

Literature. &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

SNOW FALL.

It comes again, the eternal snow—
So soft, so still, so white, I know
It came a thousand years ago.

Speak thou, my ruddy-bosomed bird,
Winter's familiar, hast thou heard
Against the snow a whispered word?

A listener thou at many a pane,
Whom didst thou ever hear complain
The eternal snow had come again?

"The Lady Alice, with drooping curl,
Playfully counting ruby and pearl,
Her latest keepsake from the Earl;

And the widow, poisoning her marriage-ring,
In wonder how much bread it might bring
For her sick little boy, that lay shivering;

tapped at the window of both to-day,
And both looked out in the morning grey,
And neither frowned on the snow as it lay;

But peaceful fancies seemed to glide
Into the brain of widow and bride,
As they watched the whiteness falling wide."

Bird, it is sooth! We chide the rain
And wind, when they batter the finching pane,
And we pity the traveller by land or main;

And we shiver almost for the sake of the dead—
But not when the coldest sky has shed
Its fair white drapery for their bed.

Thou hast silently blanched the grave cold
snow,
Where we laid our pretty one, not long ago,
And we do not shudder to think it is so;

Her brother is clapping his hands for glee,
And wishes the dead were here to see,
Eternal snow, and to welcome thee!

Rough words for the rain, and the wind from
the hill,
Though it soften the furrow, turn the mill,
But hail to the snow with a hearty good will!

THE PLANTER'S BIRTHDAY.

BARBAROUS as this determination may seem, Dupres was base and vile enough to form it, and the opportunity for putting his dreadful resolve into execution presented itself most aptly for his purpose on the day but one before the Birthday.

It had been customary upon this occasion to commence the preparation for the celebration of the anniversary, on the previous day—flag-staffs were erected on the 'brown-green' in front of the house, a sort of rustic orchestra was built for the piper, the fiddler, and the tambourine player, and another temporary kind of booth, where the supper and rum were distributed, and these were decorated with flowers and leaves, and occasionally a mat de cocagne was erected for the display of the agility and powers of climbing, for which our black brethren are so famous.

Doubtful from the recent alteration in the policy of Dupres' government of his estate, whether the good old custom was to be observed, and not being able to obtain any information from the overseer, who had quarrelled with the master six months before, and exceedingly apprehensive of making application at headquarters, the negroes resolved upon sending up their old negotiator Louis, to inquire the 'will and pleasure' of the petty sovereign.

As this address did not involve the interdicted subject of commutation of punishment, the kind hearted Louis made no scruple to become the spokesman: but things turned out unluckily. He waited till the evening, when work was over, and came into the verandah, just at the moment Adele was entering in at the other end. The master was smoking and drinking his sangaree in the middle room, and hearing Adele's voice, raised himself in his chair, and saw, what certainly was nothing sinful in an affianced pair, but which was gall and wormwood to a jealous rival—Louis taking, not stealing, for it was freely given, a kiss from the lips of the gentle Adele.

Knowing all he did of their attachment and proposed marriage, this sight should not have excited the feelings of the master in the manner it did; had he been left alone five minutes, the ebullition would in all probability have subsided, but unluckily for himself, as well as others the moment Louis saw Dupres, unconscious of having done anything unworthy an accepted and acknowledged lover, he stepped forward and stood before his master prepared to prefer his petition.

He did so, and in a few words explained the object of his visit, and the wish of his brethren.

No sooner were the words out of his mouth, than Dupres dashing down the glass which he held in his hand, with a force that shattered it into a thousand pieces, exclaimed:

'Scoundrel!—slave!—haven't I warned you

of thus thrusting yourself into my presence with petitions and messages from your fellows—why are you sent? because they think I favour you—because you, let your faults be what they may, are never punished—get out of my sight—I hate to look at you—to-morrow, at daylight, you shall be punished—yes, sir, punished, repeated he, seeing that Louis started back with surprise and horror at the thought. 'Flogged, that's the word, sir, for your insolence, which is the cause of all the insubordination on the estate.'

