eyes. I believe, on my word, it was a wolf.'

"'Was it at him you fired?'

"'No. I cannot lift my gun on account of my arm. I fired on the ground to scare him. He has gone now.'

"Solange reflected for a moment. 'Will he come back?'

"'I am afraid he will,' answered the lad. 'Solange, you will have to stay, or that beast will eat me.'

"'Well,' she said, 'I will stay. Let me have the gun.'

"She took it, put in a fresh cartridge, and they both waited.

"An hour passed. The moon, as yet invisible, had risen, however, above the horizon, for the zenith reflected a confused light, which was gradually growing more intense. Laurent felt the fever coming upon him. He shivered and moaned. Solange, half frozen, as she stood leaning against the tree, was beginning to feel drowsy. Suddenly a bark—a sort of howl like that of a dog at night when it is tied—made her start. In the faint light she saw two red eyes fixed upon her. It was the wolf. Laurent tried to rise and take his gun, but the pain flung him back with a cry.

"'Load, Solange,' said he. 'Do not fire too soon, and aim between the eyes.'

"She shouldered, aimed, and fired, but the gun recoiled and missed aim. The beast was untouched. It ran off a short way down the road. Then it was heard howling at a distance, and other howls came in answer.

"The moon was climbing the sky. It suddenly passed the dark mass of the thickets and flooded the entire forest as the footlights illumine the scenery on the stage. Then Solange and Laurent saw this horrible sight: at a few feet from them five wolves were seated on their haunches, drawn in line across the road, while another, bolder than the rest, was walking slowly toward them.

"'Listen,' said Laurent. 'Aim at that one that is coming. If you bring him down, the others will eat him, and they will leave us in peace in the mean time.'

"The wolf continued to advance with short, cautious steps. They could now see his bloodshot eyeballs distinctly, the protruding rings of his spine, the sharp bones of his carcass, his dull hair and his open jaw, with the long tongue hanging out. 'Hold the butt-end well in the hollow of your shoulder. Now fire.'

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"There was a report; the beast leaped to one side and fell dead without a groan. The whole band galloped off and disappeared in the copse.

"'Run, Solange!' cried Laurent; 'drag him as far as you can along the road. There is no danger; the others will not come back for a while yet.'

"She had started, when he called her back. 'It might be just as well to cut off that beast's head on account of the reward.'

"'Have you a knife?' asked Solange.

"'Yes; in my belt.'

"It was a short-handled, broad-bladed hunter's knife. She took it and ran to the dead wolf. She made a great effort and drove it in his throat, the warm blood trickling down her hands and along her skirt; she turned her knife around, cut deep, then hacked, and finally severed the head from the trunk, which she dragged by one leg over the slippery snow as far as she could. Then she returned to her lover with the bloody, bristly head of the beast in her hand.

"What Laurent had foreseen occurred. The wolves, at first frightened by the death of their leader, were soon brought back by the smell of the blood. In the white light of the moon, reflected by the snow like the fantastic light of a fairy scene, the two young people saw the group of lean, ravenous beasts [Pg 209] rubbing their backs against one another, crowding around the fresh prey, tearing it limb from limb, growling and snarling over it, wrenching off the flesh, until nothing was left of it, not even a tuft of hair.

"Meanwhile the boy was suffering greatly from his injuries. Solange, whose nerves were beginning to relax, struggled vainly against exhaustion and sleep. Twice her gun fell from her hands. The wolves, having finished their meal, began to draw nearer. The girl fired twice in the lot, but her benumbed fingers trembled and she missed her aim. At each report the band turned tail, trotted about a hundred metres down the road, waited a moment and came back.

"Then the two poor children were convinced that it was all over with them, and that they must die. Solange dropped her gun. It never once occurred to her that she might save herself. She threw herself down beside her lover, clasped her arms around him, laid her cheek against his, and there under the same cloak they awaited death, half frozen with the cold, half burning with fever. Their confused brains conjured strange visions. Now they thought they had gone back to the balmy nights of June when the forest, clad in deep green, sheltered their peaceful meetings, then suddenly the wood was bare, lighted with a weird snowy light, peopled with shifting forms, eyes like [Pg 210] burning embers, great open jaws that multiplied, and came nearer, ever nearer.

"But neither Solange nor Laurent was destined to die so horrible a death. Providence—yes, young men, I believe in a Providence—had decreed that I, on that Christmas morning, should find myself on that particular road on my way home in my carryall from St. Bonnet le Désert. I managed the lines; my man held the gun and inspected the road. No doubt our sleigh-bells frightened away the wolves, for we saw none. As we drove near the elm at the foot of which the lovers lay, my mare shied, and so drew our attention to them. I jumped down from the seat. My man and I settled them in the carryall as best as we could, covering them with what wraps we had along. They were unconscious and almost frozen. We took the bloody head of the wolf with us too.

"It was about seven o'clock in the morning when we reached Ursay. The day was breaking over a landscape of spun glass and white velvet. M. Roger Duflos' farmers and at least one half of the inhabitants of the borough, having heard of Solange's disappearance, came out to meet us; and in the very kitchen where we dined this evening, in front of a great fire of crackling heather, Laurent and his friend warmed themselves and told us the story of their terrible Christmas."

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One of us said,—

"And what followed, Doctor? Did they marry?"

"Yes; they were married," answered our host. "The will of Providence is sometimes so plainly indicated by events that the most obtuse cannot fail to perceive it. After the adventure with the wolves, Solange's parents consented to her marriage with Laurent Grillet. The marriage took place in the spring. The reward of fifty francs for the wolf's head paid for the wedding dress."

The doctor was silent. Night was full upon us. The sky, of a turquoise blue,

reflected its first stars in the river. The mass of forest, dense and inky, shut off the horizon. We saw Solange, the wolf-girl, dress her two boys and start homeward with them, the youngest asleep on her shoulder. She passed very near us, and looking up, smiled at the doctor. The doctor said,—

"Good-night, Solange!"

SALVETTE AND BERNADOU.

From the French of Alphonse Daudet.

I.

It was Christmas Eve in a great Bavarian town. A joyous crowd pushed its way through the streets white with snow, in the confusion of the fog, the rumble of carriages, and the clamor of bells, toward the booths, stalls, and cook-shops in the open air. Great fir-trees bedecked with dangling gewgaws were being carried about, grazing the ribbons and flowers of the booths and towering above the crowd like shadows of Thuringian forests,—a breath of Nature in the artificial life of winter.

It is twilight. The lingering lights of sunset, sending a crimson glow through the fog, can still be seen from the gardens beyond the Residence; and in the town the very air is so full of animation and festivity that every light which blinks through a window-pane seems to be dangling from a Christmas-tree. For this is not an ordinary Christmas. It is the year of our Lord 1870; and the birth of Christ is but an additional pretext for drinking the health of the illustrious Von der Than, and celebrating the triumph of Bavarian warriors. Christmas! Christmas! The Jews of the lower town themselves have joined in the general merriment. Here comes old Augustus Cahn, hurrying around the corner of "The Bunch of Blue Grapes." There is an unusual light in his ferret eyes. His little bushy pigtail was never known to wriggle so merrily. Over his sleeve, worn shiny by the rope handles of his wallet, he carries an honest basket, quite full, covered with a brown linen napkin, from under which peep the neck of a bottle and a twig of holly.

