

TO THEE, FAIR SPRING.

BY THOMAS CLAUDE DEAN.

I.

Fair child, from Father Time's unclouded Isles;
Pride of the passing year, with rapture deep
We hail thy glad return. Behold! thy smiles
Are brighter than a youthful lover's sleep.
The waking world throws off the fetters strange,
Which long have bound her fast to Winter's throng,
And, glad that she has reached thy sunny range,
Lifts up her voice in song.

II.

Now thou art here again, the laughing rill
Shall chant its anthems to the rising sun;
The feathered bands shall meet in crowds, and fill
The air with music, when the day is done;
The river shall again, triumphantly,
Call back the beauty of its white cascades,
And then bear onward to the great, dark sea,
Its matchless serenades.

III.

Again, within the precincts of the deep,
Sequestered woods, the fabled Dryads gay,
Shall hold their banquets where the mad winds sleep,
Cheered by the murmur of the budding spray;
Here, too, the butterflies shall hold again
Their airy gambols when the sun is high;
Foregoing not the raptures of their reign
Until the night is nigh.

IV.

Again, within the boundaries of the fair,
Bright valleys, where the tender passions dwell,
The shrubs shall bend and woo the scented air
At morning, when the floral waves shall swell;
And when the day is at its full, the birds,
Glad that the winter storms no longer rave,
Shall gather here again in joyous herds
Where the arched branches wave.

V.

Again, upon the hills, where years ago
Our fathers gathered strength in praise and song,
The early flowers, bending to and fro,
Shall hold communion with the fairy throng;
Here, also, when the joyous day grows old,
Again each plant shall by the sun be blessed,
And then receive from her a gift of gold
Ere she sinks into rest.

VI.

Again, among the leagues of dancing waves,
The dizzy gulls shall meet in mystic glee,
And hold their revels o'er the unknown graves
Of those who have found rest beneath the sea;
And when the phantom touch of fearful night
Shall bid the liquid separation roar,
Again these gulls shall take their homeward flight
Along the pebbled shore.

VII.

Yes, gentle spring, now thou art here again
To breathe thy fragrance on the land and sea.
All living creatures shall forget their pain,
Filled with the volume of their love for thee.
And as the days pass on towards the dim,
Dark country, where the bells of Future chime,
The moving earth shall throng with praise to Him
Who holds the wings of Time.

Trenton, April 9th, 1879.

THE VILLA POTTIER.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS.

I.

"As for that," said our notary with a shrug, "there are times in all men's lives of which they do not care to talk—periods of failure and depression—and in the same way we French are not too fond of talking about the late war, so let us pass to something else."

We had been dining with our notary and were now taking our dessert in the garden, a rough, unkempt kind of place, but picturesque, too, in its wealth of roses and wild, tangled creepers. Through the heavy wooden gates you caught a glimpse of the Seine, calm and placid in the golden light of a summer's evening. Beyond the broad expanse of river tall poplars caught the last rays of the setting sun, and between these a hazy band of purple suggested a distant landscape and far away hills. The last glass of the old Bourdeaux, rivaling in colour the glowing tints of the sky, was about to disappear. Rosalie, the ancient bonne, stood behind us hugging the big black coffee-pot, one man was rolling up a cigarette, another lighting a cigar, while the notary's hand instinctively sought his pocket for his pipe.

"Rosalie," said one of the guests, turning to the bonne, "we have been talking of the war. You could tell these gentlemen a few things about that, eh?"

"Ah, ah! Have you told monsieur of the havoc the Prussians made with our master's best faience and the holes they burned in the curtains?"

"Such are the impressions that great events make on ordinary minds," cried the notary, "and is it not the same with all of us? In my own mind, the great tragedies of the war occupy less space than the insignificant part played by myself."

It was quite clear that in spite of his alleged reluctance to talk about the war, the worthy notary had a story on his mind, and it required little pressing on the part of his friends to elicit it.

"It was a sad, dull time," he began, "as most of us remember, the time of the Prussian occupation. The future was wrapped in gloom, the present hideous with the perpetual sense of humiliation. In my own profession there was little or nothing doing; no marriage contracts, no transfer of lands. If you would borrow there was no one to lend; indeed, coin was almost unknown among us. Our banker had fled to Paris, and was there shut up; and those who

had money buried it in the ground. You will remember, Pottier," turning to one of his guests, "the circumstances under which I confided to you the whereabouts of my own strong box."

