

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

THE OLD FOLKS ROOM.

THE old man sat by the chimney side;
His face was wrinkled and wan,
And he leaned both hands on his stout oak cane,
As if his work were done.

His coat was of good old fashioned gray,
The pockets were deep and wide,
Where his "specks" and his steel tobacco box
Lay snugly side by side.

The old man liked to stir the fire;
So near him the tongs were kept;
Sometimes he mused as he gazed at the coals,
Sometimes he sat and slept.

What saw he in the embers there?
Ah! pictures of other years;
And now and then they wakened smiles,
But oftener started tears.

His good old wife sat on the other side,
In a high-back, flag seat chair,
I see 'neath the pile of her muslin cap
The sheen of her silvery hair.

There's a happy look on her aged face,
As she busily knits for him,
And Nellie takes up the stitches dropped,
For grandmother's eyes are dim.

Their children come and read the news,
To pass the time each day;
How it stirs the blood in an old man's heart,
To hear of the world away.

'Tis a homely scene, I told you so,
But pleasant it is to view;
At least I thought it so myself,
And sketched it down for you.

Be kind unto the old, my friend,
They're worn with the world's strife,
Though bravely once perchance they fought
The stern, fierce battle of life.

They taught our youthful feet to climb
Upward life's rugged steep;
Then let us gently lead them down
To where the weary sleep.

From the New Monthly Magazine.

THE WILD-FOWL HUNTER.

So he jumped into a cab and drove to Gosset's shooting-gallery, and there he worked with such intentness of purpose that in a week he was able to go through the performances of an expert, tumble over an egg, break a pipe, and double and triple his balls. Unfortunately the opportunity of obtaining his revenge did not present itself. He had received the last twenty-five louis that Langot would send him. He began to think that he should return to Maisy with 'le denier.' He determined, under such a conjuncture, to try if he could not prolong the period of his stay in Paris by gambling. So he repaired with his twenty-five louis to the nearest gambling house he was acquainted with. Arrived there, he sat down at a table with a strange officer, half-Italian, half-Polish, who had often played against him, but with uniform good luck. This time, the idea of the last twenty-five louis being at stake, made Alain unusually sensitive. He thought that his antagonist was not playing fairly.

Of the twenty-five louis there already remained but fifteen, and he risked them upon one hand.

The officer turned up the king of clubs. Neither he nor his adversary had as yet taken up their cards.

Alain Montplet placed his hand upon his antagonist's cards.

The cards must not be touched, said the officer.

'Excuse me, sir,' replied Alain, 'but if you have not three trumps in your five cards I am in the wrong, and make my apologies beforehand.'

'And if I have three trumps in my five cards?' observed the officer in a tone of defiance.

'Then not only I should not make apologies to you,' said Alain, 'but I should certainly say—'

'What would you say?', thundered the officer.

Alain turned over the cards.

The officer's hand contained the queen, the knave, and ten of trumps.

'I should say,' persisted Alain, 'that you are a cheat.'

The officer took up the cards, and threw them at Alain's face.

'Good!' said the latter; who touches, strikes, and he who is struck has the choice of arms. I shall be obliged to return to Maisy, but I shall not take 'le dernier' with me.'

To quarrel had caused a commotion, a group had assembled, and before the parties separated it was agreed that they should meet the next morning at eight. Alain Montplet had selected pistols, and the Allée de la Muette. He wished to have his revenge where he had been himself defeated.

'At eight o'clock they were on the ground. The pistols, when examined, were found to fulfil all necessary conditions.'

'It was decided that the adversaries should place themselves at a distance of forty paces, and walk the one upon the other.'

'Each was to stop after having advanced ten paces. The real distance then was twenty yards.'

'In the case of a duel the paces are of three feet.'

'The adversaries were placed at the distance agreed upon.'

'The pistols were loaded by a 'garçon de tir' [the attendant at a shooting gallery], and one was placed in the hands of each.'

'Then stepping back the two witnesses who handed the pistols to the two antagonists said at the same moment:

'March!'

