

[For the CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.]

## ONLY ONE.

There is but one; a mother's love,  
That ever lives and breathes the same  
Thro' height of glory—depth of shame—  
As steadfast as the stars above.

A woman holds me very dear;  
And looks love in my eyes to-day;  
To-morrow she is lured away  
By speeches sweeter to her ear.

And friends make pledges, clasping hands,  
That nought can e'er their pacts divide;  
And ere the ebbing of the tide,  
One wanders lonely on the sands.

There is but one that faithful stands;  
That never fades; that never dies.  
Till the sad closing of the eyes,  
And folding o'er of lifeless hands.

BARRY DANE.

## LA DAME DE MARGON.

A LEGEND OF LE PERCHE.

On the south-eastern confines of that large province of France which from its beauty and fertility so well deserves its ancient title of La Belle Normandie, lies a small tract of country which, amidst all the divisions and subdivisions of modern departments, still retains its old name of Le Perche—a fruitful picturesque little province, famous for its flax, where there are hedge-rows in the fields as in England, and where the farms are cleaner and better kept than in many parts of France. In shape it is something of an oblong square, about fifty miles in breadth and forty in length, stretching away towards Chartres upon the east, and Le Mans and Orleans upon the south-west and south-east.

Hence come the Percheron horses, large, gray, and strong, which some of us have seen in Rosa Bonheur's pictures, and which most of us have heard of, especially of late.

Le Perche is not without its historical associations. It saw something of fighting during the late war, and in the fifteenth century, when the ill-fated Maid of Orleans was living and dying for the sake of a king who never heartily appreciated her devotion, the province was occupied by the English, who burnt and destroyed most of its strongholds, amongst others the Château de Villeray, a large and strongly fortified castle overlooking the valley of the Huisne, which was rebuilt in the time of Henri Quatre, and is now a spacious and pleasant dwelling-house.

One of the principal towns in Le Perche is Nogent le Rotrou, famous as the burial-place of Maximilian de Bethune, better known as the great Sully, Duke of Rosny, the friend alike of his sovereign and the poor. A monument in the Hospice of Nogent marks the spot where he was interred. Two fine statues of himself, and 'cette très-haute et très-illustre dame Rachel de Cochefilet,' his wife, are placed above the grave. But Sully's body no longer rests there. At the time of the Revolution the tomb was opened and rifled, the coffin melted down into bullets, and the remains of the great statesman shamefully exposed and subjected to every possible insult at the hands of a brutal and infuriated mob.

The Château Fort de Nogent, purchased by Sully from the Prince de Condé a few years before his death, still towered majestically above the town; but it is now little better than a massive ruin. A few rooms in this old château have been made habitable by the present owner; but his wife, we were told, declines to live in them 'on account of the ghosts.'

On a steep hill about a league from Nogent, at a place where two roads meet, stands the old church of Notre Dame de Margon. It is very old, having been built about the tenth or eleventh century, but not otherwise very remarkable.

A triangular grass plot just below, with a round spot in the centre from which the grass has been burnt away, is more worthy of notice.

On a certain Sunday in every year the bell of Notre Dame de Margon rings loudly for many hours, and at sunset a sort of Guy Fawkes scene is enacted on this spot, which would probably arouse the curiosity and amusement of any one who beheld it for the first time. 'Thereby hangs a tale,' and the story or legend of 'La Dame de Margon dite La Belle Bourbonnaise,' as I heard it a few months ago whilst on a visit to some friends at the Château de Villeray, appears to me, in spite of much that is obscure and improbable, to retain enough of freshness and interest to make it worth relating.

Handed down to us as it has been through many generations, from amidst the mists and comparative darkness of the Middle Ages, it is not wonderful that some discrepancies should occur in the narrative; but on the whole the various chroniclers are pretty well agreed about the main facts, which are as follows:

Somewhere about the twelfth or thirteenth century a certain Sire de Courcelles, the proprietor of a large manorial dwelling on the outskirts of Nogent, which was afterwards turned into a farm, fired by the martial ardour of the times, buckled on his armour, and in a moment of religious enthusiasm betook himself to the Holy Land.

He left, not only his home, but his wife and a blooming young daughter aged about sixteen. As the young Renée (or Sophie as some have called her) was rich as well as beautiful, and as her father's absence was likely to be prolonged, it was not improbable that the question of lovers might arise before his return. He therefore left strict injunctions with his wife with regard to the disposal of his daughter's hand.

