

Literature, &c.

The British Magazines
FOR APRIL.From Hogg's Instructor.
THE FORGET-ME-NOT.

FROM THE FRENCH.

WE present our readers with the following tale, as illustrative of that peculiar species of patriotism which Napoleon contrived to infuse into the breasts of Frenchmen, and the peculiar tact with which he took care to display all his so-called generous actions. Effect was the great passion of this ambitious spirit; he was the grand centre round which he contrived to warp the heart-strings of Frenchmen, at the very time he was teaching them, by precept, to love France. There is a hollowness in the character of Bonaparte which is made vividly apparent in such traits as the following, even though they are ostensibly written to glorify him.

In the year 1809, when the twelfth regiment of the line was in garrison at Strasburg, one of its sergeants was called Pierre Pitois. He was from that semi-civilised art of the Province of Burgundy known as Morvan, and was named by his comrades *Pierre Avale-tout-cru*. This man was brave to the full extent in which that word is generally understood, and he was declared by his comrades to be the king of fire-eaters. He was the first to dash into the thickest of the battle, he was the last to retire from the work of death. He seemed to delight in only two things in the world, and these were the aroma of gunpowder and the music of the musket-balls that whistled round his head. In battle he was terrible to look upon. His eyes gleamed like tapers in the night, his mustache bristled up upon his quivering lip, and his nostrils were distended widely, as, with a wild laugh of delight he threw himself headlong into the midst of the furious foe. So dauntlessly and so wildly did he bear himself in the melee, that his comrades all declared that carnage was the jubilee of the terrible *Pierre Avale-tout-cru*.

Wonderful men are always giving people something to speak about, and assuredly Pierre kept his comrades pretty much in talk by his deeds of daring, from the drum-boy to the colonel; but the latter person was more than ordinary astonished when one day, as he was smoking his meerschaum, and decanting some choice Bourdeaux which he had in his case, a letter was put into his hand from the gallant sergeant. It contained an earnest solicitation for leave of absence, in order that the writer might be enabled to visit his mother, who was aged feeble, and very ill. His father, he said, was eight more than man's allotted span of three score and ten years old; he was so feeble and so fragile that he could not minister to his poor old wife in any way; and so Pierre besought the colonel for a pass, promising, whenever his mother was restored to health, to return once more to his duty. The colonel held the epistle between his finger and thumb for some time in the easiest way imaginable, and then he hurriedly sent his attendant to inform the sergeant, that as the regiment was in the position of being about to receive orders to join the army, then in active service, at a moment's warning, he must attend his duty, nor hope for the indulgence he demanded.

Pierre Pitois bore this rebuff in resigned silence. Five days had elapsed from the period of sending the first, when another note was presented to the commanding officer from the same man. He intimated in this one that his mother had died, and that her grief that her son could not kneel beside her couch to receive her farewell blessing was very great. She had been a good and tender mother, he said, and had dearly loved him. She was gone, however, and now he had not her to visit, still a powerful motive induced him to again beseech the colonel for the favour of a pass. He could not, he said, explain the nature of the strong and urgent necessity that impelled him to visit his native place, it was a family secret that he could not reveal. He therefore prayed the colonel to give him leave to go, only for one month. Pierre's second application, although so earnestly urged, was no more successful than the first. Indeed, the colonel did not deign to answer his note. His captain spoke to him on the subject, and he did so in such a manner as would have led anybody to perceive that the colonel and he thought the matter a very small one indeed.

'Pierre,' said the captain, 'the colonel has received your letter. He is very sorry to hear of the death of your poor old mother, and wishes he could oblige you; but that pass he cannot grant you, as the regiment has received orders to leave Strasburg to-morrow.'

'Ah! the regiment leaves Strasburg to-morrow!' said Pierre, raising his eyes from the ground. 'And whither does it proceed, captain, if you please?'

'To Austria, my boy,' replied the officer, gaily. 'We are going to dance with the fair Viennese, and to give their husbands and brothers a drubbing; that will be a treat for thee; won't it? Thou wilt let Monsieur Allemand have the bayonet to the cry of 'Vive l'Empereur! my boy.'

Pierre Pitois did not reply to this sally of his chief, he looked sadly to the ground, and seemed absorbed in deep thought.

'What dost thou say to that my boy?' cried the captain, grasping the hand of his subordi-

nate, and shaking it heartily. What ails thee to-day, man? art thou deaf? Here have I announced to thee, eight days beforehand, the pleasure of a brush with the Austrians, and yet you turn your face to the ground as if you expected it to open and swallow you up, and do not so much as say, thank you for your good news.'

