

A PINCH OF SNUFF.

At the period of the emigration, Coblenz seemed to become the refuge of nearly all the French nobility, and the court of Versailles might be said to have been transported to the banks of the Rhine. However potent might be political events, they were not able to disturb the exiles in their careless life. To remark the noise and movement of this crowd, who had carried into Germany all their native habits of levity, one would have taken Coblenz for a city of amusement, and imagined that there was a reunion here of French gentlemen bent upon pleasure.

However precarious might be, for the most part, their position, and though many were reduced to their last expedients, all persevered a gay exterior. Their only wealth, which could not be dissipated by the revolutionary movement. *Fetes* continued to be given as in France, visits were paid, the rights of precedence disputed, and the last coin wagered in play. A roulette table, lately established in a house open to the public, above all attracted the refugees by that deceitful hope of gain of which one dreams but never realizes. Some German noblemen gathered there also, led by example, and the fatal passion for play made each day new conquests in every rank of society.

Among the small number of gentlemen who escaped this general infatuation, there was one who merits particular mention. He was called the chevalier De Roquincourt; and though originally from the south of France, his family had resided for a long time in Alsace, where he was born. In yielding to the necessity which forced him to quit France, the chevalier accepted all the consequences of his exile. The small sum with which he had fled to Germany was placed by him in the hands of a banker worthy of his confidence, and the interest which he received, joined to the money obtained by teaching, permitted him to satisfy his needs and meet with honor his engagements.

This sagacity was at first attributed to avarice by the malevolent, and to mercantile shrewdness by his friends. But when it was seen that the chevalier was enabled to assist, from his slender revenue, the more needy gentlemen, esteem succeeded railway, and he became for the most obtuse a model fit to be imitated, though inimitable.

De Roquincourt merited this admiration. In the loss of position and fortune caused by his flight, the revolution had in no wise changed his character; there was always the same equity in his manner of judging men and things; the same sympathy for all that was good; the same pity for suffering which met his eyes. He had never concentrated the world into his own personality, nor did he believe all lost because his own class were in difficulties.

"My affairs are not those of the human race," he said, "and they have not fallen into decadence because the chevalier De Roquincourt gives lessons in grammar."

In following out his system of economy, the chevalier lodged in the suburbs at the house of a Jew who rented furnished apartments at a moderate price. Above him dwelt a young German named Aloisius Barker. He was from Neuweid, where he had been engaged in business in a small way with his mother and young sister; but a fire had suddenly destroyed all that he possessed, and he had come to Coblenz in hopes of collecting some doubtful accounts which would henceforth be all his fortune. Unfortunately his demands had been fruitless. Unknown to the manufacturers, without money to claim justice in the courts, already discouraged by the misfortune which had come upon him, he had not the adroitness nor the force to wring payment from debtors. One put him off, others denied indebtedness; in short, having lost his last hope and spent his last thaler, he had been for some days in a state of despair which nearly deprived him of the hope of salvation.

The chevalier was cognizant of the general state of Barker's affairs; every time they met on the stairs he inquired with interest in regard to them and his expectations; but not having seen him now for a week, he was unaware of the position of actual distress to which the unfortunate young man was reduced.

One day, upon returning from lesson giving, he met Aloisius at the door of the house with the postman, who extended to him a letter. The young man looked at it with eyes dim with tears, but without taking it. The postman seemed undecided.

The chevalier, pausing, saluted Barker by name, and his air of benevolence evidently solicited an explanation of the trouble in which he showed himself involved. Aloisius appeared not to comprehend, but the courier turned toward De Roquincourt and said:

"Since you are acquainted with this gentleman, monsieur, he might perhaps be assisted by you."

"In what manner?" inquired the chevalier quickly.

"It is a little embarrassing," returned the messenger, hesitating. "This letter has come from Neuweid for the gentleman; the postage is a quarter of a silver groschen, and he does not happen to have the amount—with him."

"Say no more," answered the Frenchman, putting his hand in his pocket.

But Aloisius stopped him with a gesture. "No," said he in a bitter tone, "I have this sum neither upon my person—nor elsewhere. I am not able to repay you, sir."

"This is fortunate, for I owe it to you," said De Roquincourt. "Take it, monsieur. Since the letter comes from Neuweid it must be from your mother or your sister."

He paid the postman, who departed, and handed the letter to Barker. The latter had not the power to thank him, but he opened the letter and rapidly perused it. As he proceeded in his reading his features changed, and upon concluding he uttered a cry.