'Massa,' said Louis, 'pardon, massa, pardon—twenty-six years me live here—me love you—me work for you—never, never have me felt the lash. No, massa, my skin smooth, smooth all over, 'cept where my wound is, which was mean for massa.'

'Hold your tongue, sir, said Dupres; 'I know perfectly well how to value that wound; your skin has been smooth too long—get out of my sight, I say—and mark me, if I don't do what I say to-morrow—go—'

'What, flog Louis, massa,' said the slave; the tears running down his bronzed cheeks.

'Yes—flog you, sir,' said Dupres, 'and take your revenge, if you like it—go, sir—'

'God help poor Louis,' said the slave; 'never did me think to see this day.' And he went; and while his master watched his departure, and heard his deep sobs as he passed through the verandah—he was pleased. Yes; pleased! and more than all, by the assurance that the gentle Adele must also have heard his denunciation of her beloved.

Tyrants are mostly cowards: and although Dupres, like the rest of his countrymen, possessed a full share of animal courage, when opposed to danger in the field; and although his course of proceeding since the assassin's weapon had been levelled at his breast, gave ample evidence that he was not to be intimidated into a change of conduct; still, when the ardour of his passion cooled, and his lip ceased to quiver with the rage which the intrusion of Louis had excited, he felt some compunctious visitations, caused by the violence of his manner, and the severity of his language. There might—we hope there was—something like remorse mingling with his other feelings, for having so spoken, and so conducted himself to the particular individual who had just quitted him; but let the sentiment have sprung whence it might, there is no doubt but that he regretted—not deeply but violently—what he had so precipitately said and done, tempered as it might and should have been by the recollection of past days and bygone circumstances. The main-spring of this repentance was selfishness—he fancied that his harshness to Louis, instead of abasing him in the opinion of Adele, might give him the increased claims upon her affection, of martyrdom for her sake; and that as fear and love are not usually considered compatible, the arbitrary power he had threatened to exercise, might make her hate him, instead of producing a contempt for her lover.

And there was more than this to be considered—Louis, however occasionally envied by his brethren, possessed unquestionable influence over them; Dupres thought he had heard the word 'revenge' muttered amidst the sobs which stifled the agonized slave's voice as he departed from his presence, upon which he had replied, Dupres cared not, for the assassin's blow, he despised clamour, and would oppose to the last, an interference with which he held to be his right; but Louis, of his class, was a powerful opponent—the recollection of M. Gallifet's slaves again flitted across his mind, and by the same preverse and perverted mode of reasoning which led him to associate his preserver with his intended murderer, he became first apprehensive and in less than half an hour, certain that Louis would incite the slaves on the estate to revolt, and that instead of a joyful anniversary as heretofore, 'The Planter's Birthday' would be a day of blood. It had not been long before the period of which we are now speaking, that a circumstance had occurred in a neighbouring island, which flashed into the memory of Dupres in the midst of his reflections and considerations as to the precipitancy and injudiciousness of his conduct towards Louis. A slave-woman who belonged to proverbially the kindest master in the colony, in consequence of having been spoken to by him harshly, resolved to have her revenge; for a considerable length of time the determination rested in her mind, but its execution was delayed only because she could not decide upon the efficacious way of putting it into practice.

At length, having considered every means in her power to do the benevolent man, who in one hasty moment had offended her, some serious mischief, she came to the conclusion, that nothing, except taking his life, which she feared to do, could injure him so much as destroying some of the slaves; and in pursuance of this scheme of revenge, she poisoned two of her own children, over whose existence, although the master's property, she fancied she had a parent's control.

This little anecdote, illustrative of a negro's revenge, certainly came to Dupres' recollection at rather an inauspicious period, and growing nervous and anxious, he rose from his seat and paced the room; looked into the verandah, half fearing half hoping, to see Louis still lingering near. But no, he was gone, so

was Adele. Dupres became more restless; nay, to do him justice, he began to repent of his rashness and violence, even upon better grounds than apprehension or self love; but to send for Louis, to recall his violent language, or revoke his hard decree, would have been degrading to a white man, especially one who had received a polished education, and proposed to figure in the saloons of Paris.