What the deuce is the old usurer up to? Can he too be celebrating Christmas? Has he assembled his friends and family to drink to the Vaterland? Impossible. Everybody knows that old Cahn has no Fatherland but his money-safe. Neither has he relatives nor friends; he has only creditors. His sons, or rather his partners, have been away for three months with the army. They are trading yonder behind the luggage-vans of the landwehr, selling brandy, buying clocks, ripping the knapsacks fallen by the wayside, and searching the pockets of the dead at night on the battle-field. Father Cahn, too old to follow his children, has remained in Bavaria, where he is doing a flourishing business with the French prisoners. He hovers about the quarters, loans money on watches, buys epaulets, medals, and money-orders. He ferrets his way through hospitals and ambulances, and creeps noiselessly to the bedside of the wounded, inquiring in his hideous jargon,—

"Aff you zumting to zell?"

And now he is trotting along hurriedly with his basket on his arm, because the military hospital closes at five, and because two Frenchmen are waiting for him there, in that great gloomy building behind the iron grating of narrow windows, where Christmas finds nothing to cheer its vigil but the pale lamps that burn at the bedside of the dying.

II.

These two Frenchmen are Salvette and Bernadou, two light-infantry men, two Provençals from the same village, enlisted in the same battalion and wounded by the same shell. But Salvette has proved the hardier of the two; he is able now to get up and to take a few steps from his bed to the window. Bernadou, on the other hand, has no desire to recover. Behind the faded curtains of his hospital bed, he languishes and grows thinner day by day; and when he speaks of his home, he smiles that sad smile of invalids which contains more resignation than hope. He seems a little brighter to-day, however, as he recalls the celebration of Christmas, which in our beautiful land of Provence is like a bonfire lighted in the heart of winter. He thinks of the walk home after midnight Mass, of the bedecked and luminous churches, the dark and crowded village streets, then the long evening around the table, the three traditional torches, the *aïoli*, the dish of snails, the pretty ceremony of the *cacho fio*,—the Yule log, which the grandfather parades through the house and sprinkles with mulled wine.

"Ah, my poor Salvette, what a dreary Christmas this will be! If we only had a few cents left, we could buy a little loaf of white bread and a bottle of light wine. It would be nice to sprinkle the Yule log with you once more before—" And his sunken eyes shine when he thinks of the wine and the white bread. But what is to be done? They have nothing left, the poor wretches,—no watches, no money. True, Salvette has a money-order for forty francs stored away in the lining of his vest. But that must be kept in reserve for the day of their release, or rather for the first halt at a French inn. It is sacred money, and cannot be touched. Still, poor Bernadou is so low, who can tell whether he will ever live through the journey home? And while it is still time, might it not be better to celebrate this Christmas together? Without saying a word of it to his comrade, Salvette rips his vest lining; and after a long struggle and a whispered discussion with Augustus Cahn, he slips into his hand this little scrap of stiff yellow paper smelling of powder and stained with blood, after which he assumes a look of deep mystery. He rubs his hands and laughs softly to himself as he glances over at Bernadou. As the darkness falls, he stands with his forehead against the window-pane, and stirs from his post only when he sees old Augustus Cahn turn the corner breathlessly, with a little basket on his arm.

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III.

The solemn midnight, ringing from all the steeples of the great city, falls lugubriously on the insomnia of the wounded. The hospital is silent, lighted only by the night lamps that swing from the ceiling. Gaunt shadows float over the beds and the bare walls with a perpetual swaying, which seems like the oppressed breathing of the people lying there. Every now and then there are dreams which talk aloud, or nightmares that moan; while vague murmurs of steps and voices, blended in the sonorous chill of the night, rise from the street like sounds issuing from the portals of a cathedral. They are fraught with impressions of pious haste,—the mystery of a religious festival invading the hours of sleep and filling the darkness of the city with the soft glow of lanterns and the jewelled radiance of church windows.

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"Are you asleep, Bernadou?"

On the little table by his friend's bed Salvette has laid a bottle of Lunel wine and a pretty round Christmas loaf with a twig of holly stuck in the top. The wounded man opens his eyes, dark and sunken with fever. In the uncertain light of the night lamps and the reflection of the long roofs, where the moon dazzles herself in the snow, this improvised Christmas supper strikes him as something fantastic.

"Come, wake up, countryman; let it not be said that two Provençals let Christmas go by without sprinkling it with a draught of wine—" And Salvette raises him on his pillows with a mother's tenderness. He fills the glasses, cuts the bread. They drink and speak of Provence. Bernadou seems to be cheered by the reminiscences and the white wine. With that childishness which invalids seem to find again in the depths of their weakness he begs for a Provençal carol. His comrade is only too happy.

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"What shall it be,—'The Host' or 'The Three Kings' or 'Saint Joseph told me'?"

"No; I prefer 'The Shepherds.' That is the one we used to sing at home."

"Very well, then. Here goes, 'The Shepherds.'"

And in a low voice, with his head under the bed-curtains, Salvette begins to sing. At the last verse, when the shepherds have laid down their offering of fresh eggs and cheeses, and Saint Joseph speeds them with kind words,—

"Shepherds,
Take your leave,"—

poor Bernadou slips back and falls heavily on his pillow.

His comrade, who believes that he has gone to sleep again, shakes him by the arm and calls him; but the wounded man remains motionless, and the twig of holly lying beside him looks like the green palm that is laid on the couch of the dead. Salvette has understood; he is slightly tipsy with the celebration and the shock of his sorrow; and with a voice full of tears he sings out, filling the silent dormitory with the joyous refrain of Provence,—

"Shepherds,
Take your leave."

MAESE PÉREZ, THE ORGANIST.

From the Spanish of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer.

I.

Do you see the one with the scarlet cloak and the white plume in his hat,—the one whose jerkin seems to glitter with all the gold of the Indian galleys? He is stepping from his litter; he gives his hand to that lady, see her! She is coming this way now, preceded by four pages bearing torches. Well, that is the Marquis of Moscoso, the lover of the widowed Countess of Villapiñeda. They say that before he thought of paying his addresses to her he had sought the hand of an opulent gentleman's daughter. But the lady's father, whom people say is something of a miser—but hush! speaking of the Devil. Do you see that man coming through the arch of San Felipe, on foot, muffled in a dark cloak, and accompanied by a single servant carrying a lantern? Now he is in front of the street shrine.

"As he unmuffled to bow before the image, did you notice the decoration that shone on his breast? But for that noble insignia any one would mistake him for a shopkeeper of the street of the Culebras. Well, that is the father in question. See how the people make way for him and greet him as he goes by!

"Everybody knows him in Seville on account of his great fortune. Why, he has more ducats in his coffers than there are soldiers in King Philip's armies; and his galleys would form a fleet mighty enough to oppose the Sultan himself. Look, look at that stately group of men! They are the Twenty-four, the gentlemen of the Aldermanry. Aha! and we have the great Fleming among us too! They say that the gentlemen of the green cross have not challenged him, thanks to his influence among the magnates of Madrid. He only comes to church to hear the music; and if Maese Pérez does not bring tears as big as one's fist to his eyes, it will no doubt be because his soul, instead of being where it belongs, is frying somewhere in the Devil's caldron.

