

BOOK THE SECOND.

THE MASSACRE OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW.

The children woke. The little girl was the first to open her eyes.

The waking of children is like the unclosing of flowers, a perfume seems to exhale from those fresh young souls. Georgette, twenty months old, the youngest of the three, who was still a nursing baby in the month of May, raised her little head, sat up in her cradle, looked at her feet, and began to chatter.

A ray of the morning fell across her crib; it would have been difficult to decide which was the rosier, Georgette's foot or Aurora.

The other two still slept—the slumber of boys is heavier. Georgette, gay and happy, began to chatter. René-Jean's hair was brown, Gros-Alain was auburn, Georgette's blonde. These tints would change later in life. René-Jean had the look of an infant Hercules; he slept lying on his stomach, with his two fists in his eyes. Gros-Alain had thrust his legs outside his little bed.

All three were in rags; the garments given them by the battalion of the Bonnet Rouge had worn to shreds; they had not even a shirt between them. The two boys were almost naked; Georgette was muffled in a rag which had once been a petticoat, but was now little more than a jacket. Who had taken care of these children? Impossible to say. Not a mother. These savage peasant fighters, who dragged them along from forest to forest, had given them their portion of soup. That was all. The little ones lived as they could. They had everybody for master, and nobody for father. But even about the rags of childhood there hangs a halo. These three tiny creatures were lovely.

Georgette prattled. A bird sings—a child prattles—but it is the same hymn; hymn indistinct, inarticulate, but full of profound meaning. The child, unlike the bird, has the sombre destiny of humanity before it. This thought saddens any man who listens to the joyous song of a child. The most sublime psalm that can be heard on this earth is the lisping of a human soul from the lips of childhood. This confused murmur of thought, which is as yet only instinct, holds a strange, unreasoning appeal to eternal justice; perchance it is a protest against life while standing on its threshold; a protest unconscious, yet heart-rending; this ignorance, smiling at infinity, lays upon all creation the burden of the destiny which shall be offered to this feeble, unarmed creature. If unhappiness comes, it seems like a betrayal of confidence.

The babble of an infant is more and less than speech; it is not measured, and yet it is a song; not syllables, and yet a language; a murmur that began in heaven and will not finish on earth; it commenced before human birth, and will continue in the sphere beyond! These lisping are the echo of what the child said when it was an angel, and of what it will say when it enters eternity. The cradle has a yesterday, just as the grave has a To-morrow; and this morrow and this yesterday join their double mystery in that incomprehensible warbling, and there is no such proof of God, of eternity, and the duality of destiny, as in this awe-inspiring shadow flung across that flower-like soul.

There was nothing saddening in Georgette's prattle; her whole lovely face was a smile. Her mouth smiled, her eyes smiled, the dimples in her cheek smiled. There was a serene acceptance of the morning in this smile. The soul has faith in the sunlight. The sky was blue, warm, beautiful. This frail creature, who knew nothing, who comprehended nothing, softly cradled in a dream which was not thought, felt herself in safety amid the loveliness of nature, these sturdy trees, this pure verdure, this landscape fair and peaceful, with its noises of birds, brooks, insects, leaves, above which glowed the brightness of the sun.

After Georgette, René-Jean, the eldest, who was past four, awoke. He sat up, jumped in a manly way over the side of his cradle, found out the porringer, considered that quite natural, and so sat down on the floor, and began to eat his soup.

Georgette's prattle had not awakened Gros-Alain, but at the sound of the spoon in the porringer, he turned over with a start, and opened his eyes. Gros-Alain was the one of three years old. He saw his bowl. He had only to stretch out his arm and take it, so, without leaving his bed, he followed René-Jean's example, seized the spoon in his little fist, and began to eat, holding the bowl on his knees.

Georgette did not hear them; the modulations of her voice seemed measured by the cradling of a dream. Her great eyes, gazing upward, were divine. No matter how dark the ceiling in the vault above a child's head, Heaven is reflected in its eyes.

