

GELE.

(From Burns' Magazine for the Young.)

Amongst all the valleys of England, there is not one more beautiful, or less known, than that in which stands the old priory church of St. Ethel; it lies out of the beaten track of those who search for the picturesque, but its quiet loveliness steals deep over the hearts of its inhabitants, and none would believe that there are finer churches than the one that seems to shelter and hallow their own homes.

"Alas all around, and prayer within— What evil thing might entrance win? Where guards like these around?" The garden bore the impress of days of magnificence long passed, as well as all around; it had formed a part of the house but was now only a beautiful enclosure, its outline varied by two of the refectory windows with their stone mullions and delicate tracery, and further on, by fantastic buttresses and pinnacles, formed partly by the ruins, and partly by the ivy and trailing shrubs that had sprung up in their crevices.

It is not, however, in the garden, or in that inviting bay-window, in which Mrs. Grey and her children pass so many pleasant hours, that I mean to introduce you to them; they were walking early in the morning along the side of a hill that rose within half a mile of their dwelling, there was a thin mist over the valley, but the sun shone bright on the church-tower, and lit up the tall stems of the trees, and the windows of the cottages that were perched here and there above the rest of the village.

"This is such a morning, mamma," said Ellen, the eldest of the young party, "as George Herbert must have thought of when he described his 'day so cool, so calm, so bright.'"

Ellen did not often quote poetry, as her sister Louisa was apt to do; but the early morning is a poetic time, and as her mother smiled, she continued the lines.

"It was on as beautiful a day as this," said Mrs. Grey, "and about this time, that I nearly lost my life."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed the children almost together, "when was that? how was it?"

"I will tell you all the story, my beloved ones," she answered; "and I know that you will never again forget the 10th of September. You can scarcely fancy me only a year older than Ellen, about fourteen, and your aunt Lucy just eleven—Louisa's age; but we were no more when we went with our father and mother to spend an autumn at Boulogne. We do not think ourselves more secure from harm now, than Lucy and I thought ourselves when, after bathing many times, we went down to the shore one morning before breakfast, with our two little sisters and their nurses, to take our bath; we found the sea perfectly calm, but the tide was very low, and we were advised to wait till the machines could be taken in at the usual place. I was very busy with my studies through the day, and as I assumed some authority, I insisted on going on at least a mile farther to the edge of the sands, near Napoleon's tower, which accordingly we did: I must be minute in my details, to show you how mercifully our heavenly Father then watched over us. When at last the driver of the machine stopped his horse, and the guide stepped into the water, our sister Bertha had the first dip, and was very unwilling to be lifted back to her nurse; then Lucy and I joyfully jumped into the water, that seemed to sparkle and dance about us. I threw myself on my back to float, as I had often done before, wishing especially to get into a long bright submarine that lay along the sea; seated, however, had I done this, still holding the loose sleeve of the bathing-woman's dress, when I heard a scream from my sister, and tried to recover my footing to help her—but in vain; in a moment I found myself dragged with the guide into a whirlpool, formed (as we afterwards knew) by a land-current, which meeting the rising tide, eddied round a deep pit always covered by the water, even at the lowest tides."

"Oh, how dreadful!" cried Herbert: "was there no one who could help you?"

"The driver of the machine, who had so carelessly led us to the edge of the pit, tried to do so," continued Mrs. Grey; "but though he dashed bravely into the water he was himself caught by the eddy, and was in equal danger with ourselves. I had heard the yell of terror of the poor guide, and then I heard the half-suffocated cries of many close to me; twice I distinctly remember being dragged round, and then the drowning woman pushed me off; but, wonderful as it seems, I did not lose my senses; thoughts of life past—of my mother, and of the future—passed through my mind: I knew Lucy was near me, and I thought if I could once raise my head above the waves, I might see her again; I did so with a desperate struggle, for the current seemed bearing me downwards; and she floated by me, at all appearance dead. At this instant the servants caught a glimpse of me: I could not swim, as you may imagine; but I remembered that by refraining from making any effort, I might be borne up by the water: I could not pray, or cry out; but I felt God could still save me, and I floated. Once more consciousness returned; but I saw neither sky nor land; a person seemed to pass close to me through the water, but I could not stretch out my hands: I felt an acute pain on my chest, which long afterwards I dreaded to think of, and I faintly argued. When I returned to life (for so I may call it), I was on the shore, surrounded by a number of fishermen and women; my hand was in pain from the violence with which it had been unclasped; something strong had been poured down my throat; my brain was dizzy, and my first feelings were those of delirium, rather than of joy: I heard the rolling of the waves, and I would have thrown myself into them—I asked for my sister, but could gain no answer; for all thought the child was dead. I saw a young sailor supporting himself against a post, and ringing his jacket; but others helped me to the machine (a thing more like a little crazy room than those we have in England)—it had only been drawn on shore when the waves were dashing through it, as the tide rose rapidly, and in a few minutes more the children must have perished. The first thing I saw there was my sister Lucy, who had just come to herself, though the servants had been too much terrified to give any assistance. We were all once more together, and soon at home with our father and mother. I might have told you more of myself, and described the singular clearness of my mind, which, when I looked back, appeared almost incredible under such circumstances of terror and suffocation—but I must tell you how we were saved."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Louisa, "is the person still alive who saved you?"

