

## Literature, &amp;c.

From the London World of Fashion.  
THE BLACK NUN.

AN HISTORICAL TALE.

It was in the year 1642 that there dwelt in the dark, tortuous and gloomy street, la Fauniere, at Cologne, and at a short distance from the cathedral, a poor woman, who was only known by the name of Marie Marianna. She lived with an old servant, in a narrow, old, ruinous, and badly built-house. Her apartments consisted of two rooms one on the first story, and the other on the second, to which the only mode of communication was a dilapidated stone staircase. To each room there was but a single window, composed of minute panes of glass, enclosed in lead. Nothing could be more miserable than the furniture of these apartments. Two wooden bedsteads covered with coarse serge quilts, a clothes press, two tables, half a dozen chairs, and a few kitchen utensils, composed the entire moveables of the old woman of Cologne.

Marie Marianna, to judge by the innumerable wrinkles that furrowed her countenance, must have been at least seventy years of age; but still there were in her countenance the traces to show that in her youth she must have been a distinguished beauty. In her features might be remarked a noble character; in her manners great dignity; and her black eyes, despite of her age preserved great power of expression; while her language was pure, correct and exquisitely constructed, and denoted in its style and tone that she was not only accustomed to the highest society, but also to command it. Living in perfect retirement, flying the world, and especially the conversation of all in her neighborhood, she never left her home excepting some occasion of pressing importance compelled her to do so. All her fortune consisted in a small pension that she received regularly every six months.

The utter solitude in which she passed her life attracted the attention of the inhabitants of the district in which she lived; and they only knew her in the street in which she lived by the name of 'The Black Nun.' And yet the distinction of her manners, her reserve, and especially the traces of profound grief that were impressed upon her features had excited great respect for her; and when she did appear in the street, there was not a little boy in the parish that did not take off his small cap of wool as she passed him by.

No familiarity existed between Marie Marianna and the old Briggittee, her attendant. Marie generally was shut up in her chamber alone, occupied with her needle; while Briggitte remained in her apartment overhead, occupied with cookery, or laboring with her wheel when she had flax. Thus did these two women pass their lives in complete isolation from the world, and one another. In the winter time, to save the expenses of two fires, Marie Marianna permitted the servant to remain in her room. There was a servant in the one corner with her wheel, while opposite sat, in a large leathern chair, with a high back, her mistress; and both thus passed the long evenings together, without even uttering a word to each other.

If the mistress ever found herself disposed to be communicative, it was to ask the servant some particulars about her family.

'Briggitte,' said she one evening, 'have you received any news from your son?'

'No, madam and yet the post from Frankfurt arrived this morning.'

'You see, Briggitte, that it is nothing better than rank folly to count on the affection of children. You are not the first mother who has had to complain of ingratitude.'

'But, Madam, Joseph can never prove ungrateful. He loves his mother and has given me many proofs of it. If he have not now written, it is plain because he has no news to tell me. We ought not to be too severe with our children.'

'Too severe! Certainly not; but then have we not a right to their submission and their respect?'

'As to me, my dear lady, I have never wished for anything beyond the affection of my child, and I certainly have no reason to complain of him.'

'I congratulate you Briggitte,' replied Marie Marianna, sighing deeply, 'I congratulate you, while I alas! I, too, am a mother; and what mother ought to have been more happy? Three sons—three sons—fortune; splendor—grandeur for all! And yet, look at me, abandoned,

by all—forgotten by them all—in misery! Considered unfortunate if I remind them I am living. Oh, how happy you are, Briggitte, if Heaven, have given one good, tender, affectionate son! I have not met from my children anything but ingratitude, harshness, disdain.'

'Poor mother!' exclaimed Briggitte, 'while my Joseph is so tender, and so full of gratitude.'

'You break my heart, Briggitte; but let us change the conversation; for this is but reviving the agony of my most anxious sorrows; and yet I have endured many evils. You suspect not all I have suffered. You see me sad, silent, reserved, Briggitte. You have often asked me the cause of my sorrows. Seek not, at all, to learn, it. If they are never to have an end, my secret will die along with me; at least I shall escape the pity of that thing called the public.'

'I respect your griefs, Madame, and God is my witness that I never tried to discover your secret. But why shut yourself out from the benevolent pity of your fellow creatures? A grief told is a grief lessened. We may receive consolation.'

'For griefs like mine, replied with some haughtiness, Marie Marianna, vulgar consolations are worthless as they are useless. Pity could not aid, but would offend me.'

The proud and haughty tone that pervaded these words intimidated poor Briggitte. The conversation dropped, and the laborious servant continued to turn her wheel.

