

## Literature, &amp;c.

From the Talleyrand Papers.

## AFFECTING INCIDENT.

"It was just about this time that he met with a romantic adventure which he cannot even now relate without emotion, and which has all the character of the events which compose the most pure and healthy of the novels of the period. He was one day returning from the *Bibliothèque* of the Sorbonne to the Seminaire Saint Sulpice, laden with books and papers; when a violent storm of rain coming on, he was forced to seek shelter beneath a gateway in the rue de Pot de Fey. The neighbourhood at that time was full of convents and ecclesiastical establishments—the Benedictines—the Carmelites—the Freres Minimes—the Cordeliers—all had houses or succursales, about the place St. Sulpice; so that you might have walked down whole streets of dark gloomy wall without finding a single refuge from the rain—the convent doors being kept inhospitably closed, and the small space beneath the eaves being even more soaked than the middle of the street, from the dripping gutters which poured down upon the miserable wayfarer, one occupied sheet of water, certainly not so pure as that which fell straight from heaven. There was but one single space in the whole street where the passer by could hope for a dry footing, and young Talleyrand knew it well; a little archway leading to the back door of a convent of Benedictines—the name of which I forget—whose principal entrance was in the Rue de Vaugirard.

"It was a long narrow passage, so dark that it was impossible to perceive any one concealed there, and might have served admirably as a place of ambush for any lurking thief or assassin, who might have chosen to harbour in its gloomy recess. Here the youth had stood for some time watching the rain—which continued to fall in torrents—still laden with his books, yet not daring to open one of them, fearful that the rest might fall into the mud—of course devoured with *ennui*, and stamping with impatience,—just, in fact, on the point of launching forth once more—if it was merely for the sake of changing his station for another more amusing,—when suddenly he became conscious of the presence of another person in the passage. He says that he was rather startled at first, but it did not belong either to his age or character to pass without investigation any circumstance which had arrested his attention, so clearing his throat with a successful effort, he called out manfully,

"Qui vive?"

"The exclamation was answered by a faint and stifled cry, issuing from the very furthest corner of the obscure passage. The young man ventured forward without hesitation, and discovered a dark and shapeless form huddled up in one corner of the threshold of the convent door, whose outline, so dark was the place, was invisible, even at arm's length. He was conscious that the form was that of a female, and he stretched out his hand and said kindly,

"What fear you?—are you in trouble?—why are you hidden thus? Let me assist you if you are in pain."

"As he spoke these words the figure slowly arose—a slight, frail, delicate form, that of a girl scarcely beyond the age of childhood, attired in the loose black dress of serge, and large capuchon, of the convent beneath the gateway of which they were standing. He took her gently by the hand and led her toward the light. The poor girl was so terrified that she offered no resistance, and conducting her to the entrance of the passage, he gently withdrew the capuchon, with which she had covered her face, bidding her take comfort, for that he would do her no harm. The girl looked up into his countenance with an expression of anxiety and doubt, but the gentle kindness which she saw written there, must have relieved her instantly, for exclaimed in a whisper,

"Oh no—I know you will not betray me—but how can you assist me? I am lost forever!" and then she buried her face in her hands, and sobbed aloud.

"The youth remained gazing upon the girl, in mingled admiration and surprise. Never to this very hour, has he beheld a face of greater beauty than that which stood thus revealed to him in the dim light. It was a small and exquisitely delicate cast of countenance, with large wild eyes and arched eyebrows, and a calm snow white forehead, which a painter might have given to the Madonna standing at Saint Anne's knee. Her hair was hanging loose about her face, in dripping masses, from the rain through which she had passed, and the steam of the capuchon. Her small chiselled mouth was parted, and disclosed two rows of pearly teeth. But Talleyrand was mostly struck by the singular beauty of her complexion, which, although she evidently had been terrified, was not pale, but of the most vivid bloom, like the petals of the damask rose; while her eyes almost dazzled him, so bright and flashing was their lustre. By his patience and his kindly manner, he soon succeeded in winning the little maiden's confidence; and although still in great agitation, she told him the story of her troubles, which was a singular one, and most affecting.