M. Pottier nodded gravely, and held out his hand to the notary, who pressed it warmly.

"Like many others in those days of sadness,"

went on M. Brunet, "I took refuge from the contemplation of my country's misfortunes in the pursuit of my studies, partially suspended from the pressure of more urgent business. I began to prepare a long-delayed monograph on the geological structure of the basin of the Lower Seine for our local society. I doubted very much whether our society would ever meet again. I thought it most improbable that my paper would ever see the light, but I went on blindly, hopelessly, but still on. Two young Prussian officers were quartered on me—they might have been Bavarians, but they are all Prussians to me—and as individuals I had nothing to complain of in them. They spoke our language fluently enough, although with a vile accent, and they made themselves very merry with Rosalie and Susette, my servants. Me they left alone to my studies and my gloomy thoughts. These thoughts were made gloomier still by anxiety as to the fate of my younger brother, my only living relative. Ernest was almost a son to me as well as a brother. A well-beloved mother on her death-bed had confided him to my charge. He had just completed his studies, and was about to become an avocat, and he was already affianced to Mademoiselle Therese, the charming daughter of M. Pottier; and, indeed, the necessary notice had been given at the mairie for their marriage, when the progress of the Prussians necessitated postponement. I had purchased a substitute for him in the ranks of the army—a thing permitted in those days—but he had thrown in his lot with those who were fighting for their country, and, madly, as I thought, had joined one of those irregular bands of francs-tireurs who, to say the truth, were almost as formidable to their countrymen as to their foes. Not a word had come to me from him for many weeks."

"The winter was frightfully cold, you may remember, and the river was almost covered with ice—ice in huge masses, that went up and down with the tide, jarring and clashing together dismally. Never such a desolate scene as then upon our quay. Not a sail upon the river, not a boat could venture out, nor were there any faces in the street, unless under a pickelhaube. I sat one night in my library, working away at my manuscript, consoled a little by the reflection suggested by my subject, that, after all, the troubles of the human race were the merest trifles in comparison with the great cyclic changes I was now studying. Everything was quite still, except the measured tread of the sentry outside."

"It jarred sadly upon me, that solid martial tread, reminding me that there was no escape anywhere from the scene of the invader's presence. The step approached, the step died away in the distance, with a measured swing like the beat of a pendulum; and then when the pendulum had reached its furthest limit I heard a low tap at my library window, a low tap such as my brother used to give when coming home late, he would find the house locked up and every light but mine extinguished."

"I opened the window and looked out. Nothing was to be seen but fog, in which the feeble rays of the street-lamp at the corner seemed quenched and lost. An indescribable feeling of trouble and depression came over me. My philosophy was at fault for once. I could not escape the influence of hitherto despised superstition. Perhaps he was dead, my brother, and thinking of me at his last moment, had sent me this message. I peered out into the formless void without, in vague expectation of I knew not what. Memories of the past came back to me; the bitter thought of what is passed forever, hopelessly bitter to the lonely childless man."

"Have you all that you want to-night, sir?" said a voice at the door. It was my tall, awkward bonne Susette. I had sent her hours before to the house of my friend Pottier to borrow a book I wanted, but I had forgotten all about her and her mission till she now burst in. I dreaded the presence of that young woman in my library as I should have dreaded the invasion of a Cherokee or a Uhlán."

"Nothing! I want nothing—away!" I cried angrily; but the girl continued to advance awkwardly across the room, knocking over a pile of books here, and there putting a clumsy foot into the middle of my most cherished manuscripts."

"Will you begone!" I reiterated in rage and almost terror, as my hand was seized and pressed; and then the supposed Susette threw back her head and revealed the closely-cropped head and dark flashing eyes of Ernest—of my brother."

"When the first greetings were over—joyous, but subdued by the sense of danger—I began to reproach Ernest for coming to me in this unworthy disguise. Detection would be followed by instant military execution; there would be no hope for one thus almost self-confessed a spy."

"I know," said Ernest gayly; "but I could reach you in no other way. There is less risk for me than another, as I am already doomed to the fusillade when caught in my capacity of franc-tireur; but they have to catch me first."

