

## THE PICTURE.

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

You paint for me a picture filled  
With all that life can bless  
And on the frame that holds it gild  
With brightest happiness.

You hold it up before my eyes—  
Its beauty I must own;  
But ah! one fault within it lies.  
One fault, and only one.

But that one fault for me can dim  
A picture ne'er so fair;  
However full of light it seems,  
It's dark if you're not there.

Then chide no more my discontent  
When I that picture view,  
My brightest scenes of joy are blest  
For evermore with you.

Still give the picture. I will trace  
Your form within its frame;  
Not all its other forms shall grace—  
That all my heart shall claim.

Not hope alone can give us bliss.  
There must be memory too—  
So in my picture hope shall kiss  
The memory of you.

JOHN READ.

WHO PAINTED THE GREAT MURILLO  
DE LA MERCED?

(From Blackwood's Magazine.)

## CHAPTER III.—Continued

"As he almost always had some pictures of mine to restore, and I took vast interest in the processes, I got into a habit of spending a great deal of my leisure in the Baron's atelier. It was about two years after our Murillo disappointment that two pictures in his possession attracted my notice. Upon inquiry, I was astonished to learn that they belonged to those we had, in our aggravation, so hastily condemned. The Baron candidly admitted that the unexpected defeat to his hopes had made him unjust to their merit. Having thrown them aside as worthless, he had refrained, till a little while before, from looking at them again; but upon a calmer investigation, he had discovered that, though by no means of the highest class, they were well worth the pains of restoration. He only hoped the others would turn out as well—they were in hand—his assistant there was at work on one of them now. At that moment this very assistant, rubbing away at the picture indicated, uttered a sudden cry, actually with something so like horror in its tone as to greatly startle us both. At a glance we discovered the cause of his fright. An angular piece of colour, as large as a crown-piece, had broken bodily away from the painting under his fingers. It was perhaps well that I was present, or I fear Baron Mordecai would not have restrained himself to the epithets and expletives he hurled at the poor fellow's head. The man wisely rushed from his incensed master's presence, and vanished. It was some time before the Baron recovered temper enough to scrutinise coolly the injury done.

"Mein himmel!" he exclaimed in his native German, as he did so, "what is here? It is all loose—see!" He was dabbling the surface near the hole with his fingers. "How—what is this? Ach, Gott!" He uttered a cry, as his man had done; for, as he pressed, another flake larger than the former fractured off. As if struck with a sudden thought, he stood for a moment to consider; then, in positively a frantic manner, after glaring at and tossing right and left the tools near him, he began shouting, "Hi! hi! hi! Come here instantly—hi there! Here, come here! Ach!" he went on, as the frightened face of his workman appeared at the door, "bring a paper-knife—your mistress—ask her for hers. And, hi!—some hot water in a bucket; and, ha!—a sponge—a large one. Quick—make haste—hi! this moment!" "Gott in himmel!" I heard him say to himself, as he pressed his hand to his forehead.

"I really feared his reason was upset. My presence seemed quite forgotten. After a moment he bent down over the fracture, and began rubbing with his forefinger in the hole, muttering all the while to himself something, of which I could only make out detached phrases.

"They often did it—they have done it very often. No concealment so sure! Mein himmel! No way so safe!—covered—hid in this way—why I never guessed it. If—if only—if it should—Gott!—a million!—worth a million! I—I beg your pardon, my lord," he said, recovering himself, and looking round confusedly, as his assistant brought him a paper-knife and a large bowl of hot water. "I pray forgive me. I forgot everything but this; what do you imagine I think it is?"

"I cannot guess, of course."

"I think it is a picture in *tempera*, painted over another picture—and if so, a fine one, be sure—to hide it. It has been done many times, especially in Spain. What—what if?—nonsense though!—but if? Ah, I don't dare hope that—but—I will soon see."