She was not to allow Renée to marry any one no matter how rich or noble he might be—

who could not bring with him a special marriage licence, as it were, in the shape of a written consent from himself, signed by his own hand, and sealed with the arms of the Courcelles. And for further security, this written consent was to be accompanied by a certain well-known ring which had been in the possession of his family for many generations. This was tantamount to saying that his daughter's hand should not be disposed of without his being previously consulted.

The precautions were not unneeded. In due time lovers appeared upon the field. Two rival suitors aspired at the same time to the honour of espousing 'la gente demoiselle' Renée de Courcelles. One of these is called in the old chronicles the Comte de Nogent, but he was more probably some relative only of the great family who at that time bore the title of Comtes du Perche. The other was the Baron de la Manorière.

Both were alike noble, but it was towards the latter that the affections of the young lady herself inclined. The Baron de la Manorière had been wounded some short time previously whilst assisting to repulse an attack made upon the Château de Courcelles. From what quarter this attack came is not stated; but we are told that the fair Renée helped to nurse him back to convalescence, and that during the dangerously sweet moments of intimacy which ensued, he, as was not surprising, lost his heart to his beautiful companion; whilst she, little by little, learnt to love the brave young champion who was suffering for her sake.

Fortunately the mother approved of her daughter's choice, and a trusty hermit was forthwith despatched to the Holy Land, bearing a letter from the châtelaine de Courcelles to her husband, containing the warmest praises of the Baron de la Manorière's conduct and character, and entreating him to send back as soon as possible by the hands of the same messenger his written consent to the young man's union with Renée.

So far all was well; but alas! for the young lovers, the course of true love in their case was not long destined to run smooth. It had been well for the Baron de la Manorière if he had been content to offer his homage at the shrine of 'one maiden only'; but in earlier days, before he had seen or known Renée de Courcelles, there had been certain love passages between himself and Marguerite de Raderai, the 'châtelaine' of Margon, a hamlet in the immediate neighbourhood. We are not told of this lady whether she was old or young, married or single; but we know that she was beautiful, and we may surmise that she was a widow, as her surname of La Belle Bourbonnaise would suggest that she was not originally a native of the province.

Whether the young baron had ever really loved her may be doubtful, but at any rate he had in some idle moment made professions of an attachment, which she had returned with all the ardour of a jealous and passionate nature.

In an evil hour she learnt the fact of her lover's defection.

Whilst the messenger who had been sent by the châtelaine de Courcelles to the East was making his way as rapidly as the slow travelling of those days would permit towards Jerusalem, a letter was received by that lady from her husband, telling glorious things of his successes in the war against the infidel, and holding out hopes of his speedy return.

Upon the strength of this welcome intelligence, and possibly with a view of presenting the Baron de la Manorière as the future husband of her daughter, she gave a magnificent entertainment, to which all her friends and retainers were invited.

Marguerite de Raderai, in her character of châtelaine de Margon, was present upon the occasion, and then and there she learnt the truth. If she had hitherto disbelieved the report which had reached her ears, she could no longer doubt the evidence of her own senses; for, carried away by the excitement of the hour, the young lovers forgot everything but their own happiness, and, undeterred by any considerations of prudence, allowed their mutual affection to be too plainly seen. The Dame de Margon saw and understood it all; the fact was patent to her, as to all others, that the man whose heart she had believed to be all her own was false to his allegiance, and had deserted her for another, younger if not fairer than herself.

The blow had fallen suddenly, and found her unprepared. In that bitter moment the very blood in her veins seemed to turn to gall; there was no room in her heart for either pity or forgiveness, and from that time forth she hated him with the cruel hatred of an outraged love.

With all the strength and energy of her nature she determined upon revenge. Alone in the solitude of her home, she devised a scheme which was as infamous in the conception as it was successful in its result.

The terms upon which the hand of Renée de Courcelles could alone be obtained were no secret in the neighbourhood. Marguerite de Margon was intimately acquainted with the device of the old ring Renée's father had alluded to, which was an heirloom in the family. The arms of the Courcelles also, consisting of a Virgin supported by two angels, were perfectly well known to her, and in all probability she had some impressions of the latter in her possession.