"Ah, neighbor, but this looks bad. I greatly fear there is going to be trouble. I shall take refuge in the church, for I judge there will be more broadswords than *Pater-nosters* in the air. Look, look! the Duke of Alcalá's people have turned the corner of the Plaza San Pedro, and I fancy I see the Duke of Medina-Sidonia's men emerging from the Alley of the Dueñas. What did I tell you? They have caught sight of one another; they stop; the groups are breaking up; and the minstrels, who on these occasions are generally beaten by friends and foes alike, are running; the officer of justice himself, with the emblem of authority and all, has taken refuge under the portico,—and then people speak of justice! Justice! yes,—for the poor.

"Come! the shields are beginning to glitter. Lord of the great power, assist us! The blows are falling thick and fast. Neighbor, neighbor, this way before they close the doors! But wait, what do I see? They have left off before they had really begun. What is that light? A litter, torches! It is the bishop, on my soul!

"Our Most Holy Lady of Protection, whom I was just invoking inwardly, has sent him to our rescue. Ah, nobody will ever know what the great lady has done for me! With what interest am I repaid for the tapers that I burn before her every Saturday!

"See him; how handsome he is in his purple robes and his scarlet cap! God keep him in his episcopal chair as many centuries as I would like to live myself! Were it not for him, half Seville would be ablaze with these dissensions of the dukes. Look at them, the great hypocrites; see how they all press around the prelate's litter to kiss his ring. They all accompany him, confounding themselves with his servants. Who would believe that those two, who seem so friendly in his presence, would if they came together in a half-hour from now in some dark street,—that is—who knows? I would not accuse them of cowardice; God forbid! They have given proof of their valor by fighting the enemies of the Lord. Still, to speak the truth, it seems to me that if they started out really determined to settle their differences,—you understand me, really determined,—it would be no difficult matter, and they would thus put an end to these continuous quarrels where the only ones that give and take the blows are their kinsmen, their allies, and their servants.

"But come, neighbor, come into the church before the crowd fills it from end to end; for on nights like this it is sometimes packed so full that you could not squeeze in a grain of wheat. The nuns have a prize in their organist. When was the convent ever as favored as it is now? Other sisterhoods have made Maese Pérez magnificent offers,—which is not at all to be wondered at, for the archbishop himself offered him mountains of gold if he would go to the cathedral. But it was all of no use. He would sooner give up his life than his beloved organ. Do you not know Maese Pérez? To be sure, you have not been long in the neighborhood. Well, he is a saintly man, poor, no doubt, but a man who never wearies of giving. With no relative but his daughter, and no friend but his organ, he spends his life caring for the one and repairing the other.

"And the organ is an old one, let me tell you; but that makes no difference to him. He takes such pains with it and keeps it in such good order that its tone is a perfect wonder. He knows it so well that he can tell merely by the touch—I do not know whether I told you that the poor man was born blind. And how patiently he bears his misfortune! When anybody asks him how much he would give to be able to see, he answers, 'A great deal, but not as much as you think, for I have hope.' 'Hope of seeing?' 'Yes, and very soon too,' he adds, smiling like an angel. 'I am seventy-six years old, and however long the life allotted to me, I must soon see God.' Poor man! yes, he will see God, for he is as humble as the stones of the street, that allow everybody to tread upon them. He always says that he is nothing but a poor convent organist, while he might teach solfeggio to the chapel master of the cathedral himself. Of course he could; he cut his teeth in the trade. His father before him had the same position. I did not know him, but my mother—may she rest in glory! —used to say that he always brought the child with him to pump the organ. Later on, the boy showed great talent; and when his father died, he naturally enough fell heir to his position. And what hands he has, God bless them! They are worthy of being taken to Chicarreros Street to be set in pure gold. He always plays well, always; but, my dear, on a night like this he is a perfect wonder. He professes the greatest devotion to this ceremony of midnight Mass, and at the elevation of the Sacred Form, precisely at twelve o'clock, which is the time when our Lord came into the world, the voices of his organ are the real voices of angels.

"But what is the use of telling you about what you will hear for yourself in a few moments? Just notice the people who are here to-night, and you will form some idea of what he is. Here is all the elegance of Seville, and the archbishop himself,—all come to this humble convent to hear him play. It is not only the learned people, those who know music, who understand his merit; not so,—the very rabble appreciate him. This great crowd that you see coming this way with torches, singing carols with all the might of their lungs to the accompaniment of their tambourines and drums,—they are the kind of people to create a disturbance in a church; but just wait, they will be as still as the dead when Maese Pérez lays his hands on the organ. At the elevation of the Host, not a fly makes itself heard. There are great tears in every eye; and when the music stops, you hear something like a deep sigh, which proves that the people have been holding their breath in ecstasy all the while. But come, come! the bells have stopped ringing; and Mass will soon begin. Let us go in. This is the good night of the world, but for none will it be a better night than for us."

And saying this, the good woman, who had acted as her neighbor's cicerone, pressed through the portico of the convent of Santa Inés, and elbowing here, pushing there, made her way into the interior of the temple, there losing herself in the surging crowd.

II.

The church was profusely illumined. The torrent of light which fell from the altars and filled the edifice sparkled on the rich jewels of the great ladies, who, kneeling on the velvet cushions which their pages laid at their feet, and taking their missals from the hands of their duennas, formed a brilliant circle around the chancel grating. Behind them, in bright gold-embroidered cloaks thrown back with studied carelessness in order to display glittering orders of green and red, their broad-brimmed felts in one hand, the plumes sweeping the floor, the left hand resting on the polished hilts of their rapiers or caressing the pommel of their chiselled daggers, stood the Twenty-four, who with a great part of the best nobility of Seville seemed to form a wall around their wives and daughters to protect them from the contact of the populace. The latter, moving about in the rear of the nave with a murmur like that of a stormy sea, burst into a jubilant acclamation, accompanied by the discord of timbrels and tambourines, at the appearance of the bishop. The prelate,

surrounded by his attendants, took his seat under a crimson canopy, beside the high altar, and blessed the people three times.

It was time for Mass to begin. Several minutes elapsed, however, and the celebrant did not appear. The crowd began to show evidences of impatience; the knights exchanged whispers among themselves; and the bishop sent one of his attendants to the sacristy to inquire into the cause of the delay.

[Pg 229] "Maese Pérez has been taken ill, very ill; and it will be impossible for him to attend Mass to-night."

This was the word that the attendant brought back.

The news spread through the church in an instant. It produced a most unpleasant effect. The noise was such in the temple that the chief officer of justice rose to his feet, and the constables entered the church to enforce silence.

At that moment an ill-looking man, ungainly, bony, and cross-eyed to boot, stepped up to the place where the prelate sat.

"Maese Pérez is ill," said he; "the ceremony cannot begin. If you see fit, I will play the organ in his absence, for Maese Pérez is not the greatest organist in the world, nor will the instrument fall into disuse after his death for the lack of a musician to take his place."

