

side, more or less appreciable, in all black-guardism—here, there was nothing but tragedy; mute, weird tragedy. The quiet in the room was horrible. The thin, haggard, long-haired young man, whose sunken eyes fiercely watched the turning up of the cards, never spoke—the bluff, fat-faced, plump player, who pricked his piece of past board pre-emptively, the register how often black was, and how often red—never spoke; the duty, wrinkled old man, with the vulture eyes, and the darned great coat, who had lost his last eye, and still looked on desperately after he could play no longer—never spoke. Even the voice of the croupier sounded as if it were strangely dulled and thickened in the atmosphere of the room. I had entered the place to laugh, I felt that if I stood quietly looking on much longer, I should be more likely to weep. So, to excite myself out of the depression of spirits which was fast stealing over me, I unfortunately went to the table, and began to play. Still more unfortunately, as the event will show, I won—won prodigiously; won incredibly; won at such a rate, that regular players at the table crowded round me; and staring at my stakes with hungry, superstitious eyes, whispered to one another, that the English stranger was going to break the bank.

The game was *Rouge et Noir*. I had played at it in nearly every city in Europe, without, however, the care or the wish to study the Theory of Chances—that philosopher's stone of gamblers! And a gambler, in the strict sense of the word, I had never been. I was heart whole from the corroding passion for play. My gaming was a mere idle amusement. I never resorted to it by necessity, because I never knew what it was to want in me. I never practised it so incessantly as to lose more than I could afford, or to gain more than I could coolly pocket without being thrown off my balance by my good luck. In short, I had hitherto frequented gambling-tables—just as I frequented bath-rooms and opera houses—because they had amused me, and because I had nothing better to do with my leisure hours.

But, on this occasion, it was very different—now, for the first time in my life, I felt what the passion for play really was. My success first bewildered, and then, in the most literal meaning of the word, intoxicated me. Incredible as it may appear, it is nevertheless true that I only lost, when I attempted to estimate chances, and played according to previous calculation. I left everything to luck, and staked without any care or consideration, I was sure to win—to win in the face of every recognised probability in favour of the bank. At first, some of the men present ventured their money safely enough on my colors; but I speedily increased my stakes to sums which they dared not risk. One after another they left off playing, and breathless looked on at my game. Still, time after time, I staked higher and higher; and still won. The excitement in the room rose to fever pitch. The silence was interrupted, by a deep, muttered chorus of oaths and exclamations in different languages, every time the gold was shovelled across to my side of the table—even the imperturbable croupier dashed his rake on the floor in a (French) fury of astonishment at my success. But one man present preserved his self-possession; and that man was my friend, He came to my side, and whispering in English, begged me to leave the place, satisfied with what I had already gained. I must do him the justice to say, that he repeated his warnings, and entreaties several times; and only left me and went away, after I had rejected his advice (I was to all intents and purposes gambling-drunk) in terms which rendered it impossible for him to address me again that night.

Shortly after he had gone, a hoarse voice behind me cried:—"Permit me, my dear sir!—permit me to restore to their proper place two Napoleons which you have dropped. Wonderful luck, sir!—I pledge you my word and honour as an old soldier, in the course of my long experience in this sort of thing, I never saw such luck

as yours! never! Go on, sir—*Sacre mille bonnes!* Go on boldly and break the bank!"

I turned round and saw nodding and smiling at me with inveterate civility a tall man, dressed in a frozzed and braided surtut, If I had been in my senses, I should have considered him personally, as being rather a suspicious specimen of an old soldier. He had goggling blood-hot eyes, mangy mustachios, and broken nose. His voice betrayed a barrack-room intonation of the worst order, and he had the dirtiest pair of hands I ever saw—even in France. These little personal peculiarities exercised, however, no repelling influence on me. In the mad excitement, the reckless triumph of that moment, I was ready to "fraternise" with anybody who encouraged me in my game. I accepted the old soldier's offered pinch of snuff, clapped him on the back, and swore he was the honestest fellow in the world; the most glorious relic of the Grand Army that I had ever met with. "Go on!" cried my military friend, snapping his fingers in ecstasy,—"Go on, and win! Break the Bank—*Mille tonnerres!* my gallant English comrade, break the bank!"

And I did go on—went at such a rate, that in another quarter of an hour the croupier called out: "Gentlemen! the bank has discontinued for to-night." All the notes, and all the gold in that "bank," now lay in a heap under my hands; the whole floating capital of the gambling-house was waiting to pour into my pockets!

"Tie up the money in your pocket-handkerchief, my worthy sir," said the soldier, as I wildly plunged my hands into my heap of gold. "Tie it up, as we used to tie up a bit of dinner in the Grand Army; your winnings are too heavy for any breeches pocket that ever were sown. There! that's it!—shovel them in, notes and all! *Credite what luck!*—Stop! another Napoleon on the floor! *Ah! sacre petit polisson de Napoleon!* have I doubt thee at last? Now then sir—two tight double knuts each way with your honourable permission, and the money's safe. Feel it! feel it, fortunate sir! hard and round as a cannon ball—*Ah bah!* if they had only fired such cannon balls at us, at *Austerlitz*—*nom d'une pipe!* if they only had I! And now, as an ancient grenadier, as an ex-brave of the French army, what remains for me to do? I ask what? Simply this: to treat my valued English friend to drink a bottle of champagne with me, and toast the goddess Fortune in foaming goblets before we part!"