Upon these she laid the foundation of her plot; but her own knowledge of heart and science was not sufficient to carry it into execution. The help she needed, however, was soon found. A poor artist—a man as false and unscrupulous as herself—was willing, for the sake of the rich reward she offered, to become her tool. With a skill and ingenuity worthy of a

better cause, he succeeded in making a copy of both seal and ring correct enough to deceive the unwary. To forge a letter purporting to come from the Sire de Courcelles was no difficult task, as in those days no private gentleman was expected to write himself, but every one of any note kept an ecclesiastic or other learned man attached to his household to act as his amanuensis. Such a letter, then, La Dame de Margon or her accomplice forged. It was addressed to the Comte de Nogent, the rival of the Baron de la Manorière, and ran as follows:

'I, the Lord of Courcelles, desire before I depart this life to give my daughter a husband, and it is you whom I have chosen. Go at once and announce this news to my family, and beg of them that the last wish of a father dying for the cause of Christ be faithfully executed. The pilgrim to whom I have intrusted the charge of this letter will also give into your hand the sacred ring which has been handed down to me from my ancestors, and which I beg of you to preserve religiously.'

This letter, duly signed and sealed, was then given, together with the fictitious ring, in charge to a hermit, who was ordered to convey them without loss of time to the Comte de Nogent; and he was further instructed how to parry the count's questions in the event of his being cross-examined on the subject of his mission. No such cross-examination, however, seems to have taken place. The man, who must have been either knave or fool, or perhaps a little of both, played his part well; while the Comte de Nogent, only too eager to grasp at the hope of happiness for which he had never ceased to sigh, was probably not disposed to inquire too curiously into the authority of the proofs on which it rested. History however, acquits him of all wilful complicity in La Dame de Margon's infamous design.

Armed as it were with his credentials, he at once sought the presence of the châtelaine de Courcelles, and in the name of her absent lord demanded permission to address the fair Renée as his bride. The news fell like a thunderbolt upon all concerned, filling the poor mother's heart with grief and consternation at the thought of her own approaching widowhood, while at the same time it gave the deathblow to her daughter's dearest hopes. But so well had Marguerite de Raderai's plans been carried out, so cunningly had the ring and the seal been copied, that the unhappy lady fell helplessly into the snare, and never doubted for an instant that the letter which sealed poor Renée's fate was otherwise than genuine. The dying wish of a husband and father was not to be disregarded, and so in spite of her own misgivings, in spite of her daughter's too evident repugnance to the match, she gave orders that the marriage should take place. As soon, therefore, as the necessary preliminaries could be arranged, the unfortunate Renée de Courcelles became the wife of the Comte de Nogent.

So far the plot of La Belle Bourbonnaise had prospered as successfully as in her most sanguine moments she could have anticipated. Utterly regardless of all future consequences, she had gone on to the fulfilment of her end without mercy and without fear. She had silenced the reproaches of her own conscience and had trampled upon the feelings and affections of others without a single pang of remorse; broken hearts and ruined lives were the sacrifices which she laid without scruple upon the altar of her false god, expediency. Whether her object in doing this had been simply to gratify the promptings of passion and revenge, or whether she indulged in the hope that Baron de la Manorière, once irrevocably separated from Renée, might return to his former allegiance, it is impossible to say. If she had such a hope, however, it proved fallacious. Not long did she enjoy even her seeming triumph, for retribution followed swiftly on her crime.

Some say that she was shortly afterwards attacked with mortal sickness, and that on her deathbed, being seized with unavailing remorse, she made full confession of her evil deeds, in the hope of winning that pardon from heaven which she felt she had no right to expect on earth; and they add that the righteous judgment of the law, which she had contrived to escape during her lifetime, overtook her even on the confines of the grave; for the Comte de Nogent, horrified at her revelations and anxious to prove that he had had no share in her odious crime, demanded that the cause should be tried by competent judges. By their unanimous decree she, being already dead, was refused Christian burial, and her lifeless body was ordered to be dragged from her manor house to the place of execution and burnt to ashes. Such is one account. But another and more probable version of the story is as follows:

That the Baron de la Manorière, growing impatient at the long tarrying of the messenger who had been despatched to the Sire de Courcelles, followed him at last in person to the Holy Land. Arrived there he was fortunate enough, not only to meet with Renée's father, but also to be the means of saving his life in an encounter with the enemy. Gratitude for this timely succour, added to his wife's earnest entreaties and his own just appreciation of the young baron's worth, induced him to lend a favourable ear to the latter's suit; and very soon he gave him leave to return to France, bearing with him a letter containing his full and hearty consent to his union with Renée.

The happy lover hurried home with all possible speed; but when at last he reached Le Perche, it was only to find that black-hearted treachery had been at work during his absence, and

that the girl he loved so dearly was already the wife of another man. His rage and disappointment knew no bounds; but at once he traced the cruel deception to its true source, and with an unerring instinct he denounced Marguerite de Margon as the author of the plot.

