

A thrill of terror ran through her, as she saw, creeping over her clothing, several of those awful worms that are seen only in a charnel house. She had not resolution enough to shake them off. It occurred to her, however, that this was an idea of death she had never heard of. Either it was an eternal sleep, or an awakening to a new state of existence. She had believed in Purgatory. But that was burning. Could it be that her Purgatory was to suffer the conscious devouring of her own body by worms? The idea nearly drove her mad. In her agony, she prayed with increasing vehemence, until the vaults echoed her shrieks and cries. To complete her misery, the candles died out and left her in darkness. Still she prayed on, and probably the excitement of her devotion kept life together. At midnight the *becchini* come to bury the pauper dead, who, naked as they were born, are thrown pell-mell into the *Fosse Commune*, whose locality is only marked by a black cross. Decomposition is accelerated by quick lime, and the trench is closed, until the same day next year. Custom has hardened them to their business, and they not only do it unfeeling, but even jest over it. Yet they are not without superstition, and as they approached the vault that night, the sounds issuing from it filled them with alarm. They crossed themselves, and even muttered an "Ave Maria," and seemed doubtful about entering. As they mustered courage to do so, carrying a torch, they excited additional alarm in the breast of the praying maiden. They wear a long black gown, which completely envelopes the figure from head to feet, leaving two small holes for the eyes. With the idea strong upon her that she was in the world of spirits, the girl imagined these were demons, and certainly they look more demoniacal than human. She had heard that the Holy Name was a powerful aid against evil spirits, and she shrieked it out hysterically. The *becchini* quickly took in the real state of affairs, and one of them at once composed a *tomo* for the lottery by calculating the hour they found her, her age, and the four nights she had lain there. Reassuring her of life, they promptly carried her on the bier to the upper air. Here she fainted, and so without loss of time, for fear too of losing the prospective reward, they hurriedly took up the bier and started with it toward her house. On their way they met a priest returning from a sick call. He joined them, and recited prayers aloud for the maiden. Others whom they met joined them, until the procession was quite lengthy. The surprise and joy of the parents at thus rescuing their child from the grave was indescribable. A great feast was given, and the resuscitated received the congratulations of his friends—wonderful was the change in her appearance. The rich blue black hair had grown white in some places, chiefly over the forehead. The skin was wrinkled as with extreme age, and the once vivacious eyes looked sunken and wild. In thanksgiving for her recovery, the girl gave up the world and became a nun.

This incident impressed itself very forcibly on my mind, for, as well as she was able, the girl had given me a description of her awful sensations. It conveyed quite a new meaning into Shakespeare's cogent argument against suicide:

"The thought of something after death,
Puzzles the will and makes us rather bear
The ills we know, than fly to others
That we know not of."

Full of strangely morbid feelings, I obtained a letter of introduction to the *Aumonier* of the Roquette, the prison of the condemned. As a student he received me with great courtesy, and I found some difficulty in frankly telling him the object of my visit. It really was to familiarise myself with the *modus operandi* of the guillotine. But this would have seemed impertinent curiosity, so I toned it down by saying that it would heighten my pity for the poor condemned if I could, &c. I found my friend ready to gratify my curiosity, and on our way to the office of the brigadier, or head-turnkey, I narrated to him the manner in which these things are frequently done at Viterbo. A man may lie under sentence of death for months and years. During this time he has four sous a day given him which are called "the wages of death." He has better food, called "the bread of death," and his bed is changed to a good wool mattress called "the bed of death." But he is not allowed a word or sign to attemper his dismal suspense. Each day the chaplain recites with him the prayers for the dying, and he does not know at morning whether he will see a sunset, or at sunset whether he will see the morning. When the authorities finally resolve to execute his sentence, the lock of his cell is well oiled during the day, and at night four men enter, spring upon him and bind him, and carry him to a vault beneath the prison. There the priest attends him to hear his final confession, and the executioner with the guillotine. As soon as absolution is given, the condemned is strapped down and decapitated. The other inmates are made aware of what has taken place next morning, by a black tablet hanging in the chapel with a skull and crossbones in white, and the name of the deceased, with an invitation to pray for his soul.