"She said she was a novice of the convent of the Rue de Vaugirard, and that the passage where they were standing formed part of the premises belonging to the building. She had been in that house ever since the age of four years—she was now fifteen—and during all that time she had never once been allowed to go beyond those walls. She had often yearned most intensely, she said, to see the world, which the other novices and the *penionnaires* had

described to her as being so very beautiful. She had sometimes begged very earnestly too, to be permitted to accompany one of the lay-sisters, who went sometimes into the country, to see a sick nun of the order, who was staying there for the recovery of her health: but had been told that out of kindness she must be refused; for as it was her destiny to pass her whole life in a convent, it was much better that she should behold no other place, and those who had more experience than herself could tell what regret and misery she would avoid by her ignorance of other scenes. She was to have renewed her vows of novitiate on the Thursday before, but she had been so ill that the ceremony had been deferred until the week following, and then she would enter into the last year of novitiate, and when that had passed away, she would take the black veil and be cloistered for the rest of her life. Her name, she added, was Constance de V., but she knew not of any friends or kindred, which she had. A notary had always remitted to the abbess the sums necessary for the expenses of her board and education, and the dower money also was already lodged in the lady's hands, so that there was no hope—none—none—that she should ever realise her dream of beholding ever so small a portion of the world, of whose beauty she had heard so much.

"She said this with such a deep sigh, and such a yearning look towards the gloomy street where the rain still plashed in torrents, that the listener was moved almost to tears.

"But how came you here, mademoiselle?" said he, "and in this state too?" pointing to her dress, which was wet through, and clung to her form in damp and streaming folds.

"Oh, I have not told you all," replied she, hesitatingly. "I know that I have done wrong, but my punishment is great as my offence," and she looked down the dark passage towards the door with a shudder of affright. "But thus it was. I had been ill in bed for more than a week, and had grown so weary of my little cell, and last night I could not sleep for thinking of all the brightness of the world I never was to see. I prayed to the Holy Virgin to take away these wicked thoughts from my mind, but she did not think fit to give me grace, for towards morning my desire to go abroad became more intense; and so when sister Marthe, who watches me, left me, still thinking that I slept, to go to matins, I left my bed and came down to walk for a few moments beneath the cloisters of the outer court, in the hope that the air of the place, confined as it was, might help to cool the fever of the past night. I have long been forbidden to go into the garden; they say it is too cold and damp, and that my cough will be worse than ever if I stay beneath the trees. Well, I turned round and round and court, listening to the chimes of Saint Sulpice, and thinking of what our Lady Abbess tells me I should never think of—the delight of lying in some cool green meadow, on the grass, beneath the overhanging branches of some old tree—when the tempter, who, as Sister Marthe has often told me, already half possesses my lost soul [alas! she must speak the truth], led me this way—into the cloister which terminates in yonder door. It was sister Mother Jeanne, the *femme de peine*, had just been cleaning it with broom and pail, and had opened it to sweep the rubbish out into this dark passage. How she could have left it open I cannot tell—yes, Sister Marthe is right—it must have been the tempter's work! My heart beat violently at sight of that open door. I thought to have fled, but I yielded to temptation, and peeped through the long dark passage into the street beyond. Scarce had I thus gazed for an instant, when I was seized with a desire so burning—so intense to see the Place, which I had been told was at the end of this little street, that without a moment's reflection I rushed down the passage and was free. I meant to have merely cast one look upon the Place, and have returned immediately. I thought it might be possible that in this illness I might die, and it was very hard that I should leave a world, which they tell me God has made so full of beauty, without having beheld aught besides this dull old pile; so I stepped out into the street with more delight than I ought to have done, considering that I was doing that which was reprehensible. I buried my head in my capuchon, and turned boldly down the street to the left; but I had not gone far before I perceived that I must have taken the wrong direction, for as I drew near to the end I saw no: the fine open square which I had been promised, but another street, more dirty and more dull than the one I had just traversed. During the walk I did not meet a soul or I think I should have fainted, for it was not till I thus stood for the first time alone and unaided that I remembered that my dress must at once betray me. I was resolved to return at once, but in the meanwhile this storm of rain came suddenly beating down with such intense fury that my dress was wet through in an instant. I ran with all the swiftness of which I was capable, to regain this dark passage; but judge of the agony of affright that I experienced on beholding the door which I had closed, and of which I had taken the key, fastened on the inside! Mother Jeanne must have perceived the absence of the key, and have bolted it within. Oh, I am lost! She has doubtless already been to tell our lady mother. They will all know 'tis I who am the guilty one, for every one else will be at matins!"

"As the poor girl concluded her story she again burst into a paroxysm of grief. The young seminariste endeavoured to soothe her, and offered to go round to the great gate to try and obtain admittance there, but the trembling child clung to him with such energy that he could not tear himself away.

"No, no, do not leave me now," exclaimed she. "I dare not be left thus alone. What shall I say when they come and find me here? They will come I know, directly, and bear me back with hotings and with shame."