"No," answered Mrs. Grey, "he is not; his name was Jean Batiste Gélé, a young fisherman belonging to Boulogne, and as such liable to be drawn by the conscription, which in France obliges all who come under it to enter the army or navy immediately. He was only three-and-twenty, but the lot had fallen on

him for the second time in his life; his parents were poor people, and had bought him off—that is, paid a man to go in his stead—the first time; but his substitute being wounded, he was obliged to take his place himself. He had only returned for one year to Boulogne when he was taken again by the lot, and he was to have marched the very evening before our accident; but having some interest, he obtained leave to remain four-and-twenty hours longer at home. The cottage belonging to Gélé's mother, and his step-father Jacques Somier, was more than a mile from the spot where we were so nearly drowned. From a boy of ten years old, he had been reckoned an expert swimmer. He was as brave as a lion, as he was gentle and dutiful to his parents, and kind to his poor crippled brother Olivier, who used to trust to him to carry him on his shoulders out into the air, and to bask in the sun by the seaside; no one ever spoke of Gélé but with respect or love.

On that eventful morning, his mother had prepared breakfast with many tears; but he was so much distressed at being obliged to leave his family and all his hopes of success in his native place, that instead of partaking of it, he walked out alone along the cliffs, with only his dog Turk to be a witness of his sorrow; he had turned to go back, when his dog pulled him by his clothes, and made him look round towards the sea, at which moment Lucy and myself were entering it in high spirits; almost immediately Gélé heard a scream, and then saw the driver rush into the water, followed by a man belonging to the French Maritime Society, which had supposed a watch over this very place; he ran down to the edge of the sands, and another man in the employment of this society threw him a rope, telling him that five persons were drowning; he pulled off nothing but his jacket, in which was his watch, and swam out with the rope taking care to avoid the eddy, for presence of mind accompanies the truest courage: all caught at it, even poor little Lucy appears to have been dragged some way by it; several people by this time had run together from different parts of the sands and assisted in drawing the rope to the shore. Gélé was returning with joy, when suddenly he recollected that he had seen two young persons jump into the water, and that only one child was clinging to the rope; he looked round and saw my blue bathing-gown shining in the sun, far off, floating out to sea. Instantly his resolution was taken. "Mademoiselle," he said afterwards, "God had put it into my heart to save you—I was determined to do it, or to perish." He made a circuit, to keep clear of the current, which his intimate knowledge of the coast enabled him to do; but he kept his eyes on me, and watched me sinking till nothing was visible but my long dark hair floating upwards under the waves. He thought that if once he dived under the current, he should never rise again; but he went on. "I came up just as he was losing the last trace of where I was, caught my hair, would it round his wrist, and raised my head, for I was sinking with my face downwards; then keeping me as far from him as possible, with my nostrils often raised above the water, he swam towards the land once more. Gélé had heard his countrymen calling to him to come back, that he was throwing away his life for no use—that he had done enough already; but he had not listened to them. He scarcely heard now the exclamations that greeted his return, he was himself dragged in to the shore exhausted; I believe I had caught hold of his collar, which had occasioned the painful unclasping of my hand; and had I done so sooner, though Gélé was the best swimmer along the coast, by general consent, no earthly power could have saved me—I need scarcely tell you that it was he I had seen on the shore; he accompanied us home, and saw us safe; but in the agitation of our meeting with our parents, no one was able to give an intelligible account of what had passed. Gélé did not stay for thanks or praise: he seemed to think he had merely done his duty."

"The people, however, who lived in the narrow streets near his home, were full of admiration, and he was warmly welcomed by our French neighbours, who so well love to give; his mother heard them cry, 'Vive Gélé!' before she knew what had happened. When my dear parents learnt to whom they were indebted, they sent and met themselves in search of him, but they only found poor Catherine grieving over the loss of her son: he had already left Boulogne to join the depot."

"Dear mamma, were you ever able to thank Gélé yourself?"

"You may fancy, Ellen, how anxious we were all to do so; but at first our getting his discharge seemed almost hopeless, and we should never have accomplished it, if he had not applied for the silver medal for him to the Royal Humane Society in England; for it is a rule in the French service never to grant a release to a conscript: Lord Stuart de Rothsay, who was then the English Ambassador at Paris, became interested for Gélé, and asked the king for his freedom as a personal favour, which was immediately granted."