The archbishop made a movement of assent; and already some of the faithful, who knew this individual to be an envious rival of the organist of Santa Inés, were breaking into exclamations of disgust when suddenly a great noise was heard in the portico.

"Maese Pérez is here! Maese Pérez is here!"

All heads were turned toward the crowded doorways from which these shouts came.

[Pg 230] In truth, Maese Pérez, pale and disfigured, was entering the church, carried in an armchair, which everybody claimed the honor of bearing upon his shoulders. Neither the doctor's commands nor his daughter's tears had been able to keep him in bed.

"No," he had said; "this is the last—the last—I know it. I will not die without hearing the voice of my organ again, on this solemn night, this good-night. Come, I implore, I command you, let us go to the church!"

His desire was gratified. The people carried him in their arms to the organ-loft. Mass began.

The cathedral clock struck twelve. After the introit came the Gospel, the offertory, then the solemn moment when the priest, after having consecrated the bread, takes the Sacred Form between his fingers and begins to elevate it. A cloud of incense in bluish waves floated through the church. The little altar-bells began to ring in vibrating peals, and Maese Pérez laid his aged fingers upon the keys of the organ.

The multitudinous voices of its metal pipes resounded in a prolonged and majestic chord, which grew gradually fainter, as though the breath of the wind had borne away its last echoes.

[Pg 231] The first chord, which seemed like a voice from the earth calling out to heaven, was answered by another, that seemed to come from a great distance, soft at first, then swelling until it became a torrent of thundering harmony.

It was the voice of the angels, which had traversed space and reached the earth.

Then followed what seemed like canticles sung far away by the hierarchies of seraphim, a thousand hymns at once blending into one, which itself was no more than an accompaniment for a strange melody that floated upon that ocean of mysterious echoes as a mist floats over the waves of the sea.

Then various chants dropped out of the harmony, leaving two voices which finally melted into each other; and this last isolated voice lingered long, sustaining a note as brilliant as a thread of light. The priest bent his brow, and above his white head, through the blue gauzes of the incense, he held up the Host to the eyes of the faithful. At that moment the tremulous note that Maese Pérez held swelled and swelled until an immense explosion of joyous harmony filled the church. In the far-off corners of the temple the air seemed to buzz, and the jewel-windows quivered in their tight frames. Each one of the notes which formed the mighty chord developed a theme of its own, some

[Pg 232] near, some far, some brilliant, some muffled. It seemed as though the waters and the birds, the breezes and the forests, heaven and earth, were each in its own tongue singing the birth of the Saviour.

The crowd held its breath and listened, amazed. There were tears in every eye, and every heart was swelled with emotion. The priest at the altar felt his hands tremble, for that which he held in them—that before which men and archangels bowed—was his God; and he thought he saw the heavens opened and the Host transfigured. After that the voices of the organ gradually grew fainter like a sound that dies as it is blown from echo to echo.

Suddenly, the cry of a woman, a piercing, heart-rending cry, was heard in the organ-loft. The organ exhaled a strange discord, something like a sob, and was silent. The people rushed to the stairs, toward which the faithful, drawn from their religious ecstasy, had all turned their gaze.

"What has happened? What is it?" whispered they; but nobody knew what to answer, and the confusion increased, threatening the good order and pious stillness proper to a church.

"What has happened?" inquired the great ladies of the officer of justice, who, preceded by the beadles, had first penetrated into the organ-loft, and [Pg 233] who now, pale and deeply distressed, was making his way to where the bishop awaited him, anxious like the rest of the congregation to learn the cause of the disturbance.

"What has happened?"

"Maese Pérez is dead!"

And so it was. Those who first reached the organ-loft, jostling one another up the stairs, had found the poor organist, fallen face downwards on the keys of the old instrument, which was still vibrating; while his daughter, kneeling at his feet, was calling to him in vain with sobs and cries.

III.

"Good-evening, my Señora Doña Baltasara; are you here, too, for midnight Mass? For my part I had intended going to the parish, but you see how it is,—one goes where everybody goes. And yet, to tell you the truth, since Maese Pérez's death I feel as though there were a tombstone on my heart every time I enter Santa Inés. Poor dear man! Truly he was a saint. I have a little scrap of his doublet which I preserve like a relic, and which surely deserves it; for I believe, by my soul, that if the archbishop would only take a hand in the matter, our grandchildren would see him canonized. But why expect it? The [Pg 234] dead and the absent have no friends. Novelty is what is in favor now,—you understand me, of course. What! You do not know what is going on? True, we are alike in that respect,—from our house to church, and from church back again, without inquiring into what is said or what is not said. However, on the wing, catching a word here, a word there, without the least interest in the matter, I sometimes happen to know the news.

"Well, yes, it seems to be a settled thing that the organist of San Ramón, that squint-eye who is always abusing other organists, and who looks more like a butcher from the Puerta de la Carne than like a musician, is going to play this Christmas Eve on Maese Pérez's organ. You know, of course,—for everybody knows it in Seville,—that no musician would accept the undertaking. Not even his daughter, who is a professor of music. After her father's death she entered the convent as a novice. Her refusal was natural enough. Accustomed as we were to hearing such marvels, anything else would seem poor, no matter how desirous we might be to avoid comparisons; and so the sisterhood had determined that in honor of the dead musician, and in token of respect to his memory, the organ should remain dumb to-night, when here comes our man, and declares that he is willing to play it.

[Pg 235] "There is nothing so bold as ignorance. To be sure, the fault is not his, but theirs, who permit such a profanation. But that is the way of the world—but, I say, it is no small crowd that has flocked here to-night. One might think that nothing had changed from last year to this,—the same fine people, the same splendor, the same crush at the door, the same excitement under the portico, the same throng in the temple. Ah, if the dead man were to rise, he would die a second death rather than witness the profanation of his organ. But the best of it is that if what the neighbors have told me is true, the intruder is going to meet with a fine reception. When the time comes for him to lay his hands on the keys, there are those who mean to make a hubbub with tambourines, timbrels, and drums. But hold! there is the hero of the occasion going into the church now. Holy saints! How gaudily he has arrayed himself What a ruff, and

what grand airs he assumes! Come, come! the archbishop arrived some time ago, and Mass will soon begin. Come! for I fancy this night will give us food for talk."

And saying this, the good woman penetrated into the church, opening a way for herself through the crowd, according to her habit, by dint of pushing and elbowing.

The ceremony had already begun.

[Pg 236] The temple was as brilliant as it had been the year before. The new organist pushed through the crowd that filled the naves, went up to kiss the bishop's ring, then made his way to the organ-loft, where he took his seat, and began to try the stops of the organ one after another with much affectation of gravity. From the compact mass of people in the rear of the church rose a muffled, confused sound,—a sure augury that the storm was brewing and would not be long in making itself felt.

"He is an impostor who cannot do anything straight, not even look straight," said some.

"He is an ignorant lout, who has turned the organ of his own parish into a rattle, and comes here now to profane Maese Pérez's," said others. And while one relieved himself of his cloak the better to thump his tambourine, and another took hold of his timbrels, and all made ready to greet the first notes of music with a deafening clamor, there were but very few who ventured mildly to defend the strange man, whose proud and pedantic bearing was so strongly in contrast with the modest appearance and affable kindness of the former organist.

