

Literature, &c.

THE DUELLIST'S VOW.

A TALE FOR THE TIMES.

UPON a certain Wednesday evening in the spring of the year 183—, a considerable concourse of persons was assembled upon the Place du Capitole, at Toulouse, anxiously awaiting the opening of the theatre doors. The opera announced was the favorite one of "Guillaume Tell," the part of *Mathilde* by Mademoiselle Pauline Duveyrier, a young actress who had but recently made her *début* upon the stage, but yet by her fine voice and correct musical taste, her beauty and elegance, had already become no inconsiderable favorite with the music-loving and critical population of Toulouse. What rendered her success the more remarkable was, that her name was quite unknown in the theatrical world, and that, without any previous training in inferior establishments, she had stepped upon the boards of one of the best provincial theatres in France, and by her unquestionable ability, at once secured herself a firm footing. It was understood that she was of respectable family, and had not originally been intended for an actress; but that the sudden death of her father in insolvent circumstances, had compelled her to exert for her support those musical talents which she had previously cultivated for her amusement. She had now been three months on the Toulouse stage; and although assailed during that time by the various temptations to which her beauty and position as an actress rendered her peculiarly liable, she had preserved an unblemished reputation, and the extreme correctness of her conduct had been scarcely less matter of comment and admiration than her magnificent voice and her dramatic power.

The doors of the theatre were at length opened, and the pit and galleries instantaneously filled by the crowds that rushed in. Before the hour that was still to pass, previously to the commencement of the performance, had more than half elapsed, the boxes also began to fill; and when the curtain rose, it would have been difficult to find sitting or standing room for a single person in the whole of the theatre. There was nothing unusual in this crowded state of the house; it was of frequent occurrence when Mademoiselle Duveyrier played, but upon the evening in question a considerable portion of the audience had been attracted to the theatre by other motives than those of admiration of the actress or the opera.

The prima donna, who for several years had had an engagement at the Toulouse theatre, and who still belonged to the company, had deemed herself greatly injured and aggrieved by the triumphant success of Pauline Duveyrier. The defects of her somewhat deteriorated voice and damaged reputation were brought out into strong relief by the fresh tones and perfect propriety of conduct of the debutante, whom the manager had, moreover, caused to replace her in several of the parts she had been long accustomed to sing, and which she thought the most advantageous for the exhibition of her powers. During the first flush of Pauline's success, it would have been in vain organizing any thing like a cabal against her; but her rival had waited patiently for an opportunity, which she at last thought she had found, of diminishing the daily increasing popularity of the new actress. Several rich young men, idlers and debauchers by profession, who had been covetous of the notoriety that a *liaison* with an elegant and admired actress would confer upon them, had thought proper to be deeply offended by the firm, and sometimes contemptuous manner in which Mademoiselle Duveyrier had rejected their advances. While their wounded vanity was still smarting, several of these disappointed aspirants met at a gay supper at the house of Pauline's rival, who, by her sarcastic style of rallying them on their bad success, managed to increase their irritation, until it reached the point at which she had aimed. She then represented Pauline as an artful prude, affecting reserve, so long as she found it advantageous so to do; but who could easily forget her rigid principles when it was necessary to propitiate a manager or secure the favor of a critic. By these and other innuendoes she contrived to set even the unprejudiced portion of her guests against the unsuspecting Pauline; and amidst copious libations of champagne, it was agreed to make a grand effort to pull down this new goddess of song from the elevation on which the favor or caprice of the public had placed her. The conspirators arranged their plan of operations, and the following Wednesday, when Mademoiselle Duveyrier was to appear for the first time in the part of *Mathilde*, was fixed upon for the execution of the scheme.

Accordingly, on the day in question, a formidable band of hard-handed, loud-voiced ruffians, hired at so much a head by the contrivers of the plot, assembled at the theatre door, and entering with the crowd, stationed themselves in groups in various parts of the pit and galleries. They offered no interruption to the earlier part of the opera, but when *Mathilde* made her appearance, and before she had sung three bars of her part, she was greeted with a deafening peal of disapprobation. Hissing, whistling, shouting, and yelling, resounded from all parts of the house, and the uproar was maintained with a vigour that for some time drowned the applause of the impartial portion of the audience. The young actress, unaccustomed to such a reception, became pale and red by turns, hesitated, trembled, tried to go on, and finally, terrified and distressed by the clamour, was sinking to the ground, when a gentleman, sitting in one of the stage boxes, sprang forward, caught her in his arms just in time to prevent her falling, and carried her behind the scenes. The curtain immediately fell.

A regular vocal combat now organized itself in the theatre. The caballers continued their roar of disapprobation, although its object was no longer before them; but the majority of the audience responded by an enthusiastic applause that finally triumphed. Some of the most riotous of the malcontents were expelled from the house, the others were silenced, and there was a universal cry for the continuation of the opera. The manager came forward and said, "That Mademoiselle Duveyrier was too unwell to sing any more that night, but that a favorite vaudeville should be substituted for the remainder of the opera."

