

that all was over: giddy with terror, they had rushed into Henri's room. Thank Heaven! he was still there, and asleep: they knelt by his bed and wept.

"Mother," he said on awaking, "I've been dreaming that they had taken me."

Another night Madeleine saw herself in a field somewhere. All around and before her were soldiers; by them stood lines of cannon; here and there were horses, and by the light of a few bivouac fires she perceived some bleeding heaps of dead. Of a sudden she stumbled: a corpse was barring her way. She stooped over it; it was her boy!

Once again she fancied herself seated by her cottage door: the sun was sitting, and down the small road which led to the house galloped an orderly, a dragoon, covered with dust. "Are you Madeleine Derblay?" he asked. — "Yes." — He drew from his sack a letter sealed with black. "Madame," he said, "your son has died for his country, but he has gained this on the field of battle;" and he handed her a cross of the Legion of Honour. "Give me back my child!" she had shrieked; "take away your reward! Give me back my child! I won't sell him for that cross."

And Henri the while? His heart was as heavy as that of his parents, for he well knew that the day which doomed him to a seven years' absence would also condemn him to orphanhood. His father and mother were too aged by sorrow to be able to abide his return: they would soon die; and if not, who would be there to tend them to earn them bread, to find them the comforts which their old arms were unfit to earn by themselves? These reflections were terrible; and besides, to make his pain more torturing, he was in love. A young girl of his own age had been destined for him by his parents and by hers, and she was to become his wife at once if—if—and ever uppermost to cloud all his prospects came that fatal if—if he should draw a lucky number at the conscription. But what if he should not? How could he ask her to wait for him seven years? or how, indeed, could he expect that her friends would allow her to do so? They were poor people, as he knew, and it was but natural that they should wish to see their daughter speedily settled. This thought filled the unhappy boy with despair; and as the twentieth of February, the day appointed for the conscription, approached, he was almost beside himself with anxiety. For a long while his father and his mother, trusting to their arms and their economy, had lived in the hope of being able to buy him off. Two thousand three hundred francs were needed to do this, and neither hard work, self-denial nor thrift had been spared to collect the money; but it was a large sum, and notwithstanding all the hard toil of father and son, and all the frugality of the mother, they had not been able in five years' time to collect more than two-thirds of it. An accident had then happened to them: Madeleine, whose love, deep and boundless as Heaven, had pushed her to pinch and stint herself almost to starvation in order to save, had fallen ill under her efforts, and her life had only been saved after a three months' combat with death, during which doctor's fees, medicines and little comforts had swallowed up five hundred francs of what had been laid by. At the beginning of February there were, therefore, nearly fourteen hundred francs wanting to make up the amount needed.

In this emergency, François Derblay had thought of a person to whom he had once rendered a service of importance—a tradesman who lived in a neighbouring town who was known to be rich, and who had promised his benefactor in the first flush of his gratitude that if ever he could discharge the obligation under which he lay, he would do so at any cost and with the sincerest joy. Poor, guileless Derblay! measuring the words of others by the same simple and honest standard of truth by which he was used to mete his own sayings and promises, he innocently believed in the sterling worth of his debtor's assurance, and starting off to visit him with his son, naively asked the man to lend him the fourteen hundred francs he so much needed. Of course, the worthy shopkeeper would have been, as he said, delighted to do so: day and night had he thought of his dear friend, and prayed Providence to send him an occasion of showing his gratitude. But why, alas! had not François come but half an hour before? He should then have had the sum, and double, treble, the sum, had he pleased; whereas now—and dear! dear! what an unfortunate thing it was!—now it was completely out of his power to comply with the request, for he had just paid in to a creditor five thousand francs, "the last money he had or should have for some months." The good soul was grieved beyond expression, wept, and affectionately showed his visitors to the door.

It was on their return from this bootless errand the day previous to the drawing of the conscription that I had fallen in with the two peasants. They had cast their last die but one and unsuccessfully: a single chance yet remained—that of drawing a lucky ticket—but on this they dared not even hope. Their match against Fortune they considered already lost, and told me so.

"No, no," I exclaimed in as cheering a tone as possible, "you must not despair, Monsieur Derblay: your son has as good a chance of drawing happily as any one else."

