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LIFE'S VALUE.

A STORY OF BRITANNY.

The scene of our little story opens in an apartment in an ancient castle in Brittany.

The young proprietor is about to quit the shade of his forefathers, to pursue schemes of ambition in court or in the great world.

The time at length came when I should depart, and Joseph, opening the door gently, informed us that the chaise de poste was ready.

This announcement was startling to my mother and sisters, who, in an agony of feeling, threw their arms around me.

'It is not yet too late!' they exclaimed, with tears; 'renounce this intended journey. Oh! do not leave us!'

'My dearest mother,' I replied, 'at twenty years of age and the inheritance of a noble name I must make myself known in my native land. I must open a path to fame either in the army or at court.'

'And when you are gone,' said my poor mother, 'what will become of me?'

'You will bear with pride and pleasure of your son's success.'

'And should I hear of his death in battle?'

'Well, of what use is life to my age?' I replied, 'but to gain honor and glory! Think rather of the time when I shall return a colonel—perhaps a marshal of France.'

'And then?' said my mother.

'Why, then honor and respect shall follow my steps where I go.'

'And then?' pursued she.

'Then I will marry my cousin Henrietta; we shall find noble husbands for my sisters, and we will all live together in peace and happiness in these ancient halls of my ancestors.'

'And why not commence this life of happiness from this moment?' said my mother.

'Where is there a wider or fairer domain in Brittany than yours? Was elms a nobler name in the province? In the midst of your faithful vassals are you not sufficiently honored and beloved? Leave us not, my son! leave not your friends, your sisters, your aged mother, whom you may never again behold! Go not to waste in the pursuit of vain glory, or to shorten, by sorrows and disappointments, those youthful days that pass so rapidly. Life is a treasure, my beloved Bernard; and where can you enjoy it more than under the lovely sky of Brittany?'

As my mother spoke she led me to a window, and pointed out the noble avenues of the ancient park, where the stately chestnuts were mingled with lilacs and woodbines, whose fragrant blossoms perfumed the air.

Before the door stood the aged gardener and his family, whose saddened looks seemed to say, 'Desert us not, our noble master—desert not those you are bound to protect! Hortensia, my eldest sister, twined her arms round my neck, while Amelia the youngest, taking up a volume of La Fontaine, pointed to an engraving, and with soft places the book in my hands. It was the fable of the 'Two Pigeons.' I started up, and exclaiming, 'I must win honor and glory! Let me go, let me go,' and I rushed into the courtyard.

As I was about to ascend the carriage a female figure appeared at the hall door. It was my cousin Henrietta. She went not, spoke not; but, pale as marble, appeared sinking to the earth. She had a handkerchief in her hand, with which she waved me a last farewell, and then fell senseless. I rushed to her, raised her in my arms, and uttered the tenderest vows of love and constancy. But when I saw the color revisit her cheek, leaving her to the anxious care of my mother and sisters, I hastened back to the carriage without even turning my head. One look more at Henrietta, and I felt I could not have left her. In a few minutes after, the chaise de poste was rolling along the high road to Sedan.

For some time my thoughts were entirely filled with my beloved Henrietta, my weeping sisters, and my dear mother, and all the happiness I felt I was leaving. But as the ancient turrets of Roche Bernard receded from my view, those saddening images seemed to vanish also, and were succeeded by the brilliant visions of glory and ambition. What airy castles rose before me as I leaned back in the old rumbling vehicle! Riches, honors, dignities,—nothing did I refuse myself as the just reward of my merit; and the scale ascending as I advanced on my journey, I was a duke, governor of a province, and a marshal of France, by the time I reached the inn at which I was to repose for the night. The voice of my servant, simply addressing me as 'Monsieur le Chevalier,' forced me unwillingly to abdicate my newly-created dignity.

The next day, and for several succeeding ones I indulged in the same intoxicating dreams, my

journey being of some length. I was repairing to Sedan, to the residence of the Duke of C— and old and tried friend of my father's, and the protector of my family. He had promised to take me to Paris and introduce me at the court of Versailles.