With this the audience were obliged to content themselves.

The individual who had come so opportunely to the assistance of the young actress, was a Spanish gentleman who had been for some time stopping at one of the principal hotels in Toulouse, and who was known by the name of the *Senor Leon*. After passing the winter in Italy, he was returning to his own country by way of the south of France, when he chanced to pause a day in the capital of Languedoc, and visiting the theatre, was exceedingly struck by the voice and beauty of Pauline Duveyrier. He made various inquiries about her, and was informed that she was a new actress, very popular, and it was said, of unblemished reputation. He countermanded the post-horses he had ordered for the following morning, and had since that day remained at Toulouse, leading a quiet and retired life, and passing his evenings at the theatre, whenever Mademoiselle Duveyrier played. He had secured one of the stage boxes, and every opera night he made his appearance in it while the opera was playing, and remained till the curtain fell upon the last scene of the performance. When Pauline was on the stage, his eyes never wandered to any other object, but were constantly fixed upon her expressive and beautiful countenance, or following her graceful movements. The actress, on her part, could not well avoid observing the handsome man of foreign and distinguished appearance, who was unremitting in his attendance upon opera nights, and whose gaze, although so earnest, was in no way either offensive or disrespectful. In time a sort of silent acquaintance seemed to spring up between the actress and assiduous auditor. Involuntarily, unknown indeed to herself, Pauline's first glance upon making her *entrée* was to the stage-box, where she never failed to read a welcome in the dark, expressive eyes of the Spaniard, although he invariably abstained from joining in the applause lavished on her by the audience.

It is difficult to say how long Leon might have contended himself with thus playing the part of a mute admirer, if the incident already related had not afforded him the opportunity of making Pauline's acquaintance. When he had carried her to her dressing room, and assigned her the care of an attendant, he waited behind the scenes till he heard that she was recovered, and then left the theatre. The following day he called at her house, and sent in a request to be allowed to make his personal inquiries concerning her health. It would have been ungracious, if not ungrateful, to have refused to admit him; and although Pauline had, from her very first arrival at Toulouse, declined all visits, upon the plea of her lonely and unprotected position, she could not avoid making an exception in favor of Leon.

If the mere beauty and grace of the actress had made an impression upon the Spaniard, that impression became stronger when he was enabled to judge of her mental perfections and accomplishments. Entirely free from the frivolity and coquetry not uncommon in women of her profession, Pauline was as remarkable for the refinement of her tone and manner, as for the elegance of her mind and the interest excited by her conversation. In the well-bred and intelligent Spaniard, she found one capable of approaching her, and willing to enjoy society, without wearying her by professions of attachment, or insulting her by that sort of incense which many men, in his position, would have thought it necessary to offer up on the altar of a young and pretty actress. His visit was prolonged far beyond the usual period of a morning call, without either himself or Pauline being aware of its length, and when at last he rose to depart, he obtained, without difficulty, permission to return upon a future day.

Leon soon became a constant visiter to the house of Mademoiselle Duveyrier, and had many opportunities of observing her correct deportment, and the steady firmness with which she replied the attempts constantly made to induce her to deviate from it. More than once when he was sitting in her drawing room listening to her exquisite performance on the piano, or to her repetition of some difficult melody that she was to sing the same night at the theatre, did her maid enter the apartment with a perfumed billet, accompanying a case of jewels, a pair of brilliant earrings, a necklace, or some other object which the sender had deemed the most likely to tempt the vanity of the actress. Notes and presents were, however, invariably returned unanswered. The only homage of this kind that was ever well received by Pauline, was some magnificent bouquets of choice flowers, with which Leon was in the habit of supplying her. Once, and once only he ventured to attempt making her a present of another description. He had heard her express admiration of a superb brilliant ring worn by an actress. On her return from rehearsal the following morning, she found a bouquet in her room, of which the most conspicuous flower was a moss rose, full blown, and in the cup of this rose was placed a ring, far surpassing in beauty the one she had admired. Half an hour afterwards the flower containing the ring was returned to Leon, enveloped in a

sheet of paper, on which were written the words, "I do not like roses."

On his next visit he saw his flowers occupying the accustomed place in an elegant porcelain vase, and Pauline received him with her usual kind frankness of manner. No allusion was ever made by either of them to the incident of the ring.