I need not detain the reader by an account of the various visits to one room after another, the melancholy "via dolorosa" of the condemned from his cell to the scaffold. I went through them all. My arms were pinioned like the culprit's. I felt the edge of the knife, and saw it fall, with its strange dull thud—a sound never to be forgotten. When I left it was night. Before daybreak this instrument of death was to be erected on the Place de la Roquette for the execution of Vergier.

I thought I would banish my dismal thoughts, which were accumulating like vultures round a corpse, by a cheerful dinner at the Café Anglais. By the aid of the generous fare of that cosy restaurant, accompanied by several glasses of the dear *Veuve Cluquet*, *frappé*, I was restored to a more healthy train of reflection. Still, ever and anon, something recalled "worms and graves, and epitaphs." I looked over the play-bills, but there was nothing inviting, so I concluded to go home and read. I selected one of my collection of *Mortuary* literature, and feeling sleepy went to bed.

I had not been asleep an hour when two men entered my room. One was a stranger. The other I recognized as a famous detective, whose exploits had furnished me with material for many a tale.

"This is the man," said the detective. His companion, without replying, motioned me to rise and dress.

"What is the matter?" I demanded. "That you already know," said the detective, "why how pale you look, no doubt you expected us."

"Certainly not; as to my looking pale such a visit, at such an hour, would alarm anybody."

"I must beg of you to dress quickly, where are your keys?"

I handed them to the officer, who at once opened drawers and trunks, and possessed himself, with the dexterity of a practised hand, of all papers and money. Then the other man placed a pair of handcuffs on my wrists, and threw a cloak over my shoulders. I looked around the dear old rooms as we departed, with a consciousness of never seeing them again. A cab was waiting at the door. It was driven by another detective. We entered in silence and drove off. My thoughts were so gloomy, and my body so chilled, that I requested my quondam friend the detective to procure me some brandy.

"Well thought of," he replied, "drive to the Café."

I could not tell in what street we were, and some minutes elapsed ere we stopped. On the steam-stained window of a common vulgar café was written, *Café des Bon Garçons*, and underneath, "Billiards."

"You know this place?" queried the detective.

"Never saw it before," I replied. Yet I must certainly have heard of it. Where, and how? I strove to collect my thoughts. Yes, I had heard of it. Three days ago a cruel and dastardly assassination had taken place in this very shop. Out of seeming commiseration for me, I was allowed to remain in the cab with the other *gend'arme*, while the detective brought out some brandy in a decanter. He was accompanied by a bullet-headed man, with closely cropped hair, in greasy clothes, and no shirt-collar. I took in all this at a glance. He looked carefully at me, and poured out a wineglassful of brandy. As I could not help myself, he held it to my lips, exclaiming as he did so:

"It is certainly he."

To be continued.

In one of her performances at the Petersburg Opera, Patti met with an accident through entangling her foot in a large robe which she wore in her rôle. The lady, however, was able to go on with her part, and received only a few slight contusions on the hands and knee.

At a meeting of head masters of English public schools, held at Sherborne, it was resolved that the present mode of pronouncing Latin in England is objectionable, and that the Latin Professors at Oxford and Cambridge should be invited to draw up a paper so as to insure uniformity in case a change is adopted.

The Earl of Orkney has been gazetted bankrupt. His lordship is one of the representative peers for Scotland, sitting, just as a Member of the House of Commons does, for the existence of this present Parliament and no longer. The question arises, therefore, whether he, being a bankrupt, does not thereby forfeit his seat the same as a bankrupt commoner.

Mr. Cox, of Brighton, recently received a telegram from a firm in London to know whether he could undertake the making of a million quinine pills within a fortnight—400,000 pills to be delivered in the first week and 600,000 in the second. Mr. Cox undertook the work. The order is said to have been given for the sick and wounded in the war.

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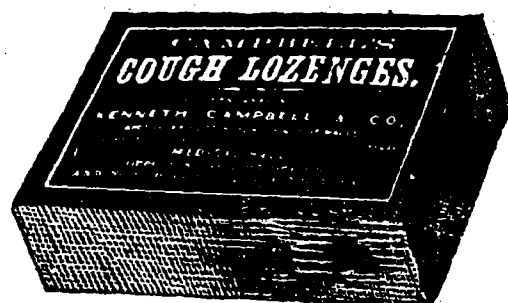
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