No! that was impossible; what he would do was this; when Adele came as was her wont to inquire about his supper, and what he would like and what she should do, he would tell her that he did mean all that he said to Louis—that he was vexed at the time—that the slaves deserved no indulgence, and that Louis should not have permitted himself to be persuaded to come to him and interrupt him in his privacy by such absurd requests—that he did not care about the celebration of his birthday—that he had no reason to rejoice in having been born, and that the anniversary brought with it no pleasant recollections nor the excitement of any hopes of future happiness.

This he thought would sooth his early playmate—this he hoped would please Adele; but then—the birthday—whether celebrated gaily or not, under his sanction would be celebrated by the slaves, who would as ever heretofore avail themselves of the privilege locked upon almost as a matter of right, of asking grace and favour, and especially in respect to the marriages of any of the young couples who were attached to each other, and were sufficiently moral to desire to be united by the rites of the church before they 'paired off'; for, much as it may shock the ears of the black-loving philanthropist, true it is that the prejudice is, or at least, was in these days, not universally strong in favour of any particular ceremony, by way of prelude to the establishment of a slave menage.

Endeavour as he might to avoid and evade the gaieties which seemed to him, in his present state of mind, only so many mockeries, he could not steer clear of these established rites, and therefore he determined not to prohibit, although he resolved not to appear to countenance the festivity.

Adele came as usual to attend her master, to inquire what were his commands; but the bright eye and light step were wanting. She had been crying, and crept rather than bounded as usual into his presence. When he saw her thus, he was at first undecided how to act; whether, as he had proposed to himself to humble his haughty spirit, and admit to her his regret for the intemperance of his language, and the violence of his threat which he had fulminated against Louis, and so by soothing her sorrows, perhaps, render her less obdurate? but no—that hope was past—he knew that they were affianced—the struggle was but short in his mind, his love had turned to hate—he loathed her for her constancy and affection, and the sight of her thus sad and sorrowing, confirmed him after a moment's struggle in the determination to wreak his vengeance at all hazards upon Louis in the morning. He dismissed her with a sharp answer to her gentle questions, and she stole silently from his presence to her bed to ponder with grief and anguish on the approaching events of the morrow.

The morrow came. Dupres visited different parts of the plantation—spoke on business to the overseer—it may be recollected they never spoke except on business—complained of a laxity of discipline, a boldness of manner and insolence of speech on the part of some of the slaves, which he was determined to check; and having harangued upon various points in a tone of magisterial discontent, instanced Louis as one of those who appeared spoiled by good usage, and as presuming too much upon an excess of favour which had been shown him.

The overseer, who had grown old in the service and who remembered the infant days of Louis, his association with the master, and who was well aware of his devoted attachment to him, of which, as every body knew, he had so recently given so striking a proof, did not venture to argue the point, but contented himself with the delivery of a fact.

'Louis, sir,' said he, 'is gone.'

'Gone whither?' asked Dupres.

'That, sir, I cannot tell you,' replied the overseer; 'he was not to be found at the morning muster, nor has he made his appearance since.'

'He can't have marooned?' said Dupres.

'I should think not,' was the overseer's reply.

A thousand thoughts rushed into the mind of Dupres. Was he really gone? Was he dead?

'But' added the overseer, 'there are five or six others absent this morning.'

'Five or six,' repeated the master.

He was convinced that the influence of Louis had been exerted to stir up revolt against him, in consequence of the occurrences of the previous evening. All the visions of St. Domingo were again conjured up before him, and again he fancied himself M. Gallifet.

'What have they gone for?'

'I know of no particular reason for their going,' said the overseer, rather drily, and with a somewhat peculiarly marked emphasis on the word 'particular.'

'They must be pursued,' said Dupres,

'overtaken, brought back, and punished. This must be crushed in the onset.'

'There have been a good many of them who have run off to escape flogging,' said the overseer, 'but you know, sir, they have come back again.'