When René-Jean had finished his portion, he scraped the bottom of his bowl with his spoon, sighed, and said with dignity, "I have eaten my soup."

This roused Georgette from her reverie. "Thoup!" said she.

Seeing that René-Jean had eaten, and that Gros-Alain was eating, she took the porringer which was placed by her cradle and began to eat in her turn, not without carrying the spoon to her ear much oftener than to her mouth.

From time to time she renounced civilization, and ate with her fingers.

When Gros-Alain had scraped the bottom of his porringer too, he leaped out of bed and joined his brother.

Suddenly from without, down below, on the side of the forest, came the stern, loud ring of a trumpet.

To this clarion-blast a horn from the top of the tower replied.

This time it was the clarion which called, and the horn which made answer.

The clarion blew a second summons, and the horn again replied.

Then from the edge of the forest rose a voice, distant but clear, which cried thus: "Brigands, a summons! If at sunset you have not surrendered at discretion, we commence the attack."

A voice, which sounded like the roar of a wild animal, responded from the summit of the tower: "Attack!"

The voice from below resumed, "A cannon will be fired, as a last warning, half an hour before the assault."

The voice from on high repeated, "Attack!"

These voices did not reach the children, but the trumpet and the horn rose loud and clear. At the first sound of the clarion, Georgette lifted her head, and stopped eating; at the sound of the horn, she dropped her spoon into the porringer; at the second blast of the trumpet she lifted the little forefinger of her right hand, and, raising and depressing it in turn, marked the cadences of the flourish which prolonged the blast. When the trumpet and the horn ceased, she remained with her finger pensively lifted, and then murmured, in a half voice, "Muthic."

We suppose that she wished to say "Music." The two older children, René-Jean and Gros-Alain, had paid no attention to the trumpet and horn; they were absorbed by something else; a wood-louse was just making a journey across the library floor.

Gros-Alain perceived it, and cried, "There is a little creature!"

René-Jean ran up. Gros-Alain continued, "It pricks." "Do not hurt it," said René-Jean.

And both remained watching the traveller. Georgette proceeded to finish her soup; that done, she looked about for her brothers. René-Jean and Gros-Alain were in the recess of one of the windows, gravely stooping over the wood-louse, their foreheads touching, their curls mingling. They held their breath in wonder, and examined the insect, which had stopped, and did not attempt to move, though not appreciating the admiration it received.

Georgette, seeing that her brothers were watching something, must needs know what it was. It was not an easy matter to reach them—still she undertook the journey. The way was full of difficulties; there were things scattered over the floor. There were footstools overturned, heaps of old papers, packing-cases, forced open and empty; trunks, rubbish of all sorts, in and out of which it was necessary to sail—a whole archipelago of reefs—but Georgette risked it. The first task was to get out of her crib; then she entered the chain of reefs, twisted herself through the straits, pushed a footstool aside, crept between two coffers, got over a heap of papers, climbing up one side and rolling down the other, regardless of the exposure to her poor little naked legs, and succeeded in reaching what a sailor would have called an open sea, that is, a sufficiently wide space of the floor which was not littered over, and where there were no more perils; then she bounded forward, traversed this space, which was the whole width of the room, on all fours with the agility of a kitten, and got near to the window. There a fresh and formidable obstacle encountered her; the great ladder lying along the wall reached to this window, the end of it passing a little beyond the corner of the recess. It formed between Georgette and her brothers a sort of cape, which must be crossed. She stopped and meditated; her internal monologue ended, she came to a decision. She resolutely twisted her rosy fingers about one of the rungs, which were vertical as the ladder lay along its side. She tried to raise herself on her feet, and fell back; she began again, and fell a second time; the third effort was successful. Then, standing up, she caught hold of the rungs in succession, and walked the length of the ladder. When she reached the extremity there was nothing more to support her. She tottered, but seizing in her two hands the end of one of the great poles which held the rungs, she rose again, doubled the promontory, looked at René-Jean and Gros-Alain, and began to laugh.