Excellent ex-brave! Convivial ancient grenadier! Champagne by all means! An English cheer for an old soldier! *Hurrah! hurrah!* Another English cheer for the goddess Fortune! *Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!*

"Bravo! the Englishman; the amiable, gracious Englishman, in whose veins circulates the vivacious blood of France! Another glass? *Ah bah!*—the bottle is empty! Never mind! *Vive le vin!* I, the old soldier, order another bottle, and half-a-pound of *bon-bons* with it!"

No, no, ex-brave; never—ancient grenadier! Your bottle last time! my bottle this. Behold it! Toast away! The French Army!—the great Napoleon!—the present company! the croupier! the honest croupier's wife and daughters—if he has any! the Ladies generally! Everybody in the world!

By the time the second bottle of champagne was emptied, I felt as if I had been drinking liquid fire; my brain seemed all a flame. No excess in wine had ever had this effect on me before in my life. Was it the result of a stimulant acting upon my system when I was in a highly-excited state? Was my stomach in a particularly disordered condition? Or was the champagne particularly strong?

"Ex-brave of the French Army!" cried I, in a mad state of exhilaration. "I am on fire! how are you? You have set me on fire! Do you hear; my hero of *Austerlitz*? Let us have a third bottle of champagne to put the flame out!" The old soldier wagged his head, rolled his goggle-eyes, until I expected to see them slip out of their sockets; placed his dirty forefinger by the side of

his broken nose; solemnly ejaculated "Coffee!" and immediately ran off into an inner room.

The word pronounced by the eccentric veteran, seemed to have a magical effect on the rest of the company present. With one accord they all rose to depart. Probably they had expected to profit by my intoxication; but finding that my new friend was benevolently bent on preventing me from getting dead drunk, and now abandoned all hope of thriving pleasantly on my winnings. Whatever their motive might be, at any rate they went away in a body. When the old soldier returned and sat down again opposite to me at the table we had the room to ourselves. I could see the croupier, in a sort of vestibule which opened out of it, eating his supper in solitude. The silence was now deeper than ever.

A sudden change, too, had come over the "ex-brave." He assumed a portentous look; and when he spoke to me again his speech was ornamented by no oaths, enforced by no finger-snapping, enlivened by no apostrophes, or exclamations.

"Listen, my dear sir," said he, in mysteriously confidential tones—"listen to an old soldier's advice, I have been to the mistress of the house (a very charming woman, with a genius for cookery!) to impress on her the necessity of making us some particularly strong and good coffee. You must drink this coffee in order to get rid of your little amiable exaltation of spirits, before you think of going home—you know, my good and gracious friend! With all that money to take home to-night, it is a sacred duty to yourself to have your wits about you. You are known to be a winner to an enormous extent, by several gentlemen present to night, who, in a certain point of view, are very worthy and excellent fellows; but they are mortal men, my dear sir, and they have their amiable weaknesses! Need I say more! Ah, no, not you understand me! Now, this is what you must do—send for a cabriolet when you feel quite well again—draw up all the windows when you get into it—and tell the driver to take you home only through the large and well lighted thoroughfares. Do this; and you and your money will be safe. Do this; and tomorrow you will thank an old soldier for giving you a word of honest advice."

Just as the ex-brave ended his oration in very lachrymose tones, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups. My attentive friend handed me one of the cups, with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it off at a draught. Almost instantly afterwards, I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. The room whirled round and round furiously; the old soldier seemed to be regularly bobbing up and down before me, like the piston of a steam-engine. I was half delirated by a violent singing in my ears; a feeling of utter bewilderment, helplessness, idiocy, overcame me. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance; and stammered out, that I felt dreadfully unwell—so unwell, that I did not know how I was to get home.

"My dear friend," answered the old soldier; and even his voice seemed to be bobbing up and down, as he spoke—"My dear friend, it would be madness to go home, in your state. You would be sure to lose your money; you might be robbed and murdered with the greatest ease. I am going to sleep here: do you sleep here, too—they make up capital beds in this house—take one; sleep off the effects of the wine, and go home safely with your winnings, to-morrow, to-morrow, in broad daylight.

I had no power of thinking, no feeling of any kind, but the feeling that I must lie down somewhere, immediately, and fall off into a cool, refreshing, comfortable sleep. So I agreed eagerly to the proposal about the bed, and took the offered arms of the old soldier and the croupier—the latter having been summoned to show the way. They led me along some passages and up a short flight of stairs into the bedroom which I was to occupy. The ex-brave shook me warmly by the hand; proposed that we should breakfast