The longed-for moment came at last,—the solemn moment when the priest, after bowing his brow and murmuring the sacred words, took the wafer between his fingers. The little bells rang at the foot of the altar, shaking out a [Pg 237] shower of crystal notes. The diaphanous waves of incense rose in the air and the organ burst into sound.

A terrible uproar filled the church and drowned its first chords. Horns, bagpipes, timbrels, tambourines,—all the instruments of the populace lifted their discordant voices at once. But the clamor only lasted a minute. It all stopped simultaneously, just as it had begun. The second chord, full, bold, magnificent, sustained itself. A torrent of sonorous harmony gushed from the metal pipes of the organ.

There were celestial chants like those which caress the ear in moments of ecstasy; chants which the soul perceives, but which the lip cannot repeat; single notes of a distant melody sounding at intervals, brought by a gust of wind; the sound of leaves that kiss each other on the limbs of trees with a murmur like rain; trills of the lark, that rises singing from the flower-covered land, like an arrow shot into the clouds; terrible bursts of sound, imposing like the roaring of a tempest; choruses of seraphim, without cadence or rhythm, unknown music of another world, which only the imagination can comprehend; winged canticles that seemed to rise to the throne of the Almighty in a whirl of light and sound,—all these things were expressed by [Pg 238] the thousand voices of the organ, with a power and poetry more intense, more mystic than had ever been heard before.

When the organist came down, such was the crowd that pushed toward the stairway, and such was the desire to see and admire him, that the officer of justice, fearing and not without reason that he would be smothered, sent his beadles, in order that, stick in hand, they might open a way for him to the high altar, where the bishop awaited him.

"You see," said the prelate, when the musician was introduced into his presence, "I came all the way from my palace to hear you. Will you be as cruel as Maese Pérez, who would never once spare me the journey by consenting to play on Christmas Eve for midnight Mass at the Cathedral?"

"Next year," answered the organist, "I will give you that pleasure, for I would not touch this organ again for all the gold in the world."

"Why not?" interrupted the prelate.

"Because," said the organist, trying to control the emotion which was revealed by the pallor of his countenance,—"because it is old and poor, and with such an instrument one cannot express all that one would like."

The archbishop retired, followed by his attendants. One by one the litters

[Pg 239] of the noblemen disappeared in the curves of the neighboring streets. The crowd around the portico was dissolved; and the faithful dispersed, taking their various directions. The church was about to be locked when two women, who had lingered to murmur a prayer before the altar of San Felipe, crossed themselves and went their way, turning into the Alley of the Dueñas.

"You may say what you choose, my dear Doña Baltasara," said one of them, "but that is my opinion. Every madman with his whim. I would not believe it if I heard it from the lips of a barefooted Capuchin. It is not possible for this man to have played what we have just heard. I tell you, I heard him a thousand times at San Bartolomé, which was his parish, and from which he was turned out by the priest because his music was so poor; my dear, it made you feel like stopping your ears up with cotton. And then you have only to look at his face. The face, they say, is the mirror of the soul. Think of Maese Pérez. Poor dear man! On a night like this, when he came down from the organ-loft after having held the congregation spell-bound, what a kind smile he wore! What a happy flush on his countenance! He was old, and yet he looked like an angel! As for this fellow, he came stumbling down the stairs as though a dog [Pg 240] were barking at him from the landing, and with a face as pale as that of a corpse. Believe me, my dear, in all truth, there is some mystery here."

IV.

A year had elapsed. The abbess of the convent of Santa Inés and the daughter of Maese Pérez were speaking in a whisper, only half visible in the shadows of the choir. The bells with loud voices were calling to the faithful from the height of the steeple. Every now and then one or two persons crossed the now silent and deserted portico; and after taking holy water, they chose their place in the corner of the nave, where a few neighbors were quietly waiting for midnight Mass to begin.

"Do you see," the abbess was saying, "your fears are supremely childish. There is scarcely a soul in the church. You should have more self-confidence. All Seville is at the cathedral to-night. Play for us, my child,—it is just as though we were alone. Why do you sigh? What is the matter with you? Speak."

"I am afraid!" exclaimed the girl, in a shaken voice.

"Afraid? Why, what do you mean? Afraid of what?"

"I do not know,—of something supernatural. Last night—listen. I had heard [Pg 241] you say that you were anxious to have me play for midnight Mass this Christmas Eve; and, proud of the distinction, I thought I would first try the registers and practise a little, that I might surprise you and do you honor to-day. I came to the choir alone; I opened the door which leads to the organ-loft. The cathedral clock just then was striking the hour; I do not know what hour, but the strokes were many, many, and so sad! The bells went on ringing during all the time that I stood petrified on the threshold. It seemed an age to me! The church was empty and dark. Far away, yonder, a little light glimmered like a star, lost in the night of the sky. It was the dying light of the lamp which burns before the high altar. By its faint reflection, which only added to the profound horror of the darkness, I saw,—yes, I saw it, Mother; do not doubt me,—I saw a man, who, sitting with his back to where I stood, was running one hand along the keys of the organ, while he touched the stops with the other, and the organ sounded, but in a most indescribable manner. Every note was like a sob stifled within the metal pipes, which vibrated, reproducing the tone, muffled, almost imperceptible, but with wonderful accuracy.

"The cathedral clock was still striking the hour, and the man was still trying the keys. I could even hear his breathing.

[Pg 242] "The blood in my veins was frozen with horror. I felt a chill run through my body; my head was hot; I tried to scream, but I could not, for the man sitting there had turned his face and was looking at me. No; I do not mean that; he was not looking, for he was blind. It was my father!"

"Come, come, sister, you must try and banish these foolish fancies with which the arch-enemy tries to disturb our weak imaginations. Say a *Pater-noster* and an *Ave-Maria* to the archangel Saint Michael, captain of the celestial hosts, that he may succor you from evil spirits. Wear on your neck a scapular touched by the relics of San Pacomio, the counsellor against temptations; and go, my child, go and take your place at the organ. Mass is about to begin, and the faithful are waiting with impatience. Your father is in heaven; and it is far more likely that from the home of the blessed he will inspire you on this holy night rather than appear to you to give you a fright."

The abbess went to take her seat in the choir in the midst of the

sisterhood. The daughter of Maese Pérez opened the door of the organ-loft with trembling hand, and sat on the stool before the organ. Mass began.

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Mass began, and nothing unusual occurred until the time of the consecration. At that moment the organ sounded, and with the first sound came a shriek from the organ-loft.

The abbess, the nuns, and some of the faithful ran to the organ.

"Look at him! look at him!" cried the girl, whose eyes, starting from their sockets, were fixed upon the stool from which she had just risen in terror. She stood clinging with convulsed hands to the railing of the loft.

All eyes were turned upon the point which she indicated. There was no one at the organ, and still it went on sounding, like the voices of archangels, in a burst of mystic joy.

