

Literature.

THE DUEL.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH FOR THE
"BOSTON JOURNAL."

In the year 1805, when the peace of Tilsit put a stop to the conquests of Napoleon in Germany, the King of Prussia, exhausted by his astonishing efforts to maintain the war against France, reduced his army to the peace establishment. Consequently many Prussian officers who were stationed at Hamburg, received furloughs, or were dismissed from the service for a time; and a life of military danger and activity gave place to habits of idleness and dissipation.

In the early part of September, several of these officers having dined together, and sacrificed rather freely at the shrine of the jolly God, adjourned towards evening to the Exchange Coffee House the most noted hotel in the city. They entered singing and shouting in the most tumultuous manner, setting at defiance the rules of propriety and decorum. The youngest of the joyous band, the Baron de V——, who bore the commission of a Lieutenant in the army, was about twenty-five years of age, wealthy, handsome, and elegantly formed. But his mind did not correspond with his person—he was vain, insolent, self-conceited and presuming. When they entered the public room in this boisterous manner, they observed an individual of small stature, in a dark suit, seated alone at a table; he held in his hand the journal of the day while his right hand supported a pipe. He paid but little attention to the entrance of this formidable host of blackguards, scarcely deigning to raise his eyes from the paper he was reading. The young Baron doubtless offended at an appearance of indifference, which he thought bordered on contempt, approached the man in black, and familiarly slapping him on the back, said with a smile of bitter irony—

"Ah, my friend, good evening. From your appearance, I should take you to be a school-master, or perhaps a tailor,—am I right! where is your goose?"

The citizen raised his eyes, and fixed them for a moment on the countenance of his interrogator, and then resumed the perusal of the journal.

"God forgive my sins," continued the Baron, "he will not answer me. Come my little fellow we must be more sociable. Ah, I perceive the reason of your silence—that pipe incommodes you. As I must hear the sound of your voice, allow me to relieve you," so saying, he snatched the pipe from the hand of the stranger, and dashed it to pieces on the floor—a piece of wit which his companions applauded with shouts of laughter.

Without laying down the journal the insulted individual turned towards the entrance of the inner room and coolly said—

"Waiter, another pipe."

"Well done," resumed the young impertinent, "I have gained something, however, I have made him open his mouth."

The pipe was brought, filled, and lighted, and the citizen continued to peruse the journal as if nothing had happened.

"My little man," said the Baron, "where do you belong? In what village do you exercise your talents? What, no answer?—Have you resolved to enter into no conversation with me?"

Here the insulted person again raised his head and looked the officer full in the face, at the same time puffing out an immense volume of smoke,—he then deliberately resumed his former occupation.

"Perhaps I was mistaken in your character," interrupted the Baron, "you may be the *quid-unc* of the village, and perhaps are endeavoring to commit to memory the news which that paper contains to impart it correctly to your friends and neighbors. But you smoke like a Swiss. That pipe causes you great inconvenience." It was a second time broken.

Without evincing by a gesture, or any visible change of countenance, the least appearance of anger, the man in black coolly repeated his first demand—

"Waiter, another pipe."

"What a melodious voice!" resumed the Baron. "Such patience must be the attribute of an angel or a devil. I would give a thousand florins to see you in a passion. It would be delicious sport!"

An old Major, whose embroidered coat was decorated with military orders, and on whose German physiognomy was depicted frankness, true courage, and loyalty, who entered the coffee house with these hair-brained youths, now addressed the Baron in a low voice, but which notwithstanding could be heard in all parts of the room—

"My young friend you are insulting a stranger without provocation—you are foolishly guilty of a great impertinence, and your conduct and that of your applauding companions, begins to disgust me. I beg you will pursue this foolish joke no further."

The Baron with his companions accordingly adjourned to a neighboring room, and commenced playing at cards. To judge from their numerous jokes, followed by loud peals of laughter, it would seem that the young officer's folly and impudence were already forgotten.—An hour passed away, all was mirth and jollity, the Baron had gained a considerable sum, and his spirits were proportionably buoyant, when the little man in black entered the room and slowly approaching his chair, tapped him gently on the shoulder, and requested to speak with him in another apartment.

The Baron regarded him with a look of disdain over his shoulder, uttered an ill-timed jest and laughed in his face.

