Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From Hogg's Edinburgh Instructor.

THE CONSCRIPT SISTER.

A True Tale.

It is a highly consolatory thought—nay, more, it is a bright streak of light upon the dark cloud of moral evil and human misery which hovers over us—that grief and wickedness, on the one hand, bring out the most brilliant exhibitions of patient endurance, of genuine sympathy; of devoted heroism on the other. With all the displays of Divine goodness and benevolence around us, with all the concomitants to render a virtuous and unfallen species happy, *were* we all virtuous and happy, how utterly ignorant should we be of some of the sublimer forms of human virtue! Were there no woes to soothe, no sorrows to assuage; were there no wrongs to be suffered or to be righted, neither patient endurance or high-minded opposition could be displayed—neither meek submission nor humane sympathy could be exhibited. Not that we are to wait for great opportunities, either to act or to suffer—great opportunities of any kind are very rare in the scope of our little career, and he who is determined to wait for them may waste his life in waiting. No, it is by the constant encounter and improvement of *little things* that our moral character is to be formed and exhibited. It is by the continual wear and tear of common life that patience and docility are to be acquired—by the continual doing of *little kindnessess* that the sweet sympathies of our nature are to be fostered.—Nevertheless, there *are* moments of emergency when alone the sublimer forms of human virtue can be exhibited; as the bright meteor is only fully visible in the darkest night. There are periods of peril, or seasons of distressful conjuncture, in which alone unusual magnanimity can be displayed; and the contemplation of such extraordinary instances of human heroism ought to be beneficial to all, and are beneficial to every well regulated mind.

Perhaps there is no incidental condition of human life to which the foregoing remarks are more strictly applicable than *war*. War! the pest and curse of humanity—the most frantic, miserable, shall I not say *diabolical*, of human evils—war itself has not unfrequently brought out some of the most exalted exhibitions of human virtue and human heroism; heroism, not in the so-called *heroes* by which the savage game is principally played, but in the subordinate and obscure, who are accidentally drawn into the wild vortex—heroism not so much in the victors as the vanquished. War is the very reverse, the immediate opposite of the gospel even in this particular—namely, that while the latter, in itself all holy, pure, and peace breathing, did, as an accident of its antagonism to the fierce passions of the human heart, send at first not 'peace upon earth but a sword;' so war, in itself the blackest offspring of infernal hate and human folly, does, as a contingence of the misery and heartrending that it creates, afford an opportunity for rare and uncommon instances of human virtue and devoted self-abandonment. War is no more to be excused of this exceedingly insignificant amount of contingent good than is the gospel to be blamed for that attendant aggregate of incidental evil; but that such is the case, few, we believe, will deny, and the following facts may serve to illustrate.

War had not as yet rolled over the rich plains, and devasted the green fields of sunny France. At least, a short breathing time of tranquility had served to heal the wounds by which that war smitten land has been too often, alas! visited, from the days of the old sanguinary Merovingians to those of the consulate and the empire. War had for some time ceased to desolate the country at large, while in the green nook and sheltered corner of the land to which our story refers, the rumour of battle was not heard for years. It was in one of those snug spots—if friend Bull will allow us to call anything snug in France—one of those deeply sequestered places, to which the imagination tends, when, tired of the din and turmoil of a city, we look to rural solitude as an earthly paradise—a paradise, by the by, of which nine tenths of your city Adams (and your city madams, too) get heartily tired in a month. This snug valley, embosomed deep in towering hills and trees, had often, indeed, heard the rumours of wars roll over it like a distant thunder storm, and, while the open country was actually scorched and blighted by the fury of the conflict, had preserved its beauty and serenity undisturbed. There was certainly not much to tempt the spoiler into its remote recesses. A few cottages—you could hardly see them in summer for the foliage—a few cottages scattered at random on the banks of a small stream, and surrounded each by its little patch of garden, orchard or paddock; a village church, over which the huge trees locked their giant arms, and beside which the mossy tombstones, setting into the ground, seemed to be following the fate of those whom they recorded; a few outlying hill pastures, dotted with ragged goats and skinny sheep—such was the place which, for convenience, we call Verdmont. The chief cause of its seclusion was, perhaps, that it led to nowhere. The hills around it, from which the sheep picked a scanty pasture, were traversed only by sheep tracks. They were wild and barren, though picturesque and romantic, and being too steep for roads, they formed of the little valley a sort of natural *cul de sac*; there was, you see, and inlet, but no outlet. The place was (fortunately perhaps) famous for nothing, nor was it (perhaps more fortunately) beautiful enough to draw together a crowd of dawdlers, to rove about its scenery and display their dresses. Thrice happy Verdmont! thy limpid brook was neither saline nor chalybeate. That drawling brook was, however, the only thing that at any time drew strangers to the secluded precincts; a brother of the angle would now and then trace up that sweet succession of streamlet scenery in the eagerness of sport, caring little for its beauties; or a curious idler (like myself) would, at rare intervals, persevere to find out where in the world, or out of the world, that charming streamlet came from. The latter would discover its very source, bubbling up clear as crystal, amid the grass and mosses, and joined by petty tributaries from every hill, gliding dimpling on, or chafing and fretting itself over the pebbles, to join the distant river.

