

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines,

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## SALEMBIER.

By H. R. Addison.

## CHAPTER II.

THEY had arrived within a league of Ostend, when the party simultaneously reined up. With sickening horror they interchanged a glance of conviction; the dreadful truth was indeed revealed to them, at least as far as circumstantial evidence could prove it. The stones and earth which skirted the road bore testimony to a violent struggle; while a discharged pistol and the well known cloak of the poor magistrate, lay upon the ground. It seemed as if no soul had passed the spot where the recent assassination had evidently been committed.

The group, prepared as they all must have been, still felt with force the sudden shock, on thus abruptly finding a confirmation of their worst fears. They eagerly dismounted, and scrutinized the spot.

On searching closely they discovered that a ball had grazed one of the trees which bordered the road, while the banks of the canal were broken, as if a second struggle on that spot had taken place, and many were of opinion that they had here thrown in the merchant's corpse.

In the mean time, however, others had traced a distinct track of blood towards a neighboring field. Crossing this field they beheld the recent marks of a horse's hoofs, deeply indented in the soft soil, and yet another line of foot-marks in an opposite direction, some twenty paces from the others. From this they judged that a horseman had come in a northerly direction across the country into the open road, and again returned to the same point, evidently bearing back some bleeding object. It was therefore unanimously determined to follow this clue, and the party carefully proceeded.

For more than three leagues they traced the mark almost without a break. At length they arrived near the village of Blakenberg, when the track at once diverged. The anxious pursuers still followed it. They led directly to the entrance of the ruined tower which, as I have before described, stands a short distance on this side of the fishing hamlet. Lights were procured, four determined men selected to lead the van, their pistols cocked in case of surprise, sentinels placed to prevent their escape, should any of the banditti still lurk within; their horses tethered, and the party at once entered. No soul appeared. The ruin was evidently deserted; and the party, having gained the utmost limit of the vaults, were about to return, when Villedieu perceived and pointed out some newly turned mould. In a moment they had examined it and discovered it to be a newly filled grave, and in another instant they had torn away the earth which shrouded from their sight the murdered corpse of their loved echvin.

Even to those who daily see death; to those who carelessly dissect the human frame, to those who tread the battle field, and with apathy behold the forsaken temple of the mind; even to those, I say, the body of a murdered man brings terror and disgust. Thus, then, the present party shrank with horror as they saw the bloody form revealed of him with whom they had often fed and laughed.

A bystander had discovered a knife, marked C. V. E. It fitted to the wounds, and was therefore carefully preserved; and the group were about to remove the victim, when one of those who had been stationed outside ran in, and stated that another line of shoe-prints had been discovered. Leaving, therefore, two men in charge, the remainder set out again in quest of the murderer.

Their search, however, was not long. The marks ceased at the stable door attached to a neat, but isolated cottage which stood on the sands to the north of the village. The place was empty as also the habitation to which it belonged. For a few moments they consulted, then bursting open the door, they rushed in. No soul, however, met their view; the interior presented a scene of cleanly comfort. Every article was arranged with just precision; and though the owner was now absent, the presence of a blazing fire bespoke the probability of his almost immediate return.

To wait for this, however, they were disinclined. Their thirst for vengeance was unslaked, and they instantly determined to search the premises, which they now learnt from a person who joined them belonged to Charles Van Eeke, a name which corresponded with the initials on the knife.

Their investigation was soon successful. In various parts of the room, beneath the bed, and in the drawers, they found the pipes, the pocket-book, and the purse of the deceased. A jacket stained with blood, and other damning proofs, sufficient to convince them that they now stood beneath the roof of the assassin.

Presently they heard the merry sound of music approaching. They rushed out. It was Charles who approached, leading to her future home the flower of Blakenberg, who had just plighted her faith at the altar, and now looked proudly happy as she leaned on the arm of him she loved so well.

The coming throng surprised her, nor could Van Eeke conceive what had led a party to his dwelling; he had no time, however, to conjecture. In an instant more he was seized, accused of murder; and while the lovely girl sank fainting in the arms of her bridesmaid, the

wretched and bewildered youth was bound and carried off, astounded at the accusation.

