

A NIGHT OF TERROR.

(Translated from the French.)



I WAS was one day travelling in Calabria; a country of people who, I believe, have no great liking to anybody, and are peculiarly ill-disposed towards the French. To tell you why, would be a long affair. It is enough that they hate us to death, and that the unhappy being who should chance to fall into their hands, would not pass his time in the most agreeable manner. I had for my companion a worthy young fellow; I do not say this to interest you, but because it is the truth. In these mountains the roads are precipices, and our horses advanced with the greatest difficulty. My comrade going first by a track which appeared to him more practicable and shorter than the regular path, led us astray. It was my fault. Ought I to have trusted to a head of twenty years? We sought our way out of the wood while it was yet light; but the more we looked for the path, the further we were off it.

It was a very black night, when we came close upon a very black house. We went in, and not without suspicion. But what was to be done? There we found a whole family of charcoal-burners at table. At the first word, they invited us to join them. My young man did not stop for much ceremony. In a minute or two we were eating and drinking in earnest—he at least; for my own part I could not help glancing about at the place and the people. Our hosts, indeed looked like charcoal-burners; but the house! you would have taken it for an arsenal. There was nothing to be seen but muskets, pistols, sabres, knives, cutlasses. Everything displeased me, and I saw that I was in no favor myself. My comrade, on the contrary, was soon one of the family. He laughed, he chatted with them; and with an imprudence which I ought to have prevented, he at once said where he came from, where we were going, and that we were Frenchmen. Think of our situation. Here we were among our

mortal enemies—alone, benighted, and far from all human aid. That nothing might be omitted that could tend to our destruction, he must, forsooth, play the rich man, promising these folks to pay them well for their hospitality; and then he must prate about his portmanteau, earnestly beseeching them to take care of it, and put it at the head of his bed, for he wanted no other pillow. Ah, youth, youth! how art thou to be pitied. Cousin, they might have thought that we carried the diamonds of the crown, and yet the treasure in his portmanteau, which gave him so much anxiety, consisted only of some private letters.

Supper ended, they left us. Our hosts slept below; we on the story where we had been eating. In a sort of platform raised seven or eight feet, where we were to mount by a ladder, was the bed that awaited us—a nest into which we had to introduce ourselves, by jumping over barrels filled with provisions for all the year. My comrade seized upon the bed above, and was soon fast asleep, with his head upon the precious portmanteau. I was determined to keep awake, so I made a good fire, and sat myself down. The night was almost passed over tranquilly enough, and I was beginning to be comfortable, when just at the time it appeared to me that day was about to break, I heard our host and his wife talking and disputing below me, and putting my ear into the chimney, which communicated with the lower room, I perfectly distinguished these exact words of the husband: "Well, well, let us see—must we kill them both? To which the wife replied, "Yes!" and I heard no more.

How should I tell you the rest? I could scarcely breathe; my whole body was cold as marble; had you seen me you could not have told whether I was dead or alive. Even now the thought of my condition is enough. We two were almost without arms; against us were twelve or fifteen persons, who had plenty of weapons. And then my comrade was