'I did hear you, captain,' said Pierre, in a low voice, 'and I am much obliged to you for the news; I listen to them with pleasure.'

'Then, cheer up, my lad; I am glad the information pleases you,' replied the captain, who evidently strove to restore the equanimity of the depressed *Avale-tout-cru*.

'Yes, the news are excellent, captain; but could you not procure me that pass?'

'Tut, Pierre thou art surely mad,' said the captain in displeasure—'still harping on that leave of absence, and we just on the point of beginning the campaign.'

'That does not matter, captain,' replied the soldier, firmly but respectfully. 'I know that we are just about to begin active service; but were we upon the very eve of battle I should still demand this pass.'

'Then you may save yourself that trouble again, my brave fellow,' replied the officer.

'The demand is not unreasonable,' replied the sergeant; 'it is just; and yet you tell me I must not urge it again. Ah! well then, I will obey you; I will not repeat the request?'

'Well done, Pitois!—that is like thyself again,' said the captain, as he turned away, humming a little air.

On the morrow the twelfth regiment of the line crossed German frontier, and on the day following that, *Pierre Pitois*, called *Avale-tout-cru*, had deserted.

Three months had elapsed, when the same regiment, after having won glory to their hearts' content on the field of Wagram, and bloody wounds to spice it with, once more entered Strasburg in triumph; and at the same time *Pierre Pitois* the deserter was led back to his corps, like a malefactor, by a posse of the gendarmes. It was not long before a council of war was convened, before which tribunal *Pierre* was accused of the heinous crime of deserting his standard when almost face to face with the foe. Tribunals before which men stand upon the charges which subject them to capital punishment are always solemn enough convocations, and this one before which *Pitois* was arraigned, albeit it was a military one, partook somewhat of that seriousness which always attaches to men who in a corporate capacity assume to themselves the power of life and death. *Pierre* stood up before his judges uncovered with his eyes turned down, but his face he was not the least indication of fear, and he listened to the following accusation which was preferred against him by an officer who acted as clerk to the court. '*Pierre Pitois*—you, one of the bravest soldiers in the service of your country—you upon whose breast gleams the star of the legion of honour—you who never rendered yourself before amenable to punishment, nor received a single reproach from your superior officers—you who had no authority to leave your regiment, did so most inexplicably and to the regret of every one who knows you, upon the very hour when you were required to face your country's foes. The council is satisfied that some powerful motive induced you to take this most unprecedented step, and not desiring your punishment, but being anxious to have it in their power to recommend you to clemency of the emperor, if such is possible, they demand to know the reason of this incomprehensible desertion.'

Pierre listened to the charge without visible emotion, and then when it was finished, he replied in a firm voice: 'I had no reason for deserting; I had no motive inducing me to this step, and yet I do not regret it. If what I have done were yet undone, I should not hesitate to do it again. I have deserved death, messieurs, and I have no desire to live. Condemn me.'

Every one who witnessed this trial, believed, indeed, that *Pierre* had absented himself from his regiment, because they knew that he had done so, but that he intended to desert no one would credit, while some were heard to declare that poor *Pierre* had lost his senses, and that, instead of drawing up a platoon to shoot *Avale-tout-cru*, they should send him to the hospital. This recommendation, which was at least creditable on the feelings of its proposers did not meet with the approbation of the judges however. There was not an individual member of that council, it is true, who did not consider *Pierre's* desertion as one of the most extraordinary and inexplicable of human actions. None of them would for a moment refuse to admit that it was a most extraordinary affair, but then the calm and collected manner of the accused, and his determined persistency not to say one word of exculpation of his offence, left the council no alternative. He determinedly refused to utter a syllable that might in any way exonerate himself from the charge of causeless desertion, and persisted in boldly proclaiming that he did not regret the step he had taken; so that to allow him to escape with such a bravado upon his lips would be to give encouragement to independence of thought, and a subversion of all subordination, and the council therefore pronounced upon the prisoner sentence of death.

From the moment of this arrest, *Pierre*, who had scarcely raised his eyes, manifested no desire to live. Many of his officers professed a lively interest in his fate, and would have willingly exerted themselves to procure a revocation of his doom; but he smiled when

they spoke to him on the subject, and steadily refused to profit by their well meant offers. The more that people reflected upon the affair however, the more mysterious and wonderful did it appear; so that instead of being immediately led to the place of execution, as is the use and wont when soldiers are capitally convicted during service abroad, *Pierre* was reconducted to the military prison, and was informed that in consideration of his former character, he was to have three days of grace, in order that he might have a last chance of explaining all, and appealing for pardon. When this was announced to him, the prisoner calmly folded his arms across his broad manly breast but said not a word.