Charles, thus suddenly apprehended, was hurried before the Judge then holding the assize at Bruges. In vain he told his story of the wounded smuggler, and ascribed to him the presence of those articles now produced in evidence against him. In vain he declared his innocence. Unfortunately, on his person was discovered the check for two hundred francs, given him by the wretch that he had sheltered. It bore the signature of 'Le Noir,' the well-known title of the captain of the Black Gang, to whom all believed the unhappy prisoner belonged. To betray them he was offered pardon, and wealth, and honor. But to do this, the youth plead in truth his total inability. He was not, however, believed, but looked upon as obdurate and wicked, and was therefore condemned at once to immediate execution, unpitied and abhorred.

In the meantime the poor girl had been conveyed to the cottage which she had left that morning with a happy heart, in a state of insensibility, from which she was doomed to wake, miserable forever. For several days she was confined to her bed, happily unconscious of the approaching fate of her lover; unaware of the speedy manner in which he had been brought to trial and conviction. After a few days, she was again able to leave her couch. Still weak, she rose and tottered down to her once cheerful little parlour. Scarcely able clearly to recall the past, like one awaking from a horrid dream—floating as it were, between a sense of real and imaginary horrors—the poor sufferer had crept from her bed, and now sat, with tearful eye, watching the moonbeams as they glittered on the scarcely rippled sea, which looked so bright, so tempting, that it almost seemed to invite the wretched girl for ever there to hide her sorrows and her tears.

How often from that window had she watched the dancing bark which buoyantly brought back her lover to her arms? How often had he leaned upon that humble sill, and spoke the words of true affection! Here, on this very spot, had Charles solicited and won her hand and heart. Here he had triumphed over all his rivals (in number not a few), amongst whom might be counted Le Noir, who under the guise of a strolling painter, had sought to win the flower of Blakenberg—had striven in vain to ruin her who now sat weeping at her lonely casement.

Le Noir had ever been mysterious; he came not when another soul was present. He came not openly to the lovely girl. His visits were by stealth to avoid, as he said, the knowledge of his parents, who anxiously desired to unite him with a wealthier dame. His person therefore was unknown to Charles.

Charlotte had forgotten in her sorrow, that the young limner, as he called himself, existed. She had not seen him since he fled with imprecations, on learning that his suit was scorned; that Charles Van Eeke had won the promise of her valued hand. She therefore started up with strong emotion and surprise, when, looking out, she saw him standing opposite her window. In another instant he was beside her.

The moon's rays reflected strongly on his image; a fiendish triumph seemed to light his eye, and the poor girl's heart sunk with fear, she knew not why at thus finding herself in the presence of the man she had rejected. At length he smiled; that smile almost amounted to a sneer, as he thus spoke:

"And so you mourn already o'er your lot? I said it would be so; and yet you spurned me! You thought me wrong, and talked of sharing joys with him who dies so soon."

She started up—"Dies so soon! Say what mean these words?"

"Their meaning is plain. Charles Van Eeke has been found guilty and is to suffer."

"Nay, nay; you mean not so. It cannot be. I'll stake my soul upon his innocence. I'll swear before high heaven he is guiltless; though I scarcely know of what he stands accused of."

"Of murder—a trifling crime, no doubt! and Le Noir smiled like a demon."

"Murder!" and she covered her face and sobbed hysterically.

"Most true," coolly rejoined Le Noir; "of foul assassination and robbery. He has not only been accused, but convicted; and this thro' thee—thee, whom he loved."

"Gracious heaven!" cried the almost frantic girl. "Speak, mysterious man, speak; and though my heart should burst, I'll listen while you explain in the meaning of that speech;" and she clasped her hands in agony.

"Be calm, then and hear thy doom, and his who dared to cross me in my path of love.—Charles Van Eeke is innocent—innocent as the new-born babe!"

"Oh, thank thee indeed for this!" cried Charlotte, throwing herself on her knees and kissing his hand. "Bless thee—you will see that he's acquitted."

"Not so," sternly replied Le Noir, shaking her off. "Not so; 'twas I that compassed this; 'twas I that planned it; and will see it executed. Yes, in me behold the real murderer!—Nay, shrink not: 'tis not the first that I've committed;—I, whom you dared to scorn for him; I who, as a miserable painter, deigned to woo you; I it was who worked your minion's doom; I (and his voice was raised to its highest pitch) I, Paul Le Noir! the captain of the Black Gang!"

The poor girl heard no more. With one harrowing shriek she fell insensible on the ground, dashing her marble brow against the stone floor of her humble cottage. The blood flowed from it; but the hardened brigand waited not to raise

or soothe her. As he concluded the last words he had dashed from the cottage, turned the key of the outer door, and fled, in wicked triumph, from the victim he had made.

