

churchyard here," remarked De Pean; "all the life of the place is down at Menut's! I like the small hours," added he, as the chime of the Recollets ceased. "They are easily counted, and pass quickly, asleep or awake. Two o'clock in the morning is the meridian of the day for a man who has wit to wait for it at Menut's—these small hours are all that are worth reckoning in a man's life!"

Without consenting to accompany De Pean, Le Gardeur suffered himself to be led by him. He knew the company that awaited him there—the wildest and most dissolute gallants of the city and garrison were usually assembled there at this hour.

The famous old hostelry was kept by Master Menut, a burly Breton who prided himself on keeping everything full and plenty about his house—tables full, tankards full, guests full, and himself very full. The house was to-night lit up with unusual brilliance, and was full of company—Cadet, Varin, Mercier, and a crowd of the friends and associates of the Grand Company. Gambling, drinking, and conversing in the loudest strain on such topics as interested their class, were the amusements of the night. The vilest thoughts, uttered in the low argot of Paris, were much affected by them. They felt a pleasure in this sort of protest against the extreme refinement of society, just as the collegians of Oxford, trained beyond their natural capacity in morals, love to fall into slang, and, like Prince Hal, talk to every tinker in his own tongue.

De Pean and Le Gardeur were welcomed with open arms at the Taverne de Menut. A dozen brimming glasses were offered them on every side. De Pean drank moderately. "I have to win back my losses of last night," said he, "and must keep my head clear." Le Gardeur, however, refused nothing that was offered him. He drank with all, and drank every description of liquor. He was speedily led up into a large, well-furnished room, where tables were crowded with gentlemen playing cards and dice for piles of paper money, which was tossed from hand to hand with the greatest nonchalance as the game ended and was renewed.

Le Gardeur plunged headlong into the flood of dissipation. He played, drank, talked argot, and cast off every shred of reserve. He doubled his stakes, and threw his dice reckless and careless whether he lost or won. His voice overbore that of the stoutest of the revellers. He embraced De Pean as his friend, who returned his compliments by declaring Le Gardeur de Repentigny to be the king of good fellows, who had the "strongest head to carry wine and the stoutest heart to defy dull care of any man in Quebec."

De Pean watched with malign satisfaction the progress of Le Gardeur's intoxication. If he seemed to flag, he challenged him afresh to drink to better fortune; and when he lost the stakes, to drink again to spite ill-luck.

But let a veil be dropped over the wild doings of the Taverne de Menut. Le Gardeur lay insensible at last upon the floor, where he would have remained, had not some of the servants of the inn who knew him lifted him up compassionately and placed him upon a couch, where he lay, breathing heavily like one dying. His eyes were fixed; his mouth, where the kisses of his sister still lingered, was partly opened, and his hands were clenched, rigid as a statue's.

"He is ours now!" said De Pean to Cadet. "He will not again put his head under the wing of the Philiberts!"

The two men looked at him, and laughed brutally.

"A fair lady whom you know, Cadet, has given him liberty to drink himself to death, and he will do it."

"Who is that? Angelique?" asked Cadet.

"Of course; who else? and Le Gardeur won't be the first or last man she has put under storeroom sheets."

replied De Pean, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Gloria patri filioque!" exclaimed Cadet, mockingly; "the Honnetes Gens will lose their trump card. How did you get him away from Belmont, De Pean?"

"Oh, it was not I! Angelique des Meloises set the trap and whistled the call that brought him," replied De Pean.

"Like her, the incomparable witch!" exclaimed Cadet, with a hearty laugh. "She would lure the very devil to play her tricks, instead of his own. She would beat Satan at his best game to ruin a man."

"It would be all the same, Cadet, I fancy—Satan or she! But where is Bigot? I expected him here."

"Oh, he is in a tantrum to-night, and would not come. That piece of his at Beaumanoir is a thorn in his flesh, and a snow-ball on his spirits. She is taming him. By St. Cocufin! Bigot loves that woman!"

"I told you that before, Cadet. I saw it a month ago, and was sure of it on that night when he would not bring her up to show her to us."

"Such a fool, De Pean, to care for any woman! What will Bigot do with her, think you?"

"How should I know? Send her adrift some fine day, I suppose, down the Riviere du Loup. He will, if he is a sensible man. He dare not marry any woman without license from La Pompadour, you know. The jolly fishwoman holds a tight rein over her favorites. Bigot may keep as many women as Solomon—the more, the merrier; but woe befall him if he marries without La Pompadour's consent! They say she herself dotes on Bigot—that is the reason." De Pean really believed that was the reason; and certainly there was reason for suspecting it.

"Cadet! Cadet!" exclaimed several voices. "You are fined a basket of champagne for leaving the table."

"I'll pay it," replied he, "and double it; but it is hot as Tartarus in here. I feel like a grilled salmon." And indeed, Cadet's broad, sensual face was red and glowing as a harvest moon. He walked a little unsteady, too, and his naturally coarse voice sounded thick, but his hard brain never gave way beyond a certain point under any quantity of liquor.

"I am going to get some fresh air," said he. "I shall walk as far as the Fleur-de-Lis. They never go to bed at that jolly old inn."

"I will go with you!" "And I!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

"Come on, then; we will all go to the old dog-hole, where they keep the best brandy in Quebec. It is smuggled, of course, but that makes it all the better."

Mine host of the Taverne de Menut combated this opinion of the goodness of the liquors at the Fleur-de-Lis. His brandy had paid the King's duties, and bore the stamp of the Grand Company, he said; and he appealed to every gentleman present on the goodness of his liquors.

Cadet and the rest took another round of it to please the landlord, and sallied out with no little noise and confusion. Some of them struck up the famous song which, beyond all others, best expressed the gay, rollicking spirit of the French nation and of the times of the old regime:

"Vive Henri Quatre!  
Vive le Roi vaillant!  
Ce diable a quatre  
A le triple talent.  
De boire et de battre,  
Et d'être un vert galant."

When the noisy party arrived at the Fleur-de-Lis, they entered without ceremony into a spacious room—low, with heavy beams, and with roughly-plastered walls, which were stuck over with proclamations of governors and intendants and dingy ballads brought by sailors from French ports.

(To be continued.)

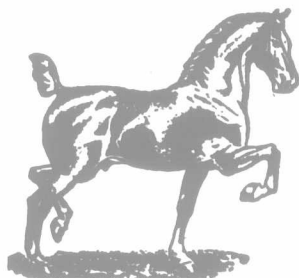


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5



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