

GROTESQUES.

Home stretch—the stretch across the maternal knee.

When you hear a man say, "Life is but a dream," tread on his corns and wake him up. Life is real.

Won't some one hurl a mallet at the young man of the Boston Post? He is trying to revive public interest in conundrums.

A circus lion is roaming around Weston, Missouri, and people have a good excuse for remaining away from prayer-meetings.

A Delaware man lost his wife and a race-horse by the same stroke of lightning, and he tried for two hours to revive the horse.

There are over ten million women in America, and yet Tom Hutton, of Georgia, hung himself on account of a girl fifteen years old.

A Milwaukee newspaper has the following curious notice:—"Wanted, a nurse to take charge of a basket of children left at this office a short time since."

The difference between a fool and a looking-glass is said to be that the fool speaks without reflecting, and that the looking-glass reflects without speaking.

When George II. was once expressing his admiration of Gen. Wolfe, some one observed that the general was mad. "Oh! he is mad, is he!" said the king, with great quickness: "then I wish he would bite some other of my generals."

Was he pleased? that is the arithmetical question. At a recent lecture a young man read a fine essay. On his way home he heard one lady remark to another, as he walked behind them, "Wasn't that fine?" "Yes," was the reply, "but what a mean-looking little wretch the lecturer was!"

The plain advice given by a coloured preacher in Richmond to his congregation will not be needed in our Northern religious meetings, but we have been in gatherings where some such direction was decidedly called for: "De fore part ob de church will please sit down, so de hind part ob de church can see de fore part, for de hind part can't see de fore part ef de fore part persist in standin' before de hind part, to de utter exclusion ob de hind part by de fore part."

A correspondent of the Richmond Dispatch writes: "The usual scene at Gordonsville was varied by the following episode: 'Aunt Martha Webster,' a middle-aged female, was seated on one of the 'platforms' with a stock in trade, to wit: One 'water-million,' one 'mushmillion,' and a small tobacco caddy full of eggs 'jest done laid.' She was waiting patiently, even complacently, for a customer when a youthful freedman, with utter disregard for the law in the case, jerked up the watermelon and started off with it. But Aunt Martha had her weather eyes skinned on him and went for him by telegraph. Now that caddy was of a size to just fit Aunt Martha's foot, and she would doubtless have caught the thief but her foot came ker slap down upon the eggs, and her attention was thus diverted at a very inopportune moment. 'Dar, now,' exclaimed the old lady, 'dar go my watermillion, dar go my nice fresh eggs, now what I gwine do?' Looking for some time at the 'mushmillion,' she finally said, resignedly: 'Well, ef I mus', I mus', and without more ado proceeded to cut open and masticate the remains of the once prosperous and promising establishment."

"A rather amusing story," says Col. Stuart, in his "Reminiscences of a Soldier," "was told me some time ago by an old lady who had an ancient servant that had lived with her for many years, named Ann Brady. One day Ann came in to her mistress in the parlor crying, 'Now, ain't I the unfortunate woman? Och, what will I do at all, at all?' 'What's the matter, Ann?' said her mistress. 'Och, ma'am,' replied Ann, 'the postman's outside, and he's got a letter for me from purgatory, and I know it's from my old mother, who's been there this tin years, and it's all about me not paying for the masses I said I would. Ochone! but I am the miserable woman.' On her mistress going out she found the postman in a fit of laughter, with a letter directed to 'Ann Brady' from the 'Dead Letter Office.' Nothing could induce her to touch it, the 'Dead' to her meaning purgatory, and nothing else; and her mistress was obliged to open the letter for her, and found it was one Ann had written to a nephew in Clare, but as he had gone to America, the letter had consequently been returned."

