

## LITERATURE.

THE MYSTERIES OF A MURDER;  
OR, THE TWIN SHOTS.

Friedrich Count T—, and his brother Franz, two years younger than himself, were the last representatives of one of the most ancient houses in all Germany. From their parents' side their fortune was not very considerable, but Franz, the younger brother, was looked upon as eventually one of the wealthiest nobles in the land, from the circumstance of his mother's sister, Baroness M—, having conceived a perfect passion for him, ere he was well out of his cradle; and having declared to himself and all the world, that he alone, after her death, should inherit her possessions.

When the boys had reached the respective ages of twelve and ten, their father was appointed guardian to the young Countess G—, then a child nine years old, and the orphan and only daughter of Count T—'s bosom friend. Wilhelmine's infancy gave forth all promise of grace and beauty, which her riper youth so largely fulfilled, and, naturally enough, she soon became the object of both the brother's care and attention.

When his eldest son had attained the age of fifteen, Count T— died, leaving the education of his sons, and of Mademoiselle de G—, to be completed by his widow, a handsome, weak, vain woman, and yet weaker and vainer mother. Madame de T— thought nothing upon this earth so perfect as her son Franz; and whatever good instincts or qualities the boy had by nature (and he had many) were destroyed or disguised by overweening selfishness and pride, and by a violence of temper, the furious outbreaks of which led him (whilst the fit was on) almost to the verge of insanity. Friedrich, on the contrary, though selfish and proud to fully as high a degree as his brother, was of a milder temper, and more conciliating disposition. The two boys were seemingly much attached to one another, and nearly equally so to Mademoiselle de G—.

Wilhelmine, however, showed a decided preference for Franz, and, by the time she had attained the age of seventeen, it became pretty well evident that these two were destined one day to be man and wife. The elder brother was perhaps a little grieved at Mademoiselle de G—'s preference for Franz, but there was, at any rate, no disappointment in his pain; for he had, from his earliest childhood, been accustomed to look upon the latter as more favored than himself in every respect.

It often happened that the Countess T— and her family spent several weeks together at one or other of the country seats of her sister, Baroness M—, and, on such occasions, the aunt would sometimes carry off her darling Franz, and, when they were all alone, show him rich jewels to be worn by Wilhelmine, when Wilhelmine should be his wife. Upon one of these occasions, the baroness said to her nephew, who was then near nineteen—

"Franz, I have latterly been reflecting much upon a point nearly connected with your future destinies. The fortune I leave you is immense, and numbers you among the twenty or thirty very largest proprietors in Germany; but it comes not from me, but from the family whose name I now bear, and, indirectly, you will be indebted to my husband, whose generosity left me absolutely and unconditionally mistress of all he possessed. I know I wrong no one by making you my heir, since distant cousins are all that would have remained to Baron M—, having no children of his own. Still, something is in justice due to his memory, and it is my wish you should assume his name joined to your own."

Franz sprang from his seat.

"I!" exclaimed he, in great astonishment, "I take the name of M—? I, whose ancestors were allied to the first Henry who filled the imperial throne? I ally my glorious name to theirs!—my arms to the escutcheon of a family which does not count three centuries, and whose founder was an Augsburg goldsmith! I! I would not do it for all the gold in Christendom!"

"For all the gold in Christendom, I can understand," replied his aunt; "but for me, Franz, would you not do it for my sake?"

The denial was a positive one.

"No," said Franz; "I would not do it were my father to rise out of the tomb and ask it of me."

"Good!" rejoined Madame de M—. We will say no more about it." Neither did she, and there that portion of the incident ended.

A few months later, Friedrich made an absence of several days, without saying whither he had gone. On his return, he came straight to his mother's apartment, and, taking his brother's hand—

"Franz," said he, gravely, "I have come from our aunt's who sent for me while you were at D—. You have offended her mortally, and she has altered her will!" (Franz turned pale, and an involuntary movement betrayed his agitation.) "Fear nothing," continued his brother, "she has made me her heir; but you know me well enough to believe that I will never take advantage of such a piece of injustice and caprice. You remain, in all intents and purposes, what you were before in my eyes—my aunt's sole and absolute heir; and when, at her death, her property comes into my hands, it will merely be transmitted into yours. That was my purpose in coming hither, and that is what I had to say to you, Franz."

The two brothers embraced, and as they were about separating—

"And will you consent," inquired the younger "to adopt the name of M—?"

