

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines.

From the People's Journal.

## SALEMBIER.

By H. R. Addison.

## CHAPTER I.

[This interesting account of Salembier, the most ferocious bandit that ever ravaged Flanders, may be relied on as authentic. It was repeated to me by an officer, who, wholly unsuspecting of his double character, was his most constant and intimate associate. The same individual commanded the military guard at Salembier's execution. I was lately living within a few doors of the residence of this once celebrated robber, who Vidocq declares to be the originator of the 'feet burning' torture; and consequently can vouch for much of this sketch being correct.—H. R. A.]

ALL was gaiety beneath the hospitable roof of the Count de Salembier, one of the most recherche party givers in Bruges. The brilliant lights, the enlivening music, the handsome uniforms of the military, and still more handsome faces of the Flemish belles then present, gave to the view of the beholder a good specimen of refined revelry. The eager card-player, the gay dancer, the philosopher and rout, each found an unusual attraction in the elegant circle of their much admired entertainer, whose invitation or rejection stamped with the hand of fashion or exclusion, the aspirants who thronged this once proud city.

Count Salembier, at the time I speak of, was considered one of the handsomest men in West Flanders, possessing almost boundless wealth, inherited (as was supposed) from a distant relation who had died in India: manners the most insinuating, and a general knowledge not to be surpassed, rendered him indeed an object worth the winning; and many therefore were the hearts who sighed in sullen envy, when it was announced that the party now given was in honor of his betrothed: for he now publicly called Anna de Juillot, who, on this evening shone the fairest of the fair, the gayest of the gay, while she smilingly received their warm yet sincere congratulations.

Ten o'clock had struck, and the ball was at its height, (for the hours here are earlier than elsewhere) when the abrupt entrance of Captain Villedieu, in the service dress of his regiment, startled the assembled group. None were usually more punctilious in the etiquette of the toilette than the gay dragoons; all therefore crowded round the officer, to learn the cause of his appearance among them in this rough attire, this anything but ball room guise.

I come, I fear, most inopportunist to disturb your mirth,' at length uttered Villedieu; 'the cause you shall know ere long; and he drew Salembier aside. They whispered for an instant, and the count returned; consulted for a moment with an aged noble; desired the music instantly to cease, and hastened to hand into her carriage, the fair betrothed, who was evidently much surprised at this sudden desire on the part of Salembier to break up the party. In a moment more their host re-entered the ball-room, where the late gay dancers stood almost petrified, and thus explained the cause at once, of his seeming agitation, and his abrupt wish to cease the revel.

'My friends, I scarcely know how to tell you my tale of woe; for many there are here present, connected with him who has just been murdered.' The company started, and a murmur of horror went round. 'Yes—it is too late. The black gang, who for years have cursed this country with their presence, have destroyed another victim. Within three miles of Ghent, I learn from my friend, that the father of my betrothed has been assassinated. His servant, who escaped, arrived in trembling haste at Villedieu's lodgings, not ten minutes since, with information of the fact. His reeking horse bears testimony that two hours have scarcely passed since this band destroyed before his eyes, his loved, his valued master! he would have been to me a parent; and a tear rolled down the cheek of the agitated speaker. 'My friends, but one consolation, if it may be so called, is now left; to discover and punish the perpetrator of this bloody deed. For this purpose Villedieu, with a chosen party is about to depart, while I seek my room, and try to soothe my poignant feelings of distress. I need not, I am sure, apologise for breaking up the fete; for even yet, I fear we have not learned the extent of our misfortunes. Strange it is to say, but no less true, this band of murderers, (may curses light on them) have never yet been known to commit a single murder. Invariably it has occurred that, simultaneous with their atrocities in one part of the country, they have sealed their savage nature by deeds of the most revolting kind, at distances of several leagues, thus proving their almost ubiquitous presence, their well-digested plans of action. May heaven grant that we hear not of their exploits in some other part before morning.'

And a deep and sincere 'amen' was pronounced by all present; and while the wretched count sought the solitude of his chamber, Villedieu and the company now as fearfully depressed as they had previously been elated, departed, some to scour the country, others to think and dream of the murderous black gang.

