

## Literature, &amp;c.

## A TALE OF THE "ARDENES."

BY FREDERICK TOLFREY.

"As soon as we were once more on a high road, I could not help exclaiming, 'Well, Pierre, here we are you see, safe and sound, and not eaten up as I was led to suppose we should have been. We are out of danger now, I presume.'"

"I am not sure of that, sir," was the reply of my companion; "we may yet have difficulties to encounter."

"I ridiculed the idea, laughed at him for his folly, and putting spurs to my gallant grey, desired him to follow me."

I had not canted above a mile after leaving the forest, when, at a turn of the road, I came suddenly on a "cabaret," or roadside inn, as you call it in this country in this country. It might have been even termed an "auberge," for it gave promise of more comfort within than the ordinary dram shops which are to be found in every cross road in France. We had been on horseback for some hours, and I was not a little pleased at the opportunity which presented itself of rest and refreshment.

As Pierre and myself rode up to the door of this rural hotel, he examined attentively the superscription, and exclaimed "C'est drôle! the landlord is, or rather was, an old camarade of mine, at Mezieres, many years ago—there cannot be two Maximus Bourdons in this part of the country."

We were in the act of dismounting, when a barefooted urchin beckoned us to ride round into the stable yard by a side gate. We did so: and having directed Pierre to look after the horses, I was on the point of making my way to the front of the house, when my attention was attracted by a female figure, of no ordinary mould, on a rude and wooden balcony which ran round this portion of the premises, and from which a staircase, or rather steps, communicated with the yard below, and close to the spot where I was standing. She advanced towards the end of this open verandah, and with the sweetest tone imaginable said, "*Par ici, monsieur, s'il vous plaît*." In three bounds I was on the platform by her side, for a petit-coat had ever irresistible attractions for me, and she led the way to an indifferently furnished apartment, which I was given to understand was the *salle a manger*.

Travellers, of all ages, from sixteen to sixty, in all countries, from time immemorial, have assumed to themselves the privilege of toying with chambermaids and female waiters—a squeeze of the hand, a kiss and a sly pinch are the usual familiarities, which, not being interdicted, very frequently have given a prescriptive right to these rambling Don Juans to accost thus unceremoniously, every female who may be doomed to servitude. I never was a Joseph; and if I had been, the lovely countenance of the captivating handmaid before me would have overruled all my philosophy; a more beautiful creature I never beheld, before or since. There was something so *distinguee* in her face, the outlines of which were the most perfect it is possible to conceive—an expression I cannot describe—but it was irresistibly winning. And to these advantages, so rare in one moving in so humble a sphere, were superadded a grace and a *tourneur* absolutely enchanting. In short I was *eperdument amoureux* at the first glance. To my surprise, she shrank from me, and repulsed me in so determined, and at the same time, so dignified a manner, that, for the moment, I was thrown off my guard. Recovering from my surprise, I renewed the attack, but the tone and manner were so decided, and the bearing of this singularly beautiful girl so lofty, firm, yet respectful, that I was annoyed with myself for having been such a fool. There was nothing of prudery, or even of anger in her demeanour, for she appeared to regard me with sorrow and a mixture of pity. In short, her behaviour puzzled me not a little. Smarting the rebuff, I believe I said to her, rather waspishly, "Why do you repulse me? I dare say I am not the first young fellow who has fallen in love with your pretty face; and perhaps I have done no more than others who have frequented this house. What is the matter with you? You look unhappy."

She turned her eyes upon me, with a look I shall never forget to my latest breath, and exclaimed, "I am unhappy—wretched—miserable—and so would you be, also, if you knew the doom that awaited you!" "And pray what is that?" I asked incredulously, for I thought she was trifling with me. "Only," she replied, "that you have not three hours to live—by that time you will be a corpse. I know not what secret impulse makes me say this to you but I cannot resist forewarning you of your inevitable fate. Escape is hopeless; and you will meet with the same end as the other victims who have entered this room."

"This is some idle fiction you have conjured up," I replied, "to deter me from making love to you; perhaps there is some lover in the case, and you wish to frighten me by this improbable story."

"I call God to witness that I speak nothing but the painful truth," she rejoined. "But stop—you shall know all."

Having said this, she went to the door, and from thence into the passage, to listen if any one were within hearing. Having ascertained that all was safe, she returned, and closing the door after her, came up to me, and continued her appalling communication.

