

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

RESIGNATION.

Beneath the frowns of leaden skies
We say "To-morrow will be fine."
And, piercing through with hopeful eyes,
See far beyond the gay sunshine.

But when the heaven is bright and blue
We search around for cause of fear,
And with foreboding's dismal hue
Bedim the radiant atmosphere.

Oh! better were it still to trust
In Him who rules the sun and rain,
Nor ever doubt that He is just,
Whether He send us joy or pain.

Both are the lessons of His love,
By which our souls are gently led
To look for endless joys above,
When all earth's changing scenes are fled.

JOHN READ.

LOVE IN THE CLOUDS.

"And this is the fellow that wants to marry my daughter! A pretty fool I should be to give Annie to a coward like him!"

So shouted honest Master Joss, the sacristan of the cathedral of Vienna, as he stood in the public room of the "Adam and Eve" inn, and looked after the angry retreating figure of Master Ottkar, the head-mason.

As he spoke, an honest young gardener, named Gabriel, entered; and for a moment the youth's handsome face flushed high, as though the sacristan's words were directed at him. For it was the old old story. Gabriel and Annie had played together and loved each other before they knew the meaning of the word love; and when, a few months before, they had found it out, and Gabriel proposed to make Annie his wife, her father rejected him with scorn. The young gardener had little to offer besides an honest heart and a pair of industrious hands, while Master Ottkar, the mason, had both houses and money. To him, then, sorely against her will, was the pretty Annie promised; and poor Gabriel kept away from the sacristan's pleasant cottage, manfully endeavouring to root out his love while exterminating the weeds in his garden. But somehow it happened that, although the docks and thistles withered and died, that other pertinacious plant, clinging and twining like the wild convolvulus, grew and flourished, nurtured, perchance, by an occasional distant glimpse of sweet Annie's pale cheek and drooping form.

So matters stood, when one day, as Gabriel was passing through a crowded street, a neighbour hailed him:

"Great news, my boy! glorious news! Our Leopold has been chosen Emperor at Frankfurt. Long live the House of Austria! He is to make his triumphal entry here in a day or two. Come with me to the 'Adam and Eve,' and we will drink his health, and hear all about it."

In spite of his dejection, Gabriel would have been no true son of Vienna if he had refused this invitation; and waving his cap in sympathy with his comrade's enthusiasm, he hastened with him to the inn.

We have already seen how the unexpected appearance, and more unexpected words, of Master Joss met him on his entrance. In the height of his indignation, the sacristan did not observe Gabriel, and continued in the same tone:

"I declare, I'd give this moment full and free permission to you and win my daughter to any honest young fellow who would wave the banner in my stead—ay, and think her well rid of that cowardly mason."

From time immemorial it had been the custom in Vienna, whenever the Emperor made a triumphal entry, for the sacristan of the cathedral to stand on the very pinnacle of the highest tower, and wave a banner while the procession passed. But Master Joss was old, stiff, and rheumatic, and such an exploit would have been quite as much out of his line as dancing on a tight-rope. It was therefore needful for him to provide a substitute; and it never occurred to him that his intended son-in-law, who professed such devotion to his interests, and whose daily occupation obliged him to climb to dizzy heights, and stand on slender scaffolding, could possibly object to take his place.

What, then, was his chagrin and indignation when, on broaching the matter that afternoon to Master Ottkar, he was met by a flat and not over-courteous refusal! The old man made a hasty retort: words ran high, and the parting volley, levelled at the retreating mason, we have already reported.

"Would you, dear Master Joss, would you indeed do so? Then, with the help of Providence, I'll wave the banner for you as long as you please from the top of St. Stephen's tower."

"You, Gabriel?" said the old man, looking at him as kindly as he was wont to do in former days. "My poor boy! you never could do it; you, a gardener, who never had any practice in climbing."