"As she spoke, so great was her terror that she shook like the aspen leaf, and her companion was obliged to support her by placing his arm gently around her waist, or she would have fallen. He then perceived with great distress that this violent trembling was the spasmodic shuddering of fever; and as she placed her hand upon her bosom to still the convulsive throes, he beheld with yet greater horror that she wore nothing beneath her robe but the night dress which he had on when she left her bed. His heart was rung at the thought of that delicate creature abroad thus—burnt with fever, and wet to the skin. It must be death to so frail and fragile a being. Something however must be done. He durst not leave her. She was in that state of mind that she might have fallen senseless to the earth if she had been left alone. Neither could he drag her with him the whole length of the street through the pouring rain, in order to arrive at the great gate of the convent. The scandal would have been terrific, had they been seen together in the costume which they each wore. In the midst of this painful embarrassment, like the drowning man who clings at a straw, he went up to the door and turned the key. There was no impediment in the lock. He shook the door violently, then pushed it with all his might. Oh, God of mercy, it yields! It is not bolted, for daylight may be seen through the opening. Once more he brings all his strength to bear against the iron studded door. The drops of sweat stand like beads upon his forehead, with the anxiety of the moment and the violence of his exertions. But he is presently rewarded by the grating noise caused by the removal of the obstacle within, and the faint shriek of joy which escape the lips of the sweet Constance. She sees it all now! Mother Jeanne, in her rage for cleaning, had moved the old oak bench from the archway of the cloister, and had placed it crosswise before the door, where it had resisted all her own puny efforts, as though it had been a wall of iron; and now her laugh of delight is so convulsive that it is more painful than were her tears and sobs.

Meanwhile young Talleyrand had pushed open a space sufficient for her passage into the cloister, and he assisted her to mount the bench and pass through. The hand which she gave him, and which but a little while before had startled him by its burning touch, was now as cold as marble! He imprinted one pure and holy kiss upon it ere he closed the door for ever; and when he found that she withdrew it not, but thanked him and blessed him fervently, and called him her deliverer, and said that "that he had saved her life," he shut the door abruptly, for he could bear no more. He stood for a moment listening at the keyhole for the sound of her retreating step. It must have been very light, however, for he heard it not. He then walked slowly home to the *seminaire* insensible now to either wind or rain.

"The books which the young student had brought from the Sorbonne were unperused that day. His mind was too much absorbed with the memory of that beautiful maiden, and with the undefined terror which he experienced for her sake. On the morrow he walked several times completely round the convent walls, but he saw not an evidence that the building was inhabited by a single human being. On the third day he could not control his impatience, and bestowed a silver crown on the *commissionnaire* to go and ask, as if despatched by some great lady, whose name he was to forget, for news of the health of Mademoiselle Constance de V. The answer he brought back was that: "Mademoiselle Constance de V., in an attack of fever, being for a few moments unwatched, had risen from her bed and gone down into the cloisters, no doubt feeling grievously ill, and in search of assistance. It was supposed that she had wandered for some time in the quadrangle, for she was found lying drenched with wet upon the oak bench, by the *porte de service* of the outer court."

"She was without sense or motion when taken up, and it was certain that she had been dead some time (this was the private opinion of the *touriere*), although the superior would insist on having the viaticum administered all the same. She had been buried that very morning at daybreak, and Mademoiselle de V., de Breteuil, the favourite *penionnaire* of the abbess, had got the promise of her cell to keep her birds in, until the arrival of another *penionnaire* to occupy it. The abbess was very angry with sister Marthe for having left the bedside of Mademoiselle de V., but could not punish her, it having been proved that she had only gone to matins."

"Such had been the fate of that beautiful girl! The earth already covered her, before she had even seen the light. That stealthy walk along the dreary street amid the cold and pelting rain, was all the experience she had carried to the grave of the world she had longed so ardently to see, and when the *seminariste* thought on the story of her life, and compared it with his own, he no longer had a right to complain. He had spent his childhood at least amid fresh air and free exercise wholesome to the body, and also amid the rude kindness and overwhelming affection wholesome to the mind; while the poor child whose dying grasp he almost fancied he could still feel, had never been allowed to roam beyond the gloomy precincts of her prison house. With her innocence and loveliness she had been suffered to grow like some rank weed which springs amid the crevice of the pavement stone of the foul gaol yard, and which struggles but in vain to catch a gleam of sunshine or a breath of air until, wearied with the effort, it sinks back dead into the crevice from which it sprang.