She looked at me with tears in her eyes, and then pointing to the floor said, "Look at this sand—did you ever see sand in a *salle a manger*? and that too on a first floor. Alas!

what scenes of blood have been enacted here. You have ordered dinner—which is being prepared below—a few minutes before it is ready, you will see three officers, in the uniform of the Imperial Guard, ride into the courtyard—they will call loudly for the landlord—order dinner, champagne, and other luxuries. You will then be waited upon by the landlord himself, who will announce the arrival of his distinguished guests, and request, on such an emergency, that you will permit them to dine in this room with you; for although he has dinner sufficient for five persons at one table, yet if it were divided, it would not suffice for three and two in separate apartments—you must comply; for a refusal would only accelerate your doom; by complying, you will gain time, and God grant you may devise some plan, with your servant, for frustrating the schemes of these blood thirsty wretches!"

I was thunderstruck, as you may suppose, and could hardly believe my senses. I desired this lovely girl to send my servant up to me as soon as she could without exciting suspicion. This she did: and I repeated to Pierre every word she had told me. He was incredulous for a long time; but upon my dwelling on every minute particular he became more attentive, although he could hardly believe that his old acquaintance of Mezieres, who was the landlord could lend himself to such a sanguinary plot. "At all events," he said, "I will go back to the stable, under the plea of looking to the horses, and return with our pistols which I can conceal in my pockets." In a few minutes he rejoined me, and we had scarcely begun to talk of the extraordinary tale that was communicated to me, when the tramping of horses' feet was heard, and three officers, dressed as the girl had described, entered the yard of the inn. Thus far her story was confirmed. Conviction of the truth now took possession of Pierre's mind.

"It is too true," he said "I will go back to the stable, and think of what is best to be done. In the meantime the landlord will doubtless, come to you; and it is better we should not be seen together."

He had not left the room five minutes ere mine host made his appearance. A more specious and obsequious Boniface you never beheld. As the girl had predicted, his opening speech was to the effect that I would, he trusted, pardon the liberty he was about to take in proposing that three officers of the Imperial Guard should dine in my room. He had dinner for five certainly; but if the repast he had prepared were served up in two separate apartments, there would not be sufficient for either party. He assured me moreover that I could not fail to be pleased with the society of these gentlemen, as they were officers of rank, *du bon ton* and *bien comine il faut*.

Putting as good a face as I could on the matter, I expressed my willingness to meet his wishes and those of the officers. I added, however, that I trusted the newly-arrived gentlemen would excuse my servant sitting at the same table with them; that I was travelling for my health, and he was seldom from my side, as I was subject to sudden attacks of spasms. I thought the fellow appeared rather disconcerted at this announcement; but not pretending to notice the effect my communication had produced, I requested him as he left the room to send my servant up stairs, as I wished to take some cordials before dinner. Pierre soon made his appearance, and putting my pistols in my hand, said

"All is but too true, monsieur; courage, and we shall be masters of the field. I have arranged my plan, and you must follow my instructions. The captain of this infernal band of cut throats you must place at the bottom of the table, facing you; his two confederates you must request to sit on one side of the table, while I take my place opposite to them. As soon as I have helped myself to a glass of wine after the dessert is placed on the table, you must shoot the scoundrel facing you—shrink not, for on your nerve and presence of mind depend our safety. Leave the rest to me; we have a desperate game to play—coolness and courage alone are wanting to ensure success."

I promised compliance, and was picturing to myself the scene in which I was soon to play so prominent a part, when the three *soldats* officers made their appearance, ushered in by the landlord. The fellows were dressed to perfection—rather *outré* as to dandyism; for they were oiled, curled, and scented as the veriest *petit maitre* in the *recherche* salons of Paris. Their address was rather of the free and easy school, somewhat overdone, perhaps, but still there was nothing offensive in their manner. They were profuse in their thanks for the honor I had conferred upon them by allowing them to dine with me; in short, they acted their parts to the life. The glances that had been interchanged amongst themselves as they entered the apartment, when they beheld Pierre, had not escaped my observation. I therefore, as soon as they had expended their volley of compliments and thanks, apologised for being compelled to have my servant at the same table, assigning the same reason as I had given the landlord. At length the soup was served, then the calettes, a fricandeau, stewed ducks, and a roasted capon. Every mouthful I took I thought would have choked me; and my want of appetite, which was remarked, I attributed to the state of my health. The fellows ate, drank, laughed, and chatted away in the most amiable manner possible.

The dinner was by this time nearly brought to a conclusion. The girl had waited upon us and during her absence from the room with remains of the dinner, one of the miscreants opposite to Pierre appeared to be searching about his person for some missing object; at last he said, "I have lost my snuff box." And addressing himself to my attendant, added, "I will thank you to go up stairs, and on the

dresser in the kitchen you will see a gold snuff-box—for I must have left it there—and bring it up to me."