At the end of a quarter of an hour Marie Marianna again spoke; 'you are a widow Briggitte, what was your husband?'

He served in the guards of my Lord, the Archbishop of Cologne.'

'Ah! he too was a soldier! Were you happy with him?'

'Heu! Poor man! Lord rest his soul! He had a great many faults. Unhappy! Oh, not at all. What with a great deal of patience, some good nature, and no small portion of submission on my side, we always lived pretty well together. He to be sure, liked drinking a little too much, and I might too, have some reason for jealousy with him.'

'Ah, yes, it is precisely so; faithless, and a debauchee, and my husband, also, Briggitte, was a soldier, he was proud to be called one. But the infamous vices you have just mentioned were his also. Each day there were new quarrels between us; and yet they called him a brave and gallant warrior! His affections too, were for the worst of our sex. Persons interposed between us to make peace, and generally they only ended by envenoming our resentments—What shall I say, Briggitte? An unhappy mother, I have also been an unhappy wife. That is not all: my husband died, the victim of frightful treason. And yet, upon whom, think you, did they seek to make the suspicion of an unworthy assassination fall?'

'Of an assassination, Madame?'

'Yes: of an assassination; and I—I was accused of it.'

'Ah, my God! how do I pity you, Madame.'

'Accused in the very face of my sons, my daughters, my sons-in-law; accused and persecuted by my son, as guilty of that crime!'

'But your innocence has been recognized?'

'Oh! without doubt, my innocence would have been recognized, if I had been a poor woman, without fortune, without power, or without influence, but I had all these, Briggitte, and it was necessary to deprive me of them. Therefore it was I that was imprisoned and calumniated; and because they could not condemn me, they separated me from my friends, and cast me into the condition in which you see me.'

'Most unfortunate lady!' said Briggitte.

Marie Marianna made no answer; but she concealed her face with her handkerchief, and shed some tears.

The strange story that she had just heard occasioned considerable anxiety, mingled with perplexity, in the simple heart and honest mind of the poor servant. Utterly confounded, she forgot to turn her wheel. Mute, she began to recall to her recollection a crowd of details with respect to the life of her mistress, that hitherto had excited no attention. Why had her mistress such a predilection for those mourning robes, that had gained her the appellation of 'The Black Nun?' Briggitte then recollected that upon several occasions she had surprised Marie Marianna busily engaged in reading parchments, covered

with seals of red wax, and that these parchments too were always kept in an iron chest, that was ever carefully locked up on her entering the room. In fine, and this appeared to her to be the most conclusive of all, one night, when her mistress was afflicted with fever, she, in her delirium, and with her eyes haggard, cried out, in a tone of indefinite horror, 'No I will not see him. Remove from me that blood-red robe; that man of blood and murder.'

What then was the phantom that pursued her? Who was the murderer that inspired her with so much horror? Who could that other be, if not an accomplice? When this idea became fixed in the mind of the poor servant, she began to tremble like a leaf. However, as she was good natured, kindly, and benevolent, she put away from herself, as speedily as she could, the evil thought, and resumed the conversation in the following manner:—

'But, my dear madame, why do you not confide your griefs to our Sovereign, the Archbishop-Elector of Cologne; he is good and kind, and will do you justice?'

'He cannot do anything for me,' replied the old Marianna,—the Elector, like all other princes, and like all men be they great or small, always looks to his own interest first. What advantage could it be to him to serve a poor old woman. My persecutors are so powerful, that he would fear to defy them. No; only one resource is left to me,—it is to place all my confidence in God,—it is to pray for the few friends who have remained faithful to me,—it is to offer up my vows for the accomplishment of their projects.'

'Well said, Madame!' cried out poor Briggitte, to whom this appeal to God and devotion to prayer appeared as the response of a tranquil conscience. 'Pray,' said she; 'pray, place all your confidence in God,—for in him you will always find the best protector and guardian.'

At that moment a knocking was heard at the street door.

'Who can it be, that raps at this hour?' said Marie Marianna.

'It is nearly nine o'clock; and I cannot even guess.'

'They rap again. See what is wanted, Briggitte,—but do not open the door unless you know them.'

Briggitte took the lamp, and entered again, in a moment afterwards, with a clergyman. It was the 'Pere Francois' on whose countenance were marked the traces of abstinence, and much suffering.

'What, good father, can have brought you here at so late an hour?' demanded Marie Marianna.

'News of some importance,' he replied; 'and that I wish to communicate to you.'

'Briggitte,' said the Black Nun, 'leave us for a moment.'

The old servant took the lamp, and ascended to her own apartment.

'Well, well; what is there to tell?' asked Marie after her departure.