Meantime Leon's visit to the actress had become matter of much conversation. There was at that time a *cercle* or club at Toulouse, amongst the members of which were numerous young men of good family, resident in the town, or having their estates and *chateaux* in the neighbourhood, some of the superior officers of the garrison, and a few foreigners of distinction. Leon had been introduced there by Count Vermejo, a Spanish nobleman who had left his country for political reasons, and had been living for some time at Toulouse. In this club the proceedings of Mademoiselle Duveyrier were matter of frequent discussion, and innumerable were the pieces of scandal here invented or retailed by her disappointed admirers, with the kind intention of casting a slur upon one whose correct life and unpretending manners should have commanded their respect. The utter absence of foundation that distinguished all these inventions caused them to fall rapidly to the ground, and it was no slight exultation that the *ci devant* adorners of the actress caught at the pretext afforded them by Leon's visits to her house, for assailing her reputation with redoubled virulence. The absence of all affectation or mystery in the Spaniard's acquaintance with Pauline, at first rather disconcerted the scandal mongers. His visits were made openly and at mid day, he never appeared behind the scenes of the theatre, nor seemed in any manner to watch or follow her, and if he met her in the street his salutation was courteous and respectful, without either the familiarity or restraint from which more than a mere acquaintanceship might have been inferred. The mere fact of the visits therefore was all there was to build upon, and that fact Leon never attempted to deny, at the same time that he steadily repelled all insinuations against Pauline's fair fame, and discountenanced by every means in his power inuendoes and jests upon this subject. Although not exceedingly intimate with any of his club fellows, he was generally liked amongst them. Moreover, he was one of those grave, earnest men with whom few persons think it advisable to push a joke beyond its proper limits, and when it was seen that any light and unfitting conversation concerning Mademoiselle Duveyrier was unpleasant to him, that tone was rarely adopted in her presence.

It happened one night that Leon remained at the club later than was his custom, in order to finish a game at chess. It was past midnight when the silence of the room, which had long been deserted by all but the two players, was suddenly broken by the noisy entrance of a dozen young men, who had dined together at the country house of one of the number, and had just returned to town, all heated with wine and some of them more than half intoxicated. The party consisted of five or six *hobereaux*, or country gentlemen of the vicinity, three or four staff officers, and a young banker who had recently managed to get admitted into the club, an admission which he owed more to his wealth, and to the readiness with which he had obliged certain needy young men of family, than to any agreeable or gentlemanly qualities of his own. He was vulgar, purse proud, and conceited, and when, as on this occasion, under the influence of wine, he became intolerably assuming and even quarrelsome. He was, or rather had been, a great admirer of Mademoiselle Duveyrier, to whom, within a few days after her first appearance, he had sent a letter, little remarkable for its good taste or delicacy of expression, containing offers which however advantageous in a pecuniary point of view, the young actress had repulsed with strong marks of indignation. The letter had been returned in a blank cover, by the hands of the lacquey who brought it, and in whose hearing Mademoiselle Duveyrier gave strict orders to her servants to refuse any other letters or communications from the same quarter. From that day Lavrille the banker became the inveterate enemy of the actress. He had been one of the chief organisers of the attempt to crush her theatrical prospects, and since the failure of that plot, had lost no opportunity of venting his malice by attacks upon her character, both private and professional.

The new comers had driven into town together, and their conversation on the road had been of the theatre, a frequent theme of discussion in French provincial cities. The subject appeared to be not yet exhausted, and while some three or four went to watch the chess players, the others threw themselves upon the sofas and armchairs, and continued their loud and laughing commentaries upon actors and actresses, the latter of whom especially seemed to meet with small mercy at their hands. If their ruthless detractors might be believed, the imperfections and failings of these ladies were glaring and manifold. One had false teeth, another false hair, a singer was losing her voice through a too great addition to the brandy bottle, and a dancer was indebted to cork and cotton for the symmetrical proportions with which she delighted the eyes of the public. It was a festival of scandal, to which each contributed his quota amidst the uproarious applause and laughter of his companions, until at last the banker brought the name of Pauline Duveyrier on the *tapis*. There was a pause, and several glances were thrown in the direction of Leon, who was apparently absorbed in his game of chess.

"Allons, Lavrille," said De Roncevalles, a captain on the staff, who liked Leon, and had shown a disposition to cultivate his acquaintance, "that is forbidden ground, you know.

No attacks upon the *belle Pauline*, the

"Pshaw! sans reproche," replied

"tis easier said than proved. Some

And he turned his insolent, half

"A credulous generation you are,"

"Truly your faith is enabled you to place reliance on the

"He started this morning for Paris,

"Certainly," returned the banker,

"And who was it?" shouted half

Lavrille hesitated, and glanced

"Who was it, Lavrille—who was

"Ha! an invention of mine,"

Lavrille, irritated by the banter

"You are entirely misinformed

"Doryou mean to say that my friend

"This attack, conspicuous alike for

"You should consider the probable

"As usually happens in such cases,

"Vous mentez, Monsieur l'Espagnol

"He was interrupted in his ungen

"Meanwhile, the object of all this

"I never retract, sir," said Lavrille,

"Nevertheless, let me hope that

"Your friend madame have been mistaken concerning the

"I can

"I can

"I can

"I can

"I can

"I can

"I can

"I can