"Our aunt does not ask it of me," was the answer. "She says she has no right to demand from me, as from you, a sacrifice prompted by affection or gratitude, and she avows that she leaves me her fortune out of the mere determination to punish you; for no other reason."

Two years after, Madame de M— died, and at her death, Mademoiselle de G— alone was with her.

The settlement of the Baroness' affairs was a considerable work, and required time and attention in no slight degree. As publicity was, up to a very late period in Germany, banished from everything in the shape of legal transactions, it was easy to conceal the change in the testamentary dispositions of the defunct lady; and beyond the men of business employed and sworn to secrecy, no one was aware of what had happened. The Countess T— even (such was the will of the brothers) still believed her favorite son to have inherited his aunt's property entire. Mademoiselle de G— had, with her guardian's permission, accepted an invitation given to her by a distant relation of her own, to stay a few weeks at the *residenz*, — town, and thither Franz had more than once gone over to see her. Upon the occasion of one of these visits, something in her manner had struck him, and he had abruptly taken his leave. After a few moments' consideration, he went straight to his brother's abode, a splendid hotel belonging to the M— succession. When he entered Count Friedrich's room, the latter turned deadly pale; and you might have seen, before a word was spoken, that something wrong was there—that a gulf yawned between those two, and held them asunder.

Franz—delicately, at first, and then determinedly—reminded his brother of his spontaneous promise touching their aunt's inheritance; but neither determination nor delicacy, won, this time, any direct answer from Count Friedrich. He sought refuge in one pretext after another, until at length his brother lost all patience, and threw off all restraint.

"What meant your readiness to act rightly two years back, or what means your hesitation now?" demanded Franz with threatening aspect.

Friedrich muttered some reply, in which the name of "Wilhelmine" was audible. His brother sprang from his seat—

"Wilhelmine?" echoed he. "What can you have to do with her?"

"My aunt, upon her death bed, made her promise to wed her heir—"

"Well!" pursued Count Franz, "and your plighted word to restore everything to me? Am I not her rightful heir?"

"I have sworn to Wilhelmine—" faltered Franz.

"You lie!" screamed Franz; and, had not the elder brother warded off the blow aimed at him by the younger, his last hour would probably have been told; but, strong as was Franz,

Friedrich was stronger still, and he rescued his own life, and retiring at the same instant, left his disinherited brother to his reflections and his despair.

But if despair he really felt, he was too proud to show it. That same evening he wrote a letter to Mademoiselle de G—, which, however, full of contemptuous irony, bore no trace of wounded affection, and the next day he set out for a journey into Northern Germany.

It was, alas! too true that Wilhelmine, so soon as she learnt from Madame de M— the alteration of her will, had resolved also upon a transfer in her own affections and had contrived to let Count Friedrich know that the love he had not hitherto dared to avow, might now, if he chose, meet its recompense. Friedrich loved Wilhelmine to idolatry—there was the secret; and to that love he had given up everything—even his honor, even the probability of domestic happiness—for he *knew* that he was accepted as a suitor for the sake of his fortune only.

Time went by, and, at the end of six months Franz returned to D—, where nothing was talked of but the approaching marriage of his brother with Mademoiselle de G—. Had he presumed too much upon his own strength,—upon his own acquired indifference towards Wilhelmine? This was yet a mystery to himself; but certain it is that from the moment he beheld her again, surrounded by all the anticipated splendors of a fortune it should have been in his power to offer her, and transporting her newly affianced bridegroom into a seventh heaven of delusive joy by her pretended attachment—from that moment Franz became a prey to jealousy, hate, and a blind thirst for revenge. The work of the tempter was done.

The marriage was to be celebrated in ten days. A portion of the family diamonds of Madame de M— were at a country residence of hers, distant about ten miles from D—, and Friedrich set out, one afternoon, to fetch a certain necklace which his bride wished to wear at the nuptial ball. When he was about to return, the *regisseur* of the *chateau* pressed him not to go alone, but to take with him at least Johann, the gamekeeper, who was standing by, leaning on his gun. This, however, he refused, and, springing on his horse, went his way beneath the rising moon. There were two roads to D—, one by what was termed the *Markt Stape*—a dusty *chaussée*, encumbered by wagons and peasants' carts—the other, somewhat longer, but beautifully picturesque, through the forest. Count Friedrich chose the latter, and, half an hour after he had left his deceased aunt's park gate, he was as deep in the woods as his own love-like pre-occupation—somewhat deeper too, for before he had journeyed very far, he had lost his way, and was alone in the midst of briery paths, tangled copses, and stony ravines, which were to him utterly unknown. The moon shone in all her purest lustre, and the solitary traveller was enabled, by her brilliant light, to see that his watch marked nearly ten o'clock. He had just emerged from the deep shadow of a wood of pines, and found himself upon the edge of a sandy hill, leading down between thick plantations, on either side, to a valley, at the opposite extremity of which a number of lights indicated some tolerably large town, probably D—. The descent was so steep that he thought it prudent to dismount, and, passing the bridle rein over his arm, he commenced his downward progress on foot. With some difficulty he reached the bottom, and when there, cast a reconnoitering glance around.