I reached Sedan at so late an hour that I could not think of presenting myself at the Duke's chateau, and therefore installed myself for the night at the Arms of France, the best inn in the town all round, and the rendezvous of all the officers of the garrison. Sedan was then a fortified town; the very streets had a warlike appearance, and the citizens a martial air that seemed to say to a stranger, 'We are occupants of the great Tuilleries.'

I supped at a table d'hote, and took the opportunity of inquiring my way to the chateau, where I intended going in the morning.

'Any one will point it out to you?' was the answer; 'it is well known to the whole country. In that chateau expired one of our most celebrated men and bravest of warriors, Marshal Fabert.'

And herron, as was natural among so many military heroes, the conversation fell upon the career of the marshal. They spoke of his many brilliant exploits, and of his singular modesty, which had made him refuse the titles of nobility and the ribbons of several orders offered to him by Louis XIV. Above all, they expatiated on his extraordinary good fortune, which had enabled him, without the aid of family interest,—he being the son of an obscure printer,—to raise himself from a common soldier to the rank of Marshal of France. It had appeared so extraordinary and unprecedented an elevation, that, even during the life of Fabert, popular rumor had not been backward in attributing it to supernatural causes. It was currently reported that he dealt in magic, and it was even affirmed he had made a compact with Satan.

Our landlord, who, in the ignorance of a native of Champanne, added the credulity of a peasant of Brittany, greatly amused us, that a few moments before Fabert expired, a black man, unknown to any one in the chateau, had entered the chamber and carried off the marshal's soul, which indeed of right appertained to him, he having purchased it long before. Mias had also went on to state that from that period to the present time, upon each anniversary of Fabert's death, the black man was seen at midnight bearing a lighted torch in his hand. The record evidenced our dessert, and we quaffed several bumpers of champagne to the familiar demon of the deceased marshal, hoping he might also take us under his protection, and give us similar triumphs to the battles of Collioure and Marteau.

The next morning, at an early hour I repaired to the chateau of the Duke de C—. It was an immense and gloomy Gothic pile, which would not perhaps at another time have made much impression upon me; but I must confess that I now gazed upon it with a singular feeling of interest. As I called to mind the landlord's story.

The domestic who ushered me in told me his master was not yet visible. I gave my name, and was then left alone in an ancient hall, adorned with the trophies of the chase, and hung round with family portraits. I waited a considerable time, but no one appeared. 'Is this brilliant career to commence by the antechamber?' exclaimed I, beginning to conceive the impatience of a discontented place-holder. I had gone three times the round of the grim portraits, and had sedulously counted all the beams of the lofty ceiling, when I heard a slight noise in the wain scot, and found it to proceed from a half-closed door, moved by the wind. I pushed it gently open, and saw a small room, tastefully furnished, and from which a glass door opened into a magnificent park. I advanced, in order to enjoy the view from the window, when another object met my sight. Stretched on a sofa, whose back was turned to the door by which I entered, was a man, who not observing me, rose hastily and rushed to the window. I then perceived that his face was bathed in tears, and that despair was marked in every feature. He remained for a moment motionless, his face buried in his hands, then, with rapid strides, began to pace the apartment. As soon as his eye fell upon me, he stopped and shuddered, while I, distressed at my intrusion, muttered some words in apology, and was about to withdraw.

'Who are you?—what brings you here?' he exclaimed, in a loud voice, and seizing my arm with violence.

'I am the Chevalier de Bernard, and I come'

'I know, I know,' he said, hastily; and taking my hand warmly, he made me sit down by him, and inquired with much interest about my family; spoke of my father, whom he appeared to have known so well, that I could not doubt my being in the presence of the master of the chateau.

'You are Monsieur de C—?' said I.

He rose, and replied, in an agitated tone, 'I was once; but I am nothing—nothing now.—'

Hush!—do not speak—do not ask any questions!'

