

Poetry.

GOD'S BLESSING ON THEM.

BY CHARLES WILTON.

God's blessing on them!—those old saints
Who battled hard and long;
Who cleft in twain a stubborn chain,
And conquered might and wrong!
O, time! revere their sanctity,
Nor let their glory cease;
For by a mortal victory
They sealed immortal peace.

God's blessing on them!—those stout hearts,
In these advancing days.
Who seek to guide the progress stride
From error's countless ways?
O, be their track a track of light,
The onward march of man;
The wise to shape our course aright,
The good to lead the van.

God's blessing on them!—one and all,
Of every rank and clime,
Who strive to aid the stern crusade
Against the growth of crime!
O be their names a rolling cry
For ages yet to come;
A word whose echo shall not die
Till Nature's self be dumb.

Select Tale.

THE POST-MISTRESS.

On a gloomy October day, in the year —, six travellers arrived at the post-house of Nonancourt, a village distant about twenty leagues from Paris, on the road to Nantes. Their harrassed horses, covered with dust and foam, were quite incapable of performing a longer stage. These travellers evidently reckoned upon remaining at Nonancourt merely long enough to afford time to replace their jaded animals by fresh ones; but when they were told that there was no possibility of satisfying their demands for the moment, all the relays being exhausted, their fury and disappointment vented itself in horrible imprecations. The person who appeared to be the commander of the little troop, called loudly for the postmaster, hoping to frighten him by menaces, as he suspected, from what was told him of the poor condition of the animals in the stable, that there was but little inclination to furnish him with fresh ones. A young woman, attracted by the noise, made her appearance at the entrance of the court; and as the boisterous clamour went on increasing, she advanced quietly, and by a sign demanded silence; then said in a cold, calm voice—

"What is it you require, gentleman?"

"The post-master."

"It is I who hold that office."

Her brother, a lad barely seventeen years of age, came and placed himself at her side; he was pale with passion, and seemed eager to protect her, but she refused his intervention gently but firmly.

The captain, making use of his authority over his rude companions, commanded silence; and addressing our heroine, Mademoiselle L'Hopital, informed her "that a most urgent matter obliged them to continue their journey without delay, and that if she would consent to furnish them with the necessary horses immediately, he, on his part, promised he would pay her double the regular charge."

"You have already been told the cause of our refusal," coldly replied the post-mistress.

"Oh, certainly; but we are not to be duped by such a subterfuge."

"Lead these gentlemen to the stable, John," returned Mademoiselle L'Hopital, addressing a servant, "that they may judge for themselves whether any one has tried to deceive them."

John obeyed, and his mistress, without listening further to the grumbling of the strangers, returned to her ordinary seat in the small apartment adjoining the common travellers' room.

The strangers, after convincing themselves of the injustice of their suspicions, installed themselves in the waiting-room, cursing the necessity they were under of delaying their journey. One of them drew from his pocket a set of dice, which he held up before his companions, urging them to make use of them as a means of killing time. Three of them accepted the challenge, whilst their chief took one of the men aside, and began a very animated discussion. The conversation being carried on in English, Mademoiselle L'Hopital, who was thoroughly versed in that language, unavoidably heard some words that made her shudder, at the same time causing her to give more attention to what was going on. She drew nearer to the thin partition which separated the speakers from herself; and pale, but with a strong determination to over-

come any emotion, she listened to the details of a foul conspiracy in which the strangers appeared to be engaged. The wretches were expressing their fears lest this delay might prove ruinous to the success of their enterprise, and thus deprive them of their promised recompense.

Mademoiselle L'Hopital, terrified at their depravity, remained at first motionless, uncertain how to act; but soon her natural energy, augmented as it was by the strength of her indignation, triumphed over this first moment of weakness. She felt that a sacred task had been imposed upon her by Divine Providence, which would demand all her prudence and courage. Every moment she knew to be precious. The courageous young girl hastily sought her brother, and hastily told him that an affair which would brook no delay required her presence at some distance from the village, and during her absence, which she would take care to render as short as possible, she trusted he would use every possible means to detain them at Nonancourt, as upon this depended the failure or success of an enterprise of the greatest importance. This mysterious communication excited both the surprise and curiosity of the youth; but his sister positively refused to answer any questions. She did not dare confide so terrible a secret to one both young and thoughtless; but as he continued to urge her, she at length replied—

"Later you shall know all, but you strive in vain to make me speak now. Can I rely on your scrupulous obedience?"

"Why not add, also, that I must obey you blindly, my sister," responded the boy in vexation. "But no matter, do not fear, I will do my best."

"I am satisfied with your promise. Remember that upon what you are about to do may depend the greatest joy or lasting sorrow, not only to others, but to ourselves."

"Go without fear, my sister, and the boy will act as a man."