"Have you received bad news?" asked the chevalier, who had begun to ascend the stairs, but turned at the exclamation made by the young man.

"Ah, this last blow alone was wanting!" stammered Aloisius, raising the letter to his brow with a despairing gesture.

"For heaven's sake, what is it?" What do you announce to you?" asked De Roquincourt, descending hastily the steps. "If you would know," said the young man, with tears choking his voice, "they have sold what remained to my sister and my mother, and they are now without shelter or food."

The chevalier signified his sympathy and surprise.

"And they appeal to me for aid," continued Aloisius, "to me, who had not even the money to pay the postage on this letter! I am without resources and without hope!"

The chevalier attempted to calm him by some kindly words, and invited him to enter his chamber to be interrogated in detail. The distress of the young man rendered him more communicative than he had ever been before, and he explained to De Roquincourt how the fire had suddenly destroyed all that the little shop contained, the property of his mother and himself. The loss amounted to twelve hundred thalers, comprising all their fortune, and they had now no means of replacing it.

As Barker entered into these details his despair seemed to be augmented. While picturing the frightful position in which his mother and sister were placed, he seemed himself to see it the more distinctly. He was angry because of his impotence to serve them. He accused heaven, and fell more and more into that wildness of sorrow which is the supreme misery of the unfortunate. De Roquincourt comprehended that all consolation would be useless. What was required at the moment to relieve the stricken heart of Aloisius was reality, not hope.

The chevalier was too poor to come himself to the young man's assistance; the needs of some companions in exile had already decreased his means. What he was able to do was far too trifling a thing to draw Barker from the abyss to the bottom of which he had fallen. It was necessary to have recourse to the generosity of one more opulent. De Roquincourt decided upon the instant what to do. Never having solicited anything for himself, he was the bolder in asking for another; the refusal might pain without humiliating him. He addressed to the young man some last encouraging words, promised to busy himself for him, and took his way to the residence of the Vicomte de Rouillac.

Through the assistance of a man of business who, by means of a pretended sale, had preserved De Rouillac's property from confiscation, the vicomte enjoyed in exile all the fortune left him by his father. He employed it with a liberality which did not even arouse jealousy. His hand, ever open, resembled those fountains which bestow their waters on all travellers. Never voluntarily refusing any assistance, none wished his fortune had another possessor; but his extravagant habits frequently interfered with his good intentions. A spendthrift and gambler, M. de Rouillac sometimes found himself without a franc. Most important, then, was it to apply to him opportunely, and before his expensive tastes, like a flock of birds, had harvested the golden grain which came to him each month from France.

De Roquincourt knew this, and quickened his steps in the hope of presenting himself in advance of some other solicitor on the road, perhaps, like himself; but he was informed at the hotel that the vicomte had not returned since morning, and would be found at the roulette table. Although the chevalier had an especial horror of gambling houses, and had never passed the threshold of one, the circumstances appeared too pressing to allow his repugnance to sway him. If M. de Rouillac proved to be in a lucky vein, as often happened, no doubt he would listen favorably to his request. So he decided to enter the hall where a number of the noble exiles were gathered about the green cloth.

He at once perceived the vicomte, who was engaged in a very spirited game. The golden Fredericks were piled before him in a little movable and sonorous heap that one saw successively increased or depleted. When he saw the chevalier he made a gesture of surprise.

"May the Lord pardon me if here is not De Roquincourt!" he exclaimed. "What miracle has led our Cato into this cave?"

"Seeking you," responded the chevalier.

"I'll be with you presently," replied M. de Rouillac. "There only remains with me two or three thousand Fredericks."

"Be careful to reserve a few," said the other, in an undertone.

"You have need of them?" said the vicomte.

"By heaven, my dear friend, take what you require."

"Gently!" interrupted a large German, who had placed himself behind M. de Rouillac. "It is necessary first that you follow our lead."

"Ah, the dence! I forgot that Baron d'Arenberg was my partner," observed the Frenchman, laughing. "But I will account to you, baron, for what I may take."

"No, no!" the German insisted. "You must not withdraw the money staked. It brings bad luck. Let the chevalier wait a little."

De Roquincourt bowed in token of consent, and the game was resumed.

But one might have said that the arrival of the chevalier caused the luck to suddenly change. M. de Rouillac, who before was winning, now began to lose repeatedly, and in less than a quarter of an hour all his Fredericks had departed under the banker's rake.