The following is Max Adeler's: Last Sunday night, during the sermon in our church, the gas suddenly went out, and there was sudden darkness. The minister requested the congregation to remain perfectly quiet until the cause of the trouble could be ascertained and other lights procured. Old Mrs. Smiley, it appears, was sound asleep when the accident occurred, but just after the minister had finished speaking to the congregation she awoke. At first she thought she had become blind, but as she sat by the window she immediately saw the light in the street, and then she knew that the congregation had gone home, and that she had accidentally been locked in by the sexton. Dreadfully frightened at the loneliness and horror of her situation, she picked up a hymn-book, and, dashing it through a pane of glass in the window, she put her head out and began to scream for help. Her shriek impressed passers-by with the idea that the church was on fire, and in an instant the alarm was given. A moment later the engines arrived, and just as the sexton began to light the gas again, one gang of the firemen began playing through the broken window on Mrs. Smiley's spring bonnet, while another gang poured a three-inch stream up the middle aisle with such force as to wash the Rev. Dr. Hopkins, the minister, out of the pulpit and down among the high hats which were floating around by the pew doors. Eventually the matter was explained, and the fire department shut off the water and went home. But the deacon wants to know how, if Mr. Smiley refuses to pay the bill for repairs to the church, he can ever look a fellow-worshipper in the face again.

The other day, says an exchange, a two-cent dog—that is, a dog that scents or sniffs two ways—one with the wind, one against the wind—sprang from an alley, closely followed by a five-cent brick. Rounding the corner at right angles he came in contact with the feet of a Dutchwoman, who was carrying a jug of molasses in one hand and a basket of eggs in the other. The sudden collision of the dog with her lower extremities threw her from her feet, and she sat down upon the basket of eggs, at the same time breaking the jug of molasses upon the pavement. A young gentleman, carpet-bag in hand, anxious to catch the train, was running close behind, and stepping on the fragments of the jug and its contents, sat down on the chest of the Dutchwoman, who said "Mine Got." The young man said something about mad dog, but in the excitement said it backwards. In the meantime the dog ran against the feet of a team of horses attached to a load of potatoes, and they taking fright started for home. The ending board falling out, they unloaded the potatoes along the street as they went. Crossing the railroad track, the waggon caught in the rails and tore one of them from its place. A freight train coming along a few moments later was thrown from the track, smashing up a dozen cars, and killing thirty or forty hogs. The horses on reaching home ran through a barnyard and overturned a milk-pail and contents, which another two-cent dog licked up. One of the horses having broken his leg was killed this morning, and the other is crippled for life. It is now a mooted question whether the man who threw the brick at the two-cent dog or the man who owns it is responsible for the chapter of accidents which followed.

REVENANT.

You ask me why at your first meeting
A sudden dimness seemed to veil
My eyes, and why they shunned your greeting,
And why my lips were strangely pale?

Who sees the shade of a lost lover,
May well be pale for hope or fear;
You seemed a ghost from days gone over
When first I looked upon you, dear!

Because, before a word was spoken,
And almost ere I saw you plain,
I thought you her whose heart was broken,
The day that mine was snapped in twain.

Now, like a ghost let loose from prison,
And strange below the common skies,
You see my dead youth re-arisen,
To meet the magic of your eyes.

NINETY-THREE.

BY VICTOR HUGO.

PART THE THIRD.

IN VENDÉE.

BOOK THE THIRD.

THE MOTHER.

X.—RADOUB.

He flung himself on Chante-en-hiver, knocked aside his arm with such force that the pistol went off and the ball whizzed against the ceiling. He seized his enemy's broken jaw in both hands and twisted it about. Chante-en-hiver uttered a howl of pain and fainted. Radoub straddled across his body and left him lying in the embrasure of the loophole.

"Now that I have announced my ultimatum, don't you stir again," said he. "Lie there, you ugly crawling snake. You may fancy that I am not going to amuse myself massacring you. Crawl about on the ground at your ease—under foot is the place for you. Die—you can't get over that. In a little while you will learn what nonsense your priest has talked to you. Away with you into the great mystery, peasant!" And he hurried forward into the room.

"One cannot see an inch before one's nose," grumbled he. Chante-en-hiver began to writhe convulsively upon the floor and utter fresh moans of agony. Radoub turned back.

