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THE OLD CAMPAIGNER.

A STORY.

On the twenty-fifth day of December, in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty-five, three taps were lightly struck on the fourth-floor door of a house on the Megisserie quay at Paris, one of those tall and ugly tenements that seem to make cross faces down upon the waters of the Seine from morning till night, like so many antiquated and grinning buffoons. The three taps in question caused a young girl, who was seated alone inside of the door to which they were applied, to start rather hurriedly from her seat, and to throw a piece of embroidery on the floor at her feet, believing sincerely, however, that she had put it on the chair beside her. Whether this arose from emotion at the announcement of an unexpected visit, or an expected one, will by and bye appear; but, in the first place, it is necessary to tell who the damsel was, as the reader cannot be expected to take such interest as we could wish in one yet a stranger to him.

Pierre Bertrand, the father of Marie, was a splendid specimen of the old half-pay captain of the empire, such as that personage, or class of personages, became subsequently to the empire's fall. Rude and rough, though warm-hearted; retaining the moustache of the soldier, and all the soldiers' habits, among which beer-drinking and smoking held so prominent a place as to swallow almost half his pension; perpetually grumbling, yet continually jolly; enormously proud of various scars and cuts, and certain relics in the shape of crosses of honour, hacked sabres, and riddled uniforms; spending in telling old campaigning stories, and in playing at dominos, all the time that was not spent in drinking and smoking: such was Pierre Bertrand, and such was his way of life. For his family, Pierre had, properly speaking, two children, although one only had a just claim of paternity upon him, as far as blood went. But for his having an adopted child, however, the old campaigner might never have had offspring of his own. On the field of battle, a dying comrade had consigned an infant boy to his arms, and Pierre had received the consignment with as much satisfaction and pride as others might receive a legacy of millions. It was to give this child a mother that Pierre had at first thought of marriage; and it chanced that this step, when he took it, only proved the means of bringing upon Pierre another dying legacy, his own little Marie. But the veteran bore up bravely under his burdens, and did his duty nobly by both his charges. To the boy Jules he contrived to give a good education, and, six months before the period of our story—six months, in short, before the three taps at the door—Jules, then precisely twenty-three years of age, had completed a course of legal studies, and had been entered a member of the bar of the Court Royal of Paris.

It was a proud day for the old captain when Jules donned the barrister's black cap and robe. Marie was then eighteen, and as pretty a blue-eyed, merry-faced maiden as could be seen, with a heart warm and open as the sunny sky. Pierre had long settled in his own mind that his two "marmots," as he called them, should be married, and that the union should take place on the day that Jules pleaded his first cause. About the feelings of the parties themselves he had never thought much, and, in truth, they had given him no cause for any uneasiness on this score.

One day, immediately after Jules had passed the legal ordeal, old Bertrand was seated in his lofty but neat domicile, smoking silently and furiously, as he always did during any meditations of special importance, when a letter was brought to him. Letters were rare things with the veteran, and he looked long at the post-mark, which was that of his native province. Opening it finally, he read thus:—"Sir, I hasten to announce to you the death of M. Joseph Bertrand, your cousin-german, proprietor of the foundry here. He has left a fortune valued at a million of francs. No direct heir presenting himself here on the paternal side, it is pre-arranged that to you reverts the sum of 500,000 francs, the half of the whole succession, and which the law destines to that branch of the deceased relatives. Of course you will take the necessary steps to secure your rights." This epistle bore the signature of a provincial justice of peace, and gave other particulars of the case.