Pierre, however, to my great delight, never quitted his seat; and very quietly remarked, that he never executed any orders but those of his master. The person addressed looked confused at this reply, and bit his lips with rage. Turning to me, he requested very politely that I would send my servant for the box in question. To my infinite relief, and as good luck would have it, the girl re-appeared with the cheese and some fruit, and I observed to the gentleman of the missing snuff-box, that *la fille* would fetch it for him.

Mademoiselle was, accordingly, commissioned to execute the errand; but she presently returned, saying there was no *tabatiere* to be found below.

"N'importe," said the fellow; "bring us some champagne."

While this very pleasant beverage was gone for, the other officer on my right hand discovered that his pocket handkerchief was absent without leave, and ordered Pierre to go to the kitchen and lock for it. This command, however, was disobeyed in like manner; for my trusty follower replied, "The servant will be here directly with the wine, and she can bring it you." The champagne was brought, and ere the cork was let loose from its confinement, the pocket handkerchief was accidentally discovered under the table!

The girl now left the room; and never shall I forget the look she gave me as she closed the door. It seemed to say, the world has closed on you for ever!—we shall never see each other again!

The bottle was passed, and as Pierre helped himself, he turned towards me, and a glance of the eye told what he meant. He put the glass to his lips; but, placing it suddenly upon the table, said to me, "I hope you are not ill, sir?" "No," I replied. I knew what he meant, but I was powerless. He added, "Monsieur must take some cordial;" he put his hands in his pockets, and drew forth a brace of pistols, and levelling them with a deadly aim at his opposite neighbours, shot them both through the heart at the same moment. He then sprang like a tiger on the captain at the foot of the table, which was upset in the *melee*, caught him by the throat, and called to me to come to his assistance. I had in some degree recovered from my stupefaction, for my senses had been paralysed, if I may use the expression, and ran to the faithful fellow.

We continued to pinion the scoundrel, between us; and to make assurance doubly sure, Pierre bound one end of the table cloth over the villain's face, while, with the other, he fastened his arms behind him.

"Now, monsieur," said he, "stand over this scelerat with your pistols, until I return from the stable with a chord;" he rushed down the stairs, and was back with me in two minutes. We bound our friend fast, hand and foot. "And now," said Pierre, "you must remain here until I have ridden to the nearest post town, which is not above two leagues from this. I will bring back assistance, and give our prisoner into safe custody. There is not a living being below—the house is empty. You have nothing to apprehend—not a soul will molest you. We have cleared the place. I must first catch a horse, for ours have been turned loose. There was one in the room just now; and you may rely upon it I will lose no time in returning with some military and police, and release you from your unpleasant situation."

I had the satisfaction of hearing my brave and faithful attendant gallop off in a few minutes. My position in the meantime was none of the pleasantest. I made up my mind to sell my life dearly, in the event of any attempt at rescue; and what with watching the door, and the wretch at my feet, I had no very agreeable time of it. The two hours I thus spent, I thought the longest I had ever experienced. Thanks to a merciful Providence, the trial I had undergone was brought to a termination.

The ind-fatigable Pierre returned at length, with a *juge de paix*, and a whole *posse* of official on horseback, besides a troop of mounted *gendarmerie*. The prisoner was secured, and the house searched from top to bottom—not a living soul was discovered; but in a large vaulted underground cellar were skeletons, and human bodies innumerable—some of the latter in every stage of decomposition. There could not have been less than from three to four hundred victims. The bodies were subsequently removed, by order of the authorities, and interred in the *cimetiere* of Mezieres; the house was razed to the ground by the infuriated populace.

Strange to say, the landlord, and the lovely girl who had been instrumental in bringing these dark deeds to light, have never been heard of from that day to this; and I much fear that the latter perished by the hand of the wretch who kept the house. I have sought, by every means in my power, to gain some tidings of this beautiful creature; but in vain. Money and large rewards have not been wanting; and I would at this moment give half I am worth in the world to discover what became of her—for to her I owe my preservation. My tale is done.

## GENTILITY—VULGARITY.

BY JOHN POOLE, ESQ.

"My bear dances to none but the genteel of tunes."—*Goldsmith*.

"From the sublime to the ridiculous is but one step," said Napoleon. But he said it in French; and had we also said it in that polite language it might, by some persons, have been considered vastly more genteel. For our own part, whatever we confess that English, provided it be tolerably good English, is good enough for us; for which confession we may be set down, by these very same persons, as being

vulgar. Be it so: it cannot be helped; to borrow the sailor's phrase, we must "grin and bear it." That's genteel at any rate.