In this retirement dwelt Jacque Duport and his wife, one of those truly French couples that possess the exclusively French privilege of growing younger in spirit as they grow older in years. Youth may be the season for mirth elsewhere, but a merry old Frenchman, is the very *acme* of propriety. In France, even the shy and awkward youngster—and there are some such, not many—grows garrulous and good tempered as he grows old. No! gravity may sit well enough on an old Englishman, an old Scotchman, even on an old Irishman, sometimes, but mirth is the every day habit of an old Frenchman, and nothing fits him so well. When Jacques Duport married his wife, they had not a sous laid by to help themselves with. Indeed, it is said they could not have been married at all had he not found a five frank piece by the wayside. So they determined to live as it pleased Heaven—a very bad way of life in England, but which seems to answer well enough in the sunny south. They managed not only, indeed, to live, but to thrive, and towards the latter part of the last century, had thriven so well, that they had got, not a cot and a kail yard, which is the sympton of thriving in Scotland, but a cot and a melon heap, which is the way to do it in France. They had, moreover, a stand of bees, three lanky pigs (French pigs, you know, are very lanky), a pair of goats, and a couple of children. But, as these children are my heroes, I must not linger too long with their parents.

Eugene and Leonore were twins, and as they were thus intimate all their lives, so their lives seemed to subsist in their intimacy. They were never apart, and never wished to be. In person, they were remarkably alike; in mind, exceedingly dissimilar: and, what was more noticeable, their character and condition were the very reverse of their sex. Eugene was a timid, retiring, sensitive, and somewhat sickly boy; Leonore, a frank, vivacious, and remarkably robust girl. They were both of them good-looking, but Eugene had a pale and delicate complexion, which occasionally exhibited a hectic tinge, more pretty than pleasing to a mother's eye; while Leonore was embrowned with the glow of health and healthful occupation. It was Leonore that encountered the cross-grained cow, drove away the obstinate ram, or stoned off the ill tempered dog, on their way to the village school; but then it was Eugene who helped Leonore to learn her lessons, and displayed as much intellectual superiority as he had betrayed a want of physical courage. As they increased in years, these several characteristics became more fully confirmed. Eugene grew more reserved and sedentary; his constitution showed deeper symptoms of delicacy, and whilst Leonore scrambled among the cliffs and ravines, on which Eugene durst not venture, to procure wild flowers and bramble berries for her much loved brother, he sat pouring over a book beside the little stream, lulled to sleep by one or both of them. Fortunately, Duport's increasing opulence rendered active labour less imperative on Eugene, while his superior talents opened to his anxious mother dazzling visions of future glory—it might even be the desk and ferule of the village dominie. Still more fortunately, Leonore was fitted for every active exertion, and, to spare her brother, she took much more than her fair share of it. We do not presume to claim for our heroine the distinguished characteristics of the Maid of Arc, but perhaps the early physical and moral education for Joan *la pucelle* was not better fitted for her extraordinary career than was the early life of Leonore for her humble history. We have no doubt at least, that Leonore often rode the neighbouring farmers' horses to water. With all this, there was nothing coarse or bold about our heroine. She was too essentially and really modest, indeed, to be affected or purdish, but she was as virtuous and well conducted a girl as any in Verdmont, or in Paris either, for that matter.

Thus did these children grow from infancy to adolescence, differing in every possible point but one, and that was their devoted attachment to one another. But now a change came over one of them. We have said that with all his reserve and timidity, Eugene was extremely sensitive, and would you believe it, ladies, he went and fell in love. This is truly a most unceremonious way of blurting out so interesting a fact, but it cannot be helped now; the secret is out, and our fair friends must make the best of it. And how was Leonore affected by the fact? Did it lessen her pure sincere affection? Not a fraction. Was there a tinge of jealous feeling in her honest, womanly heart? Not a jot. On the contrary, she extended her love to the object of her brother's affection with something of the tenderness that she bore for him. A little younger than Leonore, this new object of esteem became a sort of pet and plaything to her, and was cherished and fostered like a child. Indeed, it is believed that Eugene never would have had the courage to speak out, had not Leonore, observing how things stood, paved the way, or, in the language of the court, 'managed matters' for him.