Another half hour had elapsed. The almost ever-sounding carillon of the belfry was chiming the 11th hour, as a single horseman rode through the port d'Ostende. But so closely

muffled were his features, so completely hidden were his form by a long horseman's cloak, that the sleepy warden, when afterwards interrogated, declared his utter inability to describe the person of him who now slowly left the western gate of Bruges at a steady ambling pace. The barrier however passed, the second bridge crossed, the small hamlet of Skipsdale left behind, and the more open country gained; the horseman suddenly burying his military spurs in his proud animal's side, in another instant had leaped the wide ditch which skirted the road, and riding to a certain point some quarter of a league from the beaten path, suddenly halted, jumped off, and placing a small whistle to his lips, blew a peculiar low yet shrill signal. In a moment more that signal was answered, and in the next minute a second joined the traveller of whom we speak. A word of recognition, and at once they proceeded to business.

'Have you succeeded in the west?' 'Yes captain, though we lost poor Jaques in the melee; the old merchant made a most unexpected resistance; while his servant, ere we had time to finish him, had drawn a pistol and shot our comrade almost to death.'

'Poor fellow! I am sorry for him,' and he sighed then suddenly changing his tone, 'but what have you done with him?'

'We obeyed the rule, and as his wound seemed mortal, we at once despatched him, mutilated his features, and those of the servant who had shot him, tied the two bodies together and threw them into the canal, where they will rot long ere they are discovered, as we tied an iron weight to them to keep them down. Then, according to your orders, we let loose their horses, packed up the corpse of the old gentleman, and started off across the country for Blackenberg. We popped the carcass into the haunted ruin near the village, where, leaving it in charge of Joseph, after dispersing the rest of our fellows, I at once started off to meet your honor.'

'Tis well, right well. And the booty?'

'Is here captain.' And the assassin whose hands still reeked in human blood, placed several caskets and a purse in the hands of his superior, who, by a silent motion, signified his desire to proceed. They mounted their horses and in a few moments more this worthy pair were again on the high road which leads from Bruges to Blackenberg.

Their pace, however, was not that of haste. By the lingering look which ever and anon the captain cast behind him, it was evident he still expected the arrival of another person; in this way they proceeded slowly onwards. Presently an approaching traveller was heard; a signal passed. The chief at once despatched his companion forward to reconnoitre. His lieutenant hastily galloped up to him, and they proceeded at a quicker rate towards the fishing village, where the body of the murdered man now lay.

After a short pause the newly-arrived stranger spoke.

'You know, captain, it is not my way to ask questions. You are aware I do your bidding, and seldom seek to know your reason; but, on the present occasion, I confess I am anxious to learn your motives for this double work; especially as the Ghent affair can bring us no profit; and from the rank of the victim we may get into trouble.'

His chief laughed. 'My excellent friend you are indeed near-sighted; though, as you say, it is true I shall not gain much by the death of the marquis. But what of that? The double stroke will paralyse and divide opinion. With respect to discovery, cannot you already see, who will be pitched upon to pursue the assassins? Ha, ha, ha, you are dull indeed. Why me to be sure; and you shall be my proxy; solicited and appointed by the blind burghers of yonder proud city,' and again he laughed.

'Captain, you are right. Your genius certainly is ever ready-witted. But still in the present case—'

His chief interrupted him; 'I understand you; you cannot probe my motives for leaving my home at such an hour, and risking discovery as it were, for no earthly purpose. Are not such your thoughts?'

'Most truly divined.'

'Well, then, I'll explain. In the hamlet which we are approaching dwells one who is dear to me beyond expression, one to possess whom I would give up rank, title, riches, honor. You seem astonished; but 'tis no less true. The orphan daughter of a poor fisherman, the adopted child of a wretched smuggler, holds this heart in chains, a heart which never yet could stoop to woo. In her presence the object of a thousand courtly smiles feels as a slave. Yes—I have grovelled at her feet, and prayed but for one look of kindness, one word of self-affection, and have been spurned! and the bandit ground his teeth with rage almost unenviable.'

'Knows she of your vocation?'

'No, no,' thundered the superior. 'No, she knows me not, in either of my characters. She knows me only as the supposed son of a wealthy tradesman, a traveling painter; one willing to wed her. But there was a more favored gallant in the case, a miserable boatman! An almost boy, who lived upon the scanty means his net provided. This son of toil she loved, and for his sake rejected me! me, who never bore refusal. To-morrow she has sworn to wed the stripling. Can you not guess my purpose then?'

'Doubtless to take his life. But this fess about a peasant! any of our men had done the deed without this trouble.'

'Think you that that would content me now? No—she has scorned me, and my love is turned to hate. He shall not die a common death.'

Each pain he suffers she shall doubly feel, and know that I,—I, her despised suitor, wrought his doom! and he raised himself in his stirrups with passion.