'As this word of command, Alain and the officer advanced towards one another.'

'At the end of ten paces, each raised his pistol and fired.'

'Only one explosion was heard.'

'Alain staggered but retained his feet.'

'The officer turned twice round upon himself, and then fell with his face to the ground.'

'Each second ran to his principal.'

'Alain had received his antagonist's ball on his chin; it had flattened there, as if it had struck a sheet of iron.'

'The bone was laid bare but not broken.'

'The force of the blow had, however, made him stagger.'

'The officer had been shot right through the heart.'

'He was killed dead.'

'There is no great harm!' said the four witnesses. 'It is only one swindler the less that's all!'

The same evening Alain sold his watch, and the next day he started on his way for Maisy. He had been two years in Paris, and in those two years he had managed to make away with nearly two hundred thousand francs. Yet he was, like all prodigal sons, kindly received at home. Jean Montplet only saw his son, and was willing to ignore the ungrateful spendthrift. Nor did the latter communicate to his father the ruinous extent of his obligations to Langot. The father only saw that he was melancholy, and proposed marriage as a relief.

But upon that subject Alain was as obstinate as upon most others. His knowledge of women had been limited to a class, and he confounded the sex in his reprobation of individuals.

While the question was being still mooted, however, by the old man, whose only wish was to see his son settled, Jean Montplet was suddenly called away to his father's by a violent attack of gout. The village Shylock then came down upon the property like a wolf upon the fold. He was armed with from thirty to thirty-five titles, establishing his claim to some eighty-seven thousand francs. Alain had no idea that he had borrowed so much, but there were the bills there to prove the fact, and nothing remained but to hand over La Cochardiére to his pitiless creditor, and to walk forth into the world—beggared without a sou.

The ill-regulated, passionate temper of Alain Montplet was little suited to such a reverse of fortune. He sought the solitude of the sea shore to devour his anger. He rolled himself on the sand in a paroxysm of desperation, and, luckily for him, tears of vexation came to his relief, or the end might have been prompt and dismal. He got up a calmer, if not a better man, and mechanically he took the way to the hut which had been for so many years his headquarters when shooting wild-fowl.

As he approached he heard Pavillon, the old sportsman's dog, howling in an ominous manner. The sound was in harmony with his feelings. Had it been the voice of a man in distress he would probably have turned aside. Impelled by the instinct of curiosity, he advanced to the door, and lifted up the latch. The dog recognized him, but did not cease its lugubrious howling. Alain called le Père Gabion by name, for night had come on, and within the hut all was in utter darkness. Obtaining no answer, he groped his way to the old man's bedside, and he found that he was there, but he was motionless, and he felt at once that he must be asleep or dead. The fire in the chimney was out, but the cinders were still hot. Alain was as much at home, if not more so, at the hut than at his La Cochardiére. He soon collected some dry reeds and bits of wreck, and, blowing with his mouth, got up a flame. By the tremulous light thus produced Alain once more approached the bed. The aged hunter of wild-fowl was really dead. The dog was licking his face.

Alexandre Dumas entertains some very uncomfortable notions on the subject of death, which are worthy of psychological analysis by the able author of 'Thanatos Athanatos.' With Dumas it is always the mysterious, the unknown, that is brought prominently forward.

According to him, even the vicious and hardened Alain Montplet fell on his knees before death. 'There is,' he says, 'a majesty in death that curbs the brow of the most obdurate, the knees of the most stiff-necked; it is the majesty of the unknown!'

When Alain passed the night by the fireside, feeding the lurid flame with reeds and sticks, Dumas says:—

'He seemed to be absorbed in studying that great enigma which will be for ever unknown to men: What is death?'