"Ah, now you want to draw back from your word!" exclaimed the youth, reddening. "My head is steady enough; and if my heart is heavy, why, it was you who made it so. Never mind, Master Joss. Only promise me, on the word of an honest man, that you'll not interfere any more with Annie's free choice, and you may depend on seeing the banner of our Emperor, whom may Heaven long preserve, wave gloriously on the old pinnacle."

"I will, my brave lad; I do promise, in the presence of all those honest folks, that Annie shall be yours!" said the sacristan, grasping Gabriel's hand with one of his, while he wiped his eyes with the back of the other.

"One thing I have to ask you," said the young man, "that you'll keep this matter a secret from Annie. She'd never consent; she'd say I was tempting Providence; and who knows whether the thought of her displeasure might not make my head turn giddy, just when I want it to be most firm and collected?"

"No fear of her knowing it, for I have sent her on a visit to her aunt, two or three miles in the country."

"And why did you send her from home, Master Joss?" asked Gabriel.

"Because the sight of her pale face and weeping eyes troubled me; because I was vexed with her; because, to tell you the truth, I was vexed with myself. Gabriel, I was a hard-hearted fool, I see it now. And I was very near destroying the happiness of my only remaining child; for my poor boy Arnold, your old friend and school-fellow, Gabriel, has been for years in foreign parts, and we don't know what has

become of him. But now, please God, Annie at least will be happy, and you shall marry her, my lad, as soon after the day of the procession as you and she please. There's my hand on't."

There was not a happier man that evening within the precincts of Vienna than Gabriel, the gardener, although he well knew that he was attempting a most perilous enterprise, and one as likely as not to result in his death. He made all necessary arrangements in case of that event, especially in reference to the comfort of an only sister who lived with him, and whom he was careful to keep in ignorance of his intended venture. This done, he resigned himself to dream all night of tumbling from terrific heights, and all day of his approaching happiness.

Meanwhile, Ottkar swallowed his chagrin as he best might, and kept aloof from Master Joss; but he might have been seen holding frequent and secret communications with Lawrence, a man who assisted the sacristan in the care of the church.

The day of the young Emperor's triumphal entry arrived. He was not expected to reach Vienna before evening; and at the appointed hour the sacristan embraced Gabriel, and giving him the banner of the House of Austria, gorgeously embroidered, said:

"Now, my boy, up, in God's name! Follow Lawrence; he'll guide you safely to the top of the spire, and afterwards assist you in coming down."

Five hundred and fifty steps to the top of the tower! Mere child's play—the young gardener flew them up with a joyous step. Then came two hundred wooden stairs over the clock-tower and belfry; then five steep ladders up the narrow pinnacle. Courage! A few more bold steps—half an hour of peril—then triumph, reward, the priest's blessing, and the joyful "Yes!" before the altar. Ah, how heavy was the ladder to drag upwards—how dark the strait, stony stony shaft! Hold, there is the trap-door. Lawrence, and an assistant who accompanied him, pushed Gabriel through.

"That's it!" cried Lawrence; you'll see the iron steps and the clamps to hold on by outside—only keep your head steady. When 'tis your time to come down, hail us, and we'll throw you a rope-ladder with hooks. Farewell!"

As he said these words, Gabriel had passed through the trap-door, and with feet and hands clinging to the slender iron projections, felt himself hanging over a tremendous precipice, while the cold evening breeze ruffled his hair. He had still, burdened as he was with the banner, to steady himself on a part of the spire sculptured in the similitude of a rose, and then, after two or three daring steps still higher, to bestride the very pinnacle, and wave his gay gold flag.

"May God be merciful to me!" sighed the poor lad, as glancing downward on the busy streets, lying so far beneath, the whole extent of his danger flashed upon him. He felt so lonely, so utterly forsaken in that desert of the upper air, and the cruel wind strove with him, and struggled to wrest the heavy banner from his hand.