At this moment they had arrived within view of the ruin, said to be haunted, which is situated about two hundred paces from Blackenberg. The captain called his lieutenant to his side, whispered some short directions to him, and as the subaltern galloped back to Bruges or its vicinity, the chief of the black band entered the untenanted wreck of former grandeur.

For a moment the captain (or as we shall more frequently style him Le Noir)—groped his way in utter darkness, feeling with his hand, which grasped a naked pionard, the way leading to the interior. Arrived, however, in an open chamber, aware that the signal could not be heard outside, he ventured to give a low whistle. In the next instant a light flashed on him; a dark lantern was turned, and he found himself within three paces of his two associates, who silently held guard over the corpse which had thus for certain reasons been bro't hither. A smile of meaning, a glance towards an object lying in the corner, over which a cloak was loosely thrown, a nod of approbation from their superior, and their tale was told. The gang had done their leader's bidding, and that leader willingly accorded them his thanks; and yet no word was spoken—it seemed as if they feared the sound of their own voices would awaken their victim, or their echoes betray them to the hands of justice.

At length Le Noir broke the silence, and in a subdued tone enquired, 'How managed you the track?'

At once they understood and replied, 'Joseph turned his horse's shoes, and riding back at some twenty paces from me, gave the appearance of a single horse having left the spot, arrived at the scene of strife, and again returned to it; his reversed shoes seeming to approach Ostend, while mine appeared as coming from it.'

'Tis well. Now mark my further directions. I am about to leave you for half an hour; during that time walk one of your horses over to the stable door of the cottage which stands on the northern strand; lead him right to it, and then destroy him, or get him back as you list; but on your life let no print of returning hoof be seen, or we are lost. This I will leave to your ability to effect. While one does this, let the other dig a deep grave to put the merchant in, but not till I return. I'll see the old man sepulchred myself; 'tis but respectful; and the bandit chuckled at the joke.

While speaking, Le Noir had stripped off his cloak, and now appeared dressed as a smuggler. A bandage confined his brow and the fresh blood seemed to trickle from under it; his clothes were rent in various places, a broken pistol was stuck in his girdle, and any one who now saw him would have mistaken him for a contrabandist of the Flemish coast, escaped within the hour from a severe encounter with revenue police. So good was his disguise that even his followers were staggered and surprised, as he thus showed himself. After taking a glass of schiedan from their well-replenished horn, drinking as was customary with the band, 'to the success of his present enterprise,' Le Noir cautiously placed about him the various articles which had been rifled from the murdered man, and left the ruin in a northerly direction.

At about half an English mile from the village of Blackenberg there stands a solitary cottage, now fallen into decay, but which, at the time I speak of, presented an aspect of comfort and neatness far beyond the usual average found among the humble dwellings of the fishermen. It had just been put in thorough repair, and neatly painted, to receive with becoming respect its future mistress.

The owner of this dwelling was a young and handsome villager, one who had never been known to do an ungenerous or unmanly action; and though he owed his daily meal to the labor of his hands; though poverty might be said, with truth, to be his lot, yet so loved, so respected was the youth, that the old and young alike referred their disputes and doubts to the arbitration of Charles Van Eecke. The morrow had been fixed upon for his marriage with Charlotte Gaesbeck, commonly styled 'the flower of Blackenberg.' The enamoured and delighted fisherman now sat beside his fire in luxurious solitude, conning over his future plans, 'dreaming of bliss to come.'

While he was thus engaged a feeble knock was heard, and the youth started up in astonishment, wondering what could thus bring a being to his door after midnight. The evening was calm; it could not therefore be a shipwrecked mariner. His poverty was known; it could not be a robber. What then might it be? a message perhaps from Charlotte. She might want him; she might be ill. At once he sprang up. The castles in the air so lately built vanished 'like the baseless fabric of a vision,' and with hurried agitation he threw open the door.

'Save me, oh! save me!' uttered a voice of despair, as a well built man dressed as a sailor staggered into the room. 'They are after me; another moment and I am lost!' and he sank half fainting, evidently overcome by the loss of blood, which still flowed from his temple, into a chair near the fisherman's hearth.

Charles in a moment read the truth. The man before him was evidently a smuggler; one who carried on an illicit trade with the neighboring Dutch ports. He had doubtless escaped from a severe rencontre with the coast guard, and thus received his wound. A low groan from the sufferer recalled Van Eecke

to a sense of activity. He bolted fast the door to prevent surprise, and going to a cupboard poured out a glass of spirits, which he handed to the wounded man who drank it eagerly.

