

## FOUR TIMES TWENTY.

BUT four times twenty years gives Fate,  
Divides, controls, bids consecrate—  
Twenty for growing, for laughter and yearning,  
Twenty for loving, and mating, and learning,  
Twenty for making a name with the best,  
Twenty for wisdom, remembrance, and—rest.  
He who would have Life's full estate  
Keeps thus his years inviolate.

FREDERICK A. DIXON.

## THE VENUS OF ILLE.

[Translated for THE WEEK from the French of Prosper Mérimée (somewhat abridged).]

I DESCENDED from the last hill of the Canigou, and although the sun had already set, I discerned in the plain below the houses of the little town of Ille, towards which I directed my steps.

"You know, of course," said I to the Catalanian who had been serving me as a guide since the previous day, "you know where M. de Peyrehorade lives?"

"Do I know?" exclaimed the guide. "I know his house as well as my own; and if it were not so dark I would show it to you; it is the finest house in Ille. M. de Peyrehorade has plenty of money; and he is about to marry his son to one even richer than himself."

"And this marriage, will it take place soon?" asked I.

"Soon! It must take place immediately, for the fiddlers have been engaged for the wedding. It is to take place at Puygarrig, for it is Mademoiselle de Puygarrig whom his son is going to marry. It will be a grand affair."

I was recommended to M. de Peyrehorade by my friend M. de P. He was, he told me, a very learned antiquarian, and was possessed of boundless good nature. It would be a pleasure for him to show me all the ruins for thirty miles around.

Now, I counted upon him to visit the surroundings of Ille, which I knew to be rich in ancient monuments and in those of the Middle Ages. This marriage, of which I was told for the first time, disarranged all my plans. I am going to be a troublesome guest, said I to myself; but I was expected; and, being announced by M. de P., of course I have to present myself.

"Let us bet, sir," said my guide to me, as we reached the plain; "let's bet a cigar that I can guess what you are going to do at M. de Peyrehorade's."

"Why," answered I, handing him a cigar, "that's not very difficult to guess. At this time of night, when one has walked eighteen miles in the Canigou, the great matter in hand is to get supper."

"Yes, but to-morrow? Come, now, I would bet that you have come to Ille to see the idol? I guessed that, on seeing you draw a picture of the saints of Serrabona."

"The idol! what idol?"—this word had excited my curiosity.

"What! has no one told you at Perpignan that M. de Peyrehorade had found an earthen idol?"

"You mean to say, a statue in terra cotta—of clay?"

"No—in copper; and there is enough to make lots of pennies out of it. It weighs as much as a church bell. We found it deep in the ground, at the foot of an olive tree."

"You were present at the discovery, then?"

"Yes, sir; M. de Peyrehorade told John Coll and myself a fortnight ago to root up an old olive tree. Lo and behold! while working, John Coll, who was digging with all his might, gave a blow with his pickaxe, and I heard a ding as if he had struck a bell. 'What's that?' says I, for we were still using the pick, and behold there appeared a black hand, which seemed like the hand of a dead person coming out of the ground. I was filled with fear, and went to my master and told him that some dead people were under the olive tree. We must call the curé. 'Dead people,' said he in amazement. He came and no sooner did he see the hand than he cried, 'A relic! a relic!' You would have believed that he had found a treasure."

"And what did you find after all?"

"A big, black woman, more than half naked, saving your presence, sir, all made of copper—and M. de Peyrehorade told us that it was an idol of pagan times."

"I see what it is . . . Some image in bronze of the good Virgin from a ruined convent."

"A good Virgin! Oh, yes, indeed . . . I'd have recognized it at once had it been a good Virgin. It is an idol, I tell you. It fixes upon you its large white eyes . . . and stares you out of countenance. One lowers his eyes on looking at it."

"White eyes?—doubtless they are inlaid in the bronze. It might be some Roman statue or other."

"Roman! that is it! M. de P. says that she is a Roman. Ah! I see clearly that you are a scholar like him."

"Is it whole and well preserved?"

"Oh, sir, it lacks nothing. It is more beautiful and better finished than the coloured plaster bust of Louis Philippe at the Mansion House. But, nevertheless, the face of the idol doesn't please me. It has a bad look and it is bad, too!"

"Bad! What harm has it done you?"

"Not to me, exactly; but you shall see. It took all our strength to

set it upright; and M. de P. pulled at the rope, although he has hardly more strength than a chicken, poor gentleman. After much trouble, we got it set up. I got a broken tile to prop it up, when bang, over it went all of a heap. I cried 'Look out below!' but not quick enough, however, for John Coll hadn't time to take his leg out of the way."

"And he was hurt?"