"Did I not tell you so, one and a thousand times, my good Doña Baltasara,—did I not tell you so? There is some mystery in all this. Listen. What! Did you not attend Mass last night? Anyway, I presume you know what occurred. Why, it is the talk of Seville to-day. The archbishop is furious, and with good reason. Think of his having missed the Mass at Santa Inés,—of his not having witnessed the miracle; and all for what, pray? That he might sit and listen to a perfect charivari; for according to those who were present and who told me of it, the new organist's playing was nothing else. But I said so all the time. That squint-eye never could have played the music we heard together last Christmas Eve at Santa Inés. It was a lie! That music came from another soul. There is a mystery in all this, my dear,—a mystery, believe me."

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Yes, and so there was. A deep mystery, a beautiful mystery, which was the soul of Maese Pérez.

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THE TORN CLOAK.

From the French
of MAXIME DU CAMP.

I.

HIGH in the steeple the bells were conversing. Two of the younger ones were vexed and spoke angrily, "Is it not time we were asleep? It is almost midnight, and twice have we been shaken, twice have we been forced to cry out through the gloom just as though it were day, and we were singing the call for Sunday Mass. There are people moving about in the church; are we going to be tormented again, I wonder? Might they not leave us in peace?"

At this the oldest bell in the steeple said indignantly, in a voice which though cracked had lost none of its solemnity, "Hush, little ones! Are you not ashamed to speak so foolishly? When you went to Rome to be blessed, did you not take an oath, did you not swear to fulfil your duty? Do you not know that in a few minutes it will be Christmas, and that you will then celebrate the birth of Him whose resurrection you have already celebrated?"

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"But it is so cold!" whimpered a young bell.

"And do you not think that He was cold, when He came into the world, naked and weak? Would He not have suffered on the heights of Bethlehem had not the ass and the ox warmed Him with their breath? Instead of grumbling and complaining, let your voices be sweet and tender in memory of the canticles with which His mother lulled Him to sleep. Come, hold yourselves in readiness. I can see them lighting the tapers; they have constructed a little manger before the Virgin's altar; the banner is unfurled; the beadle is bustling about. He has a bad cold, the poor man; how he sneezes! Monsieur le Curé has put on his embroidered alb. I hear the approaching sound of wooden shoes; the peasants are coming to pray. The clock is about to strike the hour—now—Christmas! Christmas! Ring out with all your heart and all your might! Let no man say that he has not been summoned to midnight Mass."

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II.

It had been snowing for three days. The sky was black, the ground white; the north wind howled through the trees; the ponds were frozen; and the little birds were hungry. Women, wrapped in long mantles of brown wool, and men in heavy cloaks slowly made their way into the church. They knelt and with bent brows murmured the answer as the priest said, "And the Lord said unto me, 'Thou art my Son, whom this day I have begotten.'" The incense was smoking, and blossoms of hellebore, which are the roses of Christmas, lay before the tabernacle in the light of the tapers. Behind one of the pillars, near the door of the church, knelt a child. His feet were bare. He had slipped off his wooden shoes on account of the noise they made. His cap lay on the floor before him and with clasped hands he prayed, "For the soul of my father who is dead, for the life of my mother, and for me, for your little Jacques, who loves you, O my God, I implore you!" And he knelt all through Mass, lost in the fervor of his devotion, and rose only when he heard the words,—

"Ite missa est."

The people crowded together under the exterior porch. Every man lighted his lantern, and pulled up the collar of his cloak; and the women drew their mantles closely around them. Brrr! how cold it was! A little boy called out to Jacques, "Are you coming with us?"

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"No," said he, "I have not time;" and he started off on a run. He could hear the village people far away singing the favorite carol of olden France as they walked home,—

"He is born, the Heavenly Child.
Ring out, hautbois! ring out, bagpipes!
He is born, the Heavenly Child;
Let all voices sing his advent!"

III.

Jacques reached the thatched cottage at the far end of the hamlet, nestling in a rocky hollow at the foot of the hill. He opened the door carefully, and tiptoed into a room in which there was neither light nor fire.

"Is that you, little one?"

"Yes, mother."

"I prayed while you were praying. You must be half asleep; go to bed, child. I do not need anything. If I am thirsty, I have the water-jug here where I can reach it."

In a corner of the room near Marguerite's bed, Jacques turned over a litter [Pg 249] of ferns and dry grasses, stretched himself upon it, drew the ragged end of a blanket over him, and fell asleep. Marguerite, however, did not sleep. She was thinking, and her thoughts wrung tears from her eyes. She was evoking the happy days when her husband was with her, and life seemed so full of hope. She lay still, so as not to waken her boy, her head thrown back on the bolster, the tears trickling off her bony cheeks, her hand pressed to her hot chest.

Marguerite's husband had been the pride of his village, a hard worker and an upright man. At the call of the Conscription he went to the wagon train, for he was a good driver, kind to his horses, a man who made his own bed only after having prepared their litter. He spoke with pleasure of the time when he had been "in the army of the war," and would say laughingly, "I carted heaps of glory in the Crimea and in Italy." His return to the village was a source of rejoicing. He had known Marguerite as a child; he now found her a woman, and married her. They were poor, Marguerite's trousseau consisting of a three-franc cap, which she bought in order to make a good appearance at the church ceremony. They owned the cottage,—a miserable, dilapidated hut; but they were happy in it because they worked hard and loved each other. The village people said, "Marguerite is no simpleton. She knew what she was [Pg 250] about when she married Grand-Pierre. The sun does not find him abed. He is strong, saving too, and no drunkard."

Yes, Grand-Pierre was a good workman, spry, punctual,—a man of much action and few words. He had resumed his old trade, and drove his teams through the mountains for a man who was quarrying granite. He drove four stout-haunched, wide-chested horses, and excelled in manœuvring the screw-jack, in balancing the heaviest blocks, and driving down the steep declivities that opened into the plain. When he came home after his day's work, he found the soup and a jug of cider on the table, and Marguerite waiting for him. Everything smiled upon them in the poor little home, where there was soon a willow cradle.

But happiness is short-lived. There is an Arab proverb that says, "As soon as a man paints his house in pink, fate hastens to daub it black." For eleven years Pierre and Marguerite lived happily together and laid their plans with no fear of the future. Then misfortune came and made its home with them. One raw, foggy winter's day Grand-Pierre went out to the mountain. He loaded his wagon; and after having left the dangerous passes of the road behind, he sat on the shaft for a rest, and leaned against a great block of [Pg 251] granite. He was tired; and lulled by the swaying of the vehicle and the monotonous jingle of the bells, he involuntarily closed his eyes. After a little the left wheel went over a great limb that lay across the road. The shock was violent. Pierre was pitched from his seat; and before he could move, the heavy wheels rolled slowly over him and crushed in his chest.

The horses went their way unconscious of the fact that their driver, their oldest friend, lay dead behind them. They reached the quarriers and stopped at the door.

"Where is Grand-Pierre?"

Inquiries were made at once. Men were sent to the cottage. Marguerite grew anxious. As the light failed, they took torches and went up the mountain, shouting, "Hello there, Grand-Pierre!" but no voice answered. At last they came upon the poor man lying in the middle of the road on his back with outstretched arms. The wheels had cut through the cloak and the edge of the rent was crushed into his chest and black with blood.

All the villagers followed the corpse to the church and the cemetery, and held out their hands to Marguerite, who stood white and immobile, like a statue of wax, muttering mechanically under her breath, "O God, have pity! [Pg 252] have pity!" Jacques was then in his tenth year. He could not appreciate the greatness of his mother's sorrow, and only cried because she did.