'Yes,' replied Dupres, 'and have escaped their just punishment through the intervention of this very Louis who has now gone off at the head of a whole gang. His case must be met with extreme severity, or discipline will be at an end.'

Now it was that Dupres felt satisfied he might wreak his vengeance upon the unhappy object of his jealousy—a jealousy which raged with equal fierceness, even though his love of Adele had culded into hate. It was not jealousy of her affection for Louis; it was the pure envious jealousy of his success with her that actuated Dupres, and he hurried back to his house, in order to obtain the assistance of the police stationed at the Bureau de Marronage, to hunt down his runaways. While too anxious for the fulfilment of his revenge to wait patiently the result of the search, and too much agitated to remain inactive at a moment of such excitement he hastily quitted the verandah, up and down which he had been, for the previous half-hour pacing, and struck across the open plain, towards a small grove of tamarind-trees, in which it was no uncommon thing for the slaves to conceal themselves, if they could, during the day, contriving, if possible, to steal back unobserved to their homes at night; for generally speaking they are of

'A truant disposition, good, my Lord,'

and Dupres resolved upon 'hunting' this little cope, as it would have been called in the East Indies, in the hope of finding the deserters located there; a circumstance which, involving no organized design of any serious plot against himself and his property, but rather indicating the stolen enjoyment of a day's idleness, would have greatly relieved his mind from the apprehensions which filled it, and which, to say truth, were strengthened by his consciousness of the influence Louis possessed over his slaves, and the unlooked for severity with which he had treated him the night before.

Dupres entered the grove—traversed it in various directions—no deserters were there. He passed through it, and began to ascend a gentle acclivity, from the top of which he could command a considerable extent of open ground, and might espy some of his vagrant serfs, about whose intentions and destinations he was more especially uneasy, as he had ascertained that the absentees were some of the best men on the estate, and in no degree addicted to vagrancy, for which so many of the slaves have an irresistible passion.

Of this latter class M. Dupres was blest with his fair proportion, and they increased, as has already been observed, since his assumption of the government. Had it been a half dozen of those who had disappeared, he would have been prepared for the event, and not altogether solicitous as to their eventual return; but that was not the case.

As he was slowly ascending the hill, pondering these things, and in, perhaps, the worst possible humor man ever enjoyed—as the phrase goes—he approached a small tuft of stunted foliage, which as he neared it, was somewhat rudely and suddenly shaken—he stopped short.

'Who's there?' cried he.

No answer was given—but as he advanced three steps nearer the bush, a black man sprang from his hiding place, and bounded away before him—it was Louis himself. Dupres called to him to stop. Louis, instigated by some undefinable feeling, still ran. Dupres followed him at the top of his speed, but he would not have caught him had not the foot of the slave tripped over a stone, which brought him to the ground. Dupres was up with him in a moment.

'Rascal!' said Dupres, 'ungrateful rascal! how dare you fly from me! rebel, traitor, runaway that you are.'

'No, massa—no,' said Louis; 'me no traitor, no rebel, no!'

'It's false, scoundrel!' cried Dupres in a phrenzy of rage; you have carried off my slaves—you are in a conspiracy, a league against me, with the miscreants whom you have so often begged off, before.'

'No massa—no,' said Louis.

'Do I lie, sirrah?' exclaimed the planter striking him in the face. The blow (so wholly unexpected) brought Louis to the earth; but he was on his feet in an instant again, and again his master struck him—the blow was returned, and Dupres measured his length in the dust; he attempted to rise, but Louis throwing himself upon him, placed one of his knees on his chest so as to prevent his moving.

'It's all too late now, massa, the blow has been struck. Hear me, massa, hear me—we have loved you dearly, like my brother—we work for you, me do all me can for you, me save your life, massa—but no good, no—massa bid me go, massa say me should be flog—six-and-twenty years have I lived—no lash ever touch me; but no, him too late now, all is over.'

'Let me get up,' said Dupres, vainly struggling with his powerful opponent.

'No, massa, not yet, massa,' said Louis.