"Ay," answered the old man, "but few have a good chance at all this year;" and he then explained that owing to the Mexican expedition, there was a greater demand for soldiers than

usual, and also that, by a strange fatality, the number of young men of an age to draw—that is, of twenty—was smaller that year than usual. Some one hundred and ten only were to be chosen from, and of these about eighty would be conscripts.

"Well, well," I cried, "there will still be thirty winning members."

Henri shook his head: "We cannot count so many as that, sir, for of the eighty taken twenty at least will claim exemption on the ground of infirmities, as being only sons of widows, or as having elder brothers already in the service. The government will thus be obliged to press twenty more, and this will bring the number of losing figures up to one hundred."

"The odds are ten to one against him," sadly muttered the father, drawing from his pocket a paper covered with figures. "We have it all written down here; I've calculated it;" and for perhaps the thousandth time the old man recommenced his dismal arithmetic.

At this moment we heard a knock at the door of the cottage where we were all four seated round the fire. "It is Louise, poor girl!" cried Madeleine, rising; "she told me she would come;" and she opened the door to give admittance to two women. The first was a tall, neatly-dressed, middle-aged woman; the second, her daughter, was a young, slight, fair haired girl of twenty. She was not pretty, but her features wore a look of honesty and candour which gave a bright and pleasing expression to her face, and one could see at a glance that although poor and possibly untaught, that part of her education had not been neglected which was to render her a good and virtuous woman. I was not long in finding out that she was the betrothed of Henri Derblay, and I could not wonder that the poor lad should grieve at the prospect of losing her.

Casting her eyes timidly round for her lover, she blushed as she entered upon seeing a stranger, and passing by me with a little curtsy went to greet François and his wife.

"God bless you, dear child!" cried Madeleine, caressing her; "we are in sad need of your bright sunny face to cheer us;" and she led the young girl toward Henri, who, leaning against the chimney, was affecting a composure strangely at variance with the trembling of his limbs and the violent quivering of his upper lip.

Louise walked up to him, and seeming to forget my presence innocently held up her forehead for him to kiss. "Tu as du chagrin, mon pauvre ami?" she said in tones of exquisite delicacy and tenderness, and took one of his hands in hers.

A few minutes after I rose to take my leave; François accompanied me to the door. "I think, sir," he said hesitatingly, "you might perhaps bring good-luck to our poor boy by going to-morrow to see the conscription. Would you do us the favour of joining us? We shall all be at St. Valéry."

"Certainly," I replied, shaking his hand, and starting off with my heart so full that the league's walk from the cottage to my lodgings filled up one of the saddest hours I have ever spent.

I passed a dull night; how indeed could I do otherwise? And I am sure that I never so sincerely lamented the want of wealth as upon that occasion, when a thousand francs might have given me the joy of making four people happy.

The next day, the twentieth of February, dawned brightly—so brightly indeed that I began to draw from the smiling appearance of the heavens a good augury for the luck of Henri Derblay. It was about eight when I set out. The conscription was to begin at nine, but already the one straggling, narrow street which bisects the old bathing town was filled with country people hastening in groups or singly towards the market place, where the town-hall was situated. The scene presented here was of a most animated kind. The market had some time since begun, and in and out amongst the stalls of the sellers moved a crowd of people of all trades, of all ranks, and of all appearances. Fishermen, tradesmen, peasants, soldiers—knots of all these were there, some from curiosity or to accompany a friend or relation to the urn; some laughing, some shouting, some drinking, some dancing in a boisterous round to the music of a barrel-organ; some bawling a popular song in a gay, over-repeated chorus; some raffling for nuts and biscuits at smartly-decked fair-booths, or playing at Chinese billiards for painted mugs or huge cakes of gilt gingerbread; some listening to the stump orations of an extempore fortune-teller, who promised the bâton of the field-marshal to any conscript who would give him a penny; and some buying by yards, the patriotic soul-stirring songs of Bélanger, and reciting them in every tone, in every key and to every tune. One of these songsters was a young soldier, a lancer, with a bright intelligent look: he was standing outside a cabaret with several companions, and troling in a rich clear voice, a melody which seemed thoroughly to spring from his heart. His eye alternately sparkled or dimmed as his words were animated or affecting, and the expression he breathed into his notes was full of feeling and admirably suited to all he sang. The last stanza of his ballad was especially well given, and it seemed so entirely the interpretation of his sentiments that I am sure more than one person in the crowd must have thought that the young soldier was repeating a composition of his own.

