

Poetry.

THE BIRTH OF PRINTING.
FROM THE DUTCH, BY JAMES NACK.

With glowing face and kindling eye,
Earth's angel turned to the Most High,
While hell was moved with ire,
He bowed before the Godhead's throne
Until the will supreme was known.
Then from the beams that round him shone
He caught a dazzling fire;
Away, thro' systems and thro' spheres,
On floating wings he downward steers,
More nigh to earth, and nigher.

Now o'er the cloud encircled sphere
He hovers, still more near and near,
And now a moment stays
On doubtful wing, to watch the whole;
While kingdoms, states, and nations reel
Alternate on his gaze,
He searches all, to find the place
Most worthy upon earth to grace
With its celestial rays.

At last he saw a little spot,
Neglected, humble and forgot,
The lowest at his feet!
But from the sea which gave it birth
For heaven a jewel meet.

At once through clouds and vapours streams
The sacred fire, with flashing beams;
To Netherland it flies;
And there it shines forever bright,
The ray of heaven, creation's light,
The sun of mental eyes.

Amid the groves at Koster strayed
In thought beneath their shivering shade,
(Traditions thus impart),
Behold the god-borne spirit rushes
Upon him;—light around him gushes,
And flashes to his heart!
He feels—he welcomes—through his veins
It tingles—Earth! thy glory reigns!
Behold the PRINTER'S ART!

THE FALSE COUNT.

Pierre Coignard was the son of a vine-dresser of Langeais, in the department of the Indre et Loire, and served as a grenadier under the Convention.—Though a brave soldier, he was an audacious thief, and was at length apprehended, tried, and condemned to fourteen years of the galleys. But he did not like the seclusion of the Bagne; and, chained as he was like a wild beast, he contrived, in the fourth year of his imprisonment, to make his escape. His success, however, was attended by a circumstance which he had afterwards occasion to refer to as one of the great landmarks of his history. His comrade in the adventure had been likewise condemned, on the same day with himself, to fourteen years' fetters; and the two desperadoes were drawn together, not only by this coincidence in their fortunes, but by a dissimilarity in character and acquirements, which seemed to point them out as fit associates in crime. What the one wanted, the other possessed. Coignard was tolerably well educated; the other had known no other school than that of the world. Coignard was an easy, pliant man of society; the other a character of iron, molten by nature in a mould which might be broken, but never bent. Coignard, in fine, obtained his ends by address, fortified by resolution; and the other by an implacable stubbornness of purpose, which was dead to all considerations but the one idea before it, which it grappled and clung to for life or death. The union of two such men would have enriched the annals of guilt; but it was not to take place. They were detected in the act of attempting to escape, and only one could fly. Had that one been the comrade, he would at once have rejected the temptation. And why? Because the object of their plan had failed, which was the flight of both. But Coignard, who never grew sulky with fate, so far from abandoning his enterprise, made use of his unlucky friend as a stepping stone in his escape; and, putting his foot upon his shoulder, spurned him away as he caught at the wall above, behind which he speedily disappeared, with the vengeful yell of his associate ringing in his ears. He changed his name from Coignard to Pontis, fled into Spain, joined anew the French army, became a sergeant under the regime of Marshal Soult, and distinguished himself by his bravery and good conduct.

At Saragossa, in the year 1813, Pontis made the acquaintance of a Spanish girl called Rosa Marcon, whom he afterwards married; and the two congenial spirits set themselves to work to discover a way to fortune less tedious and doubtful than the ranks. An extraordinary coincidence in names gave them the first hint; and, indeed, so strange an influence do seeming trifles exercise over the destinies of men, that it was perhaps to this coincidence was owing the intimacy of two beings so well calculated to play into each other's hands in

the game of life. Why Pierre Coignard, among all the names of the world, should have chosen the name of Pontis, is not known; but it so happened that it was even as a household word in the ears of Rosa Marcon, she having served in some capacity or other in an emigrant family bearing that patronymic. Whether her service was that of a governess or a waiting-woman, and whether she retired or was driven from it, are matters beyond the ken of biography; but it is certain that she beheld with great interest an individual bearing a name so intimately associated with the events of her own history. And this interest was not lessened by the fact that Pontis was a young and handsome soldier, at once polite and daring, and endowed with that cool and gentle self-possession before which all weaker spirits quail like lunatics beneath the voiceless eye of their keeper.

But "Pontis!" that was the name of a titled family. Was this young grenadier a cadet of that noble house whose representatives had fled before the horrors of the Revolution? He might be so, by his person and bearing; and the idea retained hold of the imagination of Rosa, even after she learned that he had as little to do with the nobility, either of mind or birth, as herself. An epoch by-and-by came, when such an idea was likely to present itself in a more enticing form than now, when counts were at a discount. The French were compelled to evacuate the Peninsula. Louis le Desire returned to the throne of his ancestors; and our Pontis and his wife found themselves once more in a country where the husband had worked in chains as a *forcaut*.