Bertrand was struck dumb for five minutes, and then broke out, by way of thankfulness, into a few of his common conversational phrases, which were composed of some three or four thousand bombs, one or two hundred pieces of cannon, and a proportional quantity of thunders. "Five hundred thousand francs!" at length cried he; "Marie, my girl! read—read this. Read, my darling! Five hundred thousand francs! Yes, units, tens, hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands! All right, Marie, my girl! Hurrah for the emperor! Hurrah!" All was in-

deed right—and yet all proved not right in the end. Bertrand, soon after receiving the letter, set out for his native place, concluding that he had but to appear and take possession. But the collateral relations had taken advantage of his absence from the spot, and had prepared unexpected obstacles for him. They had stirred and intrigued most actively, and had bought four or five consciences at some few thousand francs a-piece. In short, it was found that Bertrand could not establish his degree of relationship to the deceased. Certain extracts of birth and baptism, with other indispensable documents, could not be procured, notwithstanding the lengthened researches of the old clerk of the registry, to whom Bertrand gave five thousand francs to prove his titles—which sum, by the bye, in addition to twenty thousand received from the other side, made the affair a very profitable one for the old fox. The necessary documents, however, could not be found, and Pierre returned to Paris totally disheartened, and smoking furiously.

Jules was the receptacle of the veteran's complaints. The young advocate was not slow to pronounce that chicanery and roguery must have been at work, and persuaded Pierre to pursue the matter at law. Within a few months the cause came on before the provincial court of B—. Jules, whose activity and researches had been unwearied, appeared for the first time as a pleader. While the case was going on, Marie Bertrand was in a state of feverish impatience. She knew not the issue on the evening of the 25th day of December, 1835. It was then that she heard the three taps at the door of her father's dwelling, and started from her seat to open it.

Jules entered. Marie sat down on her chair in silence, after one glance at his countenance, which wore a downcast expression. "You have lost the cause then, Jules?" said she at length. "No Marie, it is gained; you are rich," was the reply. The damsel raised her eyes in surprise, and exclaimed, "Gained! what then means this—this—?" Jules interrupted her. "Marie, I quit Paris this evening, and I come to bid you farewell. You will be wealthy, and happy. Yes; I go—but you will sometimes think of me, will you not?"

The young girl looked at Jules to see if he spoke seriously, and was stunned to behold his eyes filled with tears. At this moment Bertrand entered. Jules went up to him, and placing a massive pocket-book in his hands, said, "My kind friend, justice has been done to you; here are five hundred bank-notes, of one thousand francs each—the part of your cousin's heritage which fell to you, and which I received, as authorised by you." Bertrand looked at the papers, which Jules displayed to him; then the veteran looked at Marie, who was struggling to hide her tears; and, finally, he looked at the pale face of Jules. "Why, what is this about?" cried he. "Why do you weep, Marie? Why do I not find you happy and joyful at such a moment? Jules, what have you been saying? Wont you answer me? Marie! Jules! Thunder, there is something here—Marie, girl, tell me why you weep!"

The veteran's daughter made a desperate effort to compose herself. "He is going away, father," said she, "he departs this evening—he quits us—through pride, perhaps. He loved us while we were poor, and does so no more since we have become rich." After this effort, Marie laid her head on her father's shoulder, and wept more than ever.

"I hope, Jules," said Bertrand, "that you will explain this. May I be shot if I understand a word of what this little whimperer means!" "My father," replied Jules, "I depart this night." "You depart—ah, well—how long will you be away?" was Pierre's answer. "A long time, father," said the young man, "a long time—for ever, perhaps! You have nurtured me, you have given me a place and station in life—I ought to be no more a charge to you! I leave Paris—." "Jules, you are insane!" returned the old soldier. "Quit Paris! and at this moment, above all others, when you have won a cause that will ring in the courts! It is folly, and I don't comprehend it. Besides, it is impossible that you can go away. I have arranged matters otherwise."

Marie gently raised her head, and cast on her father a look so sweet, that Jules felt himself enfeebled by its influence.

"Yes, continued Bertrand, "I have had my plans arranged, and for a long time too. Only, I thought I could bestow on you nought but the *pearl*; but you shall now have the *selling* along with it, my lad! It won't do you any harm, will it, to have twenty-five thousand livres a-year to keep you going? Come, it is settled. Embrace him, Marie; I am pleased with him. Come, and let us off directly to the notary!"

