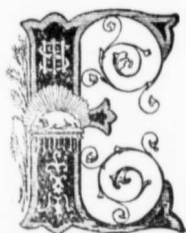


The Portion of the Poor.

An Epiphany Story.



VEN the early twilight of mid-winter brings darkness to the *Rue St-Mathieu*, shut in as it is on both sides by the lofty walls of stately mansions. Grated windows and low doorways alone open into it. But massive porches and wrought iron balconies embellish the façades of those same houses, which look out upon the drowsy river. Here and there, the darkness of the narrow street is occasionally broken by a distant gleam of light which, while rendering some parts less obscure, only intensifies that of others.

This evening, in spite of the fast-falling snow and the fierce winds that rushed whistling through the street, figures of grotesque appearance and anxious mien jostled one another in their efforts to reach the entrance of the dwelling. They came and went, plunging through the snow not yet trodden down, and presenting at the doorways a ragged, and uncouth gathering.

It was the eve of the Feast of the Epiphany, and the unfortunates were looking for the *portion of the poor*.

In these old mansions of the *Rue Saint-Mathieu*, the traditions of Kings' Day were still faithfully observed. Solemnly, in presence of the children gathered around the grandfather, the beautifully decorated cake, in which was hidden the bean, was cut at the evening meal. If well understood, the old customs and pastimes handed down from generation to generation, are worthy of veneration. The "King" chooses his "Queen" and, until the end of the repast, the two sovereigns of an hour, restrained by the tyranny of custom, cannot slake their thirst until a chorus of infantine voices clamorously cry out: "*The King drinks! The Queen drinks!*"

After that, one of the children, either the best or the youngest, enveloped in wraps and carrying a fine quarter of the cake, opens the street door, gives to each mend-