The morning light betrayed a paper lying on the table. It was a kind of testamentary document which threw no light on the antecedents of the old hunter. But it requested whoever should first come in, to bury his corpse in the sand of the sea-shore that he had loved so well, and if he was in want of it, he might inherit his hut. This was just the thing for Alain; he took a spade and dug a hole at one of the old hunter's favorite stations, and then he went back to fetch the body. The dog followed it to the grave, and then returned to the hut with Alain. He seemed to consider it as a matter of course that the man who had buried his late master must be his future one. As for Alain, he said to himself, 'I am ruined, without a home, without a friend; I cannot kill myself; I will accept the home which Providence sends me, and I will for the future be simply a hunter of wild-fowl.'

Alain Montplet hated mankind and woman-kind alike. With the exception of his own parent, whom he had never known how to appreciate, he had only known the vicious and the reprobate of both sexes, so that it would have been difficult to say which he despised most. Under these circumstances, the new career which he proposed to himself had one great comfort, he would have nothing to do with humanity, beyond the dealer in wild-fowl from Isigny.

All that remained to Alain at this moment, besides his gun and clothes, were a few jewels. He went to Isigny and disposed of these, and with the proceeds he bought a bed, a table, four chairs, some kitchen utensils, a shooting costume and powder and shot sufficient for a year's consumption. He had resolved that his visits to Isigny or to Maisy should be as few and as far between as the visits of—what he was not—an angel.

Once comfortably installed in his lonely hut, Alain gave himself up with ardor to his new profession. The exposure and exercise, the long walks and still longer night-watches, kept his mind from gloomy thoughts, and fatigue enabled him to obtain repose when otherwise he might have been worried by the memory of the past. He would pass whole weeks at the mouth of the Vire, would sleep there, eat there, live there for weeks together, shooting snipe, curlew, plovers, and other birds by day, and at night lie in wait for widgeon, teal and duck.

Time passed on in this way till November, 1841, came round and Alain prepared to go and look out for the night on the so-called "Eastern Sands," which were about two leagues beyond Maisy. It was a gloomy, threatening-looking evening, and after he had put on his great boots, his south-wester, and his well oiled canvass coat, after he had taken up his long fowling piece, cast his night cloak over his shoulder, and gone forth with Pavillon, who never forgot to visit his old master's grave, he saw that there would be a storm. The wind kept rushing from various points by fits and starts, the waves were long and deep—rising gradually mountain high. The sky was dark, with a blood-red streak.

Alain had to pass by Maisy, and when doing so he found the greater part of the population of the place assembled on the beach. The women were for the most part on their knees, praying. The men were busy bringing down a boat on rollers upon the chance of being able to launch it through the breakers. Langot was among the spectators, and he seemed even more anxious than the rest. Three fishing boats had gone out that fatal evening, and Langot was peculiarly interested in more than one. But if the old usherer was vexed, the young widow Jeanne-Marie, who was there too, was in perfect despair. Under the pretext that he could not feed idle mouths, Langot had sent her only son, still a mere boy, on board of one of those very fishing-boats not many days back.

The arrival of Alain Montplet amidst this anxious group was variously viewed. Some thought he could best say if the tempest was likely to last, and if the boats could live in the sea, or gain the shore. Others looked upon him with distrust, as a sort of bird of ill omen. Among the latter was Langot, who, rendered superstitious by terror, positively looked upon his appearance as the signal for some impending and irretrievable disaster. It is perhaps needless to say, that the wild man of the shore bore no kinder feeling to the cunning Shylock of the village, nor did he attempt in any way to conceal his hatred. As he looked at his successor at the Cochardiére, his eyes, indeed, lighted up with the flames of the angry passions that burnt within.

Half an hour elapsed, the men had got down the boat to the borders of the ocean, the women were still in the agony of anxiety, when a voice was heard through the wind and storm. It was that of Alain Montplet, who had continued his route in a westerly direction.

'To the rescue, all!' shouted the hunter; 'they are on the coast, on the bank of Pleine-sève!'

Every one rushed in the direction indicated. Jeanne-Marie at the head, her golden tresses loose in the wind, and bathed with rain and spray. Jacques Henin the most renowned fisherman of the coast, who had once been a quarter-master on board a man-of-war, began

with the help of Alain and a band of hardy sailors to drag the boat along the beach. Langot alone remained behind. He was so terrified that his legs refused to carry him.