At that instant, René-Jean, satisfied with the result of his investigations of the wood-louse, raised his head, and announced, "'Tis a she creature."

Georgette's laughter made René-Jean laugh, and René-Jean's laughter made Gros-Alain laugh.

Georgette seated herself beside her brothers, the recess forming a sort of little reception chamber, but their guest, the wood-louse, had disappeared.

It had taken advantage of Georgette's laughter to hide itself in a crack of the floor.

Other incidents followed the wood-louse's visit. First, a flock of swallows passed. They probably had their nests under the edge of the overhanging roof. They flew close to the window, a little startled by the sight of the children, describing great circles in the air, and uttering their melodious spring song. The sound made the three little ones look up, and the wood-louse was forgotten.

Georgette pointed her finger toward the swallows, and cried "Chicks!"

René-Jean reprimanded her. "Miss, you must not say 'chicks'; they are birds."

"Birz," repeated Georgette.

And all three sat and watched the swallows. Then a bee entered. There is nothing so like a soul as a bee. It goes from flower to flower as a soul from star to star, and gathers honey as the soul does light.

This visitor made a great noise as it came in; it buzzed at the top of its voice, seeming to say, "I have come. I have first been to see the roses, now I come to see the children. What is going on here?"

A bee is a housewife—its song is a grumble. The children did not take their eyes off the new-comer as long as it stayed with them.

The bee explored the library, rummaged in the corners, fluttered about with the air of being at home in a hive, and wandered, winged and melodious, from bookcase to bookcase, examining the titles of the volumes through the glass doors as if it had an intellect. Its exploration finished it departed.

"It is going to its own house," said René-Jean.

"It is a beast," said Gros-Alain.

"No," replied René-Jean, "it is a fly."

"A fly," said Georgette.

Thereupon Gros-Alain, who had just found on the floor a cord, with a knot in one end, took the opposite extremity between his thumb and forefinger, and made a sort of windmill of the string, watching its whirls with profound attention.

On her side, Georgette, having turned into a quadruped again, and recommenced her capricious course back and forward across the floor, discovered a venerable tapestry-covered armchair, so eaten by moths that the horsehair stuck out in several places. She stopped before this seat. She enlarged the holes, and diligently pulled out the long hair.

Suddenly she lifted one finger; that meant, "Listen!"

The two brothers turned their heads.

A vague, distant noise surged up from without; it was probably the attacking camp executing some strategic manoeuvre in the forest; horses neighed, drums beat, caissons rolled, chains clanked, military calls and responses; a confusion of

savage sounds, whose mingling formed a sort of harmony. The children listened in delight.

"It is the good God who does that," said René-Jean.

The noise ceased. René-Jean remained lost in a dream. How do ideas vanish and re-form themselves in the brains of those little ones? What is the mysterious motive of those memories at once so troubled and so brief? There was in that sweet, pensive little soul a mingling of ideas of the good God, of prayer, of joined hands, the light of a tender smile it had formerly known and knew no longer, and René-Jean murmured, half aloud, "Mamma!"

"Mamma!" repeated Gros-Alain.

"Mamma!" cried Georgette.

Then René-Jean began to leap. Seeing this Gros-Alain leaped too. Gros-Alain repeated every movement and gesture of his brother. Three years copies four years, but twenty months keeps its independence. Georgette remained seated, uttering a word from time to time. Georgette could not yet manage sentences. She was a thinker; she spoke in apophthegms. She was monosyllabic.

Still, after a little, example proved infectious, and she ended by trying to imitate her brothers, and these three little pairs of naked feet began to dance, to run, to totter amid the dust of the old polished oak floor, beneath the grave aspects of the marble busts toward which Georgette from time to time cast an unquiet glance, murmuring "Ma-mans."