"He appeared to nerve himself as a surgeon does who is about to perform a difficult operation. Indeed he looked not unlike one as, tucking up his sleeves and steadying his hand, he proceeded cautiously to insert the blade of the knife under the edge of the fractured colour. It peeled up bit by bit. Then he applied the sponge and washed the surface—bit by bit there was another surface below—and it revealed brilliant colour. He seemed not able to control himself, but burst out in a short, triumphant sort of shout. Again, setting his teeth and compressing his lips, he worked on with knife and sponge; while I, breathless and excited to positive pain, stood by watching the progress he made, till, piece by piece, in little or large flakes, the whole of the superincumbent painting in *tempera* lay like broken plaster on the floor; and fresh, vivid, in all its glorious harmony of colour, design, expression, Murillo's greatest, matchless picture was revealed to us perfect as the day he painted it."

"Grand! grand!" I exclaimed. "And it is now in your lordship's possession?"

"Yes. It was long, though, before I could induce Baron Mordecai to part with it. I obtained it at last as a favour for thirteen thousand guineas. He parted with it with very great reluctance; and three months after wanted it back again for fifteen thousand. When I refused, he bid again and again up

to twenty thousand; he wanted to take it to St. Petersburg. Of course no money could buy it—no amount of money. When will you come and see it?"

"Your lordship is very kind—when shall you be at leisure?"

"Oh, whenever you will come. In the morning? say, early in the morning; and we can have a long gossip about that and the other things I have got together. And, madam," he said, addressing my gracious mother-in-law, "perhaps you, and all of yours here, will do me the honour to come to luncheon?"

So it was arranged.

I found his lordship next morning pacing the terrace in front of the house eagerly expecting me. He at once led the way to his gallery. There are few things I more delight in than wandering through a collection—pausing here; glancing there; studying carefully the handling of this master; dodging to get the right point of view, to take in all the effect of that; but, mind you, by myself. There are few things I find more wearisome than being led up to one *chef-d'œuvre*; stationed "just here" to look at a second; dragged away "to tell an opinion" of a third, or to extol "the fine quality of breadth" in a fourth, and—of all objectionable *ciceroni*—by the dilettante proprietor himself. He always has in his own mind, with regard to every one of them, foregone conclusions, against which the expression of an independent opinion is nearly sure to clash, and offend, as well, his *amour propre*. Hour after hour was I subjected to such a purgatory on this occasion. Not but that his lordship's collection was really a good one, not but that his lordship was a most delightful guide through it, but—he was monarch of all I surveyed. Inevitably, under such a condition, the power of ownership makes itself felt, if not expressed; submission seems expected, if not demanded; and admiration is called for as a tax imposed, instead of being yielded of free-will to merit for itself.

By the time we had made the circuit of the great gallery, I was so thoroughly jaded that I should have hailed as the greatest relief the appearance of the party from the Rectory, or the sound of the luncheon-bell; but no, there was yet more to see—the Viscount's cabinet of gems and the Murillo.

"It is here," his lordship said, pausing, and playing with the handle of the door before he opened it. "I built this room on purpose for it. If I were Aladdin, the genius should construct a palace on purpose, and my Murillo should occupy the place of the Roc's egg. Enter."

I entered. There was but one picture on the walls. Placed opposite to it, at the best point of view, was a *fresque*. The Viscount followed me close, as I advanced to the front. Whether he expected me to utter an exclamatory shout of delight, or pour out broken expressions of rapture, or make any other exhibition of intense feeling, I know not. Apparently he quite approved of the effect the first glance of the picture produced upon me, which was, simply, causing me to sink down overpowered, upon the seat so happily placed for one in my condition.

"Ah!" he exclaimed ecstatically, patting me on the shoulder. "I see—I see! I expected no less. I will leave you to yourself. There are states of pleasure when the presence of another is an intrusion, as much as it is in certain states of grief. You will find me in the gallery."

I am afraid I stared wildly at his lordship as he receded on tiptoe through the door, and then stared no less wildly at the picture before me.

As I live, it was my own painting of Salome and John the Baptist's head!

Ben ath it, framed and glazed, hung the etching that the Viscount had mentioned, fully lettered.

"Pintado por Murillo." "Grabado por Juan Ant<sup>o</sup> Salvador Carmona." "El Quadro original existe en la Sacristia del Convento de la Merced, en Sevilla."