It was a bright and sunny morning. The heavens, the sea, all united in calm serenity. No rude breeze. No curled wave, broke the heavenly scene of peace. Nature indeed smiled, and all her children felt her power. Along the beach, a line of fishing boats had put to sea, and taken their various courses. Already they seemed as specks to the uninitiated eye—not so to those who still lingered on the strand; each wife and daughter, there, could tell the bark which bore her parent, her husband, her lover. The clock struck seven, and warned them to return to bear their share of daily labor. They therefore once more turned to the hamlet, there to pursue their various occupations of knitting, lace making, or fancy basket-work as the case might be.

To reach the village, they had to pass the cottage of the orphan; arrived here, they one and all determined to visit and condole with her, who thus seemed wedded to a dreadful destiny. It is true they were not yet aware that Charles Van Eeke was actually condemned—for news flies slowly towards the peasant's hut; they knew not yet how full of misery was the poor girl's cup. But still they were convinced there was sufficient to warrant and call forth their warmest sympathies towards one whose kindness and goodness had won the hearts of all, and, by her gentleness, robbed even envy of its sting.

They knocked; no answer was returned.—Again: still all was silent. Could she be sick? could she have fled? For a moment the crowd hesitated. Again they strove to make the inmate hear. Then, fully conscious that some evil must have befallen Charlotte, they, by a simultaneous movement, forced open the easy yielding door, which gave to their view a sight indeed of horror.

Upon the floor, in deathlike trance, lay the bereaved girl. The wound on her temple had happily bled freely; and this, in all probability, had saved her life. Her light tresses were matted with coagulated blood; her face as pale as marble; her stupor and her cold—cold hand, were at first taken for the evidences of death; and a groan of sincere commiseration went round the assembled group. Presently one more skilful than the rest had discovered that her pulse still beat, though slowly; and, raising her up, in a few minutes more, restoratives of every kind were anxiously afforded to the wretched sufferer, and all traces of disorder, as far as practicable, were speedily removed.

For a short space of time, doubt hung on every countenance, while some there were who even turned away and wept, conceiving the recovery of the poor girl to be impossible. At length she opened her eyes. No sooner did they catch the light than they became most suddenly and alarmingly dilated; they moved from side to side, as if they sought some dreadful object—as if the alarmed mind refused at once to tell the tale of dreadful recollection; in another moment, however, the unhappy creature burst from the arms of those who supported her. Her senses seemed at once to snatch from memory the extent of misery which hung over her, and ere the group could strife to soothe her, the once happy pride of Blakenberg had rushed past them, and in maddening haste had sought the road which leads to Bruges.

Those who loved her best were first inclined to follow her, and bring her back; and yet, again, why should they act thus? unacquainted with the motives which had induced her sudden flight, what harm might they not do in thus restraining her? So they considered; and therefore with a sigh of sincere sympathy, they sought their cottages, as Charlotte fled, impelled by every pang of hope and fear, towards the spot where Charles remained a prisoner.

Twice on the road the poor girl fainted, weak from loss of blood. The excitement of her feelings alone gave her strength to support herself through this journey of nearly three leagues. No friendly hand was near to succour, no hospitable roof to shelter her; but nature came to her relief, and brought her tottering limbs in safety to the goal she sought.

Although, in hurrying over the road, her mind, pre-occupied, had not caught a single feature of the scene, yet now within the city walls, she bent her looks with eager gaze on every passing object. As quickly she hastened up the Rue d'Ostend, which leads from the barrier to the heart of the town, she could not help fancying that a fair had drawn together the many well-dressed peasants, who flocked towards the Grande Place. The countryman in his blue smock frock; his wife in petticoat of many colours, with small straw hat, under which might be seen her ample cap, and even sometimes, diamond earrings (heirlooms amongst the Belgian peasantry for centuries); the Brageoise woman, known by her cloak of darkest color, enveloping her head within its capacious hood; the portly soldier, and the still more portly priest, all mingled in the human flood which seemed to pour towards the Groot Market.

Charlotte hurried on. She noted that the looks of calm surprise which her appearance caused. She paused not to inquire the event which thus drew early crowds. Her eye was fixed on the tall tower of the belfry, which, rising over the whole neighborhood, served as a beacon to guide her steps towards the prison where her lover lay; at least so she had heard from those who knew the town, and had described to her its different sites. At all events she was aware that this point gained, she might learn her farther way.