Though thus despoiled, the vicomte rose without betraying any emotion, excused himself almost with levity to the chevalier, ordered his carriage to be called, and departed.

De Roquincourt had remained in the same place, sad, disappointed, his eyes fixed upon the fatal green cloth which had swallowed up the salvation and consolation of Aloisius. The baron of the Arenberg had not, however, imitated the prudent retreat vicomte, but continued to play with that obstinate characteristic of races of the north. The game appeared to wish to recompense him for his persistence by an unexpected turn. The heaps of gold recommenced to form before him, and as they increased, words were dispensed by the taciturn German.

"I warned you that to withdraw the table money would bring bad luck," said he, turning toward De Roquincourt, who was regarding him with a pensive air.

"Merely the intention of the vicomte to take it turned the luck against him."

"Then of course it is useless for me to ask you to accomplish what he was only able to propose?" said the chevalier.

"What? I give the play money?" cried the German.

"It is for a good purpose, baron," urged De Roquincourt. "It is to be used to save one of your compatriots."

"If it was my brother, it it was my father," interrupted the German. "I would not withdraw a Frederick. The table money is sacred; it belongs to the game. You see

how the luck continues; every play is successful now."

In fact, a new deposit of gold pieces came to be added to the heaps near the baron. The chevalier could only return a gesture of chagrin, comparing mentally the fortunes of the German with that of the vicomte and indignant at the injustice of play.

The baron observed the movement. "You envy me my good fortune," said he, with the insolent laugh of a successful gambler.

"No, not for myself," responded De Roquincourt, "but only for the unfortunate person that the smallest portion of this gold would console."

"Ah, that is true!" replied the baron. "I forgot that you were the Saint Vincent de Paul of the refugees. Well, my dear sir, why do you not assault the bank for his benefit? Follow the fashion, as I do."

"I have always feared to play and avoided it, baron."

"Another reason for your trying. You have not drained your luck. One's always fortunate at the start. That is an axiom."

"I have no confidence in the favors of fortune."

"You have never sought them."

"True."

"Therefore it is prejudice."

"Suppose I lose?"

"Suppose you win?"

The chevalier made no answer; but he felt influenced by the baron's words, and yet more by the sight of the Fredericks, which continued to augment by the winnings of the latter. After all, it sufficed if by good fortune two or three throws were successful. A thaler risked upon the green board might give him in a few minutes the sum required to bring peace to Aloisius.

The temptation was singularly strong, and De Roquincourt instinctively carried his hand to his pocket; but the slender resources of the purse which he felt under his fingers cut short his desire. He recollected that after his last aims to his indigent compatriots he had carefully calculated what remained to him and the least diminution of his resources would destroy the balance established between his revenues and his expenses. For the chevalier's generosity was not unreflective; his wish to oblige did not make him forgetful of duties he owed to himself, and he was not of those who bestow favors at the expense of his creditors.

His hand rested for some time upon the purse which he had encountered. He recalculated his monthly expenses, and convinced of the impossibility of following the baron's advice, resigned.

The baron, observing him, shook his head.

"Ah, well, chevalier," said he, ironically, "what the duce are you hunting for in your pocket?"

De Roquincourt reddened in spite of himself, and drew abruptly forth a shell snuff box upon which was a miniature of his mother.

"So you are not going to play?" said the baron. "I believed that you were persuaded. What risk is there in exposing some Fredericks?"

De Roquincourt was not able to make a comprehensive reply, so contented himself with a shrug of his shoulders and opened his snuff box. The impertinence of the baron jarred upon his nerves.

"Come," added the other still railing, "since you will defy your fortune, dear chevalier, we will say no more; but give me a pinch of your snuff."

He had extended his hand toward the snuff box of the chevalier, who made a movement toward him. Then a sudden thought crossed his mind. He drew back the box and closed it.

"What!" cried the astonished German who had his hand extended.

"I beg you to pardon me, baron," replied De Roquincourt seriously, "but each has his maxims. Yours prevent you from giving anything from your coins; mine imposes on me the same obligations as I look at it."

"How so? Is it a jest?"

"Not at all."

"You refuse me a pinch of snuff?"

"I refuse to give it to you, baron."

"That is to say it must be purchased?"

"If you are willing."

The German gave a shout of laughter.

"Good Lord, this is curious!" he cried.

"The chevalier transformed into a tobacco dealer! And how much do you ask, my dear sir?"

"A Frederick, baron."

"A Frederick! Why, that is usurious!"

"It is a speculation."

"With a pinch of snuff."

