

POOR TIDBITS.

A STORY OF THE MILLS.

BY P. SPANJAARDT.

I am an unfortunate individual, and, if there ever was a man who sympathized with the sufferings of that historical personage, the wandering Jew, I am that man.

It is my misfortune that, whenever I find a comfortable boarding-house, something happens to disturb my peace of mind and compels me to move. This was the case in the last place which I honoured with my presence.

The house was a comfortable one, the room to my taste, the cook better than the average.

I had just about become accustomed to the whistle of the landlord, who, regularly about ten at night, gave the pet of his wife, a horrible little pug, an airing, and had hopes that at last I had found a spot where peace and quietness should be mine, when, in some evil moment, my landlady rented her front parlor to a young school ma'am, who took possession of her quarters accompanied by four stalwart labourers carrying a piano.

I stood her sonatas and love songs as long as I could, and it was only when my cup of misery began to overflow that I looked for a new domicile. So one day I explained matters to my landlady, paid her the balance which I owed, called a carter and left.

It did not take long to move my baggage, composed of a trunk, which contained all my earthly possessions, and a good-sized leather valise filled with unpublished and returned manuscripts. And the first thing I did was to go on a tour of exploration. I had been told that my predecessor was a medical student, who left without going to the trouble of settling his board account, and I naturally expected to find some relics of that gentleman's stay. I was not disappointed, for, upon examining an upper shelf of my wardrobe, I saw a human thigh bone and a leather-covered book marked "Diary." I was not in the least astonished, for, in my wanderings about different boarding-houses, I had met with many similar finds.

I once found the stuffed skin of a parrot, decidedly the worse for dust, and a dilapidated copy of the Koran. They belonged to the widow of an old sea-captain who had occupied the room before me, and who caused quite a scene when, in an attempt to reclaim her property, she found that I had thrown her beloved parrot into the back yard, and had used several leaves of the Moslem bible to light my cigarettes.

However, I put the thigh bone, which was yellow with age, in a corner for future reference, not because I feared that the former owner would return to claim it, but on account of the force with which it reminded me of Samson and the jawbone of the ass. I next turned my attention to the diary, and found to my regret that several leaves were missing. Still there was nothing strange in this, for the diary of a lively medical student, if conscientiously used for the purpose for which it is bought, must necessarily contain many things which he would rather not hand over to posterity.

In this instance the greater number had disappeared, and the balance was filled with comments upon the professors, records of sports, brief notices of parties, and lengthy essays upon the behaviour of innumerable persons, who were spoken of in the feminine gender and designated by different capitals. In turning over the pages again, however, I found the following, written on one of the first in the book: "Bought my first subject. Old man was found frozen to death, with a young woman and a dog. Jack got the girl. They say she was a beauty once. Paid \$5 for my share." Unfortunately several of the next pages had been torn out, and I had to do without further information.

Somehow or other I felt unsatisfied. I involuntarily looked at the thigh bone, and it set me a-thinking: The book was only three years old. Who were they? And what was she? I decided to find out. But other matters came up and the book was thrown in a corner, and it was not till several weeks afterwards, when I read about a case of accidental death in one of the papers, that these

mysterious people were brought to my mind again.

Having some free time, I obtained leave from the coroner to look over his records, and by dint of questioning several police officers, obtained the following story:

It was in the spring, about four years ago, that a number of French Canadians arrived from the vicinity of the Saguenay River for the purpose of obtaining work which had been promised them in the mills situated in one of our Eastern suburbs. Amongst them were two who attracted considerable attention—an aged man and his granddaughter. The man's age must have been near seventy; but there was about his form, though bent by years, and perhaps sorrows, something courtly, while his face, furrowed and wrinkled as it was, bore an expression of nobility, which involuntarily aroused the suspicion that he had once seen better days. As to the girl, she could hardly be over sixteen, but was fully developed. Petite in size, with a face that was freshness itself, two big, dark lustrous eyes, a wealth of dark hair, and bust and limbs that were simply perfect. Her every movement denoted an inborn grace that was the more noticeable on account of the company in which she found herself. She appeared very shy and reserved; but her shyness was of a kind which, at the least attempt to make free with her, or the least suggestive action, made place for a dignity and self-reliance seldom found in girls of her age. Altogether the couple seemed totally out of place amidst their surroundings.