'Permit me, at least,' I ventured to say, 'to assure you, that if the most devoted friendship can in any way lighten the affliction of which I have been an involuntary witness—'

'You are right,' he replied, abruptly; 'though you cannot change my doom, yet you may relieve my last wishes. That is the only service you can render me.'

He closed the door carefully, and returned to his seat at my side, where I waited in trembling anxiety for the result. There was something awfully solemn in the tone of his voice, and an expression in his countenance I had never seen before. His face was deadly pale, while lightning seemed to flash from his large dark eyes, and his features worn by suffering, were frequently convulsed by a dramatic spasm.

'What I am about to relate to you,' he said at length, in a hollow tone, 'will confound your reason. You will doubt—or will perhaps utterly disbelieve. Even I almost doubt at times still—at least I wish to do so; but the proof, the fatal proof is too strong. Alas! are there not in all that surrounds us, in our very organization itself, mysteries whose existence we are compelled to acknowledge without powers of comprehending them?'

He paused for a moment, as if to collect his ideas, pressed his hand to his brow, and continued:—

'In this castle I first drew breath; and being a younger son, upon the elder born was of course to deride all the wealth and honors of the house. Life was distasteful to me; I lived but in the future; and yet what a gloomy future appeared to my aching sight! I thus attended my thirtieth year, and I was still nothing—nothing; while I daily heard of colossal reputations, whose tops reached even this remote province. I will try the career of letters,' I exclaimed; 'let me win fame in any way, for I am nothing—nothing.'

'The only condition of my entering was an engagement, who had been in the chateau ever before my birth. Indeed, he was so old, that nobody remembered his coming; and it was said he had been present at the death of Marshal Fabert.'

Here an involuntary start of surprise, which I could not repress, made my companion pause.

'Go on,' I said, 'his nothing; but notwithstanding, I thought of the black man described by the old landlord.'

'One day,' continued Monsieur de C—, 'I gave way before Yago (so the old negro was called) to the despair of my soul, at the shameful obscurity in which I dragged on my days. 'I would give ten years of my life,' I exclaimed, 'to become a celebrated author.'

'Ten years!' said Yago, coldly; 'it is paying dear for such a trifle. However, I accept your offer. The ten years are mine. Keep your promise; you will find me true to my word.'

'I will not attempt to depict my astonishment at this speech. However, after a moment's reflection, I naturally concluded that age had enfeebled his intellects; and, with a smile of pity, left the room, and in a few days after the chateau. I arrived in Paris, and soon found myself in the most distinguished literary society of the metropolis. Encouraged by their approval, I published several works. My success exceeded my most flattering dreams. The journals of Paris, of France, of even foreign nations, rung with my name; yourself, even yesterday, young man, acknowledged the power of my genius.'

'How!' I exclaimed with astonishment; 'you are not, then, the Duke of C—?'

'No,' he replied, coldly.

'What favored son of genius, then stands before me?' said I.—'Marmontel? D'Alembert? Voltaire?'

The unknown, with a smile of contempt, continued his recital:—

'The literary fame I enjoyed, unbounded as it was, could not satisfy a soul like mine. I longed for nobler triumphs, and could not help exclaiming to Yago, who had followed me to Paris, 'Oh, there is no real glory but that which is gained on the battle-field! What is a philosopher—a poet?—nothing! Speak to me of a hero!—What are the poet's lays compared to the laurel wreath of a conqueror? To purchase that, I would willingly give ten years more of my life.'

'I agree to the bargain,' said Yago. 'They are mine also. Do not forget.'

'At this period of the narrative the unknown passed, for he observed the astonishment expressed in my countenance.

'I told you,' he said, 'you would not believe. You think it a dream as I, alas! did once. But the honors I won, the triumphs I gained—equaled led to meet the fire of the enemy—fortresses carried by my skill—standards seized by my bravery—victories that were echoed through the world; these were not dreams—no! that glory was real, and that glory was mine!'