They proceeded to Soissons, to look after the wrecks which the Revolution might have spared of their ancestral fortune. They found themselves alone in the field. No other Pontis appeared upon the scene; all had perished in exile; and owing to the registers of the town having been burned in the Revolution, the heir of the illustrious house was unable even to prove his birth! Thus unluckily situated, Pontis called upon an old lady of his own name, who was waiting in an agony of impatience to see her family re-established in their ancient honors by the blessed restoration. She recognized the handsome young soldier as a Pontis at the first glance; she knew him by the hereditary nose; she could not be mistaken in the calm, firm, half-smiling lip, which gave the world assurance of a Pontis. But who was this young wife whom he presented to her? Had the unhappy man tarnished his blood with a *mesalliance*?—Had he brought some obscure foreigner to mock the state of the Countess de Saint-Helene? No. The noble heir of the Pontis assured his aged relation, that even in exile he had been too proud of their common name to share it with one meaner than himself. This lady, though their marriage was unsanctioned by her family till his claims should be established, was of the highest blood of Spain—she was a daughter of the viceroy of Malaga. This was enough, almost too much. The old lady wept with pride and delight, and she ended by making the whole town weep with her. An act of notoriety, as it is called in French law, was readily obtained, acknowledging the birth of the returned emigrant; and this being transferred to the existing registers of Soissons, Pierre Coignard, the escaped felon, found himself transformed, as if by magic, into Pontis, Count de Sainte-Helene.

We have not ascertained that the pecuniary resources of the adventurer were much improved by this recognition of his nobility; indeed, it would seem from the context that this was not the case. It is far more difficult to obtain an estate than a title; and perhaps the count may have thought it imprudent to refer his claims to the searching arbitrament of the courts of law. But his grateful prince would not suffer the scion of the noble house to languish in poverty and obscurity; and, indeed, the talents of the count offered the fairest opportunities for his advancement, or rather made his advancement a duty on the part of the court.—He received successively the knightly decorations of the Legion of Honor and Saint Louis, became a member of the order of Alcantara, and rose to be a lieutenant colonel in the Legion of the Seine. On his part, he repaid the royal favor with unbounded devotion; his loyalty was without reproach, and he was esteemed one of the most rising and respectable characters in the French court.

The expensive manner in which the Count lived might have afforded, but for one circumstance, some suspicion that he enjoyed still weightier favors of government than crosses and decorations. The pay of a lieutenant-colonel, with any fragments he might have recovered of his hereditary possessions, was not enough to account for a liberality as unbounded as it was unostentatious.—

The inexhaustible fund on which he drew was neither squandered nor spared; he had money for all legitimate purposes; and when other men had recourse, on extraordinary emergencies, to loans and mortgages, the Count de Sainte-Helene had nothing to do but to write a cheque. His *marriage* accounted for this. His noble wife was the mine, on the produce of which he lived; and her Spanish gold was daily transmuted in any quantities into French silver.

It was supposed at the time, however, that other men had recourse to disreputable means of supply; for the wholesale robberies that were committed on all hands had become as alarming as they were inexplicable. No precautions were sufficient for the safeguard of valuable property. In the recesses of palaces, thefts were as common as in the shops of the citizens; and it was obvious that there had been established a system of brigandage, whose organization comprehended a much higher class than usual. Even a nobleman was not safe from suspicion, whose habits exhibited anything of the mysterious; but as for our Count and Countess, they lived so much in public, they belonged so completely to the court and to society, that the suspicion must have been wild indeed which could attach itself to them.

One day the Count was at the head of his regiment in the Place du Carrouzel, assisting at a splendid military parade. On one side of the square were the garden and palace of the Tuilleries; on the opposite side the Avenue du Neuilly, extending as straight as an arrow along the side of the Champs Elysees, to the verge of the horizon, now terminated by a triumphal arch; on the third, the Place Vendome, with its noble column and on the fourth, the Seine, spanned by a bridge loaded with statues. This magnificent scene was crowded with spectators, even to the trees of the Champs Elysees; and as the Count de Sainte-Helene felt himself to be one of the great actors in the pageant, a wild thro' must have heaved the chest of the escaped *forcaut*. But the word he hardly now considered to apply to him; for his fourteen years sentence was expired if not fulfilled. Some days ago he had celebrated in his own mind the fourteenth anniversary of his condemnation, and declared himself to be a free man! It is no wonder that on this occasion he should revert exultingly in his escape from the bagne, as an event which had turned the current of his life, and given to him his fortune; but as his thoughts lost themselves in the recollection, he leaped suddenly in the saddle as if transfixed with a spear.