At length the stranger seemed to revive; freed from the idea of immediate capture, conscious that his pursuers must have taken a wrong course, his strength appeared to return and he began talk freely. 'We had a hard boat of it. We were but four to seven, yet we beat them off. But what of that, I should have died ere this had it not been for you. Say, in a word, how can I repay you? Will you join us? I faith it is a pleasant life.'

'Not so,' replied Charles; 'I would never do. I'm poor but honest. Besides, I am to be married in the morning; and a rover's life would ill suit a happy bridegroom.'

'Indeed, well then, although you scorn my offer, still I'll prove my gratitude. Here is an order on a friend of mine for two hundred francs; nay, refuse it not, I've plenty and to spare; 'twill be a pretty offering to your spouse. One thing, however, I would advise keep it about you on your person; you understand. A smuggler's cheque is sometimes dangerous to expose, so keep it to yourself. And now my friend, I'll drink to 'the maiden!' and he cast a look of strange meaning on his entertainer, as he placed the goblet to his lips. Then rising, he rejoined, 'and now, good night; I would only ask one favor more, 'tis to step as far as the sandhills and look around to see if I'm not pursued.' Charles willingly acceded, for he felt relief in being thus freed from the presence of a dangerous character; one whose acquaintance might lead him into trouble. So, snatching up his cap he hastened out.

In a moment, the seeming smuggler had started up, drawn from his pocket the booty of the murdered man of whom we spoke anon, and hurrying to the cupboard and the bed, hid in them, the different articles. Drawing forth a jacket which he found, he smeared the lining with a composition resembling blood; then seizing a knife which lay upon the table, marked with the initials of the fisherman, he carefully concealed it; then sitting down again, he quietly awaited the return of Charles, who, in a few minutes more re-entered, and assured his guest that the coast was clear. The next instant saw that guest, leaving Van Eecke to dream over and enjoy the thoughts of joys to come.

The night was unusually dark, and the driving wind blew coldly over the low sandhills which skirt the sea, and bury at each moment the footsteps of the traveller deep in their yielding substance. For leagues around no hillocks rose from the surface of the extensive flat;—no beacon served to cheer or guide the wanderer on his way; but Le Noir well knew the track he now pursued, and bid defiance to the superstitious fears which any one less hardy would have felt with such a conscience, and at such an hour.

About a quarter of an hour more, and the captain re-entered the ruined castle, to which his comrades had returned, having performed his bidding. The grave lay open, and its future occupant, placed on its edge, awaited but the order of the captain to be thrown in. The chief hastily entered, and going straight up to the corpse, inflicted on it several wounds with the knife which he had abstracted from the fisherman's hut. Then spurning the body with his foot, it fell heavily into its narrow cell; and then throwing in the knife, still wet with blood, he drew his follower instantly to fill up the trench, to be at Thorout on the following Tuesday, and further commanding them to leave the place as speedily as possible when their job should be completed; the redoubted captain jumped on his horse, and ere another hour, Le Noir was far from his scene of horror and duplicity.

Those alone who have been at Bruges can picture the gaiety of a market day in that city. The "Groot Market," (or "Grande Place,") covered with innumerable booths, placed in regular allies, ingeniously built every Friday night, and as rapidly carried off on the Saturday evening displaying the well polished brass utensils, which gaudily decorate each Belgian kitchen; handkerchiefs, and shawls of dazzling colors; lace caps, old china, and wooden shoes; all lend their gay appearance to this animated scene: while hosts of females decked in every hue (grotesque, yet picturesque) make up the scene, which weekly displays itself in the aforesaid "place." The idle soldier, standing at his guardroom, waiting the carillon from above to announce his turn of duty; the healthy corn chandler, stooping over his sack in anxious expectation of a customer; the lazy chapman, and the steady burgher, may all be found, desirous equally to learn and propagate the news of their favorite day.

No laughing faces were, however, visible on Saturday, the 3rd of October, 1797. No tale of scandal or broad humour lit a smile in their honest faces. The murder of the Marquis de Juillot near the town of Ghent, had chased their laughing mood, and caused a panic midst their busy throng.

Soon after more horrid news arrived. The idol of the crowd, the last remaining link between the burgher and the people, their much-loved Echvin (sitting magistrate) had been murdered—at least so all believed. His horse and that of his servant had arrived at the barrier (with that extraordinary instinct which leads them to know their home) riderless. Their saddles were smeared with blood; while the animal which the worthy magistrate had bestraddled was wounded most severely, seemingly by a ball.