"Hold your tongue! Do me the favour to be silent, citizen, without knowing it. I cannot trouble myself further with you. I should scorn to make an end of you. Just let me have quiet." Then he thrust his hands into his hair as he stood watching Chante-en-hiver.

"But here, what am I to do now? It is all very fine, but I am disarmed. I had two shots to fire, and you have robbed me of them, animal. And with all that, a smoke that would blind a dog!"

Then his hand touched his wounded ear. "Oh!" he exclaimed.

Then he went on: "You have gained a great deal by confiscating one of my ears! However, I would rather have one less of them than anything else—an ear is only an ornament. You have scratched my shoulder too; but that is nothing. Expire, villager—I forgive you."

He listened. The din from the lower room was fearful. The combat had grown more furious than ever.

"Things are going well down there," he muttered. "How they howl 'Long live the King!' One must admit that they die bravely."

His foot struck against the sabre. He picked it up, and said to Chante-en-hiver, who no longer stirred, and who might indeed be dead—"See here, man of the woods, I will take my sabre; you have left me that, anyway. But I wanted my pistols. The devil fly away with you, savage! Oh there! what am I to do? I am no good whatever here."

He advanced into the hall trying to guide his steps in the gloom. Suddenly, in the shadow behind the central pillar, he perceived a long table upon which something gleamed faintly. He felt the objects. They were blunderbusses, carbines, pistols, a whole row of fire-arms laid out in order to his hand; it was the reserve of weapons the besieged had provided in this chamber, which would be their second place of stand.

"A whole arsenal!" cried Radoub.

And he clutched them right and left, dizzy with joy. Thus armed, he became formidable. He could see, at the back of the table, the door of the staircase, which communicated with the rooms above and below, standing wide open. Radoub seized two pistols, and fired them at random through the doorway; then he snatched a blunderbuss, and discharged it; then again, loaded with buckshot, and discharged it. The tromblon, vomiting forth its fifteen balls, sounded like a volley of grapeshot. He got his breath back, and shouted down the staircase, in a voice of thunder, "Hurrah for Paris!"

Then seizing a second blunderbuss, still bigger than the first, he aimed it toward the staircase, and waited.

The confusion in the lower hall was indescribable. This unexpected attack from behind paralyzed the besieged with astonishment. Two balls from Radoub's triple fire had taken effect; one had killed the elder of the brothers Pique-en-Bois, the other had killed De Quelen, nicknamed Houzard.

"They are on the floor above!" cried the marquis.

At this cry the men abandoned the retirade; a flock of birds could not have fled more quickly; they plunged madly toward the staircase. The marquis encouraged the flight.

"Quick, quick!" he exclaimed. "There is most courage now in escape. Let us all get up to the second floor. We will begin again there." He left the retirade the last. This brave act saved his life.

Radoub, ambushed at the top of the stairs, watched the retreat, finger on trigger. The first who appeared at the turn of the spiral steps received the discharge of his gun full in the face, and fell. Had the marquis been among them, he would have been killed.

Before Radoub had time to seize another weapon, the others passed him; the marquis behind all the rest, and moving more slowly.

Believing the first-floor chamber filled with the besiegers, the men did not pause there, but rushed on and gained the room above, which was the hall of the mirrors. There was the iron door; there was the sulphur-match; it was there they must capitulate or die.

Gauvain had been as much astounded as the besieged by the detonations from the staircase, and was unable to understand how aid could have reached him in that quarter; but he took advantage without waiting to comprehend. He leaped over the retirade, followed by his men, and pursued the fugitives up to the first floor. There he found Radoub.

The sergeant saluted, and said: "One minute, commandant. I did that. I remembered Dol. I followed your plan. I took the enemy between two fires."

"A good scholar," answered Gauvain, with a smile.

After one has been a certain length of time in the darkness, the eyes, like those of a night-bird, become accustomed to the obscurity. Gauvain perceived that Radoub was covered with blood.

"But you are wounded, comrade!" he exclaimed.

