

A MIDNIGHT VISIT.

I have a little note-book in which, among other things, I keep note of the various good resolutions which, from time to time, I may be led to make. On the last page of this book you may see the following resolution, doubly underlined in red ink,—“Resolved that I, Henrietta Studvall, will never again promise to write an essay for any society in connection with Toronto University.” The fact is that, last May, under the persuasion of a sweet-faced undergrad, I rashly promised to take an essay for one of these societies for the following term. The subject assigned to me was “Victor Hugo.” How much I regretted that promise I need not tell. Sufficient to say that, one September evening, after “long days of labor and nights devoid of ease,” I found my task almost complete. Before me lay the essay in all its greatness—fifty closely written foolscap pages in all. Around me lay scattered in confusion some dozens of heavy quartos from which I had laboriously culled all the long and tedious passages bearing on the genius and fertility of the great Victor Hugo. I had written and rewritten, polished and repolished. I had exercised the greatest care in the choice of grandiloquent language and extravagant metaphors. I had been particularly brilliant in my choice of epithets by which to characterize the great man. I had termed him “striking,” “graceful,” “brilliant,” “voluminous,” “versatile,” “sparkling,” “gorgeous,” “fantastic,” etc., etc. In my treatment of him I had wisely neglected the *facts* as unimportant. My sole object was to display my wide reading, my beautiful language and my superior critical powers. I was sure that my essay must make an impression. All that was necessary was that the final paragraph should be in keeping with the rest.

On this final paragraph, on the evening in question, I was busily engaged. My room was a square one, containing two windows looking toward the south. On the north side stood an old-fashioned sofa with a large table drawn up before it. On the west side, in the corner farthest from the door, stood a low square book case, which was rendered dignified from the fact that it contained the requisites of a good, liberal, nineteenth century, university education, in the shape of various interesting text-books showing how the barbarians spelt their words before they became civilized. In order that I might be perfectly in harmony with the educational spirit of the day, I took great care to exclude from this model book-case of mine all books with which any of the master minds of this nineteenth century of progress were connected. Needless to say, I held my book-case in great veneration. On the opposite side of the room was an open fireplace and mantel. These, with chairs, hangings and pictures, completed the furniture of the room.

I was seated by the table. It was nearly midnight. My essay was almost completed. I had turned the light down that inspiration might flow to me from the dusk. The dim light of the rising moon, as it fell slantingly in through the parted curtains, formed an indistinct quadrangle on the floor. A slight breeze was stirring through the open windows. All was serene; I was lost in reverie. Slowly and distinctly, almost painfully, the clock struck twelve. Its last stroke seemed to me to sound peculiar, as if accompanied by a rustling sound. I listened. I was not mistaken. There *was* a light rustling noise. It came from the hallway leading to my room; my heart beat quickly. There was something uncanny about the sound. It lasted a moment only; the next instant there was a slight tap on my door. I could not move; I was rooted to the spot. The door opened noiselessly; I was astonished, almost terrified. I began to tremble. Through the open door a slight figure glided in and noiselessly seated itself. My astonishment increased, for before me, would you believe it, sat the ghost of the poet Alfred Tennyson. The quiet and intellectual face was set off by a mass of wavy hair. He was enveloped in a long robe of dark blue and gold. I had not time to contemplate him

however, for he was no sooner seated than the same sounds were heard as those which had at first attracted my attention. A second figure glided into the room and seated itself as noiselessly as the first. The face of the new comer was eminently handsome; the eye large, brown and deep. The form and features were those of Robert Burns. It seemed to me at this moment that I heard a gentle and airy music float in through the doorway of my room. Now it died away. An instant later it swelled up more clearly than before. Yet it was slow, solemn and subdued, as the dead march breathed by the instruments of some ærial band. Then too might plainly be heard the light but measured tread of feet approaching my chamber. A moment later a strange and motley procession passed in through the open door. First and foremost, was to be seen the giant form of Goethe. He was robed in a dark purple mantle and wore a single red rose on his breast. By his side in white, the pale and ghost-like form of the freedom loving Schiller. Victor Hugo followed, clad in trailing garments of the deepest black, and crowned with a wreath of ivy and lilies intertwined. In marked contrast was the long crimson of the smiling Goldsmith, who kept him company. The next division of the procession astonished me still more. Four masked figures, short of stature, dwarflike in form, clad wholly in black, carried between them what appeared to be a bier, upon which rested an emaciated and lifeless body over which a light black covering was thrown. The remainder of the retinue it would be tedious to describe. It consisted in the first place of twelve or more writers of modern time whose faces were all more or less familiar—Lessing, Augier, Whittier, Lowell, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Heine and others. Behind these and somewhat separated, as was meet, from the others, was to be seen an array of venerable faces representing the classic fathers of the ancient ages. Horace, Plato, Cicero and Tacitus, clad in spotless white and marching with slow and solemn step, were conspicuous amid those of the latter group. The procession having passed in the whole company was seated in silence. The four sombre attendants deposited their burden in the centre of the room and silently departed. I was spell-bound. Not a word had yet been spoken. What astonished me as much as anything was that each of the company was bowed down, like Christian with his burden of sin, by a great packet strapped tightly upon his back. The burdens upon the backs of some were much greater than those upon the backs of others. Lessing arose, took his staff, and rapped lightly upon the floor. Immediately the door opened; a strong, well-built youth entered and proceeded to loosen the burdens from the backs of the visitors. These packets were all composed of great rolls of manuscript. The youth removed them, placed them carefully in the bottom of the fireplace, bowed to the company and retired.

The silence that followed was broken by Hugo himself, who, rising to his feet, addressed me in mellifluous French, which I have translated as follows.—

“Fair daughter, marvel not that midnight chimes
Find us disturbers of thy chamber's peace;
For night alone will bear us on dark wings,
Dew-laden, sweeping land and crested sea.
Nor is our mission such as carries awe;
Our errand peace, our purpose light reform.
Know then—Great poet-spirits, when Death's night
From nerveless fingers steals the golden pen,
Still sit in council on affairs of earth.
Then, should some blot of slander dimming fall,
The white page marring of a deathless fame,
Plans instant shape that light of truth may shine,
All shadows pass, and name and fame be cleared.
But one hour since, in yonder dying star
Merging its gleam in dancing moonbeams' play,
This poet conclave met. ‘What news?’ we cried.
Then our chief messenger from earth new come
Smilingly answered: ‘All is fair,
Save that in yonder new domain whose glades
Whisper the promise of a coming song—
Canada fair, land of the light cascade—