"Annie, Annie, 'tis for thee!" he murmured, and the sound of that sweet name nerved him to endurance. He wound his left arm firmly round the iron bar which supported the golden star, surmounted by a crescent, that served as a weather-cock, and with the right waved the flag, which flapped and rustled like the wing of some mighty bird of prey. The sky—how near it seemed—grew dark above his head, and the lights and bonfires glanced upwards from the great city below. But the cries of rejoicing came faintly on his ear, until one long-continued shout, mingled with the sound of drums and trumpets, announced the approach of Emperor Leopold.

"Huzza! huzza! long live the Emperor!" shouted Gabriel, and waved his banner proudly. But the deepening twilight and the dizzy height rendered him unseen and unheard by the busy crowd below.

The deep voice of the cathedral clock tolled the hour. "Now my task is ended," said Gabriel, drawing a deep sigh of relief, and shivering in the chilly breeze. "Now I have only to get down and give the signal."

More heedfully and slowly than he had ascended, he began his descent. Only once he looked upward to the golden star and crescent, now beginning to look colourless against the dark sky.

"Ha!" said he, "doesn't it look now as if that heathenish Turk of a crescent were nodding and wishing me an evil 'good-night'? Be quiet, Mohammed!"

A few courageous steps landed him once more amid the petals of the gigantic sculptured rose, which offered the best, indeed the only coigne of vantage for his feet to rest on.

He furled his banner tightly together, and shouted:

"Hollo, Lawrence! Albert! here! throw me up the ladder and the hooks."

No answer.

More loudly and shrilly did Gabriel reiterate the call.

Not a word, not a stir below.

"Holy Virgin! can they have forgotten me? Or have they fallen asleep?" cried the poor fellow aloud; and the sighing wind seemed to answer like a mocking demon.

"What shall I do? What will become of me?"

Now enveloped in darkness, he dared not stir one hair-breadth to the right or to the left. A painful sensation of tightness came across his chest, and his soul grew bitter within him.

"They have left me here of set purpose," he muttered through his clenched teeth. "The torches below will shine on my crushed body."

Then, after a moment:

"No, no; the sacristan could not find it in his heart; men born of women could not do it. They will come. They must come."

But when they did not come, and the pitiless darkness thickened around him, so that he could not see his hand, his death-anguish grew to the pitch of insanity.

"God!" he cried, "the Emperor will not suffer such barbarity. Noble Leopold, help! One word from you would save me."

But the cold night wind, blowing ominously around the tower, seemed to answer:

"Here I alone am Emperor, and this is my domain."

While this was passing, two men stood conversing together at the corner of a dark street, aloof from the rejoicing crowd.

"Haven't I managed it well?" asked one.

"Yes; he'll never reach the ground alive, unless the sacristan—"

"O no, the old man is too busy with his son, who came

home unexpectedly an hour ago. He'll never think of that fool Gabriel until—"

"Until 'tis too late. How did you get rid of Albert?"

"By telling him that Master Joss had undertaken to go himself, and fetch the gardener down. The trap-door is fast, and no one within call. But I think, Master Ottkar, you and I may as well keep out of the way till the fellow has dropped down, like a ripe apple from the stem."

And so the two villains took their way down a narrow street, and appeared no more that night.

Meantime, a dark shadowy fiend sat on one of the leaves of the sculptured rose, and hissed in Gabriel's ear:

"Renounce thy salvation, and I will bring thee down in safety."

"May God preserve me from such sin," cried the poor lad, shuddering.

"Or only promise to give me your Annie, and I'll save you."

"Will you hold your tongue, you wicked spirit?"

"Or just say that you'll make me a present of your first-born child, and I'll bear you away as softly as if you were floating down."

"Avaunt, Satan! I'll have nothing to do with gentlemen who wear horns and a tail!" cried Gabriel, manfully.

The clock tolled again, and the gardener, aroused by the sound and vibration, perceived that he had been asleep. Yes, he had actually slumbered, standing on that dizzy point, suspended over that fearful abyss.