As the song ended, the market-place was being rapidly filled by streams of people who came pouring into it from all directions. The

crowd was now mostly composed of country-people, all dressed in holiday garments, but in appearance, nevertheless, for the greater part at least, the very reverse of happy. In almost every case the families of peasants as they arrived, walked into the church, of which the doors were wide open to invite the faithful to mass, and from which flowed occasionally into the tumult of the crowd without, like a little brook of pure water into a bubbling, surging lake, a few waves of gentle, calm religious music. Each one of the poor people who entered to pray, went up, as I noticed, to the charity-box and dropped in a mite, in the hope, no doubt, that this good action might buy fair fortune for a son or a brother about to "draw." I also remarked that it was toward the chapel of the Virgin that most of the suppliants bent their steps, and more than one mother and sister, moved by a naive faith which one can only respect, carried with them large nosegays of winter flowers to lay at the feet of the Holy Mother's image.

As I left the church and stood looking at a poor ploughboy who, pale with apprehension, was endeavouring to give to himself a look of unconcern by smoking a big cigar in company with some soldiers, who were laughing at him for his pains, a hand touched my arm, and upon turning round I saw François Derblay with his wife and Henri and Louise. A year's illness could not have aged them more than the night they had just spent: they all seemed completely worn out, and when the old man tried to speak, his voice was so hollow and harsh that it frightened me. "Look at Louise, sir," he said at last, slowly shaking his white head: "she and Madeleine there have been sitting up all night praying to God."

"Cast thy bread upon the waters," I answered, "and thou shalt find it after many days."

"Yes, sir," said Louise; "our curate tells us that prayers are like letters—when properly stamped with faith they always reach their address."

"Ay," exclaimed Henri, "but does God always answer them?"

François drew a mass-book from his pocket, and finding the Lord's Prayer. "Look," he said, as he pointed to the words, *Pat voluntas tua in terra et in celo*.

A few minutes after the church-clock struck nine, and by a common impulse all the population of the market-place hurried simultaneously toward the town-hall. The door and ground-floor windows of this building opened at the same time, and we could see the mayor of St. Valéry, with the commissioner of police and a captain of infantry in full uniform, seated at a table upon which stood a cylindrical box horizontally between two pivots. This was the urn. Two gendarmes, one upon each side, stood watching over it with their arms folded. A man came to the window and shouted something which I could not catch, and at the same moment half-a-dozen mayors of districts, girt with their tri-color sashes, ran up the steps of the Hôtel de Ville to draw for the order in which their respective communes were to present themselves. This formality occupied five minutes, and the mayors then came out again to marshal their people into separate groups. The district in which the Derblays lived was to go up third, and as he came to tell us this, the Mayor of N—patted François on the back and told him that there was an odd number and therefore lucky. Poor Madeleine was so weak that she could hardly stand up; Louise and I were obliged to support her.

At half-past nine, punctually, the conscription began, and amidst a breathless silence one of the mayor's assistants came to the window and called out the first name: "Adolphe Monnier, of the commune of S—;" and a tall country boy, elbowing his way through the crowd, walked up into the town-hall. The commissioner of police gave the round box a touch, and as it turned round some six or seven times one might almost have heard a raindrop fall. "Now," said he laughing, "good luck to you!" and the peasant, plunging his hand into the trap of the box, drew out a little piece of cardboard rolled into a curl. "No. 17," shouted the infantry captain, taking it from his hands and reading it, whilst a loud roar of laughter from the mob hailed the dismal fate with which the unhappy lad had heard of his ill-success.

"Oh, what a head for a soldier!" cried some wag in the crowd. "Yes," screamed another, "he'll make the Russians run." "Have you chosen your regiment yet?" barked a third. "Why, of course!" yelled a fourth: "he is to be life-player in the second battalion of the pope's horse-beadles."

And amid a shower of jokes equally witty No. 17 came down, and a second name was called. After him came a third, and then a fourth, and so on, all equally unlucky; and no wonder, since all the numbers up to one hundred were losing ones. There were great differences in the way in which the youths bore their discomfiture; some went up crying to the urn, and trembled as if in an ague whilst it was rolling round; three stamped and sobbed like children when they had lost, and the crowd over charitable in its doings, threw about their ears by way of comfort a volley of epigrams which pricked them like so many wasps; others, on the contrary, went up laughing, and upon drawing a bad number, stuck the card in their hats and came down bandying jokes with the mob as unconcerned as though they had been only taking a pinch of snuff instead of selling seven long years of their lives. Others, again, trying to

imitate the latter, but in reality too miserable to do so with ease, only succeeded in making themselves ridiculous, drawing upon themselves an extra amount of squibs from the spectators; upon which, like young steers worried by mosquitoes, they would begin distributing kicks and blows right and left with most liberal profusion, to the no small disgust of the mayor, and the immense amusement of the infantry captain, who laughed like an ox in a clover-field.

