

The Rockwood Review.

GASPARD, THE VIOLINIST.

Twelve o'clock on a moonlight night in a little French village. There were no lights in any of the windows, but from the rich baker's house, at the upper end, came the sound of a weird and melancholy music.

Jean Michot, the cobbler, nursing his sick child, shuddered as he heard it, and muttered under his breath, "So he is at it again!" and crossed himself devoutly.

Let us follow the sound and see who it is that plays so strangely. Gaspard Dubois stands at his open shutter, holding eagerly a shrill-toned kit. Like a child in pain, it moans and wails under the touch of his magic bow, then wearied out, sinks into a low monotonous throbbing—slower—fainter—one long sweet note, and—Crack! the string has gone and the player is still.

The moon shines full on him as he bends over the little instrument, and shows the glittering black eyes set close to the long thin nose and delicate white hands that do not match the lean boyish frame.

Suddenly an arm out of the darkness snatches his treasure and dashes it on the ground, the shutter is sharply closed, and father and son stand facing each other in the gloom.

Then the mother enters with a lamp, and tears of terror rise in her eyes as the old man raises his sinewy arm and strikes blow after blow while the boy stands pale and breathless, yet with a defiant smile upon his lips. When he had spent his wrath a little thus he upbraided him bitterly. "Is it not time to look to the ovens?" broke in the woman, timidly.

Still growling and swearing, the baker descended the stairs after having locked the door and carried away the key.

Late in the following morning, his mother brought him up some

food, but when she opened the door, the room was empty. Gaspard was gone.

Jean Michot sat at his door and talked it over with a neighbour. "He will come to no good," said Jean. "I would not be in his father's shoes for all that." The lad was young and lazy, and cared for naught but his fiddle, and never a merry tune either, but he is the only one, and his mother's darling. Did you hear what old Dubois did when first he found he wouldn't mind his work?

Well, the boy saved up money enough to buy a fiddle, that he kept rolled in wool as tenderly as a baby, and one night, when he ought to be minding the ovens, he was playing away just for all the world as if there was a mad devil in his fingers, and the end of it was, the old man flew into a rage and threw the right thing on to the fire.

Gaspard said never a word, but just looked at him and bit his lip till the blood ran down but after that he got more strange than ever."

"He was at it again last night. Mere Nanot and my little Marie could not rest with the sound of it. He will come to no good; he is an evil lad."

Only his mother wept for him, and hid the fragments of the kit in her chest.

PART II.

Ten years have passed away, and the little village has forgotten Gaspard. His mother is dead, and Citizen Dubois has taken to himself another wife, who knows how to make the hoard in the old stocking grow heavier with each week's end. Jean still sits at the door mending the old shoes, but tired little Marie a sleep that is beyond the reach of troubling.

One evening, when the rain-laden winds of closing autumn were driving the fallen leaves along the