It was midnight immediately preceding the day appointed for the execution of *Pitois*, when the door of his prison-cell receded softly on its hinges, and a subaltern officer of the young guard softly approached the camp-bed upon which the prisoner slumbered. He seemed wrapped in a calm and deep sleep, for as the officer stood and gazed upon his brown sunburned face he could discover no indication of grief. At last he laid his hand upon *Pierre* and awoke him. *Pierre* quietly opened his eyes, then raising himself upon his elbow, and looking round his cell, as if to assure himself of where he was, he exclaimed, 'Ah! has the hour arrived at last? Well, I am ready.'

'No, *Pierre*,' replied his visiter, in a low friendly tone, 'the hour has not yet come, although, alas! it soon will be here.'

'And what do you want with me, then?' said *Pierre*, looking wonderingly up in the face of the young guardsman.

'*Pierre*, do you know me,' said the subaltern, laying his hand gently upon the arm of the prisoner, and looking kindly in his face, 'but I know you. I saw you at Austerlitz, where the combat raged fiercest and longest, comport yourself like a hero, and from that day I have conceived an ardent esteem for you. I arrived yesterday in Strasburg, when I was apprised of your trial and condemnation, and as I am intimate with the jailer of this prison, I sought and obtained permission to come and speak with you. *Pierre*, there are few men upon the point of death who do not regret that they have not a friend to whom they can unbosom themselves in whom they can confide—to whom they can depute the last holy offices of affection and remembrance. Comrade, if you please,' said the subaltern, in low thrilling tones, 'I will be that friend to thee.'

'Have mercy on me comrade,' said *Pierre*, in a choking voice, as he turned his eyes to the ground, and sadly leaned his head upon his hand.

'Is there nothing of this kind that I can do for thee?' continued the soldier, in the same low voice.

'Nothing,' was *Pierre's* reply. 'What! not a lock of thy dark hair for some sweet village maiden, who will mourn thee even when the sun dances over the green fields of Morvan, and the song of the grape-gatherers is rising from the vine groves? Hast thou no farewell for thy sweet heart—no kind word for thy sister?'

'I never had either friend,' replied the prisoner coldly.

'To thy father, then, who will love to hear of thee, even though he may never see thee? This star, which thou didst win upon the gory field, wilt thou not send it to the old man, that he may at least remember that his son was once worthy of him and France?'

'My father is gone; about two months ago he pilloved his hoary head upon my breast, and sighed out his last breath in my arms,' said *Pierre*, softly.

'Thy mother then?' continued his friend.

'My mother!' cried the young man, suddenly turning his eyes upon the officer, and looking in his face with an expression of the most indescribable sorrow, while his voice became even musical in its intonation—'For my mother! Ah, comrade, do not breathe that name to me if you have pity for me. I never hear the sound of that holy word, mother, but it stirs my heart with all the soft and tender emotions of a little child. Ah, then, I think I hear my mother speaking to me in the low fond tones of endearment which she used to breathe into my ear in childhood, and then I think I speak to her as I was wont to do, when a boy, in our dear old home.'

'Ah, well! my brave comrade,' said his visiter with emotion.

'Oh! I could weep libations of tears when I think of her!' continued *Pierre*, 'but tears do not become the cheek of a man. Were I to weep when only separated from death by a few hours,' said *Pierre*, with a look of pride, 'it would be said that the heart of *Pierre Pitois* had failed him and that he was afraid to die.'

'You are too severe my friend,' said the subaltern, gently taking the prisoner's hand. 'I do believe that I have as few of the weaknesses of mankind about me as many, and I am certain that no one who knows me would call me soft-hearted; and yet I could shed tears, and feel no shame in doing so, when speaking of my mother.'

'Indeed!' cried *Pierre*, suddenly grasping the hand of the soldier, and looking in his face with an expression of pleased wonder beaming in his own. 'You are a man and a soldier, and yet you would not blush to shed tears.'

'When thinking of my mother?—no, surely not. She who bore me in her arms, and nursed me on her soft and downy lap; she who is so good and so noble—who loves me so fondly and whom I so dearly love? Ah, no

comrade! Tears shed in remembrance of a mother's love are holy drops that will become the cheeks of even bearded men; and I know that I could wear them on mine like heart-jewels, and feel no shame.'