"I urged him to go at once and resume his proper habiliments. There were some in his

own room that was kept always prepared for him. Let him not lose an instant; the danger was frightful and imminent. In his real character as my brother, I could easily account for his presence; and who was there to identify him as the franc-tireur? Safety on one side and imminent death on the other, why did he hesitate?"

"Let us talk a little, my brother," said Ernest, seating himself calmly in the arm-chair. "In the first place, I am not alone. I have five comrades not so comfortably placed as myself; in fact, lying at the bottom of a very damp ditch."

"I threw up my hands in despair."

"And Therese?" I asked.

"Yes; I have seen Therese," he said, mournfully. "I felt that I must see you both once more. Consider me as one coming from the grave to visit you."

"He explained in a few words how he came to be placed in this fearful position. Misled by false information, his band had found themselves in the Prussian lines; the greater part had been destroyed, and only himself and five of his companions had, for the time, escaped. Thanks to his knowledge of the country about and the good-will of the peasantry, to whom he was mostly well known, the little band had thus far contrived to elude pursuit. And now they had found refuge in one of those sunken paths that here and there intersect the forest, and close to which, as Ernest well remembered, began the extensive grounds of the Villa Pottier, the residence of his fiancée. And then Ernest had volunteered to venture forth from the forest, to obtain much-needed provisions and some instructions as to their future route. The river lay before them broad and deep, incumbered with ice, a labyrinth of pools and quicksands, with every boat closely guarded by the Prussians. Behind, a circle of fire hemmed them in."

"Then it occurred to me that I had a chart of the river with the soundings marked, the sand-banks, and the various channels. We pored over it earnestly. At one point, where the wood closely approached the river—in a narrow ravine inclosing the bed of a small stream—the channel appeared to be at its shallowest. Here, too, a sandbank stretched boldly halfway across—barely covered with water at low tides—and at the further end rising above high-water mark in the form of an island. On this island had been built a small light-house to mark the channel, with a wooden hut for the light-keeper. There were no lights in the river now, and the light-house staff had been withdrawn, but the Prussians had not thought fit to occupy the little island, which had seemed too insignificant, perhaps, to attract their attention. Ernest anxiously took the bearings of the light-house from the confluence of the little stream. He saw that if they could only reach it unobserved they might be able to cross the deeper channel beyond. A raft could be improvised quickly from the timbers of the hut, and once on the other side of the river—a sort of neutral zone not yet included in the Prussian lines—it would be easy by a forced march to reach our own army."

"Yes; that is our way," said Ernest; "give me the chart of the river, that I may convince my comrades, who are not accustomed to implicit obedience. And now, my dear brother, I must find my way to the Villa Pottier. He concealed the chart on his person, and wrung my hand with emotion."

"At this moment the outer door was flung violently open with a great clatter of military accoutrements—my two German officers coming in! Ernest cast a hasty burning glance around, and snatched up a knife that lay on my table, a curious silver-mounted Circassian dagger, which had been given me by one of my travelled friends, and which I commonly used as a paper-knife."

"Hush," I whispered; "they will not come here; they will go to their own rooms."

"But to-night, of all nights, my inmates departed from their usual practice. They had been supping with comrades, and were merry and excited as if with wine. The light usually placed for them in the passage had been accidentally extinguished, and seeing the glare from my room, they advanced and stood in the doorway, peering in with owlish expression of good-nature on their blonde stolid faces."

"News for you, worthy sir," cried the elder. "Venture not out to-night; for after the hour just struck all circulation is forbidden, except with a special pass. The sentries are doubled, and all are on the alert; for a band of assassins—francs-tireurs they call themselves—are lurking in the forest close by."

"I thought that the glare of Ernest's eyes from under his capeline, hastily pulled over his face as the Prussians entered, would have betrayed him; but our foes were in a happy, uncritical frame of mind. They had noticed my companion at the first moment, dazzled by the glare of my lamp; and when they saw the supposed Susette, they exchanged glances and began to laugh furtively. Perhaps the attitude unconsciously assumed by Ernest, who stood leaning over my fauteuil, was rather familiar for a servant. Anyhow they began to rally me broadly about Susette. 'Here was a second Faust,' cried one; 'the sage turned into the betrayer of innocence.' They saw that I was angered, and only laughed the louder, Ernest behind me boiling with rage and ready in a moment to spring upon them."

"We are two for two," he muttered, under his breath; but I held up a warning finger.