"Am I really here?" he asked himself, as he awoke; "or is it all a frightful dream that I have had while lying in my bed?"

A cold shudder passed through his frame, followed by a burning heat, and he grasped the pinnacle with a convulsive tightness. A voice seemed to whisper in his ear:

"Fool! this is death, that unknown anguish which no man shall escape. Anticipate the moment, and throw thyself down."

"Must I, then, die?" murmured Gabriel, while the cold sweat started from his brow. "Must I die while life is so pleasant? O Annie, Annie! pray for me; the world is so beautiful, and life is so sweet."

Then it seemed as if soft white wings floated above and around him, while a gentle voice whispered:

"Awake, awake! The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Look up, and be comforted."

Wrapped in the banner, whose weight helped to preserve his equilibrium, Gabriel still held on with his numb arm, and, with a sensation almost of joy, watched the first dawn lighting up the roofs of the city.

Far below, in the sacristan's dwelling, the old man sat, fondly clasping the hand of a handsome, sunburnt youth, his long-lost son Arnold, who had sat by his side the livelong night, recounting the adventures which had befallen him in foreign lands, without either father or son feeling the want of sleep.

At length Arnold said:

"I am longing to see Annie, father. I dare say she has grown a fine girl. How is my friend Gabriel, who used to be so fond of her when we were all children together?"

The sacristan sprang from his seat.

"Gabriel! Holy Virgin! I had quite forgotten him!"

A rapid explanation followed. Master Joss and his son hastened towards the cathedral, and met Albert on their way.

"Where is Gabriel?" cried the sacristan.

"I don't know; I have not seen him since he climbed through the trap-door."

"But who helped him down?"

"Why, you yourself, of course," replied Albert, with a look of astonishment. "Lawrence told me, when we came down, that you had undertaken to do it."

"Oh, the villains, the double-dyed scoundrels! Now I understand it all," groaned the old man. "Quick! Arnold, Albert! Come, for the love of God; look up, look up to the spire!"

Arnold rushed towards the square, and his keen eye, accustomed to look out at great distances at sea, discerned through the gray, uncertain morning twilight something fluttering on the spire.

"Tis he! It must be he, still living."

"O God!" cried Master Joss, "where are my keys? O that we may not be too late."

The keys were found in the old man's pocket; and all three, rushing through the cathedral-gate, darted up the stairs, the sacristan, in the dread excitement of the moment, moving as swiftly as his young companions.

Albert, knowing the trick of the trap-door, went through it first.

"Call out to him, lad!" exclaimed Master Joss.

A breathless pause.

"I hear nothing stirring," said Albert, "nor can I see anything from this. I'll climb over the rose."

Bravely did he surmount the perilous projection; and after a few moments of intense anxiety, he reappeared at the trap-door.

"There certainly is a figure standing on the rose, but 'tisn't Gabriel—'tis a ghost!"

"A ghost! you dreaming dunderhead," shouted Arnold.

"Let me up," and he began to climb with the agility of a cat.

Presently he called out: "Come on, come on, as far as you can. I have him, thank God! But quick; time is precious."

Speedily and deftly they gave him aid; and at length, a half-unconscious figure, still wrapped in the banner, was brought down in safety.

They bore him into the "Adam and Eve," laid him in a warm bed, and poured by degrees a little wine down his throat. Under this treatment, he soon recovered his consciousness, and began to thank his deliverers. Suddenly his eye fell on a mirror hanging on the wall opposite the bed, and he exclaimed:

"Wipe the hoar-frost off my hair, and that yellow dust off my cheeks!"

In truth, his curled locks were white, his rosy cheeks yellow and wrinkled, and his bright eyes dim and sunken; but neither dust nor hoar-frost was there to wipe away—that one night of horror had added forty years to his age!

In the course of that day, numbers who had heard of Gabriel's adventure crowded to the inn and sought to see him, but none were admitted save the three who sat continually by his bedside—his weeping young sister, the brave Arnold, and