

had one of his periodical scores of durance to wipe off, for his first remark to us, when he had shaken hands with Noemie and kissed the children, was about going to Ste. Pelagie on the morrow. "Three months for writing disrespectfully of the Senate," he said in his dry bass voice, and casting a sidelong glance of anticipation at the *chiffonniere* where the bottles stood.

"Yes, three whole months!" exclaimed little Madame Barbelard in glee. "I had some hopes it might have been six, for then we could have saved up enough to buy that pretty villa at Suresnes, on which I have set my heart."

"We'll make up for it by taking three more months in the summer, if all goes well, my dear," said Barbelard, good humoredly; "too much of the real isn't good; one likes to get out and breathe the air now and then."

"Ah, that's just it; and then bathtubs of frames are spent in billiards and little glasses with your friends," responded Madame Barbelard, tartly. "Think of what nice things we might do if you remained for a whole twelvemonth under lock and key!"

"I wonder why they never send printer's foremen to prison," said Madame Grattelot, querulously. She was an Alsatian dame, very fleshy and frugal, and talked with that grinding Strasburg accent, which used to make us Frenchmen laugh till all the sturdy men and women of our fairest Bretonish province passed under the Prussian yoke. "*Lecher Himmel!*" continued she, "what would I not give to see Sesostris in prison for a year, that we might have a little money in these not-to-be-equalled-for-hardness times!"

Sesostris was Grattelot, and he laughed; "Softly, Mamma Grattelot—if I were sent to prison thou wouldst save nothing, for I should have to go there at my own cost. The good times when printers were imprisoned went away with the Empire."

"I wish the Empire would come back then," declared Madame Grattelot. "There should be equal privileges for all; if a sub-editor goes to prison, a printer should be allowed to go too."

At this Madame Barbelard fired up, for she was a stickler about her husband's prerogatives.

"But you forget, Madame, a sub-editor runs great risks, for he has to draw the sword at times," she observed with a touch of asperity.

"Heedless, Madame, but Sesostris would fight too if need were," said Alsatian dame, dryly; "and all I say is that it's hard that all the enjoyment should go to one set of parties, when there's room enough in those prisons for other parties if the Government only chose to make better laws."

Noemie diverted the course of this delicate dispute. It was in her nature to play the peace-maker. I have seen her in the old times, before her husband went away, reconcile a quarrel of artists, who were quarreling about a statue art by setting a jug of beer in their midst. She did some of the sort now by bringing out a decanter of kirch and some liquor glasses to whet our appetites. Such potations make tongues soft. We were still expecting John Brokenshire.

The children had climbed on to Barbelard's huge knee something like a camel's hump in size, and were riding a cock horse on it. The two lady guests, possibly struck of a sudden by the incongruity of vanishing the delights of imprisonment in the hearing of Noemie, who was pining after her captive husband, fell to conversing with their hostess on the more congenial topic of children's garments. Grattelot, pleasantly inhaling the odors of good things that came from the kitchen, took his stand by the mantelshelf and talked to me about my natty and "handy" verses. He was delighted with a recent sonnet of mine on a newly-invented soapbox.

The half after six struck from the steeple of a neighboring church. It was at that hour that John Brokenshire was due; and he never came late, for he regulated every movement of his by a powerful chronometer that told the days of the week and month, and even the changes of the moon. The children pricked up their ears. "L'Ami Brokenshire" was to them the very incarnation of Father Christmas, for he never failed to come with parcels of toys under his arms, and bags of sugar-plums in his pocket. Was he going to be late this year, just for once? No, here he came. Those were his well-known strides on the staircase, clearing four steps at a time, like a grapple racing uphill. One step more and he would be here.

"Le voici!" cried little Victor and his sister jumping off Barbelard's knee with a loud crowing, and off they rushed into the passage. Another minute, and John Brokenshire, parcels, wraps, comforter, and all, was standing under the mistletoe to be hugged and kissed. We all kissed him, men and women, as the fashion is in our country; and I promise you Noemie Leblanc's salute was not the least hearty, though she did make a little sisterly blushing about it.

III.

Imagine the lankiest of men, with cheekbones the line of red currant jelly, a bay-colored beard flowing over his waistcoats, a gray tweed suit delved down, with deep pockets fore and aft, and there you have John Brokenshire as he appeared every day in the year; add a little fog that hung about his flaxen hair and the bluish end of his nose, and a broad smile that displayed his long yellow teeth, like a whole gone at dominoes coloured by long use, and you will have him as he showed himself on this particular occasion of Christmas festivity in our hospitable Parisian lodging.