"Sir," said the man in black, in a decided and manly tone, "you labor under a trifling mistake, which I must be at some pains to correct. I am neither a tailor nor a school-master. I have the honor to be a post captain in the English Navy, very much at your service. You have insulted me, and I demand satisfaction; if you refuse it, I shall find means to obtain it. To-morrow morning, at seven o'clock, I shall await you here.—Bring pistols with you."

The astonished Baron, who during this address had risen from his chair, changed countenance more than once, and answered only by a low bow of acquiescence; he dared not trust himself to speak, lest his tongue should betray his terror. The captain politely saluted the rest of the company, and left the house.

With him parted all the gaiety of the lieutenant. He became thoughtful and taciturn, his mind wandered from the game, and he soon lost more than he had won. He was unnerved with terror, while reflecting on the consequences of his folly. What an advantage must an adversary possess over him, who could bear with so much calmness a series of degrading insults, and who could prose a duel with such imperturbable sang-froid! Such an antagonist must surely be singularly endowed with courage and skill. Such were the ideas which continually passed through his mind.

When the company separated, they all agreed to meet at the same place at the appointed hour. But it is not to be supposed that all slept equally well during the night. When they assembled the next morning at the Coffee House, they found the Englishman before them at their rendezvous; but he was now dressed in a splendid suit of the naval uniform of his nation. He was attended by a valet who carried a case under his arm.

He requested the officers to accept of some refreshment; and they entered into conversation, when the Englishman gave indications of possessing a cultivated mind, and a knowledge of the forms of society and of good breeding.

About eight o'clock he arose from his chair and begged the Prussian officer to select the spot where their quarrel must be decided, adding, that he was a stranger in the city, and that all places were alike to him. The Baron named the open pastures, lying between Hamburg and Altona.

When they arrived on the ground the Englishman asked the Prussian what distance he would prefer. He answered "fifteen paces." "That distance is too great," resumed the Englishman; "you will miss me. Call it ten if you please."—And his proposition was adopted.

The Major now made the observation that the captain had no second.

"That is of little consequence," said the Englishman, "if I fall my valet has my orders."

The Major represented that such a proceeding was contrary to the usage in affairs of this kind, and that if such a formality was neglected the duel could not take place, but he politely offered to assist in that capacity.

When the ground was marked out, and each of the principals had taken his station, the captain asked his antagonist significantly, if he had good pistols, for said he, I have a pair which I have often used, and which never miss their man. I will give you a proof of their excellence.

He then called his servant and ordered him to throw something into the air. The man took a handkerchief from his pocket. "That is too large," said the captain, "find something else." He then took from his pocket a dried prune.—"That will do," exclaimed his master. The fruit was thrown into the air—the pistol was fired—and the prune was shattered into a thousand pieces.

At this extraordinary proof of address, the spectators were struck with astonishment. As to the poor Lieutenant he was more dead than alive.

The captain now resumed his station, and requested his antagonist to fire, but the Major interposed, stating that it was contrary to the custom of the country—that the offended had an undoubted right to make the first essay, and after his fire was returned the rest should be decided by chance.

"My friend," said the captain, "if I should suffer myself to be influenced by your opinion, this young gentleman would never have another opportunity of testing the quality of his pistols. I must have my own way in this particular, and after I have settled the affair with this gentleman, each of his companions, who amused themselves at my expense last evening, and who, instead of restraining the impertinence of their friend, laughed at his ridiculous follies, must one after another front the muzzle of my pistol. Now, sir, I am ready.—Take good aim, for if you miss me you are a dead man."

The Lieut. presented his weapon, drew his trigger, and the ball passed through the Englishman's hat.

"It is now my turn," said the captain. "I was last evening a butt for your railleries, for your sarcasms. Without provocation you insulted me, covered me with humiliations. I was a schoolmaster, a tailor, a village babler. What am I now? a man. And what are you? a miserable wretch! a poltroon, trembling with fear! The death which in a few minutes you will receive from my hand, already surrounds you with shadows. The grim tyrant's icy hand is already extended over you—your lips are livid, your eyes are glazed—and your visage is as pale as the winding sheet, which in a few hours will envelope your body. Your feeble limbs can hardly support you, for insolence and cowardice go hand in hand together. But before my bullet pierces your heart, tell me, have you any arrangements to make? have you a last adieu to send to a mother, a father, a sister, or any other person who is dear to you? I have here the materials necessary for writing and will willingly grant you time to make any arrangement which you may think is necessary.

