

LITERATURE.

ERNEST;
OR, THE CHILD OF DESTINY.

BY PAUL CREYTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

It was late at night. The good bourgeoisie of the city of Paris had retired to rest, and the streets were deserted and silent, save that at intervals a fiacre or a carrosse rattled over the pavements, and the quick footsteps of an occasional passenger fell upon the ear. The theatres and other places of amusement were closed for the night, and the swarms of pleasure-seekers which they poured forth had had time to reach their homes.

The soiree of the beautiful Mademoiselle Marie Duval had passed pleasantly away, and the select few, who had been admitted to her society, were now taking leave of her, one by one, and sauntering into the streets. Two alone lingered after the rest were gone, and these were among the most favored of the guests of M. Duval and his daughter. Maurice Lambert had long been intimate with the family, to which he had some time before introduced Ernest Claret, his bosom friend; and as Maurice was held in high esteem by both Marie and her father, Ernest was, for his friend's sake, regarded rather as an old acquaintance, than one whom the Duval family scarcely knew.

The two friends, we said, lingered after the other guests were gone, but they too, at last, took their leave, and, arm in arm, sauntered along the street. To have seen them, one would scarcely have recognised in their thoughtful features the two gay young men, who, an hour before, attracted the attention of the entire party by their elegant address and ready wit. Their gayety had passed away, and a sort of pleasing seriousness had taken possession of their hearts. For some time neither spoke, but they walked on in silence, absorbed in their own reflections.

"What ails you, Ernest?" cried Maurice Lambert, breaking in upon his friend's meditations.

"I was thinking," replied Claret, with a smile. "Very probable," returned his friend; "for I believe that every rational being thinks. But may I ask what weighs upon your mind, giving to your every look and action a tinge of melancholy?"

"Diable! I do not know myself, Maurice.—But somehow the look which our good friend Duval gave me, as I took my leave, calls up early associations, and it seems to me that I have seen his face before."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Maurice, it is even so; although where or when I cannot tell. It must have been many years ago, however—perhaps when I was a poor forsaken orphan."

"Dame, Ernest! tell me about that—when you were the orphan you have so often mentioned in my presence."

"Not to-night, Maurice," said Ernest, shaking his head sadly, "for the recollections Duval's strange look called up, are sad enough, without recurring to the details of my early history. You know that I am an orphan, that I was adopted at an early age by the excellent M. Claret, whose name I have borne ever since, and that I have every reason to consider myself a fortunate man. But the wrongs I endured—the wrongs which killed my mother, which I have since sworn to revenge, if Heaven has not saved me the task—you know nothing of them my dear Maurice, and I hope you never will!"

"Pardon me, Ernest, for questioning you; I was not aware of the deep wounds in your bosom, and am sorry to make you sadder than before."

"Parbleu!" exclaimed Ernest Claret, vehemently. "I am sad, and unless I seek some stirring scene—some powerful excitement, the melancholy of this night will stay by me for days. It is what I cannot shake off without assistance."

"Then I will remain with you, Ernest; we will seek some diversion together, and I will help you to get rid of your melancholy thoughts."

"Thanks, thanks, dear Maurice; but what do you propose?" asked Claret.

"You are fond of play?"

"It is an amusement, although I never play for money, except through courtesy."

"I know it, Ernest. But the game alone excites you. If you would forget your own thoughts, you could not do better than spend the remainder of the night—or at least a part of it—at Jean Louis' saloons. The company there is always of the first class, the players generous, and the wine superb. What do you say?"

"Sacrebleu! I accept your proposition," replied Ernest Claret, quickening his pace.

CHAPTER II.

THE GAMESTERS.

Half an hour after, the two friends were stationed in one of the most fashionable gaming saloons in the great metropolis of France. Foreigners from almost every country were present. Russian counts, Italian amateurs, English sportsmen, and German speculators, were mingled with dandies, blacklegs, artists, and even the nobility of Paris. All appeared upon the same footing there—all seemed moved by one common impulse—the passion for gaming.

Ernest Claret was engaged with an experienced Parisian player, while Maurice, together with several strangers, stood by, watching the progress of the game.