He paced the room with rapid strides, and his

cheeks flushed with the recollection of his discourse, while I muttered to myself, 'Who, then, is this renowned warrior? Coligny! Richelieu!—perhaps Marshal Saxe himself?'

The fever of enthusiasm passed away, and the unknown sank again into despondency.

'Yago spoke truly,' he continued, in a low and mournful tone. 'I was soon weaned with the vain promise of military fame, and perceiving there was but one thing real and substantial in the world, I purchased, by five years more of my existence, the riches I coveted. Yes, young man, it is true, though incredible—I saw my wealth increase beyond my most sanguine desires. Lands, forests, castles—all were mine. Even this morning I thought myself—but no matter; you will soon be convinced of the truth—ah, how soon!'

He approached the clock on the chimney, and looked at it with a terrified gaze, then continued, rapidly:—

'This morning, on awaking at daybreak, I felt a degree of exhaustion throughout my whole frame that alarmed me. I rang my bell, and Yago answered my summons. 'What is the matter?' I exclaimed; 'I am faint.'

'It is but the course of nature,' he answered calmly. 'Master the hour approaches—it is come.'

'What hour?' I cried, in surprise.

'Do you not divine it?' said Yago. 'Heaven allotted as your portion sixty years of existence. You had lived thirty of them when I first became your slave.'

'Yago,' I cried, 'you are jesting with me.'

'No, master, no; in five years of life you have expended twenty-five to purchase glory. They became my property, and will be added to the term of my existence.'

'That, then?' I cried, 'was the price I paid for your services?'

'Others have paid dearer,' he answered boldly; 'for instance, Fabert, whom I served long.'

'The life; his life!' I exclaimed, vehemently.

'You will find it true, my master,' said the black; 'you live but half an hour to live.'

'Oh, say not so, Yago; you are deceiving me!'

'Calculate yourself,' he answered; 'thirty-five years that you have actually lived, and twenty-five left. The account is square. It is my turn now; every one their own, is but justice.'

'He turned to go, but feeling myself gradually sinking, I exclaimed in despair, 'Oh, Yago, Yago! give me but a few hours more!'

'They would be deducted from mine,' said he; 'and I know the value of life better than you do. What treasure is equal to two hours of existence?'

'A dark cloud seemed to pass before my eyes, and the chill of death was in my veins. With a last effort I gasped out, 'Take back the wealth for which I have paid so dear. Give me but four hours more of life, and I resign my lands, my castles, my gold—all, all!'

'You have been a kind master,' said he, after a pause; 'I wish to do something in gratitude.'

'I felt my courage revive, and ventured to say, 'Four hours are almost nothing. Yago, Yago, grant me some more in addition, and I resign the literary fame that placed my name so high in the world.'

'Four hours for such a bagatelle as that,' said the negro, with disdain; 'but for your sake I will not refuse your last request.'

'Oh, say not my last,' said I, emboldened by his compliance; 'give me the twelve hours complete—one more day—and let the fame of my battles and victories be for ever effaced from the memory of mankind. One day, Yago—one day, and I am willing to resign all else.'

'You abuse my good nature,' he said; 'but I will not refuse. I give you till sunset. Farewell. With the last beam of day I come to fetch you.' And left me, continued the unknown, in the accents of despair; 'and this is the last day I have to remain on earth.'

He rushed to the window and pointed to the park. 'I shall never again behold that lovely sky, that verdant lawn, that silvery stream, nor never again breathe the balmy air of spring.—Fool—fool that I was. The blessings that God lavishes upon all were mine also, and I despised them. Now I know their inestimable value; and I might have enjoyed them for twenty-five years longer; and in few hours I must leave them for ever. I have squandered my life for a vain chimeric—a sterile fame, that has perished even before myself. Look; he cried, pointing to a group of peasants, who, on their return to labor, filled the air with their joyous songs, 'what would I not give to share their labors and poverty? But I have nothing now to hope for—not even labor and poverty.' A bright sunbeam at this moment fell upon his pale and distorted features; he grasped my hand convulsively, and ex-

claimed, 'Look—look at that glorious sun; and I must leave it for ever. Ah, let me lose not a moment of this precious day, to which, for me, alas! there will be no morrow.' Thus saying, he rushed into the park and disappeared among the foliage of a shady alley.