At first he hardly knew what it was that had affected him, or knowing it, he set it down as a delusion growing out of his waking dream. An eye had rested upon his for a moment, as his face was turned towards the crowd—a phantom eye, doubtless, such as sometimes glares upon us from the abysses of memory, for he never could meet with it again. Yet the Count could not help repeating to himself, nor avoid a sensation of sickness as he did so, that the comrade he had abandoned to his chains, spurning him with his foot while he did so, was now a free man like himself, and by a more legitimate title! In the case of almost any other human being in similar circumstances, this would have been of little consequence, for he was now rich enough to buy silence from hate itself. But Pontis knew his man.

That night the portress of a common-looking house in the rue Saint Maur was called from her repose by a gentle ring at the bell.

"What is your pleasure?" said she, speaking through the wicket. "I am alone, and although very poor, do not care to open to strangers." The visitor muttered a word in reply, and the door was opened as instantly as its ponderous bolts permitted. He followed her through a ruinous court, and signifying by a silent gesture that he would dispense with her further service, he knocked at another door. Here he was again challenged, but his voice gained him admittance as before, and presently he found himself in a room much more comfortable than might have been expected from the exterior.

"What! you here?" said the man who opened the door to him, and who was the only inmate of the apartment. "Why, Peter, this is an unusual and unexpected honor."

"I have reasons, Alexander," replied the visitor gravely; and as he opened his cloak and threw his hat upon the table, the striking resemblance between the two men would have enabled a stranger to pronounce them at once to be brothers.

"Reasons you of course have, for you never act without them; but before you open your budget, let me put you in good humor by presenting you with this handsome sum of money, your share of as rich a spoil as we have yet taken."

"Set it down; I cannot attend to business at present. I have seen a ghost."

"A ghost! I know a man who would scare even you; but I was not aware that you stood in special awe of the immaterial world. In what form appeared the ghost?"

"In the form of a human eye, which was fixed upon mine to day for an instant in the Place du Carrouzel. Whether it was anything more than a fragment of a dream I had fallen into at the moment, I cannot tell, but if it was really in a human head, it belongs to the man you allude to."

"And what then?"

"Merely that I am lost."

"What nonsense! You are too clever, too self-possessed, too far-seeing for that. You are unknown even to your own band—I, your lieutenant and your brother, being the sole medium of communication between you. Besides me, you have no confidant in the world but your own wife, your splendid Countess, who is the life and soul of the association, without whose guiding voice we could not stir a step, and who could not erminate you without destroying herself."

"All that is true; but you do not know the man as I do."

"We must buy him."

"It is for that I am here. But take care you bid high. Strip me of all I possess—take the diamonds crosses from my breast—take the jewels from my wife's hair—but let him have his price! You must do still more than that."

"Not blood?"

"Not without necessity. We must employ him. We must steep his hand in crime—and that will be your easiest task. Till he is again at the mercy of the police—till the fourteen years' fetters of Toulon dance again before his vision—it is impossible for me to sleep."

"And if all fails? If he will neither steal gold nor accept of it as a present—"

"Then we shall talk farther."

Among the crowd that day in the Place du Carrouzel, there had been a man who attracted the attention of some of the older members of the police. His was a well known face; but it had not been seen for many years, and the thief-takers employed themselves in getting the lineaments again by heart. But the man, secure in his innocence, (for the bagne wipes of all scores,) strolled carelessly on. He did not meet a single acquaintance—fourteen years being, in his calling, the outside limits of a generation; till all on a sudden, as he glanced upon a general officer passing slowly on horseback, an expression of surprise escaped him, his dull eye lightened with joy, and then the brief illumination faded away into a fixed and lurid glare. At that moment the officer appeared to see him; and shutting his eyes suddenly, and ducking under the shoulders of the crowd, the old *forcaut* turned away.

It was easy for him to ascertain the rank and position of the object of his interest; to learn that without estates, he possessed prodigious wealth; that he had brought a wife with him from Spain, who was supposed to be the source of his riches; and that the records of Soissons having been burned, he had established his birth by an "act of notoriety."

"Ah!" said he, "that is so like him! He is a clever fellow, and he is now at his old tricks; but he has climbed thus far upon the shoulder of his comrade—he must down!" He went straight to the office of the prefect, and denounced Lieutenant Colonel Pontis, Count de Sainte-Helene, as an escaped *forcaut*. The clerks laughed at him, the prefect ordered him to be turned out, and the informer, saying politely that he would call again to-morrow, took his leave.

The next morning he was met near the prefecture by a man, who entered into conversation with him.

"You are from Toulon?" said the stranger, abruptly.

"Well, if so?"

"You are going to denounce somebody?"

"Yes!"

"He is too strong for you."

"We shall see."

"Are you rich?"

"I have still enough for dinner; I must shift as I can for the rest of the day."

"Will a thousand francs do?"

"No."

"Ten thousand?"

"No."

"Twenty thousand?"

"No."

"Come, at a word—we want to be friends with you. What do you want?"

"Take four from fourteen, and there are ten; ten years of fetters would satisfy me. I will not abate him a month."