Probably in Georgette's language this signified something which looked like a man, but yet which she comprehended was not one—perhaps the first glimmering of an idea in regard to phantoms.

Georgette, oscillating rather than walking, followed her brothers, but her favourite mode of locomotion was on all fours.

(To be continued.)

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

WEDNESDAY, Sept. 9.—M. de Lesseps has abandoned the Central Asian Railway project.

The first train is to be run through the Hoosac Tunnel on the 1st of November.

A cargo of tea, valued at \$40,000, has been seized by the Customs authorities at New York.

A Berlin despatch says it is rumoured that all foreign priests, monks, and nuns will shortly be expelled from Prussia.

A further instalment of \$9,000,000 was forwarded yesterday by the United States Government to the European Syndicate.

Charles Perkins, a former United States Vice-consul at Paris, found guilty of obtaining money under false pretences, was sentenced to one year's imprisonment, a fine of one hundred francs, and ordered to refund all the monies fraudulently obtained by him.

THURSDAY, Sept. 10.—M. Guizot died at Paris to-day. A severe shock of earthquake was lately experienced at Yokohama.

The Japan Gazette relates the murder of Mr. Haber, German Consul at Hakodadi, by a native.

Up to the 8th inst. the "Faraday" had paid out 458 knots of the new direct cable to the United States.

Five per cent. of the Cuban volunteer force has been ordered out immediately for active service till April, 1875.

The total value of grain and flour shipped during the month of August last from Chicago to Canada to be transhipped to European ports aggregates \$543,712.

The New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company have negotiated a \$3,000,000 loan, which will enable them to complete four tracks to Buffalo.

FRIDAY, Sept. 11.—Extensive forgeries of deeds of real estate have been creating quite a sensation amongst real estate agents of New York and Brooklyn.

The September returns of the United States Department of Agriculture show a very heavy decline in the prospective cotton crop.

The International Law Association, which has been sitting at Geneva this past week, closed its session to-day.

The new Spanish ambassador has presented his credentials to President MacMahon, who promised friendly co-operation with the Republic.

A despatch from Shanghai says it is thought likely that the Formosa difficulty will be referred for arbitration either to the United States or the King of Italy. A peaceful solution of the trouble is confidently hoped for.

A collision took place on the Great Eastern Railway to-day near Norwich, England, by which twenty persons were killed outright, and fifty wounded, some of whom are not expected to survive.

SATURDAY, Sept. 12.—It is rumoured that the King of Ashantee is to be deposed.

Calixte Garcia, the Cuban insurgent leader, is likely to die of wounds received at the time of his capture.

Eight iron-clads were sold by the United States Government at New Orleans on Saturday for the total amount of \$66,725.

Tilton threatens to publish another statement, in which case there is some talk of putting into force the law respecting the transmission of obscene literature.

By the recent agreement of the Atlantic Steamship Co., the steerage passage from Liverpool to Boston was fixed at the uniform rate of £5, for fast and slow boats. The slow lines have consequently withdrawn, and competition has again commenced.

SUNDAY, Sept. 13.—Guizot is dead.

MONDAY, Sept. 14.—An unsuccessful attempt has been made to assassinate the President of Peru.

The trial of the alleged accomplices in the escape of Marshal Bazaine commenced to-day.

The rumour that Germany was seeking territorial acquisitions on the American continent is officially denied.

Six hundred Moldavian peasants created immense excitement by making a journey into Austrian territory.

The voting in the French Department of Maine et Loire resulted in no election. A second ballot will be taken on the 27th inst. The Republican candidate was 17,000 votes ahead.

The aspect of Germany toward Denmark has become so threatening, and the expulsion of Danish subjects from German soil of such daily occurrence, that it is thought a formal protest will shortly be sent to Great Britain.

Governor Dix has at last given forth his decision in the Have-meyer case, and while condemning in pointed terms the action of the Mayor, declines any further proceedings in the case, not considering that the Mayor was actuated by any corrupt motive.