I threw myself upon the sofa, bewildered and oppressed by all I had heard and seen. Was it indeed a reality, or was I under the influence of some fantastic dream? The door was opened by a servant, who announced the Duke of C—.

A noble-looking personage, of about sixty years of age, entered, and, cordially taking my hand, apologized for having detained me so long. He had been compelled, he said, to attend a consultation of the faculty upon the state of his unfortunate brother.

'He is not in danger, I trust?' said I.

'No,' replied the duke, mournfully; 'the disease is a mental one. From his youth he suffered the most extravagant ideas of glory and ambition to gain possession of his mind, till his frame, weakened by such violent emotions, was attacked by a fever, in which his life was despaired of. He recovered, but his reason is, I fear, gone for ever. The unhappy illness under which he labours is that he has but one day more to live.'

All was explained.

'Now, my young friend,' continued the duke, 'let us speak of your future prospects. Towards the end of the month I will be able to accompany you to court.'

'I am fully sensible of your kindness, my lord,' I replied; 'but I have given up all idea of profiting by your generous offer.'

'How is this?' exclaimed the duke, in unfeigned surprise; 'give up the advantages that are about within your grasp?'

'I resign them all, my lord.'

'Young man,' said the duke, 'you know not what you do. Good Heaven, such a brilliant career open before you. In ten years—'

'What would be ten years of my life lost?' said I, with a smile.

'Lost?' cried the duke; 'would it not be sleepily having glory, fortune, and honours?—Come, come, you but jest. You will go with me to Versailles.'

'No, my lord,' I replied, in a respectful but firm tone; 'I will return to Brittany, where I will ever retain a grateful sense of your lordship's goodness and consideration.'

'This is madness—downright madness,' muttered the duke, in a disappointed and angry tone.

'I feel it is sound reason,' whispered I, as I thought of all I had heard and seen so lately.

The next morning I was on the road. Oh, with what inexpressible delight I beheld again the sweet sky of Brittany—the trees of my noble park—the turrets of my ancient castle. There I found my beloved mother, my sweet sisters, my faithful vassals; and there I found true happiness, which I have never since quitted. Eight days afterwards I was the husband of Henrietta.—Metropolitan Record.

THE TIN SAVINGS BANK.

Charles Lynford was a young mechanic in good business in one of the cities of the American States. At the age of twenty-six he had taken to himself as a wife Caroline Eastis, the daughter of a neighbor, who had nothing to bring him except her own personal merits, which were many, and habits of thrift learned in an economical household under the stern teaching of necessity.

It was well, perhaps, that Charles Lynford should obtain a wife of this character, since he himself found it very difficult to save anything from his income.

It was not long before Caroline became acquainted with her husband's failing. She could not feel quite easy in the knowledge that they were living fully up to their income, foreseeing that a time would come when their family would grow more expensive, and perhaps her husband's business, now flourishing, might become less so.

Accordingly, one day she purchased of a tinsmith a tin safe, and placed it in a conspicuous place in the parlor, as such children frequently use as a savings bank. This she placed conspicuously on the mantel-piece, so that her husband might be sure to see it on entering.

'Hallo, Carrie, what's that?' he asked curiously.

'Only a little purchase I made to day,' said the wife.

'But what is it meant for?' he asked again. 'Let me illustrate,' said his wife playfully. 'Have you a ten cent piece about you?'

Charles drew a dime from his waistcoat-pocket. His wife, taking it from his hand, dropped it into the box through a little slit at the top.

Charles laughed. 'So you have taken to hoarding, Carrie? My little wife becomes a miser!'