As of the sublime and the ridiculous, so may it be said of the genteel and the vulgar. And here we wish it to be understood that we use those terms, not in their strictly-defined sense, representing, as closely as they can, certain positive qualities; but as they are used, *vulgar* by the (would be thought) genteel, and *genteel* by the (would not be thought) vulgar. So taken, even "one step" is far too liberal an allowance of space; while Dryden's "thin partitions," so falsely and unphilosophically placed between "great wits and madness," would denote a separation infinitely too wide between them. There is, in fact, no palpable line of demarcation; like the colours of the rainbow, they glide into each other.

Now, of the bear mentioned in the line which we have quoted we know nothing; but if he would dance to none but the genteel of tunes, he was, unquestionably, a very vulgar bear, without a spark of true gentility in his composition. His stipulating for none but genteel tunes to dance to, such, for instance, as the minuet in "Ariadne," is clear proof of this. Had he been a real gentleman of a bear, confident in the soundness of his gentility, he would have tripped it on his "light, fantastic toe," to any tune whatever, from "Nancy Dawson," to the "Devil among the Tailors;" the innate gentility of such a bear would have manifested itself in his free, unconstrained deportment, in the unaffected grace of his mien, no matter for the tune he danced to.

But we must beg this particular bear's pardon. We have no proof of the vulgar fastidiousness of his habits, beyond his keeper's word for it, and that we are disinclined to take. For whatever may have been the case with regard to the eminent *artiste*, there can be no doubt that his keeper, manager, or lessee, was himself an essentially vulgar fellow: by praising what he considered to be the gentility of Mr. Bruin, he was doing, in fact, what the essentially vulgar are prone to do—he was apprehensively insinuating to his companions his claim to the same quality for himself.

As with bears and bearesses, so with men and women. The vulgar among them are the most sensitive to the quality of the tune.

The pretension to gentility takes strange forms, and exhibits itself in odd ways. We were one day riding in an Omnibus—There! two letters more and we had irretrievably compromised ourselves, with the whole community of bears who will dance to none but genteel tunes; for, with them, riding in such a vehicle, is the height, or depth, of vulgarity. Having, however, gone so far, we will risk the rest; endeavoring, at the same time, to render our fall in their opinion as easy as possible, by pulling down along with us two others who both plead guilty to the same enormity.

Sir W—— (not a knighted chessemonger or apothecary, who would neither of them have so compromised his "position," but a baronet of the oldest standing) was coming to town in a Hammersmith omnibus. Presently it stopped, and the vacant seat next to him was taken by Lord ——, a nobleman who had been employed as ambassador at more than one of the European courts.

"Bless my soul!" whispered the latter, and affecting astonishment, "bless my soul, my dear ——, do you ever ride in an omnibus?"

"Never, Lord ——," gravely replied Sir W——; "do you?" Now, then. We were riding in an omnibus. Opposite to us sat two very "genteel" women. One of them, indeed, evidently thought herself, "uncommon genteel;" she was showily dressed; she looked at every one about her (except her companion) with an air of disdain, and seemingly wondering how she came to be where she found herself; every now and then she put to her nose a handkerchief overpoweringly scented with bergamot; and this she did in a manner to make it clear to every body that the operation was indispensable to her comfort—under the circumstances. She made it distinctly intelligible that she was unused to omnibuses and their disagreeable concomitants.

The two ladies talked to each other in a half whisper, the word "genteel" being used by her of the bergamot once, at least, in every three sentences. In the course of their conversation two infallible tests of "the genteel," of both person and place, were adduced.

"Well!" said the companion, "I do not wonder that you visit Mrs. Edwards, considering"

"Considering what?" inquired the other.

"I never heard anything against her."

"No; I don't mean to say there is anything against her; only she is so very vulgar, and you are so very particular about that."

"Why, I am particular upon that point, in course. But you are quite mistaken, I assure you; on the contrary, she's quite the lady, and uncommon genteel; she always wears silk stockings and has done ever since I've known her—but, in course, I won't undertake to say what she might have done before then."

The next was— "But," said the companion, "I do wonder you should think of leaving the Crescent"—(some suburban paradise)—it is so very pleasant."

"Very true," replied the vastly genteel lady, "but we went. It is no longer the genteel place it was. Why, when we went to it almost every house had a *pe-army*—(piano-forte)—"whereas, now!—two shops has come to the end of it, as true as I'm sitting here."

We were not personally acquainted with Brummal; but, if many of the sayings which are attributed to him were uttered in sober seriousness, we should set down that "glass of fashion" as an essentially vulgar man. We incline, however, to consider him as a humourist, who was slyly laughing at those who had chosen to