"Without further delay, Mademoiselle L'Hopital hurried out of the house. She soon passed the limits of the village, and quitting the road leading from it, she hastened across the fields without once pausing to take breath, until she had attained the high-road, which formed at that particular spot a sort of *carrefour*, or place where four roads meet in crossing each other. She looked towards the road to Paris with an intensity almost amounting to agony—but all was silent. She heard nothing but the sound of her own footsteps rustling among the fallen leaves that were strewn along the road.

"Have I arrived in time," thought the courageous young girl; can I manage to warn him of the horrible danger that menaces him? Oh, my God! since thou hast willed that I should become acquainted with this intended crime, grant me the means to avert it."

After thus imploring the assistance of Heaven, she sat down on a small rising ground, covered with turf, and watched as if awaiting some one.—But her looks betrayed how painful this state of forced inaction became to her feelings, as with increasing anxiety her eyes scrutinized, and seemed to interrogate the different routes that crossed at this point.

Would it be the victim or his murderers that would first make their appearance? Horrible doubt—horrible alternation of thought tormenting her mind, caused it to wave continually between hope and fear. If, incited by impatience, the strangers in her house at Nonancourt chose to proceed with their own horses, however fatigued the animals might be, what expedient, what could a poor youth throw into the way of six resolute men, formidably armed? It seemed to the anxious watcher, that from one instant to another they must appear before her, and her heart was chilled with fear. How could she flatter herself with the hope of saving one whose ruin they had sworn to accomplish? The fatality which seemed to follow and weigh down all his race, was it also to annul all her efforts? There Mademoiselle L'Hopital asked herself whether she had acted with all the prudence and circumspection that so important a secret demanded. Was it right to have assumed to herself so great responsibility, to trust to no other than her own intervention to prevent the commission of a fearful crime? These doubts preying on her mind became a terrible torment; she accused herself of precipitation, and deplored her own imprudence, as if she had the choice of means, and the time to appreciate between them.

An hour passed away in this trying condition; the courage of the poor young girl became exhausted; sadness and discouragement overwhelmed her. Suddenly a distant noise attracted her attention, but she was not quite certain from what direction it proceeded. She rose with eagerness, and the sound approached nearer, and she imagined she heard the rolling of carriage wheels. A post-chaise at length came in sight on the Paris road,

drawn by four horses. Heaven had heard and answered her prayer.

Mademoiselle L'Hopital advanced in front of the carriage, and waving her handkerchief, entreated the driver to stop. The postilion hesitated, but one of the travellers ordered him to obey the signal, in spite of a rather warm opposition on the part of his companion; then, leaning out of the carriage, he desired the maiden to approach, thoroughly convinced that it must be some poor unfortunate person who wished to make an appeal to his generosity. The stranger, whom the young girl regarded so earnestly, had barely attained his five-and-twentieth year. His features, although regular, and of a noble and distinguished cast bore the stamp of melancholy, which was more or less peculiar to the whole race of Stuarts, to which he belonged. Misfortune had already left its indelible traces upon his countenance. Remarking all this at a glance, Mademoiselle L'Hopital at once recognized the son of the illustrious exile of St Germain, better known as the Chevalier de Saint George, at this time the victim of the French Regent, who was endeavouring from political motives, to compel him to quit France.

Turning kindly towards the young girl, the Chevalier said—

"Speak without fear, lady; unfortunate myself, I will know how to feel for the misfortunes of others."

So encouraged, our heroine, in a trembling voice, began to relate how she had become acquainted with the infamous plot formed to assassinate the unfortunate exile. A few abandoned wretches had determined to waylay him about a quarter of a mile, off, where the road, being extremely lonely, appeared most favourable for effecting their purpose.

In spite of the prepossessing appearance of his informant, and the truthful accent of her voice, the Chevalier appeared to listen with a kind of incredulity, whilst he gave way to some expressions of anger.

"Assassinate me, in France! They dare not!—I know we are no longer in the good times when a great king accorded a generous and noble hospitality. The Regent, on the contrary, thinks he is bound to follow another policy! But what then? Surely even he would never consent to so disgraceful a piece of treachery as this?"

"He has given an order to arrest your Grace?" exclaimed his companion in an undertone. Such a proceeding as that would justify one in supposing him capable of anything."

During these remarks the agitation of Mademoiselle L'Hopital went on increasing.

"If your Grace does not put faith in my words," she cried, "all is lost!"

The conviction of the truth of her warning at once flashed upon the mind of the Chevalier. It seemed to him impossible that the emotion she betrayed could be feigned.

"I believe you, madam," he said, after a short pause; "it was not your sincerity I suspected, but I could hardly believe the treachery even of my enemies. Now, however, that we are acquainted with it, the danger is over; for if the assassins do come, we shall know how to defend ourselves."

"Your Grace cannot speak seriously," observed his companion in the carriage, "When you would cross swords with such a band of cut-throats.—Fie upon it! such a task is only fit for a hangman."