Great was the tumult and confusion at the angle of the coast where the crowd came nearest to the bank of Pleine-sève. Jeanne-Marie had discerned that it was the *Sainte Therese*, the very vessel that bore her son.

'My child! my child!' she ejaculated, throwing herself upon her knees, 'my dear little Jean-Marie! Our most gracious Saviour, our good Lady of Deliverance, have pity on my child.'

The unfortunate vessel was in a most precarious position. Cast upon the bank, every sea broke over her, and, one after another her crew disappeared before the very eyes, and amidst the shouts and sobbings of the assembled multitude.

The boat at last arrived, and Jacques Henin, selecting eight of the stoutest hands, launched her through the breakers. But, alas! she had not made a few yards before the tremendous billows threw her over, as if she had been a shell, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the gallant crew regained the beach. Three different times did the old quarter-master try to force a way through these billows—just as often was he baffled.

In the mean time the number of men on the shipwrecked vessel kept on diminishing. One body was seen to repose upon another. Death mounted in stories. There were only two remaining. One of them was Jean-Marie.

'To think,' said the old quarter-master, ruminating aloud, 'that we should be obliged to stand here, and see our fellow creatures perish before our eyes without the means of succor.—It is indeed distressing! But not a boat could go except keel upwards. Perhaps a swimmer might reach the wreck, but he must be as strong as ten men.'

The mother had caught the old mariner's words. Her eyes turned upon Alain. He was the most expert swimmer on the coast. Rushing up to him, she threw herself down at his feet and prayed him to attempt the rescue of her child. It was impossible to resist her pitiful entreaties. Alain felt all his stimulated hatred of his race vanishing from his bosom.

'Well, be it so!' he exclaimed: 'make fast a rope, and I will see if I can reach them.'

'Do not go,' said Henin, 'you will assuredly perish.'

'Monsieur Alain! Monsieur Alain!' ejaculated the widow, 'save my child!' And she embraced the young man.

'Courage, Alain! courage!' shouted out the crowd.

'Well, if you must go, I will go with you,' said Henin, beginning to strip.

'No, no,' interrupted the hunter, 'that won't do. Remember you have children. I have no one, not even a friend.'

'Nonsense,' said the old quarter-master; and, French fashion, he also embraced the youth.

Alain advanced into the water up to his middle, preparing himself like an athlete for the struggle.

He then waited till the first wave came to him.

It soon arrived: monstrous, roaring, and terrible.

Instead of flying from it, he threw himself before it, dived boldly at its base, and, carried away by the backwater, reappeared some sixty from the beach.

'Bravo! bravo!' shouted the old quarter-master; 'the boy knows what he is about, and now I have seen him at work I bet my life against a quid that he will get there.'

'Courage, Alain! courage!' shouted all together.

The mother alone did not shout.

She was on her knees, crying and praying, overwhelmed by the immensity of her anxiety, so little proportioned to her own light, and delicate frame. She had not even strength to look.

As to the fishermen, they followed Alain's movements with great anxiety, mingled with pride.

The spectacle of devotion has in it that which is remarkable, it raises even the spectators in their own estimation.

Add to this, the young man was worth looking at. He swam with unwonted vigor, repeating his first manœuvre whenever the occasion demanded it.

Soon the space that separated the swimmer from the vessel was diminished, and Alain was seen to grapple with the rocks on which it had struck.

A little more and he was seen to stretch out a hand to grasp the sides of the boat.

At that moment a tremendous sea rolled over and nothing farther was seen—swimmer, vessel, and wrecked had all disappeared.

It was one of those terrible moments of anxiety impossible to describe. That anxiety was indeed at its full at that moment, complicated as it was with the danger run by Alain, and the hopes to which his daring had given rise.

Once more the vessel righted herself.

The boy attached to the mast still lived!