

St. Victor, since it conquered my natural pride and brought me to that grave—a mourner. You were sad—subdued; you extended me your hand, you prayed that all might be at peace between us—that all might be forgotten. I took the offered hand—it was necessary that I should dissimulate—and I said that I forgave. Time rolled on, you overcame your grief, you married again, you inherited your noble patrimony, you became the head of the great house of St. Victor. I left you, but before I quitted your employ I had prepared the way to ruin, I had sown the seed of all that hath followed, and is yet to come. I also married for the sake of wealth. I entered upon business, I struggled hard, I have not toiled in vain, I am now the richest man in all Marseilles. My wife is dead, but she has left me one son, the only thing I love; for him and for this vengeance I have worked and lived!

"And for his sake," exclaimed St. Victor, "you will have mercy upon me; if not on me; on my wife; if not on me, on my children!"

For a moment the hard eye softened, and the face assumed an hesitating expression, but it was only for a moment. His answer was—

"Not the anguish, the shame of a life, shall not pass unavenged! To-morrow, and St. Victor shall be the wonder and the scorn of all Marseilles!"

"Ah, Devereux! think not, I beseech you, of that hasty act! Think rather of my long felt, long-shewn trust in you, think of my father, how he loved and trusted you; think how sure has been, for years the first house here. What a terrible thing this would be! The head of the St. Victors arrested—arrested, and by you!"

"All this," answered the creditor, "that you urge against the act, but stirs me more deeply towards it. To-morrow, and I have my revenge!"

"Give me but a day, Devereux, and I will essay to raise the money. Give me a week. The ship Volant, my last venture, is expected ere the week is out. Give me but until her return. Her cargo is of ore and diamonds, if she comes laden, as I hope, I may meet all demands, and save, at least, my honour. Give me but time!"

But the creditor smiled as he replied,—

"Not an hour!"

"Oh, Devereux, have some mercy!" and St. Victor sank upon his knees, clasping his hands in agony.

Just as the creditor opened his lips to reply, a howling blast of wind shook the windows of the room, and moaned wildly down the wide chimney. He paused and started.

"My son is at sea: God grant there be no storm!"

He approached the casement, he gazed anxiously forth. Evidently thought only of his young sailor, nothing of the suffering debtor at his feet. The debtor rose.—

"That wind is fair for the Volant; Heaven send her safe to port!"

A voice was heard upon the quay beneath,—

"The Volant! the Volant!"

Creditor and debtor rushed to the window.

"What of the Volant? What news of the Volant?" shouted St. Victor from the casement.

There was an eager group upon the quay, many had friends or relations in the expected vessel; some had shares in the rich freightage; fifty telescopes were levelled at the horizon; a hundred voices were loud in assertion, denial, conjecture; but all agreed in one point that a vessel was in sight and making towards the port.

"Tis the Volant, five days before her time!" said an old sailor, who had been gazing long and eagerly through his glass. "I would swear to her top-gallant-sails among a thousand. 'Tis the Volant!"

"And I may yet be saved!" murmured the debtor.

The creditor turned fiercely upon him—

"Triumph not yet, St. Victor!" he said; "she is yet far away; the perils of the deep sea are many, and between her present course and this harbour the sands are shifting, and the rocks are dangerous. Triumph not yet!"

But St. Victor, wild with hope, heeded him not; and the old man, muttering angry threats and denunciations, quitted the hotel and took his way home.

His residence was also on the quay, not far from the Hotel Victor, with his windows also looking upon the busy scene of the harbour—upon the dark distance of the sea. As with slow and feeble steps he retraced his way, he paused amid the throng now momentarily increasing on the pier. Even to his feeble vision a dim white speck was visible, just between the deep blue of the sky and the deeper purple of the ocean.

"If it is the Volant," said one, "we shall hear the gun for the pilot soon."

The old man turned away.

"I would that she and her cargo were deep within the sea!"

He reached his own door; as he paused ere entering, some one addressed him. It was Jean, the pilot, whose turn it would be to answer the signal gun of the Volant.

"Hast thou any commands, Master Devereux?" asked Jean.

Devereux made no reply, but, opening his door, he ascended his stairs. The pilot followed. Devereux entered his apartment and closed the door; Jean stood within.

He laid his hand upon the springlock of an ancient bureau, and the carved panels flew wide at his touch; there were many bags of gold within.

"The half of this," said Devereux, "I would give, that the Volant were deep within the sea."

The pilot spoke,—

"Give me all, and it shall be done." Devereux hesitated for a moment.

"I will give thee all."

The gun sounded, and the pilot hurried to his post. The pilot-boat sped merrily across the waves; but night was falling over blackening waves and whitening foam, and ere she reached the Volant, neither boat nor ship were visible.