"To fly before them, my lord, seems to me far more humiliating."

"There are six of them, all well armed," added Mademoiselle L'Hopital.

"Assassins always tremble," replied the Chevalier warmly.

The countenance of his companion expressed how much he suffered from the impatience that burned within him, but which he endeavoured to repress.

"Let your Highness commands," he replied bowing, "be obeyed. I am ready to sacrifice my own life in this unequal contest; but yours, Sire, belongs to England."

"Already on my way in consequence of this cruel and treacherous order, it is not enough but I must now fly before a fear of assassination! Sad mockery of the semblance of royalty!" Then he he added in a milder tone, "Your generous intervention shall not be forgotten, madam. I obey the counsels of prudence, however hard they may be, under such circumstances. My lord, will you inform the postilion that we change our route?"

"Ah, God be praised!" exclaimed the young girl, sinking on her knees in gratitude upon finding that her counsels were received, and the Chevalier would incur no further risk.

"I have a mother, lady," exclaimed the exiled prince sadly, "a good and excellent mother, who will thank you for having saved the life of her son; she will find in the depth of her heart the means of

expressing her thanks, which altogether fail me; but misfortune has not dried up my heart as to leave it incapable of remembering a service like this."

As he added these words he bowed to the maiden before him, and gazed upon her with a look full of kindness and dignity.

Obedient to his orders, the postilion changed his route, and starting his horses off at full gallop.—Mademoiselle L'Hopital gazed earnestly upon the receding carriage, which soon disappeared amidst a cloud of dust.

"He is saved!" she murmured to herself; "thank heaven that I have been permitted to be the instrument of this."

She returned with a quick step to Nonancourt, her mind agitated by new anxieties. She longed to know how her brother could have managed to retain the assassins there so long without awakening their suspicions. How could an imprudent and impetuous youth be expected to guard against the danger of such men? The worst consequences must be expected, if once they found out that they had been deceived. Of what excesses might not such wretches be guilty!

A few yards from the post-house, Mademoiselle L'Hopital perceived her brother running towards her. She received him instantly in her arms with an affectionate embrace.

"You grant me a recompence before you know whether I deserve it," began the youth gaily.

"Do I not see you safe and sound?" replied his sister; "what can I desire more?"

"What! you do not even ask after your prisoners?"

"What have you done with them? Where are they?"

"They are in the room, just where you left them."

"Their anger must be beyond all bounds."

"Bah! they are as mild as lambs!"

"Are you not joking when you speak thus?"

"Not in the least; but you may judge for yourself."

"But how? By what miracle can this be?"

"Ha! ha! I knew well that curiosity would awaken at last; but I am going to be good, and not tantalize you too long. Well, then, as soon as you left, I sent out servants in all directions, wherever they might meet the horses that were being brought back to the post, and I contrived to persuade our guests that I acted thus in order to accelerate the arrival of the postilions. They waited patiently enough for about half an hour; but after that loud cries, imprecations, menaces of all kinds burst from them; one would have thought that a whole legion of evil spirits had escaped from the lower regions."

"My poor boy?"

"What would you have done in my place?"

"In truth I know not."

"Well, where your wisdom might have been at fault, my folly knew quite well how to get out of the trouble."

"Be brief my dear brother, and tell me all."

"I placed at the discretion of these miscreants—and gracious, what discretion!—the best wine in our cellar."

"And now, what are they doing?"

"They sleep, not exactly the slumbers of the blest, but those of the besotted."

"You have indeed been inspired with a happy stratagem. But our task is not yet ended; and when the drunkenness of these wretches is dispelled, they must be treated according to their deserts."

"So be it. But you do not intend to explain all this?"

"Prepare at once to take a few lines from me to the captain of the town guard, which I am now going to write."

"How can you expect me to aid you blindly a second time? No, indeed, that is too much—I revolt at last!"

"Dear brother, my note will be open, and you can read it on the way."

"Well, and good, on such conditions."

"But, above all, be quick; for should our guests awake, I might find myself in a predicament."

"Never fear; they have taken a precious narcotic."

The youth was right. When they did begin to recover from the effects of the intoxication, it was to find themselves manacled, and under the guard of the soldiers.

Shortly after this, Mademoiselle L'Hopital received a packet sealed with the arms of England, containing a letter, and enclosing a portrait. The first contained the thanks of the illustrious mother of the Chevalier St. George, for preserving the life of her beloved son. The portrait, which proved an excellent likeness of the prince, was surrounded by diamonds of great beauty and value. Our heroine preserved it most precious, and it served to remind her at once of the happiest and most painful hour of her life. Nor was this all. The post-mistress of Nonancourt received from time to time an accession of distinguished visitors, no doubt recommended from the same source, which speedily rendered her prosperous.