At length the Grande Place had opened on her view—not solitary and deserted as usual, but filled with eager groups. For a moment she marked not what it was that claimed their stern attention. She had entered by the western corner, and the angle of a projecting building for a moment shut out the object which thus gathered to the spot all ranks in Bruges. The pointed finger, the fixed gaze, at length made her turn her head back, and she perceived with horror, in front of the Panier d'Or, the dreaded guillotine.

Fascinated as the serpent's victim, horrified at its appearance, yet drawn by an attraction to it, the poor girl approached the spot. In the next instant the busy murmur was hushed; each breath was held as the prisoner appeared. A single second only was he allowed to pause; but that pause gave time to Charlotte to recognise his person, and to read the dreadful truth. Ere, however, she could utter his name, the public axe had drank the blood of Charles Van Eeke.

She strove to scream; her voice refused its office: reason tottered for a moment on its seat; the struggle was not long; she fell from her throne, and left the "Flower of Blakenberg" in happy doubt of her misfortunes—in happy ignorance of her real misery—for ever hence to roam a wretched maniac.

We will now return to the spot where first our tale opens. The gay apartments of the count Salembier were again crowded. A masked ball had drawn all the aristocracy far and near to his hospital roof in the Rue d'Espagne. The marquis, whose supposed death had so abruptly checked the gaiety of his late entertainment, had by an almost miracle recovered. His wounds, though numerous, were slight; and the count now gave a fete in honor of his fair betrothed and the happy escape of his beloved father.

On this night he shone with more than usual brilliancy. He moved about with easy grace. His wit flew here and there, and happy felt the dame with whom he spoke. Villedieu also exerted himself to please. He danced, he played, he chatted, and in every way assisted his kind host to entertain the company, who willingly shared his gaieties and dedicated with a fervent heart this night to Momus and Terpsichores.

From this scene of happiness and revelry, from this abode of mirth and gaiety, let us again revert to the poor girl, on this, the second day of her bereavement and her widowhood. Desolate, forlorn, but happily unconscious of the full extent of all her woes, the unfortunate girl had wandered through the streets of Bruges, hoping as she believed, to meet her lover. Some friend had met her and accosted her. From him she had fled, and ran with rapid pace along the Quai St. Anne. Here her uncouth and strange appearance, her wildly rolling eye, and maniac laugh, had attracted a crowd of idle boys, who, in the very mischief of their hearts, that ruling passion to tyrannize inherent from our birth, had pelted her, reviled, and even struck her. For succour, the poor creature had fled into the church of the Holy Sepulchre, passed quickly through the body of the curious edifice, and hid herself within the cell built in the exact form of the grave of him who died to save the world.

Here the unhappy lunatic crouched down, and strove to repress the wild and painful throbbings of her beating heart. Here, in the mimic tomb, did the wretched Charlotte creep from insult and from blows. Here did the once most lovely girl of Flanders pass the night; her head unpillowed and her eye unclosed.

In the morning the woman (whose duty it is to feed the ever-burning lamp which lights this shrine) started back with horror on beholding, as she thought, some guilty spirit. In fear she fled and spread the news. In few minutes a crowd was collected. The unhappy girl was discovered, and with shouts of execration and mockery, she was again driven forth to wander and to droop.

Till sunset did Charlotte tread the streets, fondly expecting to behold her Charles. At length, quite wearied and worn out, she crept within the shade of a Porte Cochere, in the Rue d'Espagne, and for the first time since her bereavement, slept.

The hour of ten had struck when she awoke. The sound of music struck her ear. She looked up; the opposite house was brilliantly illuminated. The merry voices of those within, their joyous laugh went painfully to the heart of the orphan. Presently a tone was wafted on the breeze, and her whole soul hung on the sound. Each note she eagerly drank in, and a change came o'er her spirit as she listened.

It was the voice of Salembier who had been solicited to sing; and ever ready to oblige, now trotted forth the following stanzas:

We ride through the forest, we chase the wild deer,

We smilingly sail o'er the sea;  
There is health in the blast—there is love without fear.

In the heart of the bold and the free.

The coward may swerve from each danger he meets,

And fearing each trifle may flee;  
And death and dismay are unknown in the feats

Which lighten the hearts of the free!

There is love in our hearts—there is strength in our arm

We merrily revel with glee;  
Our welcome is joyous—our welcome is warm,  
To those like ourselves who are free!

As he concluded, a sudden noise was heard.