

Selections.

THE BEGGAR OF THE STEPS OF ST. ROCH.

A TRUE STORY.

A young priest attached to the Church of St. Roch, at Paris, in the year 18—, had been in the habit of giving occasional alms to a beggar whom he passed every day as he went into the church. This man used to sit on the steps of the front entrance, and to solicit the charity of the faithful as they passed to and fro. He was old, and his countenance stern and sad. If any one addressed him, he answered briefly and abruptly; nor had his features ever been seen to relax into a smile. He was known as "old Jacques of the steps of St. Roch;" and none had troubled themselves to inquire into his history, or ascertain his origin. The good priest who had frequently relieved him, remarked that he was never seen *within* the Church, and endeavored at different times to find out from him whether he indeed neglected his religious duties, or performed them at such times as had escaped his observation; but he always returned evasive answers to his questions, and shut himself up in the deepest reserve. Once or twice the Abbe——had perceived that he wore round his neck a black string, to which was attached a small enameled cross. When his eye had fixed itself upon it, Jacques had hastily hid it from sight, and since that day had taken care to keep his poor ragged coat buttoned over it. It so happened that the priest was called away from his post during the winter that followed his first acquaintance with Jacques, and remained absent for some weeks. At his return he missed the beggar from his accustomed place, and when after a few days he still did not appear, his charity prompted him to make inquiries about the poor man. He found some difficulty in discovering his abode; but it was at last pointed out to him, his informant adding at the same time, that, though Jacques was very ill, it was no use for a priest to visit him, as he had absolutely refused to send for one, and seemed determined to die in sullen obstinate silence. This account only confirmed the Abbe——in his resolution to seek him out; and as he bent his steps towards the narrow street which had been pointed out to him, he thought of the cross which he had noticed on the old man's bosom, and wondered that one apparently so poor should wear so rich an ornament, or one so

irreligious the symbol of our redemption. After groping up a narrow staircase in the house to which he had been directed, he succeeded in finding the garret in which Jacques was lying. His worn and emaciated appearance, heightened by the progress of disease, had greatly increased since he had last seen him; the dark lines about his eyes and mouth, and the restless twitching of his limbs, seemed to indicate that life was drawing to a close. There was little furniture in that miserable room; the bed, if bed it could be called, occupied one half of it; a piece of stained, discolored silk hung against the wall in the shape of a curtain. There seemed no particular reason for this contrivance, which scarcely harmonized with the squalid, neglected aspect of that poor abode. Jacques lifted up his eyes as the Abbe approached, and made a sign of recognition. When the priest kindly addressed him, he held out his hand and murmured a few words of thanks; but when his visitor, after alluding to his illness, and proposing certain measures for his relief and comfort, proceeded to speak of the preparation every Christian should make for death, and to express a hope that he would avail himself of the means of grace which a merciful God was placing within his reach, the old man's face darkened, the lines about his mouth grew harder, and he exclaimed with impatience that it was all of no use: that he had nothing to say to a priest, and only wished to be left alone.

"You are satisfied, then, to die in your present state of mind, my dear friend," the Abbe said with gentleness. "You feel easy at the prospect of death?"

"Easy, easy as the damned," murmured Jacques, with an accent of such despair that it startled his companion.

"You are not an infidel, Jacques; I know you are not; then why will you not die as a Christian? I have observed that you always wear a cross."

Jacques looked up wildly at these words, and muttered:

"It scorches my breast."

The Abbe——knelt down by the side of the bed, and with earnest words that faith and love suggest in such an hour, he argued with the dying man. He implored him not to reject his good offices, and if he would not speak to him as a priest, to treat him at least as a friend, and disclose the secret that sealed his lips and withered his heart.

"My secret!" said Jacques. "Would you