Although a moderate player, and what is termed an amateur, for want of a better or more suitable phrase, Ernest was unusually skilful at cards, being quick at observation, and accustomed to all the games and tricks of the day. On the present occasion, however, he had his match. His adversary played with great coolness and precision, turning his whole attention to the game. Ernest, at first, played carelessly, but when Louis after Louis had passed from his purse over to the side of his adversary, he began to pay greater attention to the game, although he played with the same coolness as before. His fortune, however, did not change. Vibert—for such was his adversary's name—continued to win from him until he had but a single bill of fifty francs remaining in his pocket. This Ernest staked, played for—and lost."

"Morbleu, M. Vibert!" he exclaimed, "you are in luck to-night! You have won from me more than eight hundred francs, and I haven't time to stop and recover my losses. Another time, however—"

"It is not late, Monsieur," interrupted Vibert, politely.

"Not late, I know, but you will excuse me for to-night," began Ernest; but a murmur of disapprobation among the spectators checked him, and he cast a meaning glance at Maurice Lambert.

Maurice understood him, and knowing that the adopted son of M. Claret was not always flush with ready money, slipped a *billet de banque* into his hand, unobserved by the spectators.

Ernest glanced at it hastily, and a strange smile played upon his lips—he saw that it was equal in value to all that he had lost that night.

"If then I am to be revenged on you, to-night, M. Vibert," said Ernest, gaily, "I must do it at one stroke. There is my stake."

"Good!" exclaimed Vibert, and the cards were again arranged. The game was short, but played with the greatest coolness and attention.

"You have lost, Monsieur," observed Ernest, carelessly. "Are you satisfied now?"

"Ah, Monsieur, you are very kind!" returned Vibert. "But you will not surely leave me so—"

"A *votre service*," said Ernest, shuffling the cards.

"The stake?" suggested Vibert.

"That *billet de banque* seems to be a lucky one," observed the other, with a smile. "If you have no objection—"

"Not the least," interrupted Vibert.

Once more they played, and once more the *billet de banque* won.

"Sacrebleu!" muttered Vibert; "*que je suis bete!* Had I not played a diamond when it should have been a trump;—but never mind; we will try the game once more."

Vibert studied the game until the perspiration stood upon his brow; played with the utmost caution; watched every move of his ad-

versary as the tiger watches his prey; but all in vain. A third time Ernest was in luck.—Vibert said not a word, but wiping the sweat from his forehead, proceeded to shuffle the cards.

"The *billet de banque* again?" asked Ernest.

Vibert made no reply, save a gesture of affirmation, and again the play went on.

"*Pardieu!* the devil is in your fingers!" muttered Vibert, forcing a smile, as still another thousand francs passed over to Ernest's side.

"Only a momentary change of fortune," said Ernest; "you will recover in a short time."

Again they played, and again Vibert lost.—He became agitated at last, and played like an insane man, clutching the cards with desperate energy, and keeping his bloodshot eyes fixed upon the game. Ernest, on the other hand, was cool and self-possessed; he appeared to regard his astonishing success with the utmost indifference. A group of admiring spectators soon gathered around them, greatly interested in the progress of the play.

"My dear sir," said Ernest, at length, frightened by the desperate manner in which his adversary played—"my dear sir, is it not time to finish for to-night. Another time—"

"Play on—play on!" interrupted Vibert, in a husky voice.

And they did play on; and in half an hour Ernest had reduced his opponent to the last franc.

A death-like silence prevailed for a moment, as Vibert, with his ashy lips compressed, and his pale brow resting upon his hands, stared fixedly at the cards upon the table.

"Let us away," whispered Maurice, touching Ernest upon the shoulder.

Ernest glanced at his friend, then at Vibert, and finally at the pile of money he had won.

"Diable! Maurice, what shall I do?" he murmured, passing his hand across his brow. "Here have I been playing for more than two hours without knowing what I was about. I played for amusement, never once thinking that I was ruining this poor devil—in fact, when I look at the money here, it seems that I have been dreaming. Tell me if I have won it all in fair play—"

These last words alone reached the ear of Vibert. He started up, as if a sudden thought had flashed across his brain.

"Fair play!" he echoed, with a ghastly smile. "*Sacre dieu!* I never lost like that with an honest player!"

"Sir?" said Ernest in a whisper, while the hot blood mounted to his brow.

Vibert was desperate. While all the spectators started back with a sort of savage delight, he sprang forward, and glancing fiercely at Ernest, exclaimed:—

"You heard my words—all present heard them, too!"

Ernest had become perfectly calm. One would not have observed the least emotion in him, had not his features been a shade paler than usual.

