

Literature, &c.

FROM A LONDON MAGAZINE.

THE HISTORY OF A FRENCH ARTIZAN DURING THE LAST REVOLUTION.

I was born in the beautiful valley of the Seine, near the small town of Bonnières. It is a lovely place; and I will say no more of it; for in sitting down to write all the miseries and horrors that have visited me since I left it, the fair calm spot of my birth, and the sweet peaceful scenes of my boyhood, rise up like the reproachful spirit of a nobler parent before a criminal son, and upbraid me for having ever quitted my tranquil home. My father, though but the gardener at the chateau, was also a small proprietor; and, in his spare time, used to cultivate his own fields by the banks of the river. The chateau had been purchased by Mons. —, the rich bookseller in Paris; and in hanging about the house while a child, I became a great favourite with the good Parisian. Still my principal patron was Monsieur le Cure of Bonnières, who discovered in me an amazing genius for my catechism, taught me to read and write, gave me a smattering of Latin, and declared, that if I took pains and behaved well, he and Monsieur V— between them, would procure me the means of studying, and make me a clergyman like himself.

My ambition was flattered with the prospect; and during my early years, the dream of my future honors was always before me; but, as I grew up and learned to dance upon the green with the girls of the village, my sentiments insensibly changed. I began to think of leaving off dancing, and being grave, and serious, and never marrying—each with an augmented degree of horror. The decisive blow, however, was struck, when I had seen three times Mariette Dupont. We were both as young as we well could be to fall in love; but she was so beautiful, and her soft dark eyes looked so imploringly into one's heart, that from the very first moment I saw her, I felt an inclination to put my arm round her, and say, "Thou shalt be my own; and I will guard thee from sorrow, and care, and adversity, and shelter thee from every blast that blows in the bleak cold world around." But on this I must not pause either, for the memory of such dreams is bitterness. The matter went on—I loved Mariette, and she—Ay! that joy is at least my own—lasting, imperishable, and the annihilation of a world could not take it from me—She loved me—deeply, truly, devotedly—through life—to the tomb!

Years flew by; and we were married; for my father had never liked the thought of my becoming a priest, which he looked upon as being buried alive. He said I should do much better to labor as my ancestors had done; or, since I had a superior education, could read and write, and understood Latin, I might easily make my fortune in Paris. So he willingly gave his consent to my marriage with Mariette. Monsieur V—, the bookseller, and it was always right to let fools have their own way; and the Cure frowned and united us, merely observing, that he had bestowed his time and attention very much in vain.

By my father's counsel we determined to go to Paris immediately, for he and my brother were both sure that I should there become a great man, and Mariette had no doubt of it. "Besides," my father said, "if you do not get on there, you can come back here, and help to take care of our own ground, while I work at the chateau."

To Paris we went, and took a small lodging in the Faubourg Poissonniere, where, for two or three weeks, Mariette and myself spent our time and our money in love and amusement. We were not extravagant, but were thoughtless; and surely a three-weeks thoughtlessness was but a fair portion for such happiness as we enjoyed. At length I began to think of seeking something to do, and I had sufficient self-confidence to fancy I could even write in a newspaper. Forth I went to propose myself; and Mariette's eyes told me how high were her anticipations of my success. To the proprietors of the *Constitutionnel*, my first application was made; but the gentleman I saw bent his ear to catch my provincial jargon—looked at me from head to foot—told me I was dreaming; and turned upon his

heel. How I got out of the house, I know not; but when I found myself in the street, my head swam round, and my heart swelled with mingled indignation, shame, and disappointment.

It required no small effort to force myself to enter the office of the *National*, which was the next I tried. There I mentioned my pretensions, in a humbler tone, and only proposed that something from my pen might be received as an experiment. The clerk to whom I spoke bore my message into an inner room, and returned with a calm, business-like face, to inform me that all departments were full. This had occupied me the whole morning; and I now returned to Mariette, who instantly read my mortification in my countenance. She asked no questions, but only cast her arms round my neck, and with a smile, which was not gay, though it was not desponding, she whispered, "Do not be vexed, Frank. They cannot know yet how clever you are. When they see more of you, they will be glad enough to have you. Besides, we can go back again to Bonnières."

The thought of returning unsuccessful to my own home, was not what I could endure. I imagined the cold eye of the curate; and the disappointment and surprise of my father and brother; and the jeers and the wonder of the whole village; and I determined to do any thing rather than go back to Bonnières. The landlord of our lodgings was a tinman, a great politician, and a literary man. All his information, however, was gathered from a paper called the *Globe*, there I went, after dinner; and, having taken a couple of turns before the door, to gather resolution, I went in, and modestly asked when I could see the editor. One of the young men in the office answered that Monsieur — was then in the house, and ushered me into another room. Here I found a gentleman writing, who looked up with a pleasant and intelligent expression, and pointing to a seat, asked my business.