This affair, however, happy in itself, brought on an unhappy separation. It was now more than ever incumbent on Eugene to do something for his daily bread, and as the reversion of the village school seemed likely to fall in, he was obliged to depart to the nearest town—and the nearest was many weary leagues away—to fit himself for his intended occupation. A few years flew by, and still Verdmont, happy in its seclusion, was not very seriously affected. Revolution, massacre, and bloodshed passed over unhappy France; and, though the most sequestered village could not fail, in its measure and degree, to feel the throbs by which the agonised metropolis was agitated, Verdmont, happy in its remoteness, and comparatively secure in its poverty, escaped very severe distress. The simple villagers shuddered, indeed, over the oft repeated tale of noyades, and jail deliveries, and the tricoloured cockade, with other horrid baubles, found its way even thither; but the honest peasants were anything but keen politicians, and as they thought the tricolor very gay and pretty—they had never seen it steeped in gore—they escaped molestation pretty well.

Duport and his wife grew uneasy about their son; he came home, and they grew more uneasy still. Study had suited his tastes and abilities better than his physical constitution, and when he came home, it was to drink goats' milk, and to try the air of his native hills. The physician—who by the by knew that he had no money—told him he did not require any medicine, and sent him home to try his native air. Ah, we all know what trying our native air means. Fortunately, Eugene's native air was as pure and fresh as ever blew over the green hills of France; then, goats' milk was abundant, and medicine interdicted; but, above all, there was a pair of bright eyes to grow brighter at his coming; there was parental care, maternal tenderness, and Leonore—Leonore was a host in herself. From the moment the poor invalid set foot in his native village, he began to recover his health, and his friends soon began to entertain hopes even of his perfect restoration. It was evident that care, and nursing, and watching—love, goats milk, and Leonore (without medicine)—might save his life. The dark nightmare of terror was past in France, and the mad daydream of glory came over her. War! war! was the cry, from the palace to the hovel, from the cabinet council to the peasant's fireside. Judicial murder had crushed the meek hearted king, and republicanism crouched before the dauntless emperor. Europe trembled with the footsteps of armies, and France was drained of her intrepid millions. Men became scarce, but men must be had, and that green nook, which had been almost overlooked by revolutionary inquisition, could not be concealed for the conscription. Again and again did our friends see their young men hurried off to change their blouse for martial attire, and bear the brunt of war. Men grew scarcer and more scarce, and at length the lot fell upon Eugene.

Death itself was not more relentless than the conscription; it was not more useless to appeal to the dull cold ear of death itself, than to that of military need and military despotism. Conscription was the chance of death to most men, the certainty to Eugene. In his delicate state of health, and to his timid temperament, the very announcement of his fate, was well nigh shock enough to prostrate his reviving powers. Hopeless distress settled down upon the household of Duport. With all the vivacity of French feeling, whether in joy or sorrow, they exhibited every variety of wretchedness: they wept, they moaned, they wrung their hands, they uttered the most piteous exclamations to which that vivacious tongue is competent. Eugene alone sat stupefied with grief. Leonore paced the room, sternly revolving the future. There was something inexpressibly bitter in the fact of a man's going to certain, but perhaps protracted, death—something much worse than the chances of a bullet. A fellow conscript, a kind neighbour, came to say that they must march that evening, and that he would call for Eugene at the proper hour. Leonore followed this man from the house, and held a conversation of some length with him. They said, no doubt, she was giving him a solemn charge to watch over the safety of her brother—kind-hearted, careful Leonore.

The long and miserable afternoon was over at last. The hour arrived, and the man came back, but it was only to say that their march was postponed to the morning, and again he promised to call for his comrade. To what a marvellous complexity of feeling the human heart is subject, that little respite of a few brief hours almost made them happy. Had they set themselves to calculate the point, it might have seemed better to part at once, and have the anguish over; but they were alive to feeling alone, and that short postponement made them, at least comparatively happy.

But the day was closed, and Leonore, his nurse, insisted that her brother should endeavour by repose to fit himself for the fatigues of the morrow. The rest reluctantly consented. She promised to sit by his bedside, and, lest his harassed spirit should prevent his slumber, she would give him a composing draught. She did so.