The thing was madness. In the extremity of suspense and danger, however, I found a luminous idea, a way of averting the present danger and placing my brother in comparative safety."

"Messieurs," I said gravely, "I am glad you can amuse yourselves with such a childish joke. My servant here, about whose presence you are pleased to make merry, has brought me an urgent message from my friend, M. Pottier, of the villa on the heights."

"Ah, we know him. Prince L. is there, and some of the headquarters' staff. There is a charming daughter, too. Ha! ha! our princes know how to choose their quarters. They share the penchant of savants for the rustle of a petticoat."

"Again I thought that Ernest would have flown at them; but I warned him with a glance to be patient."

"My friend, M. Pottier," I said sternly, "will inform the prince of the motives imputed to him."

"Oh, no, no!" cried the Germans; "pray don't repeat our words; we were only jesting."

"Well, as you have had your joke," I said, resuming my good humour, "perhaps you will give me your help. Mmc. Pottier is dangerously ill, and requires my professional assistance to arrange her affairs. It is a matter of urgent necessity. Susette will accompany me to the villa with a lantern. Kindly give me the consigne, that I may pass your sentries safely."

"The young men became instantly grave and sobered. 'What you ask is impossible. It is forbidden to tell the pass-word; but we are anxious to oblige you. Come, we will ourselves accompany you, and pass you to your destination.'"

"This was a favourable turn of affairs on the whole, for the presence of these officers would insure us against detentions and awkward examinations. True that when they reached the villa they might see the real Susette, and thus detect the false, but sufficient for the moment were its own perils. I extinguished my lamp at once, and we went out into the street, I holding fast by the supposed Susette on the pretext of my shortsightedness. We passed a line of sentries, eliciting challenges at every moment. At more than one post we were stopped, and a low conversation would ensue between our conductors and the officer on duty. The word given—all's well—we passed on, our hearts beginning to beat once more."

"As we descended the hill we emerged from the fog into a clearer atmosphere and were soon in sight of the house of M. Pottier. The lower rooms were brilliantly lighted up, and the strains of music could be heard—clarinet and horn—in a gay dancing measure, with the rush of dancers' feet, the murmur of voices and the sound of light laughter."

"For a sick house a merry one," said one of my companions dryly; and at the moment I felt confounded, thinking my ruse detected, incredible as it seemed, that my friend should be thus dancing and making merry over his country's misfortunes. But as we approached the case became clear. Through the long windows we saw the glitter of splendid uniforms; a number of Prussians of high rank, as I gathered, were enjoying a frolic. There might have been unworthy French women among them. Of that I know nothing."

"To my intense relief, at this point our companions drew off. Here were Herts and Vons, it seemed, of the blue blood, twice-born barons, two-sworded damies; and our humble infantry officers, with the awe of rank inherent in Teutonic blood, feared to intrude upon them. They would wait on the terrace, and begged me to lose no time."

Here the notary broke off, seeing Rosalie approach with her arms full of bottles and jars of liquors and strong waters.

"And the Kirsch," cried the notary. "Rosalie, don't forget the Kirschenwasser."

II.

"Yes, try the Kirsch," said the notary; "the only reminder of the German occupation that is not altogether distasteful." It was tried and pronounced good, and our host, having himself swallowed a glass of the compound, and made a very face over it, proceeded with his story refreshed."

"Some one had been waiting for us at the Villa Pottier, for when we reached the side door—the great door had been abandoned to the use of the Prussian inmates—it was opened quickly and noiselessly. I received a soft, warm pressure of the hand—not intended for me, alas! a pressure that made me for the moment feel envious of my younger brother, even in his present plight. Therese had been waiting at the door, listening for Ernest's footsteps; for the younger servants could not be altogether trusted, and the old housekeeper, who was known to be faithful, was watching over my poor Susette, whose loyalty was also suspected, though, as it proved, unjustly."

"My pious fraud was almost justified by facts. The excellent Madame Pottier was actually ill in bed, overcome by the troubles and anxieties of this dreadful time. The suite of rooms occupied by her and her daughter were the only parts of the house absolutely secure against interruption, and at Madame Pottier's bedside we held our family council. Gathering about her couch, in low, sad tones we consulted as to Ernest, who now in his own proper garb stood beside Therese, holding her hand in his. Should we let him go