The young man muttered something of which an humble *I thank you*, was all that was intelligible.

"In that case," resumed the Englishman, "since reconciliation between us is absolutely impossible, and as it is necessary that your blood should wash out the affronts which I have received, I beg you to implore, by a fervent but brief mental prayer, for the mercy of the Eternal power."

Then taking off his hat he looked around upon the mute and terrified spectators of this imposing scene, who by a spontaneous impulse, uncovered themselves likewise. For a minute there reigned among the group, a religious and solemn silence, which was only interrupted by the hard breathing of the suffering Lieutenant.

At length seizing a pistol, and pointing it towards the Lieutenant, he kept him for a minute in a state of the most horrible suspense—then suddenly raising the weapon, he turned towards his valet, who stood near and handed him the pistol—

"Take it," said he, "this officer is not worthy the honor of dying by the hand of an Englishman."

The next day the Baron de V—— quitted that part of the country, and never resumed his station in his regiment.

SLEEPING FLOWERS.—Almost all flowers sleep during the night. The morigold goes to bed with the sun, and with him rises weeping. Many plants are so sensitive that their leaves close during the passage of a cloud. The dandelion opens at five or six in the morning and shuts at nine in the evening. The "Gnat's Beard" wakes at three in the morning, and shuts up its blossom in the evening and opens its "day eye" to meet the early beams of the morning sun. The crocus, tulip, and many others, close their blossoms at different hours towards evening. The ivy leaved lettuce opens at eight in the morning, and closes forever at four in the afternoon.

The night flowering cereus turns night into day. It begins to expand its magnificent, sweet scented blossoms in the twilight, it is full-bloom at midnight, and closes, never to open again, with the dawn of day. In a clover field not a leaf opens until after sunrise!

So says a celebrated English author, who has devoted much time to the study of plants, and often watched them during their quiet slumbers. Those plants which seem to be awake all night, he styles "the bat and owls of the vegetable kingdom."

LANGUAGE OF BIRDS.—A traveller in South America, speaking of the birds of his native land says it is pleasant to notice that, into whatever strange countries they may have wandered during winter, and whatever strange tongues they may have heard, they nevertheless come back *speaking English*. Hark!—"Phoebe! Phoebe!" plain enough. And by and by the Bob o' link, saying, "Bob o' Lincoln," and the quail saying, "Bob White." We have heard of one who always thought the robin said, "skillet! skillet! three legs to a skillet! two legs to a skillet!" A certain facetious doctor says the robins cry out to him as he passes along the road, "kill 'em! cure 'em! physic! physic! physic!" And the frogs indulge in humorous, sarcastic ditties, in which one hears, "jug o' rum! jug o' rum!" While another responds, "Paddy got dhroonk, got dhroonk, 'oonk, 'nk!"

DISTINGUISHED STRANGER EXPECTED.—Astronomers are looking for the appearance, in 1856, of one of the largest comets, described by European or Chinese observers. Its period is about 300 years. It was seen in the years 104, 392, 683, 975, again in 1264, and the last time in 1556—always described as shining with an extraordinary brilliancy. At its last appearance it fairly frightened Charles V. from his throne. Dejected by recent defeats, he looked upon the flaming meteor as a warning from God, abdicated his throne, and not long after died. If, at its expected coming, it would only frighten a few European tyrants from their thrones, the people would probably hail its appearance with joy.

The pulse, in the time of Hippocrates was, probably, not more than sixty beats in a minute, from which, probably, originates our smallest division of time, denominated the *moment*, or *second* which divides the day into eighty-six thousand four hundred parts. As the human species refine, probably the pulse quickens, and so completely are we machines, that, like a clock, the faster we go, the sooner we run down.

Abby Kelly, in one of her lectures expressed strong faith in Providence ultimately coming to the aid of the women in their attempt to gain their rights. "All things are possible with God," exclaimed the pious Abby.

"Divil a bit," responded an Irish listener in a dark corner. "He's not able to make a man of yers."