Christmas was his one day of rest in the year, if rest it can be called to breakfast with an uncle in the suburbs at eight, to attend divine service in the British church at 11, after that to lunch with a married sister, and to wind up with a three hours' racing among toy-shops to bargain for the best sort of gifts for a legion of juvenile friends at retail price. But this was rest to John Brokenshire, comparatively speaking, for mostly he was in a hurry to catch express trains. Christmas was the one day on which he did no travelling, but that which was done for his own pleasure, and the maintenance of affectionate relations with his kinsfolk and acquaintances. When he came to dine on the 25th of December with Noemie Leblanc, we might be sure that he would have the whole evening to himself, and not bolt away between the roast and sweets, as he was certain to do if invited on any other day or any other month in the year.

"*Mong Deu, mes Amis, quel plaisir de retrouver pa teinquet!*" exclaimed this worthy man, drawing a fifteen-bladed knife from one of his score of pockets and beginning to cut the string of his various parcels. "Only to think! *pas de voyage* until 1.15 to-morrow morning, when I'm off for Lyons! Monsieur Barbelard, you seem to me fresh and hale. I've brought you a pair of furred slippers to wear in prison."

"Thank you, Monsieur John," laughed the tall sub-editor. "You seem gay enough too; your business is prosperous, I hope?"

"Business is so-so," said John Brokenshire. "There are times in this country of ours, when money can be hauled in with a net, and others when it has to be angled for, coin by coin, with a fish-hook. It depends on politics, which are silly things everywhere."

"Politics come of newspapers," remarked Grattelot; "if people would read more books and fewer journals, it would be better for trade."

"Not for my trade," said Barbelard, finishing his kirch. "Here's to the spread of journalism!"

"Oh! you—you'd like to be setting people by the ears all the year round; but they'll look you up for longer than you like one of these days," ejaculated the fleshy Madame Grattelot.

"No, madame, they won't look him up for longer than he likes; he'll retire from the business if he sees any signs of that," retorted Madame Barbelard.

They were at it again, but John Brokenshire checked them: "Hullo, you were wrangling over that question last year, and the year before," said he. "I shall be thinking myself at Versailles, among the Deputies, if you don't mind. But I tell you what, I am hungry, and the sooner we sit down the better."

"There's that goose in the kitchen squealing to be dish'd, my dear Noemie," remarked Grattelot, with an enjoyable whiff.

"Ah yes; and, Noemie, *mes enfants*—don't serve up the pudding in a soup-tureen, as you did a year or two ago," prayed John Brokenshire with a wink.

Noemie laughed at this reminder of a bygone failure in preparing the national English dish. She retired to lend a helping hand to the servant-maid, who had been hired for the evening from *Boulevard* over the way; and meanwhile our commercial friend laid out all the presents he had brought. No one had been forgotten. No one—for the Grattelots and Barbelards were adherents of Brokenshire—and it was not in his nature to perpetrate slips of memory. The sub-editor got his furred slippers; the printer's foreman a meerschaum pipe with a pound of Latakia, bought while selling a stock of rifles to the Turks in Asia Minor; Madame Barbelard had a Norwich shawl that looked like cashmere, and Madame Grattelot had a piece of Lyons silk that looked like what it was—first-rate stuff, and no cheating about the dye. Then came the turn of the children to be helped out of one of those wondrous toy-boxes which our Parisian toy-shops send out to develop the instincts of luxury in the minds of French infancy. Victor was presented with a set of articulated soldiers, who made a mimic war in defending a cardboard fort; and little Louisette was rendered happy with a silk-clad doll that could shut its eyes, and say "Mamma," like a very small child with a stomach-ache. I wish I could add the names of a number of gaudy children's books illustrated by my sprightly friends MM. Bertall and Grevin; but I had scarcely time to examine these treasures then, for John Brokenshire thrust something into my own hands—a Russian leather purse, and a pretty full one too. As he did so, he told me that he had been successful in disposing of a whole sheaf of my verses.

This was grateful news that made me redder. "And I've orders for a lot more, friend Poet," said he, closing that fearful knife of his with a snap. "A publican at Nice wants you to recommend his fried fish, and a pastry-cook at Arles has a notion that you can make his cream popular."

"Stick to the six-foot verses, Poet—there's nothing like them for printers," observed Grattelot, who was sucking at the amber mouth-piece of his pipe.

"And then there's a fellow at Carassonne going to set up some cheap baths," continued Brokenshire, consulting a list. "As this is the first time the people in those parts have seen a bath-house, they may poke fun at the innovation unless the inventor can put the laughers on his side by something smart in the way of an epigram, which he will print on his prospectuses."