As I explained it to him his countenance took a look of great seriousness; and he replied, "I am extremely sorry that no such occupation as you desire can be afforded you by the editors of the *Globe*, for we have applications every day, which we are obliged to reject, from writers of known excellence. I am afraid also, that you will find much difficulty in obtaining what you seek, for one of the worst consequences of bad government is now affecting the whole of France. I mean the undue proportion between the number of the population and the quantity of employment. Where the fault lies, I must not presume to say, but that there must be a great fault somewhere is evident; otherwise every man who is willing to labor, would find occupation."

It has struck me since, that there must often be causes for want of employment, which no government could either controul or remedy; but at the time, his reasoning seemed excellent; and all I felt was renewed disappointment, and a touch of despair, which I believe showed itself very plainly in my face, for the editor began to ask me some farther questions which soon led me to tell him my precise situation.

He mused, and seemed interested; but for a moment replied nothing. At length, looking at me with a smile, he said, "Perhaps, what I am about to propose to you, may be very inferior to your expectations; nevertheless, it will afford you some occupation."

The very name of occupation was renewed life, and I listened with eagerness, while he offered to recommend me to a printer, as what is called a reader, or corrector of the press. I embraced his proposal with unutterable thankfulness; and having ascertained that I was capable of the task, by some proof-sheets that lay upon the table, he wrote a note to Monsieur Manson, the printer, and put it into my hand. I could almost have knelt and worshiped him, so great was the change from despair to hope. With the letter in my hand, I flew to the printing-house, was tried and received; and, though the emolument held out was as small as it well could be, my walk home was with the springing step of joy and independence; and my heart, as I pressed Mariette to my bosom, and told her my success, was like that of a great general in the moment of victory, before the gloss of triumph has been tarnished by one regret for the gone, or one calculation for the future. I was soon installed in my new post; and

though what I gained was barely enough for the necessities of life, yet it sufficed; and there was always a dear warm smile in the eyes I loved best, which cheered and supported me whenever I felt inclined to despond or give way.

It is true, I often regretted that I could not procure for Mariette those comforts and those luxuries which I little valued myself; but she seemed to heed them not, and every privation appeared to her a matter of pride—to be borne rather as a joy than a care. Six months thus passed; and they were the happiest of my life, for though I labored, I labored in the sunshine. I had perfectly sufficient time, also, to make myself thoroughly acquainted with the whole art of printing; and to fit myself for the task of a compositor, which, though more mechanical, was more lucrative; and it became necessary that I should gain more, as a change was coming over Mariette which promised us new cares and new happiness. Strange, that when I looked upon her languid features, and her altered shape, she seemed to me a thousand times more lovely, than in all the fresh graces of expanding womanhood! And when fears for her safety mingled with the joy of possessing her—when her calm sweet eyes rested long and fixedly upon me, as if she strove to trace out the image of her future child in the looks of its father—a new and thrilling interest appeared to have grown up between us, which was something more than love.

At length, one of the compositors having gone to conduct a printing office at Rennes, my object was accomplished, and I obtained his vacant place. Still the emoluments were infinitely small, for the book trade was bad, and of course, the printers suffered. Sometimes there was plenty of work, and sometimes there was none; and the whole of my companions murmured highly at the government, whose imbecility and tyrannical conduct, they said, had destroyed the commerce of the country, and done every thing to ruin and degrade the press. There was many a busy whisper amongst us, that nothing could save the nation but a new revolution; and as we all felt more or less the sharp tooth of want, we madly thought that no change could be detrimental to us. I doubted some of the opinions that I heard; but one of my comrades worked at the *Globe*, which now became a daily paper, and he used often to give us long quotations, which convinced us all that the government was opposed to the wishes of the whole nation, that any change must be for the better.

During the autumn, I contrived to save some little portion of my wages; but the rigor of the winter, and the quantity of wood we were obliged to burn, soon consumed all that I had laid by; so that the provision for Mariette's confinement became a matter of serious and dreadful anxiety. One morning I received a letter from my brother, telling me that my father died suddenly on the preceding night. I will not rest upon all that I felt. I had always been the slave of my imagination: and it had been one of my favorite vanities to think how proud my father's heart would be to see me raise myself high in the world, and how comfortable I should be able to render his old age, when the smile of fortune should be turned upon me. But now he was dead, and those dreams were all broken.

The little patch of ground which we possessed was of course divided between me and my brother; and my portion was instantly sold to provide for the occasion which was so near at hand. The depression of all property, and the haste with which I was obliged to effect the sale, rendered it the most disadvantageous that can be conceived; and what with the expense of Mariette's confinement, a long illness which she underwent after, and a fit of sickness which I suffered myself—before the end of March my stock of money was reduced to fifty francs.

Work was about this time sufficient and regular, so that I could maintain myself, Mariette and our boy. We had, indeed, no superfluity; we knew no luxury; and the external enjoyments which I saw many possessing, far less worthy than ourselves, were denied to us.

Mariette bore it all with cheerfulness, but I grew gloomy and discontented, and the continual murmurs at the government, which I heard amongst my companions, wrought upon me. I gradually began to dream