"The reason we were so anxious to obtain this boon was, that Gélé had been studying for some months to enable himself to pass an examination, after which he might be qualified to command a merchant-vessel, the object of his highest ambition. He came over to my father's house with Somier, his step-father, who loved him like his own son; and we step-father received the medal, at the annual festival of the Humane Society, amidst the applause and warmest congratulations of numbers of the noblest and bravest in the land."

"Do tell us, dear mamma," exclaimed Herbert, "what this noble fellow was like. Oh, how I wish we had known him?"

"He was not tall," answered Mrs. Grey, smiling, "but he was strongly made, with rather handsome features, and an expression of so much sense and feeling that his countenance could not be otherwise than interesting; his manners were remarkably modest, and also self-possessed, and although he rather shrunk from notice, he seemed to think less of himself than of the kindness of our friends in talking to him, and every one was struck by the good sense and manliness of his demeanour. After spending a fortnight in London, Gélé returned to Boulogne; and our next tidings of him, about a year afterwards, were, that he was employed in the command of a merchantman, by a shipowner at Calais. This old man having found his business prosper under Gélé's management, offered him, when he was about thirty, his niece Genevieve in marriage, to whom, indeed, he had for some time been attached. They were to be married on his return from his next trip to Barcelona; and Catherine was delighted with her future daughter, and the proudest mother in France."

"On the last day of his stay in harbour, Gélé had given leave to his crew to go on shore, with the exception of two sailors, whom he left to take care of the ship; and he did not himself mean to go on board till the evening; he bought some presents for his bride, and a gown for his mother, and a gay silk handkerchief for poor Olivier; but when with a light heart he returned to the brig, what was his dismay to find her robbed, and the sailors gone, whom he had trusted so entirely! A little boat was missing, in which they must have escaped; and on further search, he found his own money, his pistols, his two trunks, and some valuable property carried off. Gélé took some of his men and followed in a boat for three days, in vain hoping to overtake the thieves; at last he went back to Barcelona, and there learnt that some traces had been obtained of them in the interior of the country. He set out again, accompanied by a hundred and fifty miles, they reached an obscure town, which they were on the point of leaving, when Gélé happened to go into a little shop, and he had scarcely entered it, when a man respectfully dressed, in some of his own clothes, came in also. 'Ah, brigand, je te tiens!'"

"Ah, rascal, I have you!"

his exclamation; and his strong hand was on the man's collar. Instantly he threw himself on his knees, offering to lead him to his accomplice, and promising to give back all he had taken, if only his life was spared. The officers of justice went with Gélé and his prisoner to a miserable garret, where however, the robber had heard them coming up-stairs; for he had a loaded pistol in his hand, and as Gélé entered, it was at his breast; he succeeded in wrenching it from the man's hand, and both the thieves were carried back to Barcelona.

"Gélé's hard earned money was spent, with but little exception; his property was seized by the police, with promises of its being restored at the end of the trial; but the lingering forms of Spanish justice kept him three months after month, till anxiety and fatigue brought him into a bad state of health; and at last he returned to Calais, having secured justice for his employers, but having gained scarcely any redress for himself."

"The old shipowner said he was now too poor to think of marrying his niece; but Genevieve told him that, poor as he was, he had all her affection still, and his own good name and industry to retrieve his disasters. He set to work once more, that he might lose no time, till he went to sea again; but he was no longer a strong, healthy man, as he had been; he worked as a ship-repenter, and one day as he was employed on the mast of a ship, he wounded his hand severely with his own hatchet; he paid little attention to it, but soon it became worse and worse, and he was obliged to give up work. The surgeons had recourse to amputation, but could not stop the progress of mortification."

"Poor Catherine was sent for by his friends, and she nursed him, and trusted a few days that he might be spared to her. From all we heard, it appeared that his last care had been for her and for Genevieve; and that he calmly resigned his own fate to the will of his Creator."

"When your father and myself went to Paris, soon after our marriage, we passed a day at Boulogne, near Somier and Catherine again. It was about two years after Gélé's death. Olivier used to be a cheerful, contented boy, in spite of his apparently joyless existence; but he had never recovered his brother's loss, whom he looked up to as to a superior being. Catherine's mild countenance bore the trace of ever sorrow, though she seemed to wish as truly as ever to make her little home comfortable; her first words to me were, 'O Gélé, Gélé! all my life I shall grieve for my son!'"

"She told me that although many had sought the hand of Genevieve already, so good and pretty as she was, she had refused them, saying that she never could love any one after Gélé."

"When Mrs. Grey had finished her story, the children walked on in silence; for their hearts were too full to ask any more questions. The summer mist had now cleared away; and all the lovely vale of St. Ethel, and the old parsonage with its blooming garden, lay smiling in the sunshine. When they reached home, Mr. Grey was ready for family-prayer, for it was eight o'clock; and the Psalm he read that morning was the 116th. His children have never heard it since without remembering their walk on the hill-side and the 10th of September."

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