"The subject does not matter. All economists will inform you that the selling price depends not alone upon the thing vendible, but the circumstances. Have not rats been paid for at their weight in gold in besieged cities? And wandering travelers in the desert of Sahara, would they not give a pearl for a draught of water?"

"And you consider me in an analogous position."

"Near it, baron, for I saw you just now seeking in vain for your tobacco box, and you are not willing to leave your game to seek it. I consider, then, for the moment, that your nose is dependent upon me; and I do not abuse my position, but only use it in demanding of you a Frederick."

"Upon my soul! Give it to me for the curiosity of the thing," laughed the baron.

De Roquincourt immediately extended his snuff box.

"Only made a bargain for one pinch," continued the German, as he plunged his fingers into the box of mother-of-pearl, "but, in faith, my winnings allow me some foolish expenses, I will take two, my dear sir, and here are two gold pieces."

"Leave them upon the cloth," said Roquincourt. "They will be my wager."

"You intend to risk them on a single throw?"

"On a single stroke."

The game was called, and the chevalier won. He immediately drew away three-quarters of the stake and risked one Frederick, which he lost; then he risked two, with which he recovered double the sum he had laid out. The same fortune followed him in subsequent wagers, sometimes against him but often favorable. He watched each turn with an anxious curiosity which one might have taken for the cupid of a gambler. At length he counted the Fredericks which were before him, gathered them into a roll and rose. He had his twelve hundred thalers. Crossing the hall rapidly, he re-echoed with exclamations, maledictions, cries of rage and a few of joy, he quickly gained the street and then the quarter where he resided.

Night had come. The chevalier, having no fear of observation, drew up the skirts

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of his habit, the better to hurry across the pools of mud and water which abounded in the suburbs. His heart beat violently at the thought of the delight Aloisius would experience, and he arrived almost breathless from joy and his speed.

Quickly ascending the three flights of stairs, he came to Barker's door. It was closed. He descended to his own apartment, hoping that the young man might have remained there since his departure, but it was empty. He was about to seek the landlady to ask where Aloisius could be found, when his eye fell upon a letter placed upon his bureau. He looked at the handwriting, which was unknown to him, and then opened it. It was signed by Barker, and contained the following lines:

"You bade me hope, but I have not the power. God himself has abandoned me. I am not able to assist either my sister or my mother. I even lack the courage to support the sight of their sorrow. Adieu, you who have had pity for me, you who would have succored me if good will could serve in place of means. But Providence resembles man; she assists but the succeeding."

This letter overwhelmed the chevalier. It announced a desperate resolution which perhaps there was no time to prevent. He hurried to the rooms of his landlady, which were upon the lower floor, and inquired if she had seen Aloisius. The Jewess affirmed that he had not gone out, and De Roquincourt remounted to the mansard. The door, fastened on the inside, for some time resisted his efforts, but it at last yielded; the young man was lying upon the floor, his head supported upon one of his hands; a brazier of charcoal burned at his feet.

The chevalier sprang toward him, and raising him in his arms carried him to the head of the stairs, where the landlady had also arrived. The effect of the gas was happily not complete, and by prodigious exertion the young man was recalled to life. Regaining his senses, little by little, he cast about him a glance vague and wandering; then, at sight of the chevalier, all his memory returned. He started up abruptly, clasping his hands with a cry.

"Ah, why have you resuscitated me?" he said brokenly.

"To prove to you that God has not abandoned you," said De Roquincourt, who, while he supported the young man's head with one hand, displayed the roll of Fredericks in the other.

Aloisius appeared struck by an electric shock.

"It is gold!" he cried.

"There are twelve hundred thalers," replied the chevalier; "just the amount you have lost. Carry them quickly to your mother, and remember, another time, that Providence does not assist those only who are successful."

We need not attempt to paint Barker's joy, there are emotions too strong for words to express. Cured by happiness, he departed the next day for Neuweid, where he reopened his little store, the profits of which had sufficed before, and wherein he re-found comfort and peace.

As for De Roquincourt, he returned some years afterward to France. There he recovered a small part of his fortune, enough for one of his simple tastes, and with which he still found means of solacing those more needy than himself; for, as is sometimes said, good will double one's resources, and though only possessing a pinch of snuff, one may yet save a family.—From the French.

Politics Versus Science.

There are two subjects that are engrossing the conversational powers of the Dominion at present, and they are both worth discussing. One of them is the political situation, and the other is the new discovery of science, Rigby Waterproof Cloth.

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