

pertinacious in his demand for the just penalty of the law to be inflicted upon him. He so boldly and fearlessly avowed his crime, continually repeating that he did not regret it, that at length his firmness assumed the character of bravado, and left no room for clemency. Sentence of death was then pronounced.

Pierre Pitois heard his sentence read with the most steady unflinching gaze. They warmly urged him to plead for mercy, but he refused. As every one guessed that at the bottom of this affair there was some strange mystery, it was determined that the execution of Pierre should be delayed. He was carried back to the military prison, and it was announced to him, that, as a mark of special favour, he had three days given him to press for pardon. He shrugged up his shoulders and made no reply. In the middle of that night on which was to dawn the day fixed for his execution, the door of Pierre's dungeon turned softly on its hinges, and a subaltern officer advanced to the side of the camp-bed in which the condemned was tranquilly sleeping; and after gazing on him some time in silence, awoke him.

Pierre opened his eyes, and staring about him said—"The hour, then, is at last come."

"No, Pierre," replied the officer; "it is not yet the hour, but it will soon come."

"And what do you want with me until then?"

"Dost thou not know me, Pierre?—No matter;—I know thee well. I saw thee at Austerlitz and bravely didst thou bear thyself. From that day, Pierre I have had for thee a regard no less warm than sincere. Yesterday on my arrival at Strasburg, I learned thy crime and thy condemnation. I have prevailed on the gaoler, who is a relation of mine to allow me to see thee and now that I have come, I would say to thee, Pierre, it is often a sad thought to a man about to die, that he has not a friend near him to whom he might open his heart, and entrust him with some sacred commission to discharge when he should be no more. If thou wilt accept me, I would be to thee that friend."

"I thank you, comrade," replied Pierre, briefly and coldly.

"Why! hast thou nothing to say to me?"

"Nothing."

"What! not one word of adieu to thy sweetheart, to thy sister?"

"A sweetheart?—a sister? I never had either."

"To thy father?"

"He is no more. Two months ago he died in these arms."

"Thy mother, then?"

"My mother!"—and Pierre, whose voice suddenly and totally changed, repeated—"my mother!—Ah, comrade, don't utter that name; for see, I have never heard that name—I have never said it in my heart without feeling melted like a child,—and even now, methinks, if I were to speak of her—"

"What then?"

"The tears would come—and tears do not become a man: 'Tears!' continued he; 'tears when I have but a few hours to live—ah! there would not be much courage in that!'"

"Thou art too stern, comrade. I think I have, thank God, as much courage as other people, and yet I should not be ashamed of weeping, if I were to speak of my mother."

"Are you serious?" said Pierre, eagerly seizing the officer's hand—"You, a man and a soldier, and not ashamed to weep?"

"When speaking of my mother? Certainly not. My mother is so good, so kind; she loves me so much, and I, too, love her dearly."

"She loves you? and you love her?—Oh! then I may indeed, tell you all. My heart is full; it must have vent, and however strange my feelings may appear to you, I am sure you will not laugh at them. Listen, then, for what you said just now is quite true. A man is glad, when about to die to have a heart to which he can pour out his own. Will you really listen to me, and not laugh at me!"

"Surely I will listen, Pierre,—a dying man must ever excite compassionate sympathy."

"You must know that, since I came into the world, I never loved but one being—that being was a mother. But her I loved as none loved—with all that was in me of life and energy. While yet a babe, I used to read her eyes, as she read mine; I guessed her thoughts, and she knew mine. She was the heart of my heart, and I the heart of hers. I have never had either sweetheart or wife; I never had a friend—my mother was everything to me. Well, I was summoned to take arms, and when they told me I must leave her, in a paroxysm of despair I declared that they might drag me limb from limb, but never should they take me