"Never mind that, commandant! What difference does it make—an ear more or less! I got a sabre thrust, too, but it is nothing. One always cuts oneself a little in breaking a window. It is only losing a little blood."

The besiegers made a ha't in the first-floor chamber, which had been gained by Radoub. A lantern was brought. Cimourdain rejoined Gauvain. They held a council. It was indeed time to reflect. The besiegers were not in the secrets of their foes; they were unaware of the lack of ammunition; they did not know that the defenders of the tower were short of powder; that the second floor must be the last post where a stand could be made; the assailants could not tell but the staircase might be mined.

One thing was certain, the enemy could not escape. Those who had not been killed were as safe as if under lock and key. Lantenac was in the trap.

Certain of this, the besiegers could afford to give themselves time to choose the best means of bringing about the end. Numbers among them had been killed already. The thing now was to spare the men as much as possible in this last assault. The risk of this final attack would be great. The first fire would without doubt be a hot one.

The combat was interrupted. The besiegers, masters of the ground and first floors waited the orders of the commander-in-chief to renew the conflict. Gauvain and Cimourdain were holding counsel. Radoub assisted in silence at their deliberation. At length he timidly hazarded another military salute.

"Commandant?"

"What is it, Radoub?"

"Have I a right to a little recompense?"

"Yes, indeed. Ask what you like."

"I ask permission to be first to mount."

It was impossible to refuse him; in fact, he would have done it without permission.

XI.—DESPERATE.

While this consultation took place on the first floor, the besieged were barricading the second. Success is fury; defeat is madness. The encounter between the foes would be frenzied. To be close on victory intoxicates. The men below were inspired by hope, which would be the most powerful of human incentives if despair did not exist. Despair was above. A calm, cold, sinister despair.

When the besiegers reached the hall of refuge, beyond which they had no resource, no hope, their first care had been to bar the entrance. To lock the door was useless; it was necessary to block the staircase. In a position like theirs an obstacle across which they could see, and over which they could fight, was worth more than a closed door.

The torch, which Imânus had planted in the wall near the sulphur-match, lighted the room.

There was in the chamber one of those great, heavy oak chests, which were used to hold clothes and linen before the invention of chests of drawers.

They dragged this chest out, and stood it on end in the doorway of the staircase. It fitted solidly and closed the entrance, leaving open at the top a narrow space, by which a man could pass, but it was scarcely probable that the assailants would run the risk of being killed one after another by any attempt to pass the barrier in single file.

This obstruction of the entrance afforded them a respite. They numbered their company. Out of the nineteen only seven remained, of whom Imânus made one. With the exception of Imânus and the marquis they were all wounded.

The five wounded men (active still, for in the heat of combat any wound less than mortal leaves a man able to move about) were Chatenay, called Robi; Guinoiseau, Hoisnard Branche d'Or, Brin d'Amour, and Grand-François. All others were dead.

They had no ammunition left. The cartridge-boxes were almost empty; they counted. How many shots were there left for the seven to fire? Four.

They had reached the pass where nothing remained but to fall. They had retreated to the precipice; it yawned black and terrible; they stood upon the very edge.

Still the attack was about to recommence—slowly, but all the more surely on that account. They could hear the butt-ends of the muskets ring along the staircase step by step, as the besiegers advanced.

No means of escape. But the library? On the plateau bristled six cannons, with every match lighted. By the upper chambers? To what end? They look up on the platform. The only resource when that was reached would be to fling themselves from the top of the tower.

The seven survivors of this Homeric band found themselves inexorably enclosed and held fast by that thick wall, which at once protected and betrayed them. They were not yet taken, but they were already prisoners.

The marquis spoke: "My friends, all is finished."

Then, after a silence, he added, "Grand-François, be again the Abbé Turmeau."

All knelt, rosary in hand. The measured stroke of the muskets sounded nearer.

Grand-François, covered with blood from a wound which had grazed his skull, and torn away his leather cap, raised the crucifix in his right hand. The marquis, a sceptic at bottom, bent his knee to the ground.