They lived in a cottage and occupied it by themselves, having no other companion than an old spaniel which they had brought with them. Who they were or whence they came originally no one seemed to know, not even the people with whom they had arrived. Once, in an outburst of confidence, the old man had told the parish priest, who made them a visit to enquire why they did not attend church, that he was a lineal descendant of the famous navigator, Jacques Cartier; and this coming to the ears of the people that lived in the neighbourhood, they had dubbed him "Old Jake," while the girl, whose name was Marie Antoinette, called so perhaps after the great and beautiful but unfortunate Queen of France, was, probably on account of her diminutive size, known as "Tidbits" amongst her English companions in the mills. Though surrounded by a crowd of people whose coarse jests often sent a blush to her cheek, little Tidbits remained singularly free from the insults which were continually heaped upon the other women, and even the foreman seemed to stand in awe of her. She spoke to no one unless obliged to, attended regularly to her work, and usually went straight home from the mill. When the weather permitted, she spent most of her time near the river, where, with the old dog by her side, she read French poems and tales of chivalry, or dreamingly gazed into the broad sheet of water before her for hours at a time, watching all kinds of curious things as they joyfully floated past towards the boundless ocean.

There was not a man or a boy in the village who would not gladly have done anything she might have asked in return for a smile. But she never asked favours, and she never gave them a chance to come near her or address her; in fact she seemed to be hardly aware of their existence.

One day while seated in her accustomed place a small sail-boat, containing two men, stopped in the immediate vicinity of where she was sitting. The men were both young, wore summer attire, and sported straw hats and white flannel shirts. After they had fastened the boat and jumped ashore, one of them, taking off his hat, asked her in English where the nearest hotel was. As she evidently did not understand him, the other and handsomer of the two, addressed her in French, asking the same question, to which she replied in as few words as possible. After which he thanked her and both went in the direction pointed out by her. When they returned she had gone, a circumstance which seemed to cause the two young men some disappointment.

"Fred," said the handsomer one of the two, "I wonder who she was anyhow. No doubt she is one of the prettiest little things I ever saw."

"Take care now," said his companion, in a tone of mock warning, "that you don't fly from the frying-pan into the fire. Better wait till we hear from Philadelphia before turning your mind to new entanglements."

"Oh, bother Philadelphia and the whole virtuous lot of them," was the not very polite reply. "Besides, you don't suppose that I would fall in love with that little thing we saw just now simply because she is pretty, moves about like a queen, and has lips for talking French that would seduce a saint. Bah! what nonsense. I am astonished at you, Fred."

"Well, I am glad to hear it," the other dryly replied, "for I would most strenuously object, though I know that it would do just as much good as whistling for storm in a calm."

And he was right. Arthur, the one who talked French and whose other name need not be mentioned, usually did just as he pleased, especially if a pretty woman was concerned. Being far from bad-looking, with an independent little fortune, and an indulgent mother, who was ready at all time to help her darling out of any of the troubles caused by his often reckless behaviour, he was one of those men that walk carelessly through life's garden, plucking the choicest flowers they meet, and, after enjoying their beauty and perfume to the utmost extent, throw them aside or crush them under their foot as soon as they show the slightest signs of fading. His latest exploit of that kind had got him into a more or less serious scrape. He had poached upon the preserves of others, and by the advice of his mother's lawyer, who was usually the best physician in those cases, had decided to spend a couple of months with friends in the Dominion, where, under the circumstances, the air doubtless could be more beneficial. Though denying to his friend his intention of troubling about the girl, he had secretly made up his mind to return the next day, and planning in matters of this kind with him was acting. He had become tired of the monotonous life he was living; he wanted some new excitement and thought he was in a fair way to get it.

He did return the next day and the next, and whenever the weather allowed. At first little Tidbits left when he arrived; but soon she became accustomed to his visits, and in a few days actually began to watch for the little white sail and the narrow tri-coloured streamer which, to please her, he floated from the masthead. The old spaniel, which had watched over her so long, fearing no evil, was the first to break the ice, and the mistress soon followed. She allowed her newly-found friend to induce her to change her seat to a spot where they could not so easily be observed by the villagers. He brought her books and fruits, talked to her about the glorious time when French was the language of Canada, expressed his disdain for the treacherous English, and painted in glowing colours the wealth, the beauty, and the freedom of his own country. She on her part commenced to admire and ended with love. Hers was one of those natures whose passion is but slowly kindled; but, when once ablaze, cannot be extinguished without often involving the destruction of both body and soul. Arthur himself did not know exactly what to do. He had received a note stating that the trouble in Philadelphia had been settled and was anxious to leave Canada. At last he made a plan. He wrote for money, stating that he was going to make a trip to the south. He then took leave of his friends, bought two tickets for New York, hired a carter, who had a pair of dark horses, by the hour, and went to bid farewell to the little girl.

Sometime about dusk the watchman at one of the mills saw a carriage with two dark horses drive past him towards town at a furious pace. In it were a man and a woman, and the latter's figure seemed familiar to him. But as he was only paid to watch the mill, he soon forgot all about it. That night the old spaniel, with drooping ears and tail between his legs, went sadly home alone.

The next morning every one knew that Tidbits had disappeared, but no one knew how or with whom. Old Jake had been to the police station, but they knew nothing till two days afterwards,