## New Works,

From Campaigns in India.

A CAMP DURING THE MONSOON.

One night in particular, during our stay here was a truly dreadful one. The rain fell in torrents, the lightning was truly vivid, and the thunder awful in the extreme. The horses came frightened and restive, and out of a party of three hundred, we had scarce twenty standing to their pickets at midnight. The whole camp was in an uproar. The horses which are here naturally very vicious, were galloping about in all parts of the camp, with their heel ropes and the pegs to which they had been fastened trailing after them; in some places half a dozen were fighting with each other, with their several heel ropes entangled, and it was impossible, from the darkness of the night, to extricate them; in fact, it was much as we could do to prevent our tents from being thrown down in consequence of the horses galloping over the tent ropes; and all our endeavours, some were struck, and the saddlery, arms, bedding, &c., exposed to the pitiless pelting of the storm; so we made ourselves as comfortable as tents swimming in water could possibly permit, and, as the soldiers say, "dug for daylight." Indeed, when a day broke, the camp appeared as if the enemy had surprised us. Many tents were down, amongst the rest, that of the line guard; and so far as the eye could reach, our horses were seen scampering over the face of the country. In some places five or six were knotted together by their heel ropes, some standing others like swine wallowing in the mud; several fast in the stream which ran at the foot of our encampment, and a few, very few, standing quietly at their pickets. The trumpeters were in different directions and sounded the "feeling" which had the desired effect of bringing some of the old stagers to their lines, and at length after a hard day's work, we managed to get the camp into something like its former condition.

During our stay at Adoni, our party mounted daily an advanced picket of thirty men, in the midst of all these heavy rains, they were to their horses night and day, without shelter not being allowed to unstrap the cloak from the saddle until sunset; and on making rounds, during the night, to the sentries, the horses stuck fast in the deep ground, and had to dismount to extricate them; and frequently, both man and horse came down, and had a pleasant roll in the mud together. The sentries, who were posted on the flanks of the camp, could not walk about on their post, but were compelled to stand like statues during their two hour's duty on one spot of ground.

From Recollections of a Nautical Life.

THE MEDITERRANEAN.

Of all the stations to which a man of war can be appointed, it must be conceded that the Mediterranean is the finest. It were not for fear of making a *bull*, I should call it a *classic ground*, at any rate, to use your own country phraseology, it is classic localities. From the pillars of Hercules to the "ancient home of Dido," nothing terrestrial meets the eye which has not been said or sung by deathless historians and poets.—If we add the charms of recollection and imagination to those of reality, as the delicious scenery in various forms meets the view, and let these still further enhanced by the mild and salubrious climate, the beauty of the heavens, so well and truly expressed by the term, "a Mediterranean sky," the continual variety of natural language, religion and manners, which shores present,—these keep up in the most one perpetual excitement; and I am persuaded that, to an observant disposition, two years station in that region will give a greater insight into human nature, than ten in any other part of the world. Let us view them in their order. We have the jealous and revengeful Genoese, the grave and melancholy Spaniard, gay and civil Frenchman, or rather the *tomte* of mankind, exhibited in the south of France, the polished Italian, the fanatical Neapolitan, the phlegmatic Turk, the degenerate though occasionally high-souled Greek. Round the eastern borders of that sea, in every point and bay tells of exploits once famous on the earth; we see fishing villages interspersed with magnificent ruins, which are cities once powerful on the earth, we see Tyre and Sidon, and the abodes once "flowing with milk and honey," which were the "glory of all lands," now a desolate region, thinly peopled by a dishonored and grovelling race who have succeeded the people chosen of God, and from whom every trace has vanished, that plenty and peace which was the lot of the Israelites, whilst they walked in the way of the commandments. In returning along the southern shores, we pass the land once seat of wisdom, arts, and philosophy, now degraded among the sons of men;—we proceed, and view the lands where once the swarthy Numidian managed his fiery courage, and with his bow and arrow rivalled even Parthian himself;—we reach the confines of ancient Carthage, the former mistress of the seas, the most formidable antagonist of the grasping Rome, the land that has undeservedly furnished a name for treachery;—and finally attain to the dominion of the despot, the stronghold of barbarism, fanaticism and slavery. Besides all these, the islands present a variety of character, both moral and physical, which in themselves are sufficiently interesting; Rhodes and Cyprus in the Balearas, all dignified and all command admiration.—nor should the rock of Malta be jumbled up in the mass of places, standing as it does at once a monument of superstition, bravery, and political interest.