



FOUND, on a holiday, unburdened by any plans, I sought the little tranquil town of Berthier, and there learnt this tale on the banks of the Bayonne river.

An old *habitant* told it me as he sat in a broken chair outside the time-stained door of the old white manor house, with his black clay pipe between his grimy fingers, his faded blue worsted tassel fluttered in the breeze, brushing against his dull grey hair and rugged cheeks. On the same "stoop"—perchance the same chair—as he mentioned amongst his many *histoires*, the Duke of Kent had rested after a dinner within the hospitable walls of this old manor house. How many years ago? When the *seigneur* lived there, and lived as only a *seigneur* knew how to live. But the story that touched me was not their story, but the story of Victoria, a lowly maiden, who had wandered through these long, low beamed rooms when they had fallen from their grandeur and become the home of a poor but honest *habitant*. She was a pretty girl, this Victoria, his daughter,—as pretty as only a fair French girl can be, with English blue eyes rid of all their languor, and creamy skin tinged with the soft crimson that first touches the maple trees in early autumn.

They were very dear to her, the traditions of the old place; the lives of the great people who had passed their days beneath the roof which now witnessed her out goings, her in-comings; to her fancy the place was still peopled by forms with soft garments and softer voices, who moved merrily about and stepped so demurely over the green grasses to the little stone chapel in the grounds, to say their evening prayers, or, perchance, perform a petty penance. Then she would cry to think their dust now rested beneath the very boards they had so happily trod. But by-and-by came her own trial, and these were for the nonce forgotten.

Just half a mile from the manor door, or, as those from whom she was descended would have said—a *pipe's length*—stood the smithy. It was but a grey, barn-like building, slightly leaning to one side, as though it had been battered by many storms. Its walls were symbolical of the scenes within. There was a long and irregular row of painted horse-shoes above the door, and a genuine one fastened, with what had once been a gay ribbon, against a project-

ing beam, and a big black horse depicted in fiery disfavour of the forge, by an amateur artist's brush.

Within there was beauty because of the reality. The flaming fire of the forge, the sparks spurring upwards into the wide chimney, lighting the dark leathery face of Joe Dasseloa, as he stooped over the shoeing of a horse, while his son Dan stood near-by learning the trade. Dan was a strapping lad and inherited the large dreamy eyes his name gave him the right to. On his knees before the forge he looked more like a religious devotee than an embryo blacksmith. There was a sternness in the outline of his features against the fire, which only his eyes belied. It was just so that Victoria had first seen him, and after

that first meeting many followed.

All the villagers looked on and wondered. She was not held in much favour,—this little French girl with the English hair and high notions. An old crony shook her head portentously over her store of sweets,—“no good would come of it,” and to hasten the fulfilment of the prophecy hobbled over to the manor one morning after learning at Mass that these two were going to be married.

She found Victoria singing as blithely at her spinning wheel as ever Priscilla sang in expectation of the gallant John Alden's arrival, and what passed between these two when the wheel stopped no one ever knew; but as the old dame ambled down the long, straight avenue with its borders of broad armed elms, Victoria sped with pale face and miserable eyes to the little chapel in the fields, and there wept her sorrow out on its cold stones.

When Dan walked through the moonlight that evening, to meet his soft-haired sweetheart, no gleeful voice greeted him. He waited in the door-way fully five minutes before she appeared, and then as he looked at her, wonderment, dismay, fear, encompassed him. Such a cold, distant Victoria, with all the colour gone from her cheeks, the tenderness from her eyes. She bid him follow her, and so he

went, scarcely conscious of movement. The October moon glinted through the tall trees and touched Victoria's frock as she flitted along the pathway in front of him, until she reached the “Lovers' Walk.” Such a dell for happy lovers. A spot sanctified by nature. In just such a place might Lancelot in safety have sought the unhappy Queen, or a later Hero and Leander strayed without the fear of a dividing sea.

There were bitter words beneath the bare boughs that had budded over their betrothal in the sweet May days, and when they parted it was in cold pride and tearless eyed anger.

Dan had fiercely declared he would never come back to her, and she had cried she could never wish him to.

A year went by. The autumn came again with its many glories of harmonious colourings and crept on into the winter with its wonders of frost, and ice, and snow.

Time teaches us many things. Well for us if she does so tenderly, instead of turning satirist, as oft it pleases her.

Victoria had come to comprehend that love forgives the past, purifies the present.

If Dan had only come then he would have found a faithful woman waiting for him with nothing but affection and forgiveness in her heart. But still he did not come. The forge still burned brightly with old Joe Dasseloa at the bellows, but no dreamy-eyed boy stood at his elbow. Perhaps Joe knew of his son's whereabouts, or perhaps even he did not; be that as it may no word, no whisper of Dan had come to Victoria's hearing since that cruel October evening when the moon witnessed their cold parting in the “Lovers' Walk.” Each day since then she had told God of her desire.

“Let me see him! Let me see him!”

She sent this prayer through the holy saints, hoping for its acceptance.

“Let me see him!”

Her heart told her this would be sufficient if she could but meet him. What was to follow would be easy.

The day before Christmas came. There had been a shower of rain after a steady snow-storm, and near and far the ground sparkled as though spread with precious stones, and every bare branch had become a marvel of beauty, incased in shiny covering of ice and snow. The sun shone in unclouded glory on the fairy scene. The crispness in the air carried courage to Victoria's heart. Everything held a hope of happiness.

Victoria thrilled with the certainty of coming good as she drove over to Midnight Mass under the star-lit sky. Even the tinkling of the turret bells on the old brown mare added to her exhilaration. There was one star, larger, brighter than all the rest before her. It kept her gaze. Had not so the shepherds been guided to their Saviour hundreds of years before? This was her star of Bethlehem guiding her to happiness. It seemed to hang between the tall spires of the white walled church. She wanted Dan, and heaven would send him to her. When we are young we have such hearty faith in heaven's regard for our individual welfare.

When Victoria knelt before the railings to receive the blessed sacrament she only sent this simple supplication to the throne:

“Let me see him!” Let me see him!”

Then she raised her head, and what she had prayed for had come to pass. Dan stood before her. But behind the altar railings.

His face was filled with a light that had not before lain on its features, while from his lips slowly fell the sacred words:

“*Corpus Domini Nostri Jesu Christi Custodiat Animam Tuam in Vitam Aeternam.*”



IN GASPE HARBOUR.