The miserable woman was cited to appear before the criminal court. Proofs of her guilt were not long in forthcoming, while not a voice was raised in her defence. She was found guilty on every count, and condemned to suffer the utmost penalty of the law. Her manor was to be given up to the flames, her meadows dried up (*desséchés*), and her trees torn up by the roots, while she herself was condemned to be hanged by the neck till she was dead, and her corpse then dragged upon a hurdle to the open space in front of the church at Margon, and there burnt in the presence of the assembled multitude. And further, in order to perpetuate the memory of her crime, it was ordained that the latter part of the sentence should be repeated annually, and that for evermore, on the 16th of July, La Belle Bourbonnaise should be burnt in effigy on the same spot, as a wholesome warning to all future generations against the sinful indulgence of jealousy, hatred, and revenge.

According to one account, the vassals of La Dame de Margon were required to furnish a straw figure every year for this purpose, which was to be dressed in *paper* at the expense of the commune.

Such is the story of La Dame de Margon, as it has been handed down by oral tradition to the inhabitants of Le Perche, and as it may still be read in the old chronicles of the province. But even in the written pages of the latter the details are meagre and unsatisfactory, and much is left to the imagination of the reader to supply. We are told nothing of what befell the Baron de la Manorière after the wicked woman who had plotted to destroy his happiness had ceased to exist, nor of how it fared with the Comte de Nogent and his reluctant bride in their after married life—whether poor Renée died of a broken heart, or, resigning herself to the inevitable, did her best to live happily with her adoring husband. Upon these details history is silent; but that the legend is true on all important points there can be but little doubt. At any rate the fact remains unaltered that, once in every year, on the Sunday following the 16th of July (*la fête patronale de Margon*), a straw figure, made to represent a woman, and dressed in all the richest garments that the voluntary contributions of the neighbourhood can provide, with gloves on its hands and shoes on its feet, is taken in a sort of procession to where the cross-roads meet in front of the church at Margon, left exposed for some hours on a platform about five feet high, and finally burnt at sunset, amidst much ringing of bells and shouting of boys, on the self-same spot where Marguerite de Margon is said to have met her fate hundreds of years ago.

The little grass plot, with its blackened centre, 'still remains,' as Carlyle would say, 'a curious monument of many things.' The name of La Belle Bourbonnaise, her wicked life and miserable end, have grown as familiar in Le Perche as household words; and her story has given rise to a proverb which is sometimes used still in that part of the country as a coarse jest against any one who is supposed to have been crossed in love, '*Celle-là aura sûrement entendu sonner à Margon*,'—'She must certainly have heard the bell ring at Margon.'

H. S. ENGSTROM.

## HUMOROUS.

THE STAMP OF CIVILISATION.—The postage-stamp.

FOX'S MARTYRS.—Ducks, chickens, turkeys, and geese.

THE BEST LUMINARY FOR AN IMPETUOUS INDIVIDUAL.—A rush light.

A PRESCRIPTION is wanted which will prolong the existence of a dying echo.

WHY is the fire a dissipated character?—Because it goes out every night.

OLD lace is the object of the latest fashionable mania, and the factories are running double time to supply the demand.

MEN AND GOLD.—Anything Midas touched was turned to gold. In these days touch a man with gold and he'll turn into anything.

YOU should never tell a man that he lies, simply remark that he is guilty of heterophemy and drop the subject—if he'll let you.

JAPANESE officials commit suicide when found guilty of theft or embezzlement. American officials retire to their farms and receive the congratulations of friends.

"I ALWAYS think," said a reverend guest, "that a certain quantity of wine does a man no harm after a good dinner."—"Oh, no, sir," replied his host. "It is the uncertain quantity that does the mischief."

At a restaurant, the other day, a man inquired reading from a bill of fare, "What is this sirloin of beef à la financière?"—"I suppose that is a cut from the stock exchange bull," replied his friend.

A BROOKLYN man, who had the toes of one foot cut off by a horse car, sued the company for \$5,000 damages—\$1,000 per toe. The company denied responsibility *in toto*, but the jury awarded the plaintiff \$500 as a memento of the affair.

At Port Hope, Ontario, a competitive concert was given a few days since by two rival brass bands, and now, rather than have it repeated, the Port Hopers would prefer having twenty-seven successive thunder storms.

LITTLE Willie having hunted in all the corners, at last appears to give them up, and climbing on a chair, betakes himself to a big book on a side table. Mother says to him:—"What is darling doing with the book?" "It is the dictionary," papa looks in the dictionary for things, and I'm looking in it to see if I can find my shoes."