"I'll do my best," said I, thinking of a rhyme for soap and water.

"But stop a bit; this isn't all," said John

Brokenshire, in that smileless way he had when giving a serious order that he meant to be executed with care and dispatch. "I must bespeak some of best quality verses for a tailor. This is an extra important case. Do you think you could say something nice and kind about breeches and waistcoats?"

"I happen to have a copy of tailoring verses ready made, and only waiting to be filled up with the purchaser's name," answered I, foraging in my pocket-book.

"Good, then. But are they of your best brew?"

"As good as I can write, I think; but I'll try better, if needful."

"All right, then," said the Englishman; "but stay—we'll hear your verses by and by; now's the time for dinner—and here's Noemie's present."

Saying this, he laid a small square parcel by the side of Noemie's plate. She had just entered, preceding the servant wench who bore the soup-tureen, but when she would have stretched forth her hand, smiling, to look at the present, Brokenshire restrained her. "No, my dear, not now. When the plum-pudding comes on, and there's a flash of blue light to cheer us."

His will was law on these occasions. If he had told us all to kneel in a row and guess conundrums we would have done it. Noemie said nothing, but began ladling out the smoking soup with tranquil acquiescence; and we all sat down, the Englishman laying his napkin over his knees, while we three Frenchmen tucked ours under our chins, Frenchwise.

I noticed that John Brokenshire had made no remark yet about Noemie's husband, and she had done no more than question him with a silent interrogation of her blue eyes. She knew his ways, and that there was nothing to be got out of him by pressing. If he had anything to say he would divulge it all in due time. For the present he was absorbed in his soup, and we in ours. It was the richest beef-broth, flavored with leeks, that the spoons seemed to dip into it lovingly of their own accord. Only the children had no appetites, being too much excited about their presents, and grudging every moment that delayed them from going back to play with these tokens of John Brokenshire's friendship.

So this dinner of ours proceeded. And had my friends, how I wish I had the pen of those eminent gastronomists, MM. Erickmann-Chertrain, to describe to you what effect that succulent array of dishes had on our jovial minds. None others but the chronicles of so many brawny feasts in the hard-eating country round Phalsburg could do justice to the splendid figure which the roast goose cut in his dish, stuffed as he was with chestnuts and truffles, and glistening with the sheenest gravy. A ring of well-browned sausages surrounded him. His flesh was so plump that the knife sliced deep into it, and the mouthfuls which you ate with the appetite seemed to melt on the tongue. Nor must it be forgotten that we had drink enough to defy indigestion. The yellow ale of England sparkled in our glasses with its white wig of froth, and our own red vin de Grave, so petulant and ninth-compelling, twinkled like molten rubies. Grattelot and Barbelard drank a bottle apiece, and then polished off a third between them. Their wives gnawed the drumsticks, which they held in their fingers like persons who are not ashamed to show they are enjoying themselves; and buxom Madame Grattelot said all this reminded her of Alsace. John Brokenshire stuck to his beer and made havoc among the sausages. At last he had enough of it, not that we were tired in mind, but because physical Nature said "Hold!" Noemie helped to clear away the plates, and the servant wench went out to fetch the pudding.

It was then that I uncorked the champagne bottles and filled the glasses for a toast to our hostess. We always began with that, and followed it with one to John Brokenshire, in those long glasses of the old fashion that show off the bubbles better than the modern top-heavy bowls. At this moment the maid marched in with the pudding, which she held at arms' length, laughing and shutting her eyes. She had set fire to it in the kitchen, and the flames, leaping up in forked tongues of blue, red, and yellow, licked the sprig of holly on the top and made it crackle. The children clapped their hands, and Barbelard, exhilarated by what he had drunk, shouted "*Vive l'Angleterre!*" There never was such a joyous meeting.

John Brokenshire, however, held up a finger to enjoin silence.

"May I open my parcel now?" asked Noemie, timidly, but with a woman's curiosity about all things hidden.

"Not yet, my dear—one moment," said John Brokenshire; and he looked across the table to me. "Poet, what did you say about having some verses suitable to a tailor? Mind you, it's a tailor whom I wish to please and honour."

"I have the verses here," said I. "I keep a stock of them ready, in case of getting sudden orders."

"A good plan," said our commercial friend. "Sometimes inspiration doesn't come when wanted," I explained, smoothing out my verses on the tablecloth. "You may be asked to rhyme to 'black' when your thoughts are running on 'eau-de-Cologne.' What's your tailor's name?"