I knew the name of Carmona as being the engraver of many of Murillo's pictures. The paper on which it was printed, like the painting, had been made to undergo processes that had given to both the aspect and mellowness of age.

My life has been so on one side of the wicked world—so apart from, so untroubled by, its knaveries, cunning, and frauds—that all my notions of villainy are ideal rather than real. Perhaps, too, I am what nowadays is expressively called "jolly green"—meaning, I take it, slow at suspicion; but I could not sit there looking at my own handiwork, with the Viscount's narrative fresh in my mind, and for one moment doubt that he had been made the victim of a cool, calculating, deliberately contrived, marvellously worked-out, gigantic swindle.

In the time I had for reflection, I could only arrive at a settled conviction of the fact, and at two resolutions: the first one being, to keep for the present my own counsel; the next, not to rest till I had found out the mystery of that blood-drained head; for all the horrible ideas connected with it were now rendered a hundredfold more cogent by my reflections suggesting, that those who had so little hesitation in employing all means useful for or necessary to their purpose, could have had no scruple in resorting even to murder.

When I rejoined the Viscount I had little difficulty in avoiding discussion, simply by looking intelligent and assentive; while he poured forth his own inexhaustible rapture of admiration of the work, and exultation at being its possessor. The next day I went back to London.

I had elicited from his lordship the two or three facts I required—the address of the late Baron Mordecai, that his relict survived, and that she still occupied their residence at Highgate. I had made up my mind to a certainty that in the Baroness I should discover my old patroness, the black-veiled duenna. Immediately upon my arrival in town I called upon my old friend, confidant, and counsellor, Morris Blake. Morris always asserted that unless he had the assistance of "baccy and strong waters" he was quite unqualified for the two latter offices. By observing what quantity of smoke he pulled out and how much whisky he took in, it was not difficult to estimate the degree of interest he felt in a story. Judging by these tests, I was highly gratified at the effects my tale produced—they were simply immense. "Having done, he gave me for my pains a 'world of thanks,' and, to use his own phrase, 'concurred intirely' in all my conclusions. And then, promising me his personal assistance and countenance, we arranged our plan of operations.

The following morning we went together to Highgate. We were fortunate; there was no difficulty in finding the house—a handsome mansion in its own grounds; and the Baroness was at home. Lest she should remember my name, we had agreed that Blake was to send in his card. There was no hesitation in admitting us, and we were shown at once into a

large apartment, which—although altered by the tapestry I formerly described being transferred to a different side, leaving the windows it before concealed visible—I immediately recognised as the one I had used for a studio. It was occupied by a lady, tall, and enormously fat, with grey hair, but dark eyebrows, dressed in deep mourning. She was seated at a table with what appeared to be a ledger and several account-books open before her. As we entered she turned upon us a glance of the keenest black eyes I had ever seen.

"Good mornin', shen'll'mens," she said; by Jove! with the preliminary wheeze and husky tones recognisable, and to be sworn to, as if heard only yesterday. "Vhat ist your blensure mit me? Veesh ist Mishter Blake?"

"Yours to command, madam," said Morris, bowing low. "But you'll not remember me. Sure it's my friend here that's wantin' to renew the pleasure of an old acquaintance with you, Baroness."

"An old acquaintance mit me!" she exclaimed, turning on me a searching look. "Vhat ist your name?"

"Permit me the honour, madam," I replied, placing my card before her. "Surely you have not forgotten me?" As she read my card, and I spoke, her expression visibly changed to one curiously impenetrable and defiant.

"I nefare knowd you—I hafe nefare seen you in all mine life. Vhat ist you mean?" she hastily answered, rising, and at the same time pulling a bell.

"Mean, madam? Oh, nothing but to recall myself to your memory. I know it is many years ago, but you can hardly have forgotten that I painted in this room a picture, in which the deaf-and-dumb model, Serafina Pagano, commonly called 'La Principessa,' whom you brought from Florence, and who is now living at Naples, sat for one of the figures, and which picture the late Baron Mordecai sold as a Murillo to Viscount Brickbrakmont for thirteen thousand guineas, as his lordship told me only the day before yesterday."