Then misfortune had followed misfortune,—poverty, illness, misery. And so through this Christmas night Marguerite lay stifling her sobs as she recalled the past.

IV.

Jacques rose at dawn, shook off the dry grasses that stuck to his hair, and went over to his mother. Her eyes were half closed, her lips very white, and there were warm red spots on her cheeks. When she saw the boy, she made a faint movement with her head.

"Did you sleep, mother? Do you feel well?"

"Yes; but I am very cold. Make a little fire, will you?"

Jacques searched every corner of the hut, looked in the old cupboard, went through the cellar which had formerly contained their supplies, and said,—

"There is no wood left; and there are no roots either."

"Never mind, then. It is not so very cold, after all."

Jacques picked up a stone, hammered at the nail that secured the strap of [Pg 253] his wooden shoe, slipped his foot into it, pulled his cap down over his ears, and said resolutely,—

"I am going out to the mountain to get some dead wood."

"Why, you forget that to-day is Christmas, my child!"

"I know; but Monsieur le Curé will forgive me."

"No, no, you must not go; it has been prohibited."

"I will see that the rural guard does not catch me. Please let me go; I will be back soon."

"Well, go, then."

Jacques put his pruning-knife in his pocket, threw a rope over his shoulder, and opened the door. A gust of wind thick with snow dashed him back and whirled through the room.

"What a storm!"

"Holy angels!" cried Marguerite; "it is the white deluge! Listen, little one: you are not warm enough. Open the old chest where your father's things are, and get his cloak,—the cloak he had on when they brought him home. Wrap it around you, and see that you do not take cold. One sick person in the house is enough."

Jacques took the cloak, upon which a twig of blessed box had been laid. It [Pg 254] was one of those great black and white cloaks of thick wool and goat-hair, with a small velvet collar and brass clasps. There was a gaping black rent in it, and here and there an ugly dark spot. It was very long for Jacques, so Marguerite pinned the edges up under the collar. When he was halfway out of the door she called out to him,—

"Jacques, if you pass the Trèves do not forget to say a prayer."

V.

Jacques started off at a brisk pace. There was not a human being to be seen anywhere. The fields were gloomy and desolate. The snow seemed to shoot along horizontally, so violently was it lashed by the north wind. On the high, frosted limb of a poplar a raven was croaking. Jacques stopped every now and again to knock off the snow which gathered and hardened on the soles of his wooden shoes. He was not cold, but he found his cloak very heavy. He had gone a long way and had reached the first undulations of the mountain, the edge of the forest, when he stopped petrified before the rural guard, who appeared suddenly at a turn in the road, imposing with his cocked hat, his sword, and the word "Law" glittering on his belt.

This Father Monhache, who had been a sapper before he became a rural [Pg 255] guard, was greatly dreaded in the land. He was the terror of the village boys, for whenever he found any of them stealing apples, shaking the plum-trees, or knocking down nuts, he swore at them terribly, and then led them by the ear to Monsieur le Maire, who sentenced the delinquents to a paternal spanking. Jacques was therefore aghast when he found himself face to face with this

merciless representative of the authority.

"Where are you going, Jacques, in this devil of a storm?"

Jacques tried to concoct some story to explain his expedition; and before he had decided which would be the most effective, he caught himself saying simply,—

"I am going to the mountain, Father Monhache, to get some dead wood. We have none at home, and my mother is ill."

The old guard dropped an oath and said in a voice which was by no means harsh,—

"Ah, so you are going to the mountain for dead wood, are you? Well, if I meet you in the village this evening with your fagot, I will close one eye and wink the other, do you understand? And if you ever tell anybody what I said, I will pull your ears." And he walked off with a shrug. He had not gone ten feet when he turned and shouted, "There is more dead wood in the copse of the Prévoté than anywhere else."

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VI.

"He is not such a bad man, after all," thought Jacques.

He was now climbing the mountain, and it was a hard struggle for his little legs. Every now and then he heard what he thought was a moan in the distance,—the breaking of a limb under the weight of the snow. Look as he would through all those branches, he could not see a single blackbird, nor even a jay. Not a little mouse ran along the slope. A few intrepid sparrows alone, black spots on the white ground, hopped about in search of food.

Measuring his steps to the time, Jacques began to sing in a low tone,—

> "He is born, the Heavenly Child,—"

and walked along with a great effort, leaning forward. He sunk into hollows where the snow was deep. He knew that he was not far from the copse of the Prévoté, so he took courage, though he stubbed his foot against the hard, concealed ruts, and tumbled into holes. Father Monhache was right; there was surely no lack of dead wood at the copse of the Prévoté.

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Over the shivering heather and the crouching brier, lay the fallen branches in their furrows. Jacques fell to work; and how he toiled! He had taken off his cloak, that his movements might be freer. His legs sunk deep in the snow. His hands and his arms were drenched and chilled, while his face was hot and wet with perspiration. He would stop every minute or two to look at his pile of wood, and think of the bright flame it would make in the hut.

When he had all he could carry, he tied it in a fagot, threw his cloak over his shoulders, and started along the shortest cut to the village. His legs trembled. Now and then he was compelled to stop and lean against a tree.

VII.

After a little he came to a cross-road. This was Trèves. In the days of the Romans it had been called Trivium, because of the three roads that met there. On that spot had formerly stood an altar to Mercury, the protector of roads, the god of travellers, and the patron of thieves. Christianity had torn down the Pagan altar and replaced it by a crucifix of granite. On the pedestal, gnawed by lichens, one may still find the date, A. D. 1314. During the Hundred Years' War the statue was shattered, and the cross-road strewn with its fragments.

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Then, when the foreign element which sullied our land had been cast out, when "Joan, the good maid of Lorraine," had returned the kingdom of France to the little king of Bourges, the statue was raised, and from that time it has been the object of special veneration through the country. Every peasant bows before it, and even the veterinary, who delights in laughing at priests, would not dare pass the Trèves without raising his hat.

With his hands nailed to the cross, his brow encircled with thorns, the Christ hangs, as though he were calling the whole world to take refuge in his outstretched arms. He seems enormous. In the folds of the cloth which girds his loins wrens have built nests that have never been disturbed. His face is turned toward the East; and his hollow, suffering gaze is fixed upon the sky, as though he were looking for the star that guided the Magi and led the shepherds to the stable in Bethlehem.

VIII.

Jacques did not forget his mother's instruction. He laid down his fagot, took off his cap, and there, on his knees, began a prayer, to which the wind moaned a dreary accompaniment. He repeated some prayers which he had learned at the Catechism class; he said others too,—fervent words that rose of themselves from his heart. And as he prayed, he looked up at the Christ, lashed by the storm. Its parted lips and upturned eyes gave it an expression of infinite pain. Two little icicles, like congealed tears, hung on its eyelids, and the emaciated body stretched itself upon the cross in a last spasm of agony. Jacques began to suffer with the suffering embodied there, and he was moved to console the One whom he had come to invoke.

