

communication between herself and Caroline. She had learned enough during her brief interview with Caroline in the forest of St. Valier, and from what she now heard respecting the Baron de St. Castin, to convince her that this was no other than his missing daughter.

"If Caroline could only be induced to admit La Corriveau into her secret chamber, and take her into her confidence, the rest—all the rest," muttered the hag to herself, with terrible emphasis, "would be easy, and my reward sure. But that reward shall be measured in my own bushel, not in yours, Mademoiselle des Meloises, when the deed is done!"

La Corriveau knew the power such a secret would enable her to exercise over Angelique. She already regarded the half of her reputed riches as her own. "Neither she nor the Intendant will ever dare neglect me after that!" said she. "When once Angelique shall be linked in with me by a secret compact of blood, the fortune of La Corriveau is made. If the death of this girl be the elixir of life to you, it shall be the touchstone of fortune forever to La Corriveau!"

Mere Malheur was next day despatched on a visit to her old gossip, Dame Tremblay. She had been well tutored on every point, what to say, and how to demean herself. She bore a letter to Caroline, written in the Italian hand of La Corriveau, who had learned to write well from her mother, Marie Exili.

The mere possession of the art of writing was a rarity in those days in the class among whom she lived. La Corriveau's ability to write at all was a circumstance as remarkable to her illiterate neighbors as the possession of the black art which they ascribed to her, and not without a strong suspicion that it had the same origin.

Mere Malheur, in anticipation of a cup of tea and brandy with Dame Tremblay, had dressed herself with some appearance of smartness in a clean striped gown of linsey. A peaked Artois hat surmounted a broad-frilled cap, which left visible some tresses of coarse gray hair and a pair of silver ear-rings, which dangled with every motion of her head. Her shoes displayed broad buckles of brass, and her short petticoat showed a pair of stout ankles enclosed in red clocked stockings. She carried a crutched stick in her hand, by help of which she proceeded vigorously on her journey.

Starting in the morning, she trudged out of the city towards the ferry of Jean Le Nocher, who carefully crossed himself and his boat too as he took Mere Malheur on board. He waded her over in a hurry, as something to be got rid of as quickly as possible.

Mere Malheur tramped on, like a heavy gnome, through the fallen and flying leaves of the woods of Beaumanoir, caring nothing for the golden, hazy sky, the soft, balmy air, or the varicolored leaves—scarlet, yellow, and brown, of every shade and tinge—that hung upon the autumnal trees.

A frosty night or two had ushered in the summer of St. Martin, as it was called by the habitants—the Indian summer—that brief time of glory and enchantment which visits us like a gaudy herald to announce the approach of the Winter King. It is Nature's last rejoicing in the sunshine and the open air, like the splendor and gaiety of a maiden devoted to the cloister, who for a few weeks is allowed to flutter like a bird of paradise amid the pleasures and gaieties of the world, and then comes the end. Her locks of pride are shorn off; she veils her beauty, and kneels a nun on the cold stones of her passionless cell, out of which, even with repentance, there comes no deliverance.

Mere Malheur's arrival at Beaumanoir was speedily known to all the servants of the Chateau. She did not often visit them, but when she did there was a hurried recital of an Ave or two to avert any harm, followed by a patronizing welcome and a rummage for small coins to cross



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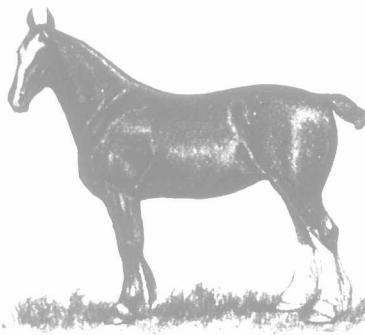
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her hand withal in return for her solutions of the grave questions of love, jealousy, money, and marriage, which fermented secretly or openly in the bosoms of all of them. They were but human beings, food for imposture, and preyed on by deceivers. The visit of Mere Malheur was an event of interest in both kitchen and laundry of the Chateau.

Dame Tremblay had the first claim, however, upon this singular visitor. She met her at the back door of the Chateau, and with a face beaming with smiles, and dropping all dignity, exclaimed:

"Mere Malheur, upon my life! Welcome, you wicked old soul! you surely knew I wanted to see you! come in and rest! you must be tired, unless you came on a broom! ha! ha! come to my room, and never mind anybody!"

This last remark was made for the benefit of the servants who stood peeping at every door and corner, not daring to speak to the old woman in the presence of the housekeeper, but knowing that their time would come, they had patience.

The housekeeper, giving them a se-