"My father, it is impossible!" cried Jules, in accents which proved the struggle he was undergoing. "It is impossible! Alrea-

dy do my friends, the court, all Paris, declare that my labours, my researches, my journeyings, have all been for this money! Oh, Marie! pardon me—I love you! Yes, I love you to idolatry! But were you now to be my wife, all men would point the finger at me, as one who would not take the poor girl, but snatched at the rich heiress—snatched at her, as soon as she had become so, and ere she could have an opportunity of seeing other suitors, more worthy of her condition, at her feet! Oh, why did I gain this cause!"

Jules was proceeding in this passionate strain, when Bertrand, who had in the meantime taken the pocket-book into his hands, brought the young advocate to a pause by thus addressing him. "It is, then, this parcel of papers which renders you so scrupulous, my boy? It is this bundle of stuff," continued he, holding up the pocket-book, "that prevents you wedding my little girl? Ah, well, young man, I admire your delicacy. But I will not be less generous than you!" So speaking, old Pierre turned to the window, which he had previously opened, and with all the force of a vigorous arm, cast the valuable pocket-book far out into the deep and muddy waters of the Seine!

Bertrand then turned from the window, and showing one single bank-note to the astonished and thunderstruck youth, observed coolly to him, "I have kept this one thousand francs, you see; it will serve for the expenses of the nuptials; for you will not draw back now, Jules?" He continued in a severe tone—"A few moments ago, my daughter was rich, immensely rich, and you refused her hand—like a madman, I must say. She is now poor as yourself, for I know she would have been miserable with riches which she could not share with you. To-morrow you will marry her, if you are a man of honour. If not—but I shall leave you together. Marie will inform me of your reply." Bertrand then left the room, shutting the door behind him with a shock that betokened an angry excitement of mind in the old campaigner. But, after all, the recent loss of fortune seemed not long to trouble the veteran, as, on sitting down soon after to a game of dominos with a boon companion, the latter declared he had never seen Pierre so merry in all their intercourse, or so given to burst into peals of laughter on the slightest incitement.

Jules was completely staggered by Bertrand's act, but, when left alone with Marie, he soon recovered. The sensibility of the young advocate to the public voice was no affected sentiment, nor was his love for Marie; and the pair speedily pledged themselves to each other, hand and heart. They sat long together, yet Bertrand considerably staid out of the way, and ere he returned, Jules had departed. It would be peering too curiously, perhaps, into poor weak human nature, to ask if Jules did not cast a self-reproachful glance into the Seine that night as he passed it on his way homewards. If he did look wistfully on the waters, however, the future comforts, to do him justice, of Marie and her father, formed the cause of his feelings at the moment. The case was hopeless at all events. A hundred years' dragging might not have brought up that book from these deep and muddy waters.

The nuptials of Jules and Marie took place a day or two after these events. Bertrand took upon himself the orderment of the marriage-festival, and he made it so splendid a one, that the single bank-note of the heritage must have deeply felt the inroad. All the friends of the family were present; and amongst them, the majority, at least of the gentlemen, were deficient in some prominent member of the body, from the nose to the right limb. But the defects of these friends of the veteran were honourably compensated by medals, and crosses, and other badges of renown. After dinner, an enormous cold tart, or pie, which Pierre publicly declared to be a new dish of his own invention, was produced with the dessert. All eyes were turned to the dish, the task of opening which fell to the pretty hands of the bride. Marie blushing began to the duty, but her first incision fell upon a hard substance, which made her declare her father's fine dish to consist of something totally indivisible and indigestible. "Ah ha!" cried Pierre triumphantly, "cut it out!" Marie did so, and the company beheld a new red morocco pocket-book, well-stuffed, and marked in gilded letters with the words, "Four hundred and ninety-nine thousand francs."

Pierre roared with rapture and delight, as well he might. The sly old campaigner had thrown into the Seine nothing but the worthless old pocket-book!

Jules did not require his worthy father-in-law's laughter to tell him what meant the pocket-book in the pie. As soon as it was brought out, and the lettering read, the veteran's ruse was clear. Jules now enjoys his twenty-five thousand livres of rent, and loves his wife as much as if she had only brought him her heart for a-