At last a boy went up and drew the number 109; frantic cheers greeted this check to fortune, and the lucky fellow rushed down with such wild demonstrations of joy that it would have been no great folly to have mistaken him for a criminal just reprieved.

A few minutes after the commune of Henri Derblay was called up. Henri himself was sixth on the roll. His father's face had become livid; his mother hung so heavily on my arm that I fancied at one moment she had fainted; Louise was as white as a sheet, and her lips, bloodless and cold, looked blue and frozen as ice.

"Courage, Henri!" I said: "more than forty have drawn, and but one winning number has come out yet: you will have at least nine good chances."

"Henri Derblay, of the commune of N—," cried an official, and we all started as though a gun had been fired. The moment had come; a minute more and the doubt would become certainty.

"Courage, mother!" whispered the boy, stooping over Madeleine, and repeating in a faltering tone the words I had just spoken to him.

The poor woman was speechless; she tried to smile, but her face twitched as though in a convulsion. "My child—" she whispered, and stopped short.

"Henri Derblay!" cried the voice again, and the crowd around repeated the cry: "Be quick, Derblay, they are waiting for you."

The boy drew his sleeve across his eyes and tottered up to the steps of the hall. Louise fell down on her knees; François and his wife did the same; for myself, my temples throbbed as in fever, my hands were dry as wood, and my eyes, fixed on the conscription urn, seemed starting out of their sockets.

Henri walked up to the box.

"Allons, mon garçon," said the mayor, "un peu d'aplomb;" and he opened the lid. Derblay thrust in his hand: his face was turned towards us, and I could see him draw out his ticket and gave it to the captain; a moment's deep silence.

"Number three!" roared the officer; and a howl of derision from the mob covered his words. Henri had become a soldier.

I could not well see what then followed; there was a sudden hush, a chorus of exclamations, a rush toward the steps of the town-hall, and then the crowd fell back to make way for two gendarmes who were carrying a body between them.

"Is he dead?" asked a number of voices.

"Oh no," tittered the two men—"only fainted; he'll soon come round again." And the mob burst into a laugh.

#### THE IRISH CONSTABULARY

Have always shown themselves to be a splendid body of men, and a thoroughly trustworthy force. Instances of gallantry and devotion on the part of individuals are by no means rare, but we are so accustomed to hear of them that pluck and readiness of resource do not always meet with the full recognition which they deserve. A remarkable case, exemplifying determined courage and singular presence of mind, occurred quite recently in Co. Galway, and has been passed over in absolute silence. When the roughs were throwing stones at the hounds near Greg Clare, and making themselves generally unpleasant to the gentlemen of the hunt, it happened that certain phases of the affair were enacted in close proximity to a "police hut." The men were all away on duty except two, but one of these promptly sallied out against some fifty roughs, while the remaining man took charge of the hut. In the centre of the crowd one big blackguard was busy throwing stones and using beastly language; the constable "went for him" at once, and quickly taking him by the collar, ran him out of the crush before the rest recovered from their astonishment. After a pause of a few seconds, however, a rescue seemed imminent, so the constable picked out the fellow who looked most threatening and hooking his arm through that of his second prisoner, marched on with both of them towards the "hut." Another pause ensued, after which the hooting crowd again pressed forward. The policeman put his hand into his breast-pocket to draw his revolver, but to his horror found he had left it at home. Instead, however, of exhibiting any surprise or uneasiness, with wonderful presence of mind he kept his hand where it was, as if grasping the weapon, and turning on his assailants, said, "If any man comes within ten yards of me I'll shoot him dead." The mob was checked instantly, and before the ruse was suspected the plucky fellow succeeded in reaching the hut and turning the key on both his prisoners. Meanwhile a reinforcement of police fortunately arrived, and made several further arrests. The hounds have never since been interfered with.

POLICE patrols have again been appointed to guard Hawarden Castle during Mr. Gladstone's residence.