The dawn of morning shewed the Volant stranded on those dangerous rocks so well known to the pilots of that sea, the rocks on the right of the entrance to the harbour. But with the morning came a calm, the wind fell, the turbulence of the ocean subsided to a gentle swell; and so near was the Volant to the shore—so hushed was the tempest, that the voices of those within could be distinctly heard upon the pier.

All that day boats went to and fro between the wreck and the shore; all the rich cargo—the heavy ore—the caskets of precious diamonds, were safely landed and consigned to the warehouses of St. Victor: even the good ship herself—lightened of her load, somewhat strained, but still sound and buoyant—was saved.

The pilot stood before Devereux, claiming his reward. But the latter said,—

"The freightage and vessel are saved."

"No fault of mine," muttered Jean. "I have done my best, the tempest fell just as she grounded, and she lived through the night."

Devereux flung him the gold; he dared not resist the claim. As the pilot was passing from the presence of the old man, he turned and said,—

"One life hath been lost!"

Devereux was indifferent to this; he made no comment. The pilot continued,—

"Not one of the crew, but a youth they were bringing home—a lad of Marseilles, his vessel had stranded in the Straits."

Devereux recked little of this death. Why did the pilot persist in talking of it?

He resumed the subject.

"The boy was washed from the deck by a wave just as she struck; it was dark, and there were no means of saving him."

Devereux coldly replied,—

"Poor youth! I am sorry!" then turning to his previous occupation, he shewed that he desired the absence of the pilot.

But the man still spoke,—

"They have tried all means of restoration, but in vain; it is a pity, for he is a fair youth, and seems of gentle blood."

Now Devereux became impatient. Why

should the pilot linger still, tormenting him by this idle recital? What was all this to him?

The pilot repeated the last sentence,—

"He seems of gentle blood;" and he added

"and he is the only child of his father."

The old man laid down his pen, struck by the pertinacity of the pilot, and gazed at him with a look of inquiry. A noise was heard below—a noise of feet, staggering as though beneath a burden—a noise of many voices, speaking in hurried whispers.

"They are bringing the drowned boy here!" said the pilot, as he turned and departed.

With a sharp, wild cry, the old man rose to his feet. The truth, with all its terror and its anguish, broke upon his soul at once: he had murdered his own dear son!

That old man lived for many years after this day, but he never again became conscious of what had passed; he was blessed, beyond his desert, in complete forgetfulness.

Every day he seated himself opposite the window that looked upon the ocean.

"The wind is rising," he would say; "God grant there be no storm! My son is at sea!"

Then when the night fell, he would say,—

"It is late, and I can see the white sail no longer; but if the wind is fair, he will come to-morrow. Drowning is a fearful death! God grant there be no storm!"

St. Victor gradually recovered from his embarrassments, and, gaining prudence from past difficulties, became again the great merchant of Marseilles—the prosperous St. Victor.

But his name and race are now extinct; and the splendour, and the wealth and the prosperity of that great house have passed away for ever.

A TALE OF MID-AIR—OR THE MOUNTAINEER'S PERIL.

In a cottage in the valley of Salanches, near the foot of Mont Blanc, lived old Bernard and his three sons. One morning he lay in bed sick, and burning with a fever, watching anxiously for the return of his son, Jehan, who had gone to fetch a physician. At length a horse's tread was heard, and soon afterwards the doctor entered. He examined the patient closely, felt his pulse, looked at his tongue, and then said, patting the old man's cheek—"It will be nothing, my friend—nothing." But he made a sign to the three lads, who, opened mouths and anxious, stood grouped around the bed. All four withdrew to a distant corner; the doctor shook his head, thrust out his lower lip, and said—"Tis a serious attack—very serious—of fever. He is now in the height of the fit, and as soon as it abates, he must have sulphate of quinine."

"What is that doctor?"

"Quinine, my friend, is a very expensive medicine, but you may procure it at Salanches. Between the two fits, your father must take at least three francs worth. I will write the prescription. You can read Guillaume!"

"Yes, Doctor."

"And you will see that he takes it?"

"Certainly."

When the Physician was gone, Guillaume, Pierre, and Jehan looked at each other in silent perplexity. Their whole stock of money consisted of a franc and a half, and yet the medicine must be procured immediately.

"Listen," said Pierre. "I know a method of getting from the mountain, before night, three or four five-franc pieces."

"From the mountain?"

"I have discovered an eagle's nest in a cleft of a frightful precipice. There is a gentleman at Salanches who would gladly purchase the eaglets; and nothing made me hesitate but the terrible risk of taking them; but that's nothing when our father's life is concerned. We may have them now in two hours."

"I will rob the nest," said Guillaume.

"No, no, let me," said Jehan, "I am the youngest and lightest."