As I went on speaking, she turned very pale, and pressed her hand painfully on her bosom; and when I finished, apparently taken quite off her guard, in a hoarse, broken whisper, asked the question that, in reality, acknowledged everything.

"Hafe you tell eem as you vas haint it?"

"No; I have told him nothing yet." My reply seemed to relieve her; but she sank into her seat again, as if unable to support herself.

At the same time, from the door through which I used to go to my bedroom, there entered a man in whom, despite a bald head and other changes which age had made in his appearance, I recognised the individual I had seen under the carriage-lamp, with features, the prototypes of those belonging to the dead head. He seemed sorely startled at beholding the palpable agitation of the Baroness, and demanded in a bullying tone:

"Was giebt's denn? was giebt's denn?"

"Schweig, schweig, Nathan!" the lady answered, holding up her hand and beckoning him. "Zu mir gleich, gleich!"

Long and earnestly they conversed in whispered German. My companion and I curiously noticed how Nathan seemed suddenly, from the first words she spoke to him, to be infected by his mistress's fear and pallor. Gradually, as they continued to converse, we observed stealing over the faces of both the same hard defiant expression assumed at first by the lady. At last the man turned to us, and said, quite in a threatening manner:

"De Baroness Mordecai say she knew nothing about de von or de Coder oaf you; an' noting about no picture at all;—no. So you git away mit you, both at once."

I was about to reply in a very indignant manner; but Morris, turning upon me a look with the irrepressible devil of an Irishman's fun in it, took upon himself to be spokesman. "It was in his very sweetest manner that he said:

"Oh bedad! I was just thinking so, sirr. An' it's sorry I am for any bother we've given the Baroness; an' I hope she'll forgive us, seeing it was only because we consated we'd settle by a little cosy chat among ourselves, ye see, the trouble she's likely to git out o' lawshutes, an' all that, with my Lord Viscount Brickbrakmont." (good heavens! how he mouthed the title); "an' also havin' a lot o' quare stories raked up consarnin' how the Baron—rest his soule!—used to manufacture old pictures out o' new ones. An' there's that quare story yet about a kilt man's head—for kilt, somehow, we all know he was—over the likes o' which the rascally police, magistrates, an' editors o' papers'll just make a shine—oh! such a shine! won't they? But there; if it's only disagreeable we're making ourselves—many apologies, madam and sirr—good mornin';—we'll humbly take our leaves,—good mornin'."

Immense was the effect of this "firework" which Morris threw at the pair; every joint of the cracker as it exploded increased their obvious dismay, especially that of the Baroness.

"Shtop! shtop! eef you please. You don't go till I vas shpeak mit you," she querulously entreated, recalling us. She had become more dandy pale, and was pressing her hand with more painful gesture upon her heart. "Nathan, halt des man!" she said, speaking with great sharpness to the man; then she addressed me, moving at the same time to the recess of the farthest window. "You shoost blense to coom here. Let me talk a leetle mit you."

I went to her; but it struck me as rather a hardy thing to do, for, as she faced me, I think I never saw a human face with an aspect of such fierce malevolence.

"Now den," she asked, in a short, sharp whisper, "how mo'sh you vant?"

"How much I want!" I repeated, taken completely aback.

"Ach, ya-eel say, how mo'sh money?"

"Money!" I exclaimed, laughing, as her view of what we came for dawned upon me. "My good madam, I don't want any money."

"Himmel's donner! was ist es den as you vants?"

"Baroness," I said, speaking aloud, and moving to the centre of the room, "my friend is of counsel with me in this matter. I can have no discussion with you to which he is not a party. What I want is satisfaction to some very uneasy feelings I have. I ask you, and you must—mind me, you must—explain to me the mystery of that man's head which I painted here, how he came by his death?"

"Gott in himmel!" she interrupted me by exclaiming indignantly. "Vhat!—you tinks we 'as mordert eem?"

"I hope not," I replied firmly.

"Vhy, he vas dis man's bruder—Nathan's zwillings-bruder—vhat you calls eems tveen."

"Good Lord!—his twin-brother!" I could not help ex-