A straight path lay rather to the left, whilst to the right the moon's rays were reflected in a large pond, surrounded with blooming heather to its very edge, and in parts overgrown with wild iris and water lilies.

The spot was so widely beautiful, the night so serene, that Friedrich stopped for an instant in contemplation. But this was an instant stolen from Wilhelmine, and he hastily gathered up the reins of his horse, and put his foot in the stirrup. But never was Count Friedrich to sit in saddle more, and never was gallant steed to bear again his living load. The stillness of the night was broken by the sharp report of a gun or pistol, and—with hand falling from the mane, and foot gliding from the flank

—the lonely horseman sank to earth without cry or groan. Almost simultaneous with his fall was heard a splash, as of something heavily dropping into water; then arose a cry so fearful it might have aroused the eternal sleepers, and from out the thicket darted the form of a man, who flung himself, with every mark of the wildest agony, upon the corpse. *It was Franz the fratricide!*

The details are useless. The crime was committed, the victim sent to his long account by a brother's hand, and that brother, seized with harrowing remorse, instantaneously upon the perpetration of the horrid deed, denounced himself to the magistrate of D— as the murderer. The trial was not a long one, for there was little or nothing to unravel, since the criminal withheld no detail of his guilt, but called loudly and unceasingly down upon his head the vengeance of both God and man. The body was submitted to the process of dissection, nevertheless, and the bullet was found to have literally traversed the heart, thus causing immediate and total suspension of vitality. Franz was condemned, but *not to death*. His bitter, despairing repentance, and the provocation given him by his brother, were taken into consideration, and he was sentenced to hard labor in the mines of — for life.

His mother went mad during the trial, and never recovered her reason. What became of the Countess Wilhelmine, no one seemed to know, and after the lapse of a year or so she was forgotten, and so was the tragedy of the T— family, when an event occurred which suddenly recalled the awful event to every one's mind. A noted poacher and thief, who had for years rendered the forest insecure, was seized, and brought to trial at D—. Amongst the witnesses, an elderly man swore to his having once had the prisoner under his orders, as gamekeeper, in the service of Baroness M—, whose steward or *regisseur* he, the witness, had been. The crimes laid to Johann L—'s charge being amply proved, he was condemned to death; but the day before his execution, he made a general confession of all his sins, not only to the minister of God, but to the director of the prison also. Something contained in these revelations was judged so important that an express was despatched to the highest authority, and Johann L—'s execution was deferred.

An order was also sent to the overseers of the mines at —, and one of the convicts was dispatched instantaneously to D—. That convict was Count Franz T—, so changed that his mother, had she enjoyed the use of her senses, could not have recognized him. He was made to submit, as it were, to his trial over again, and with great difficulty induced to recall every particular connected with the crime of his brother's death. In the midst of this, which was a private examination, a man entered the apartment, holding a gun in one hand, and a bullet, brown and rusty-looking, in the other. He approached the examining judge with marks of some strong yet strange emotion on his countenance.

"*It fits!*" said he, in a low, mysterious tone. "Is that the bullet?" asked the magistrate, and upon the other's affirmative reply—"Good!" added he, "you may go."

The one object which now absorbed seemingly, all the judge's attention, was the discovery of the pistol with which Franz had shot his brother. For some time the convict could not furnish any information on this point, until at length he remembered that, at the very moment of seeing his victim fall, he had flung it from him, and had heard it fall into the pond behind him.

The pond was dragged and the pistol found, and Count Franz was again sent for before his judges. In one corner of the apartment stood a ruffianly looking fellow in a prison gart, watched over by two soldiers.

"Count Franz," said the magistrate, "fifteen years ago you were condemned for the murder of your brother, whom you waylaid on the 17th of August, 183—, in the forest of S—, and against whose life you took aim with a pistol."

Franz kept his eye steadily fixed upon the ground and neither moved nor seemed to have more animation than a figure of stone.

"Count Franz T—," continued the judge, "you did not kill your brother. There stands his murderer."