The hours passed on—day dawned. The restlessness of grief caused the old people to come early into their son's chamber, but he slept soundly, and the watcher was gone, no doubt, to *hers*. The hours passed on—high noon approached—the soldier had not come—Eugene still slept—Leonore was not there: they sought her in her chamber, she was not there. Eugene's clothes had disappeard, and Leonore was gone.

Reader, if you are sceptical concerning human virtue—devoted heroism, even under the disaster of human degeneracy—remember, in its principal events, this tale is true.

We shall not dwell on the events that followed at the village of Verdmont—on the anguish of the parents, not unmixed, however, with a high ennobling admiration of the fraternal piety of Leonore, that half consoled them—on the gladsome regret of Louise, in which joy and sorrow struggled hard together—on the heartrending awakening of Eugene—on his intense desire and futile attempt to follow—on his broken blood vessel, his death like swoon, his long and lingering illness, from which he searce recovered with his life. Throughout the course of two or three wearisome and arduous campaigns, there was one young soldier who steadily and unobtrusively performed his duty. He seemed to shrink at first, as a young conscript might, from scenes of blood and slaughter; but some deep seated stern resolve to nerve his arm. He was a favourite with his officers, but not quite so popular among his companions; for while, on the one hand, he punctiliously performed his duties, and thus secured the esteem of the former, towards the latter he behaved with courtesy, indeed, but was, as they thought, somewhat reserved and unapproachable. He held himself, indeed, so much aloof from their wild orgies, that they nicknamed him, in their sport, the 'gentleman conscript.'

He had but one companion, at least but one confidential friend—a fellow soldier, it was said, from the same village. These two seemed inseparable—they appeared to have some secret between them; and when any would have intruded into their confidence, the brawny fist of his comrade warned them that the 'gentlemen conscript' was not to be offended. For the rest, they were both gay, cheerful, good soldiers. The 'gentleman conscript,' indeed, was so exact in his duty, and so active in the field, that he was raised more than one step from the ranks; and serjeant Leon, as he was now called, was looked upon with great respect as a promising and rising soldier. An accidental circumstance still further elevated him in the eyes of all. The soldier who had been his faithful comrade fell into a river, and was on the point of perishing, when serjeant Leon, accoutred as he was, plunged in, and saved his friend. But the climax of his glory was at hand. The war was nearly closed; but in a well fought field, when both sides were nearly spent with the conflict, the colonel of our hero's regiment (a gallant and most amiable officer) was surrounded, and well nigh overwhelmed. Excited not only by a deep sense of duty, but a warm and fervent affection toward the gallant veteran, Leon dashed forward to the rescue. Animated by his example some dozen soldiers followed, and the struggle was renewed. A fierce and desperate melee was the result. Amid the tumult of dropping pistol shots, the slash of sabre cuts, the shouts and exclamations of men in mortal contest—amid smoke and dust, and sweat and death—the colonel was beaten down, and a bayonet thrust aimed at his heart was only just struck up by serjeant Leon. This, however, was decisive; for his own men, closing in around him raised the fallen officer from the earth, while the enemy—whose numbers, from the first inferior, were now thinned by the conflict—took advantage of the confusion to retreat from the field.

Unable to repress the emotions of his breast towards the preserver of his life, the colonel snatched the medal of order from his own breast, and insisted upon buttoning it on that of Leon. In doing so, he saw that the dark blood was trickling down the serjeant's light blue uniform. A bullet had lodged in his shoulder; he turned pale as death, and, to the surprise of all, burst into tears. They marvelled that so brave a man should be so unmanly—he had been wounded before, though not so severely. He quickly subdued his emotion, however; was conducted to the rear, and his wound dressed.

Soon afterwards, the army surgeon came in great haste and consternation to the colonel.

'Monsieur,' exclaimed the latter, 'the sergeant is dead.'

'Not at all, monsieur; his wound is slight, but'——

He wispered something in the colonel's ear.

Reader, you are of course aware that Leon was Leonore. Amid the perils and fatigues of war—high in resolve, and resolute of purpose—the noble-minded and heroic sister had kept her secret, and maintained her post. To say that admiration and esteem followed the footsteps of the true-hearted girl—that even French enthusiasm and French gallantry were at a loss to express themselves in adequate terms, were to express ourself but coldly. Honours and tokens of merit were headed upon her; while the colonel, deeply indebted to her zeal, bestowed on her more solid proofs of his esteem. She resisted his offers until further resistance would have become ingratitude, and then he placed her in a position which to the simplest peasant girl was affluence.