

of performance. I retreated, uncertain what to do, and waited outside until the shop was clear.

Three words explained the nature of my visit; and Jasmin received me with a species of warm courtesy, which was very peculiar, and very charming—dashing at once with the most clattering volubility and fiery speed of tongue, into a sort of rhapsodical discourse upon poetry in general, and his own in particular—upon the French language in general, and the *patois* of it spoken in Languedoc, Provence, and Gascony in particular. Jasmin is a well-built and strongly-limbed man, of about fifty, with a large, massive head, and a broad pile of forehead, overhanging two piercingly bright black eyes, and features which would be heavy were they allowed a moment's repose from the continual play of the facial muscles, which were continually sending a series of varying expressions across the swarthy visage. Two sentences of his conversation were quite sufficient to stamp his individuality. The first thing that struck me was the absence of all mock modesty, and the pretended self-underrating, conventionally assumed by persons expecting to be complimented upon their sayings or doings. Jasmin seemed thoroughly to despise all such flimsy hypocrisy. 'God only made four French poets!' he burst out with; 'and their names are Corneille, Lafontaine, Beranger, and Jasmin!' Talking with the most impassioned vehemence, and the most redundant energy of gesture, he went on to declaim against the influences of civilization upon language and manners as being fatal to all real poetry. If the true inspiration yet existed upon earth, it burned in the hearts and brains of men far removed from cities, *salons*, and the clash and din of social influences. Your only true poets were the unfettered peasants, who poured forth their hearts in song, not because they wished to make poetry, but because they were joyous and true. Colleges, academies, schools of learning, schools of literature, and all such institutions, Jasmin denounced as the curse and the bane of true poetry. They had spoiled, he said, the very French language. You could no more write poetry in French now, than you could in arithmetical figures. The language had been licked and kneaded, and tricked out, and plumed, and dandified, and scented, and minced, and ruled square, and chipped—(I am trying to give an idea of the strange flood of epithets he used)—and pranked out, and polished, and muscaded, until for all honest purposes of true high poetry, it was mere unavailable contemptible jargon. It might do for cheating *agents de change* on the Bourse—for squabbling politicians in the chambers—for mincing dandies in the *salons*—for the sarcasm of Scribels comedies, or the coarse, drolleries of Palais Royal farces; but for poetry the French language was extinct. All modern poets who used it were mere *faiseurs de phrase*, thinking about words, and not feeling. 'No, no,' my Troubadour continued; 'to write poetry, you must get the language of a rural people—a language talked among fields, and trees, and by rivers and mountains—a language never minced or disfigured by academics, and dictionary-makers, and journalists; you must have a language like that which your own Burns (whom I read in Chateaubriand) used; or like the brave old mel-

low tongue unchanged for centuries—stuffed with the strangest, quaintest, richest, raciest idioms, and odd, solemn words, full of shifting meanings and associations, at one pathetic and familiar, homely and graceful—the language which I write in, and which has never yet been defiled by calculating means of science or jack-a-dandy *litterateurs*.

THE LAIRD.—I say lads, has any o' ye read Herman Melville's new work?

THE DOCTOR.—You mean "*Pierre*; or the *Ambiguities*." I presume?

THE LAIRD.—Just sae! I saw it on Scobie's counter this morning, and wad ha'e coft it if I had had siller enuech in my spleuchan!

THE DOCTOR.—It was just as lucky, that your exchequer was at so low an ebb, else thou might have been a practical illustration of the old saw which declares that a fool and his money are soon parted!

THE LAIRD.—You astonish me! I wad ha'e judged that in this age o' commonplace, a production frae the pen o' the author o' *Mardi* wad ha'e been a welcome addition to the stores o' our booksellers!

THE DOCTOR.—Melville unquestionably is a clever man, but in the present instance he has sadly mistaken his walk. "*Pierre*" from beginning to end is a gigantic blunder, with hardly one redeeming feature.

THE MAJOR.—What is the nature of the story?

THE DOCTOR.—You might as well ask me to analyse the night-mare visions of an Alderman who after diving upon turtle and venison had wound up by supping upon lobsters and toasted cheese! The hero is a dreamy spoon, alike deficient in heart and brains, who like Hamlet drives a gentle confiding maiden crazy by his flutulent caprices, and finally winds up by drinking poison in prison to save his neck from a hempen cravat!

THE MAJOR.—The affair, I presume belongs to the German school?

THE DOCTOR.—Yes! "*Pierre*" is a species of New York Werter, having all the absurdities and none of the beauties of Goethe's juvenile indiscretion!

THE MAJOR.—Strange that a really able man like Herman Melville should have compromised himself so egregiously by giving birth to such a production!

THE DOCTOR.—'Tis passing strange!

THE SQUIREN.—Men of genius will occasionally be guilty of such freaks. I remember Liston once playing Richard III. for his benefit in the Theatre Royal, Dublin, and though his most tragic passages were received with shrieks of laughter from box, pit, and gallery, the besotted comedian could not be convinced that it was with himself and not the public where the error lay!

THE MAJOR.—By the way, Laird, you have got some grandchildren I believe?

THE LAIRD.—O ay! There's Peggy nine