'I have received news from France.'

'Good?'

'It may be, in its results. The discontentment of the nobles with the Prime Minister is at its height. Henric d'Effiat, the Grand Chamberlain of the King, as well as the prime favorite, has entered into the views, and takes part in the plot of the Duc de Bouillon, and Monsieur, the King's brother. A treaty that is about being concluded with Spain has for its object peace, and as its condition, the removal of the Cardinal.'

'Heaven be praised!'

However, let us not too soon flatter ourselves with success. The war against Spain is, up to this time, carried on with great vigor and good fortune. The Spanish armies have been defeated by our Generals, both in Catalonia and Belgium. The conclusion of peace in the midst of these triumphs, and the disgrace of the Minister who had paved the way for them, would find many opponents. The hatred that is felt for Richelieu, is the best friend to our cause. The King, always weak, always without a will of his own, it is hoped will take up that party which is adopted by his favorite.'

'That is infallible, and then I shall quit my exile; I shall be restored to all my honors and to all power. Be assured, father, that I am one who will well know how to recompense, these who like you, have served me with zeal and devotion.'

'I am convinced of it, Madame. However, continue to act with prudence. As soon as I gain fresh intelligence you shall hear it. In the mean while frequent our church; place yourself in the

darkest corner, on the right hand, at the end of the nave. Then you shall next hear from me when I can next pay you a visit.'

I mean to act up to all your instructions, father.'

I answer to the voice of her mistress, Briggitte descended and conducted the Pere Francois to the street door.

The next day Briggitte saw her mistress kneeling piously on the broad cold flags of the cathedral, and praying with piety. If there had remained in the mind of the simple servant a doubt as to the innocence of the lady, this spectacle completely removed it. 'She asks of God, said the servant, the necessary strength to resist her enemies. The guilty could not pray with the fever that she does.'

The winter passed away; and Marie Marianna continued daily her attendance at the cathedral. This unusual exercise joined to the alternations of hope and fear, injured her health, and the attacks of fever, which she had experienced before, reappeared with new violence. Almost every day she saw the Pere Francois at the church; but his looks told nothing; he passed close to her without turning his head. One day he stopped; he stooped down to her, and said in a whisper—'All is lost.'

The shock that these words gave to the poor Marianna was so dreadful, that her head bent down to the very ground on which she was kneeling; and if she had not supported herself with her hands she must have fallen prostrate. She returned to her home, in a state of great agitation, and was obliged to take to her bed.

The same evening the Priest came to visit her, and when they were alone, she said—

'What has then occurred, Father?'

'M. de Cinq Mars is arrested.'

'And the Duc de Bouillon?'

'Has fled.'

'But the treaty with the king of Spain?'

'At the very moment at which it was signed at Madrid, the tricky Cardinal received a copy of it.'

'By whom has the conspiracy been made known?'

'By means of a traitorous agent, who contrived to get into the secret of it.'

'Thus then, my enemies have again conquered me.'

Richelieu is more powerful than ever, and the King in a greater state of bondage.'

At this moment the malady of the poor old woman became dreadful. The delirium returned, and with it the phantom—the supernatural being in the blood red robe, that had excited such dreadful thoughts in the mind of the servant. In the worst excess of fever, Marie Marianna saw herself pursued by the shade. With horror did she repel it from her, abuse it, and address to it the most furious reproaches; while Briggitte, seated at the pillow of her patient, prayed to heaven for her, and suspicion respecting her, again filled her mind.

This fever lasted a month, and at the end of that time Marie, weakened by age, exhausted by sickness, and destitute of the necessary resources required by her in malady, expired. This event occurred on the 1st of July, 1642.

As soon as the news of her death was known in the quarter she inhabited, a magistrate of the city of Cologne presented himself in the miserable habitation, in order that he might certify the fact of her death, the name of the deceased, and those who were her heirs. They only knew that she was a stranger.

'Write,' said the Pere Francois, who was present, as the names of her heirs—

'The King of France.'

'Monsieur, Duc d'Orleans, brother of the King,

Henrietta of France, Queen of England.

'What then, was the name of the deceased?' demanded the magistrate.

'The most high and mighty Princess Marie de Medecis, Queen of France, the widow of Henry IV. and mother of the reigning monarch.'

From the New York Sunday Times.

SNEEZING WITH EFFECT.

I witnessed a case of sneezing the other evening at the Chatham Theatre, which for exquisite humor, exceeded anything of the kind I ever saw. And yet I have seen many cases of sneezing in my lifetime, and I have heard of—and I have heard—without the of—many reports, of sneezing,—and I have sneezed myself