

nimble-footed debtor at the advent of a hum-bailliff!

"Just as the strong-lunged warder, on the climax of the dungeon keep, proclaimed that the sixth day of my misery had reached its meridian, the door of the dungeon flew open as usual, and in marched the misbegotten Clootz-mahoun, with his wonted train of ministering demons.

"This time the trial assumed a new aspect. The dishes which the sneering scoundrels bore, contained a fresh aliment! Oysters formed the staple of the temptation!

"There were raw oysters—scalloped oysters—fried oysters—pickled oysters—stewed oysters—oyster soup—and oyster patés! Oysters in every shape, phase, and form, which the diabolical ingenuity of fallen man could by any possibility devise! I verily believe that if Ancient Plunder (now vulgarly styled Old Booty) had officiated, for that day only, as cook to my jailor, he could not have added a single additional item to this felonious bill of fare!

"Now, noble ladies, you must know, that the above mentioned variety of shell-fish had ever been one of my fondest and most cherished solacements. Since the days of my sunny childhood, I could have lived on oysters from the *alpha* of the year to the *omega* thereof, without once seeking or sighing for change,

"This weakness I had unconsciously betrayed in the ravings of a troubled slumber, to a lurking spy of a turnkey, who failed not to enlighten his chief on the subject. Being thus put up to the dodge, the viper invented this gigantic trial, to which the faith and firmness of your humble obedient servant was now exposed.

"Oh, my Sultanas, words the most vivid are all too feeble to adumbrate the crushing misery which I endured in the course of this terrific ordeal! To a wretch squirming under a six days' fast, North British collops were madness, but oysters constituted a cento of the horrors of Tartarus itself!

"There lay the maddening messes, ranged, like the far famed two dozen violinists, *all in a row!* Every one of them appeared gifted, *pro re nata*, with speech, and to intone,—*come eat me! come eat me!* To this blessed hour, I marvel hugely, that confirmed demeritation did not immigrate into my horrically anguished brain! And there stood the Austrian oppressor—the incarnate son of perdition, repeating his thrice-infamous propositions, and, between hands,

singing forth the praises of the too, too captivating natives! Jupiter Tonans! where then slumbered thy thunderbolts, that they did not smite the malevolent monster into merited perdition?"

Here, aunt and niece simultaneously exclaimed, in sympathetic chorus,—“Where, indeed?”

“For a season,” the Count went on to say. “I managed to preserve my self-command, but at length, the trial became too tremendous for poor flesh and blood to bear!”

“What!” exclaimed the much alarmed Fanny, “did you consent to heap odium on the honoured head of your country’s idol for the sake of a paltry shell-fish?”

“No beloved!” was Widdicomb’s response, “Heaven be praised I was preserved from such an abyss of turpitude! As I said before, however, I could no longer bear up against the test to which my frenzied appetite was subjected! With a shriek that might have caused the ears of deaf Burke to tingle, I started to my feet, and by a mighty, spasmodic effort, burst my fetters as if they had been threads of a spider’s manufacture!”

“Ha! ha! ha! how I laughed, and yelled, and shouted, as I darted pell mell, slap dash, at the congregated oysters! At one absorbing gulp I drained off the soup, though it was hot as the molten lava of Mount Etna, or the limb of an intensely devilled turkey! Ere you could invoke the time-honoured name of Saint John Robinson, I was pegging away at the balance of the dishes, and in the twinkling of an optic they were clean, as if they had been subjected to the manipulation of a scullion! Speedy as the levin bolt, I next tackled a heavy headed poculum of double X, and before the world was a minute more ancient, the bottom thereof was as dry as a long winded essay on political economy! I did not even take time to ejaculate the customary orison of ‘*Ullit luck!*’”

“But pray, Sir Count,” interjected Laura Matilda, “what was the odious Clootzmaheou doing all this time?”

“He and his myrmidons,” answered Blitzen, “were fairly palsied with astonishment and surprise. So soon, however, as their presence of mind was restored, the biped scorpions rushed upon your unfortunate servitor *en masse*, and bearing me to the earth once more, fixed the cramping gyves upon my limbs!”