"Yes, Monsieur!" he said, politely, but with a sarcastic smile, "I heard your words, and beg to know when you will deign to explain them to me."

"*Morbleu!* at any time—the sooner the better!" replied Vibert, fiercely.

"Here is my address," began Ernest—

"I care not for your address," interrupted Vibert. "It is better that our differences should be settled on the spot—here—at this very moment!"

"*Cela n'est egal*," returned the other calmly. "It only remains for you to choose your weapons."

"They are chosen," said the Parisian, pointing, with a ghastly smile, at a pair of short swords which hung against the wall.

"Be it so," said Ernest.

"*Dame!*" whispered Maurice, "you are not going to fight the poor fellow?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? He is beside himself—he is desperate. Return him the money you have won, and let us be gone."

"Maurice!" exclaimed Ernest, reproachfully, "you, too, are beside yourself, are you not?—Consider that he insulted me before a crowd of spectators, and that I could not retreat if I would. I pity him, for in the state you see him, I am confident that he will lose not only his money but his sword."

"Be not too confident," whispered Maurice,

"for I am told that Vibert is one of the ablest swordsmen in Paris."

"*Tant mieux! tant mieux!*" exclaimed Ernest, gaily.—(To be Continued.)

SKETCH OF A BATTLE.

Now for the fight. On the morning of the battle of Toulouse we left Grenoble. It was known, amongst us that the battle was coming off; and we started with the expectation of passing the night either in the city or in its immediate vicinity. We ascended towards the city by the left bank of the Garonne, but reached a Pontoon bridge, which enabled us to cross to the right bank, where the main body of our troops were posted. The fight had commenced. We heard the firing as we advanced, and while we approached the scene of action it became gradually louder and more distinct. Immediately in the rear of the British lines we halted, not knowing the ground, and withdrew from the road into a field which was close at hand, in order that our numerous party might not prove an obstacle to passing troops, ammunition or artillery. Our forces held the low ground, and closed in a kind of semi-circle around the heights occupied by the French. As it so happened that I was not only at the battle, but in it, I here beg leave to relate the circumstances which led to my finding myself in a position where, as a civilian, I was so little wanted and so much out of my ordinary sphere of duty.

Sancho did it all. We were sitting upon our nags, speculating upon the fight, and seeing all that could be seen, till we began to think we knew something of what was going on. At this moment rode up from the rear, coming across the fields, an old officer of rank, a major-general, well known at head quarters, without aide-camp, orderly, or any kind of attendant. He inquired eagerly,

"Where are the troops? Where are the troops?"

We pointed forward; little was visible but trees. He looked rather at a loss, but turned his horse's head in the direction we had indicated. That villain Sancho, seeing another horse go on, snorted and pulled at the bridle. He was tired of standing still. I, ever indulgent to Sancho, followed the old general, and soon overtook him.

"I believe I know the position of the troops, sir. Will you give me leave to show you?"

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said he, "I shall really be much obliged."

We rode on till we reached a British regiment, drawn up in a line. With renewed acknowledgments, he then took his leave. The air was musical above our heads with whistling and humming missiles. I was now fairly upon the ground, and didn't like to go back.

There was a lull in the fight. The spectacle was singular. Some firing was kept up on both sides, but not sufficient to obscure the view of the French position, which rose immediately in front, a bare range of hills crowned by their redoubts. The atmosphere was bright; and though the skirmishers on the declivity were discoverable only by small white jets of smoke as they fired from time to time, every movement of the enemy on the summit, with the sky for its background, was perfectly visible. I noticed a single horseman, probably an aide-camp bearing orders, as distinct and diminutive as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope.—You might perceive the very action of his horse, that laborious up and down gallop of the French *manege*, which throws away so much of the animal's strength and sacrifices speed without securing elegance.

The combat at this moment was renewed, and our troops went to work in earnest. The Spanish army ascended the hill to assault the enemy's redoubts. This movement at first had all the regularity of a review. But the redoubts opened their fire; as the Spaniards moved up the smoke rolled down; and, when the wind swept it away, their broken bands were seen in precipitate retreat, followed by a large body of the French, who swarmed out from their entrenchments. Instantly, and just in front of me, our artillery opened upon the pursuing foe. The round shot plumed into their columns, knocking up clouds as high as a house; and the enemy not relishing this salutation, hastily fell back to their former position. Sancho now