"Poor fellow! yes, his leg was broken like a stick. When I saw this I was furious. I wanted to break the idol into pieces with my pickaxe, but M. de P. prevented me."

Conversing thus, we entered Ille; and I soon found myself in the presence of M. de Peyrehorade. He was a little old man, still fresh and active, powdered, with a red nose, and a merry and jovial air.

Before opening M. de P.'s letter, he had me seated before a well supplied table, and presented me to his wife and son as an illustrious archaeologist, who was to save the Rousillon from the oblivion in which the indifference of scientific men had left it.

While eating with a good appetite, for nothing whets it better than the sharp air of the mountains, I was scrutinizing my host and hostess. I have already said something about M. de Peyrehorade; but I ought to add that he was vivacity itself. He spoke, ate, got up, ran to his library, brought me books, showed me engravings, poured me out wine—never, indeed, was he two minutes at rest.

His son, Mr. Alphonse de Peyrehorade, meanwhile, did not once move from his seat. He was a tall young man, of six and twenty, with fine and regular features, but lacking in expression. His fine stature and athletic figure fully justified the reputation he had earned in the country for being an indefatigable tennis player. He was elegantly dressed that evening, after the engraving in the last number of the *Journal de Mode*; but he seemed to me ill at ease in his clothes. He was as stiff as a stake in his velvet collar; and when he turned round it was with his whole body. His coarse, sun-burned hands and short nails contrasted ill with his costume. They were ploughman's hands issuing from the sleeves of a dandy. Moreover, although he looked at me very curiously from head to foot, in my quality as a Parisian, he spoke to me only once during the whole evening, and that was to ask me where I had bought my watch chain.

"See here, my dear guest," M. de Peyrehorade said to me, when supper was nearly over, "you belong to me, you are in my house, I will not let you go until you have seen everything curious and interesting in our mountains. You must learn to appreciate our Rousillon and do it justice. You must have no doubts about anything we are going to show you. Monuments, Phœnician, Celtic, Roman, Arabian, Byzantine—you shall see all from the summit to the foot. I will conduct you everywhere, and will not let you out of my hands till you have seen the last brick."

An attack of coughing obliged him to pause. I took advantage of the occasion to tell him how much I should be grieved to discommode him on an occasion so interesting to his family. If he would only give me his excellent counsel for the excursions I would have to make, I could find my way about without putting him to the trouble of accompanying me.

"Ah, you will speak of the marriage of that young man," cried he, interrupting me. "That is nothing; it will be all over the day after to-morrow. You will make one at the wedding, which will be quite a private affair, for you must know that the intended is in mourning for an aunt, whose property she inherits. So you see there will be no entertainment, no ball;—which is a pity—for you should see our Catalanian maidens dance. They are pretty; envy might perhaps induce you to imitate the example of my Alphonse. One marriage, they say, brings on another. . . . Saturday, the young folks married, I shall be free, and then for our exploration. You must pardon me for inflicting upon you the tedium of a provincial wedding. For a Parisian satiated with feasts . . . and a wedding without even a ball! but you will see a bride; you will tell me what you think of her. . . . But you are a sedate fellow and don't concern yourself about women. I have something better than such to show you. I will let you see something! . . . I have a delightful surprise in store for you for to-morrow."

"But, my dear sir," said I to him, "it is difficult to have a treasure in one's house without the world being aware of it. I think I can guess the surprise you have prepared for me, if it is your statue; the description my guide has given me of it has only served to excite my curiosity and to dispose me to admiration."

"Ah! he has spoken to you of the idol, for so they call my beautiful Venus; but I will say nothing about it now; to-morrow, in broad daylight, you shall see her; and you will tell me if I am not right in believing it to be a *chef d'œuvre*."

"A *chef d'œuvre*, a *chef d'œuvre*, a pretty *chef d'œuvre* she has made breaking a man's leg!"

"My wife, look at her!" said M. de Peyrehorade in a resolute tone, and stretching towards her his right leg, encased in a stocking of Chinese silk, "if my Venus had broken that leg, I would not have regretted it."

"Goodness gracious! Peyrehorade, how can you speak like that; fortunately the man is recovering. And yet I cannot persuade myself to look at the statue which causes such misfortunes as that. Poor John Coll!"

Supper at an end, there was an hour during which we did not eat. I was fatigued, and I could not manage to conceal the frequent yawnings which escaped me. Madame de Peyrehorade was the first to notice this, and remarked that it was time to go to bed. Then commenced new excuses for the poor accommodation I was going to have. I ascended at last to the chamber assigned to me, accompanied by M. de Peyrehorade. The staircase, of which the upper steps were of wood, ended in the middle of a corridor, from which there opened several chambers.