"Jakers, an Englishman; but he lives in France. Fill up that name in your blanks, if it will scan. If not, contrive to make it scan."

"It will scan," said I, drawing out a pencil.

"Well, then, read on," begged John Brokenshire. "This is no common matter, and we'll all listen."

I was struck by John Brokenshire's tone—one of greater gravity than the circumstances seemed to call for. Reading aloud is not my forte, and I would have gladly passed on my verses to Noemie, who had a sweet musical voice, well suited to bring out the beauties of poetry. But she was labouring under the emotion of women when they suspect some mystery, and was not in the mood for anything in the nature of a public performance. So I did the reading myself in my best company singsong; and here is the poem I read. I need hardly tell you it was French, but John Brokenshire has since translated it for me into his own tongue and given it a title. I dedicate it with affection and respect to the noble-hearted clothier whose ware it celebrates:

A PAYMENT IN RHYME.

On a summer's morning early, when the grass with dew was pearly,

I called upon a farmer who was feeding little chicks;

He ceased not from his labour, but he said, "Good morning, neighbour;

My breeks are worth a guinea, and they cost me twelve and six."

And the morning sun rose higher, and there came a forage buyer,

And he asked the stalwart farmer for the prices of his ricks;

It was "New hay, four eleven, and the last year's ninety-seven;"

And his breeks were worth a guinea, but had cost him twelve and six.

Then a builder, as appointed, came to speak of fences joined,

And an apple-loft of timber, and a cattle-shed of bricks;

When the notes were daily posted, then again the farmer boasted

That his breeks were worth a guinea, and had cost him twelve and six.

When the clouds at noon grew thinner, then we took a frugal dinner,

And the farmer's buxom daughter did a glass of toddy mix;

And her father waxing wroth, said his legs were strong and sturdy,

And his breeks were worth a guinea, but had cost him twelve and six.

To the fish-pond then we sauntered, where I often had the vacant beard

When wheat's in bloom the trench will rise, although you bait with sticks;

And he caught some goodly dishes of the little silver fishes;

And his breeks were worth a guinea, but had cost him twelve and six.

When the sun had finished setting, and the spouse our tea was getting,

He took a pair of candles and put matches to their wicks;

And the swallows on the skylight were remarking in the twilight,

That his breeks were worth a guinea, and had cost him twelve and six.

And I lit a cigarette, for no fair one puts a veto

On the act, when my affection on myself alone I fix;

And as home I slowly wandered, I seriously pondered,

Would my breeks be worth a guinea, and had cost but twelve and six.

In my sleep a vision hailed me, and at first my courage failed me;

But he smiled, and then I knew it was no courier of Old Nick's;

"I'm the ghost of William Jaker, England's famous breeches-maker,

And my wares are worth a guinea, but shall cost you twelve and six."

I finished reading, and gazed at my plate as authors do when they have been airing their talents in the family circle, and know that the applause will exceed their dues.

"Bravo!" cried the whole table, children included; and there was a chorus of compliments from all save Grattelot, who deplored that I had abandoned the safe path of six-foot lyrics.

"If you write such long verses as those, you might just as well be doing prose," said he, sententiously.

"Hush!" exclaimed John Brokenshire. "Hand over the paper to me, Poet. You'll be glad to give it gratis (though it will be paid for, don't fear) when you learn that William Jaker is a man who makes breeches for the President of the Republic's favourite valet."

"Ah!" ejaculated Madame Grattelot, admiringly.

"An old soldier—I knew him," chimed in Barbelard. "He was one of those who stormed the Malakoff Tower; but he wears black breeches and a white choker now, like a notary."

"And he shaves his master every morning," said John Brokenshire.

I bowed my acknowledgments, but looked puzzled. Noemie, quicker, as women are, detected some meaning in the phrase, and changed colour.

"Consequently, William Jaker has influence, you see," continued John Brokenshire, shaking the pudding-dish to make the flames go on leaping. "You know servants have often more power than Cabinet Ministers. So when I got talking to William Jaker about poor Jules Leblanc's case, I knew that if he repeated the thing to the Marshal, he would be throwing seed on good ground."

"And did he repeat it?" asked Noemie, breathless.

"Yes, my dear, he did," said John Brokenshire. "He repeated it while he was plying his lather, and while the Marshal had a napkin round his neck so that he couldn't budge."

"*Ach! der Himmel!*"—the brave man. And did anything come of it?" asked Madame Grattelot.

"Well, Noemie may open her parcel now," answered the Englishman.