'Your mother, whom you love, and who loves you!' cried *Pierre*, who seemed but to have caught these words; 'Ah, then, do I indeed discover in you one in whom my soul can confide. You have been sent, like my good angel, to share the griefs I bear. You will not laugh at me—ah, I know that you will not. Bend your ear to me, then my comrade, and listen to the whisperings of my heart. Ah, how truly you spoke within this hour, when you said, that to the dying man it was a glorious consolation to have a heart into which he could pour the emotions that filled his own. Will you listen to me then as a friend—as a brother? You will not laugh at me?'

'I shall listen to you *Pierre*, as if I were listening to a dying man, who should ever claim our sorrow and excite our sympathies,' said the subaltern, taking the hand of the condemned, and seating himself beside him on the edge of the camp-bed.

'You must know, then,' said *Pierre*, speaking freely, but at the same time with a melancholy expression—'you must know that there was only one person in all this world whom I can be said to have truly loved, and that was my mother; but her I did love with all the intensity and ardour that was in my life and nature. When I was but a child, I would gaze into her soft kind eyes and read the thoughts that beamed in them as intelligibly as she could perceive my undisguised feelings in mine. I could divine her thoughts from her looks as well as from her words, and well could she read the feeling that stirred me. If ever mother reigned in the bosom of a son, my mother did in mine, and if ever a son was enthroned in a parent's heart, I was in hers. I never had a sweetheart—I never knew love for another woman in my life; my mother was all the world to me. At last however I passed through the period of my boyhood, and reached the years of man, and then I knew an awakening indeed from my life of affection and toil that knew no care. I was drawn as a conscript, and called upon to follow the eagle of France in flight of glory; but what a sacrifice did not this impose upon me?—it tore me from my mother, I became gloomy—dependent—thrown into despair—and at last declared that I would not be taken from my mother with life in my bosom. But she, noble and magnanimous woman that she was, soon changed my grief to firm resolve. '*Pierre*, said she in a decided tone, I perceive that we must part. I knelt before her, as I had often knelt when a child, to receive her blessing, and I murmured, 'Mother, I will go then.'—'*Pierre*, said she looking kindly at me, 'you have been a good and dutiful son to me, and I thank God that gave thee to me; but the duties of a son are not only ones that belong to a man. He is a citizen as well as a son, and owes allegiance to his country as well as to his parent. When our country calls, her voice must be obeyed. France asks thee at this moment to be a soldier, and remember that thy life is not thy own but thy country's. When her interests are weighed in the balance with our own selfish feelings, we must not hesitate which to prefer. If God wills that though shall fall upon some bloody plain, and there breathe out thy last breath before I am called away, ah! I shall drain my heart of tears to thy memory—but still I bid thee go; and if thou lovest me my son do thy duty.—Oh! these words of that dear woman, I have treasured them in my bosom, since she spoke them to me. 'Do thy duty,' she exclaimed; 'it is the duty of a soldier to obey every one above him, and always to obey; he must be ever ready to advance through the heart of danger without question and without hesitation. I have ever done so; and those who have seen me revelling in the fight have cried, 'Behold a hero!' but they would have spoken more correctly if they had cried, 'Behold one who truly loves his mother!'—One day I received a letter apprising me that she was ill. My heart yearned too soon the dear old woman, and I demanded a pass, which was refused. I recollected her last words, 'If thou lovest me, do thy duty,' and I resigned myself to our separation as I best could, but in a short time afterwards I heard that she was dead. Ah! then my brain reeled, all sense of subordination forsook me, and I felt that I must return to my native village at every hazard. Thou canst not tell me whence arose this strong, impetuous, unconquerable desire to visit the spot where my mother slumbered in death, but I shall tell you; and, seeing that you have a mother whom you venerate, and who doats upon you, you will comprehend the force of that feeling, and from what it springs. We peasants of Morvan are a simple people; we can boast of but little of the knowledge possessed by those who have been bred in cities; but we have our beliefs—superstitions; they are called by wise folks, who laugh at them; and one of the strongest of these is that whoever calls the earliest flower that springs upon a grave shall never cease to remember the beloved being who sleeps beneath its sod, and that the spirit of the departed shall ever hover round the path of him possessed by this sweet floral treasure. That flower I saw spring—that flower I called,' cried *Pierre*, looking up with a smile of delight; then, suddenly resuming his calm demeanour, he said, 'I am wandering, however, my comrade; forgive me. After six days of long and weary travel,' he continued, 'I hung at last over my