When his prayers were said, he took up his fagot and started on his way; but before he had left the cross-road behind him, he turned and looked back. The Christ's eyes seemed to follow him. The face was less sombre; the features seemed to have relaxed into an expression of infinite gentleness. A gust of wind shook the snow that had accumulated on its outstretched arms. One might have believed that the statue had shivered. Jacques stopped. "Oh, my poor God," said he, "how cold you are!" and he went back and stood before the crucifix. Then with a sudden impulse he took off his cloak. He climbed upon the pedestal, then putting his foot upon the projection of the loin-cloth, and reaching about the shoulders, he threw the cloak around the statue.

When he had reached the ground again, "Now, at least, you will not be so cold!" said he; and the two little icicles that had hung on the eyelids of the divine image melted and ran slowly down the granite cheeks like tears of gratitude.

Jacques started off at a rapid pace. The cruel north wind blew through his cotton blouse. He began to run, and the fagot beat against his shoulders and bruised them. At last he reached the foot of a declivity and stopped panting by a ravine sheltered from the snow and the wind by a wall of pines. How tired he was! He descended into the ravine and sat down to rest, only for a minute, thought he,—just a minute more, and he would be up again and on his way to his mother. How tired he was! His head, too, was very hot, and felt heavy. He lay down and leaned his head against the fagot. "I must not go to sleep," he said. "Oh, no, I will not go to sleep;" and as he said this, his eyelids drooped, and he became suddenly engulfed in a great flood of unconsciousness.

IX.

When Jacques awoke he was greatly surprised. The ravine, the snow, the forest, the mountain, the gray sky, the freezing wind,—all had disappeared. He looked for his fagot, but could find it nowhere. He had never seen or even heard of this new country; and he was unable to define its substance, to circumscribe its immensity, or appreciate its splendors. The air was balmy, saturated with exquisite perfumes, and it exhaled soft harmonies that made his heart quiver with delight.

He rose. The ground beneath his feet was elastic, and seemed to rise to meet his step, so that walking became restful. A luminous halo hovered about him. Instead of the old torn cloak, he wore a mantle strewn with stars, and it was seamless, like the one for which dice were cast on the heights of Calvary. His hands—his poor little hands, tumefied with chilblains, and which the cold had chapped and creviced,—were now white and soft like the tips of a swan's wings. Jacques was amazed, but no feeling of fear agitated him. He was calm and felt strangely confident. A great burden seemed to have been lifted from his shoulders; he was as light as the air, and aglow with beatitude.

"Where am I?" he asked; and a voice more harmonious than the whispering of the breeze answered,—

"In my Father's House, which is the home of the Just."

Then through a veil of azure and light a great granite crucifix arose before him. It was the crucifix of the Trèves. Grand-Pierre's cloak, with the rent across it, floated from the shoulders of the Christ. The coarse wool had grown as diaphanous as a cloud, and through it the light radiated as from a sun. The thorns on his brow glittered like carbuncles, and a superhuman beauty lighted his countenance. From fields of space which the sight could now explore came aerial chants. Jacques fell upon his knees and prostrated himself.

The Christ said,—

"Rise, little one; you were moved to pity by the sufferings of your God,—you stripped yourself of your cloak to shield him from the cold, and this is why

he has given you his cloak in exchange for yours; for of all the virtues the highest and rarest is charity, which surpasses wisdom and knowledge. Hereafter you will be the host of your God."

Jacques took a few steps toward the dazzling vision and held out his arms in supplication.

"What do you want?" said the Christ.

The child said, "I want my mother."

"The angels who carried Mary into Egypt will bring her to you."

There was a great rustle of wings, and a smile shone on the face of the granite Christ.

Jacques was praying, but his prayer was unlike any that he had ever said before. It was a chant of ecstasy, which rose to his lips in words so beautiful that he experienced a sense of ineffable happiness in listening to himself.

Far away, on the brink of the horizon, pure and clear as crystal, he saw Marguerite borne toward him on billows of white. She was no longer pale, worn, and sad. She was radiant, and glowed with that internal light which is the beauty of the soul, and is alone imperishable. The angels laid her at the foot of the crucifix, and she prostrated herself and adored. When she raised her head there were two souls beside her, and their essences blended in one kiss, in one burst of gratitude. The granite Christ wept.

X.

High in the steeple the bells are conversing. The two younger ones are sullen. "The people in this village are mad. Why can they never be quiet? Were not yesterday's duties sufficiently tiresome?—midnight Mass, Matins, the Mass of the Aurora, the third Mass, High Mass, Vespers, the Angelus, to say nothing of supplementary chimes. There was no end to it! And now to-day we must begin all over again. They pull us, they shake us,—first the toll for the dead, the funeral service next, then the burial. It is really too much! Why

will they never leave us in peace on our frames? Our clappers are weary, and our sides are bruised with the repeated strokes. What can be the matter with these peasants? Here they come to church again in their holiday clothes. Father Monhache wears his most forbidding scowl; his beard bristles fiercely; every now and then he brushes something from his eyes with the back of his hand. His cocked hat has a defiant tilt. The boys had better be on their guard this day. Far down the road there, I see two coffins, one large and one small. They are lifting them on the oxcart; see! But what is that to us, and why are we expected to ring?"

The old bell, full of wisdom and experience, reproved them, saying,—

"Be still, and do not shame me with your ignorance. You have no conception of the dignity of your functions. You have been blessed; you are church-bells. To men you say, 'Keep vigil over your immortal souls!' and to God, 'O Father, have pity on human weakness!' Instead of being proud of your exalted mission, and meditating upon what you see, you chatter like hand-bells and reason like sleigh-bells. Your bright color and your clear voices need not make you vain, for age will tarnish you and the fatigues of your duty will crack your voices. When years have passed; when you shall have proclaimed

church festivals, weddings, births, christenings, and funerals; after having raised the alarms for conflagrations, and rung the tocsin at the invasion of the enemy,—you will no longer complain of your fate; you will begin to comprehend the things of this world, and divine the secrets of the other; you will come to understand how tears on earth can become smiles in heaven.

"So ring gently, gently, without sadness or fear. Let your voices sound like the cooing of doves. A torn cloak in this world may be a mantle of eternal blessedness in the next."

THE END.

Transcriber's note

- Obvious printer errors have been silently corrected.
- Original spelling has been kept but variant spellings have been made consistent when a predominant usage was found.
- Blank pages have been skipped.
- The spelling of some Spanish words has been emended, namely:
    - Page x: "Becquer" replaced by "Bécquer"
    - Page 16: "petenéras" replaced by "peteneras"
    - Page 23: "San Jeronimo" replaced by "San Jerónimo"
    - Page 26: "Martinez" replaced by "Martínez" (twice)
    - Page 32: "Jimenez" replaced by "Jiménez"
    - Page 60: "Alcala" replaced by "Alcalá"
    - Page 61: "*casa panadería*" replaced by "*Casa Panadería*"
    - Page 117: "*El Latigo*" replaced by "*El Látigo*"
    - Page 118: "*Las Animas*" replaced by "*Las Ánimas*"
    - Page 156: "*delicto*" replaced by "*delito*"
    - Page 183: "Retriro" replaced by "Retiro"
    - Page 221: "Becquer" replaced by "Bécquer"
    - Page 234: "San Ramon" replaced by "San Ramón"

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