

"Good Heavens!" I cried, "what has happened?" I approached the bed, and lifted up the body of the unfortunate young man; he was already stiff and cold. His teeth clenched and his face blackened, betokened the most frightful anguish. It was evident that his death had been violent, and his agony terrible.

No trace of blood, however, was on his clothes. I opened his shirt and saw on his breast a livid mark which extended to his sides and his back. One would have said that he had been clasped in a circle of iron. My foot rested on something hard lying on the carpet; I stooped and saw the diamond ring.

I hurried M. de Peyrehorade and his wife to their chamber, and made the bride go there also.

"You have still a daughter," I said to them, "to whom you owe all your care." Then I left them alone.

It did not appear to me doubtful that M. Alphonse had been the victim of an assassination, the perpetrators of which had found the means of introducing themselves during the night into the bride's chamber.

The circular bruises on the chest, however, embarrassed me greatly. A stick or an iron bar could not have produced them.

Suddenly, I recollected having heard at Valencia of ruffians making use of long leathern bags filled with fine sand for the purpose of overpowering those whom they have been hired to kill. Then I recalled to mind the Aragonias muleteer and his threat.

Still, I could hardly imagine that he would have taken such a terrible revenge for so slight an offence.

I went within doors seeking everywhere for traces of the house having been broken into, but could find none. I went down into the garden to see if the assassins could have introduced themselves from that side; but could find no certain indication.

The rain of the previous night had so moistened the soil that an impression could not be retained. I observed, however, some foot-marks deeply imprinted on the earth; they went in two contrary directions, but on the same line, parting at an angle of the hedge close by the tennis ground, and terminating at the door of the house.

These might have been the foot-prints of M. Alphonse when he went in search of his ring on the finger of the statue.

From another side the hedge, at a particular spot, was not so closely set as elsewhere; that might have been the place where the murderers broke through.

Passing and repassing in front of the statue, I stopped for an instant to consider. This time, I must confess, I could not contemplate without dread its expression of ironical wickedness; and my head being full of the horrible scenes of which I had been the witness, I imagined I saw before me an infernal divinity, looking with satisfaction on the misfortune that had befallen this home.

I regained my chamber and remained there till noon. I then went out and asked my host and hostess if anything further had been discovered. They were now somewhat calmer.

Mademoiselle de Puygarrig (I ought to say, the widow of M. Alphonse) had recovered consciousness. She had even spoken to the Crown Attorney of Perpignan, then on circuit at Ille; and that magistrate had received her deposition. He asked me for mine; I told him what I knew. I did not conceal from him my suspicions in regard to the Aragonias Muleteer.

He ordered him to be arrested on the spot.

"Did you learn anything from Madame Alphonse?" I asked of the Crown Attorney when my deposition was written down and signed.

"That unfortunate young lady has become mad," said he, with a sad smile, mad; "quite mad. Here is what she states:

"She had been asleep, she said, for some minutes, the curtains were drawn, when the door of her chamber opened, and some one entered. She was then at the edge of the bed with her face towards the wall.

"She did not stir, supposing it to be her husband.

Presently, the bed creaked, as if it had been burdened with an enormous weight. She was in great alarm and durst not turn her head. Five minutes, ten minutes passed; she could not reckon the time. Then she made an involuntary movement, or rather the person who was in the bed made one, and she felt the contact of something cold as ice;—these were her expressions. She sank down in the bed, trembling in every limb. A little while afterwards the door opened a second time, and some one entered who said, 'Good evening, my little wife.' Soon after that the curtain was drawn. She heard a stifled cry. The person who was in the bed at her side rose and appeared to stretch out his arms in front of him. She then turned her head . . . saw, she says, her husband on his knees near the bed, his head above the level of the pillow, in the grasp of a greenish-coloured giant, who hugged him furiously. She saw further, and she repeated it to me twenty times, the poor woman! . . . She saw, she recognized . . . Can you guess? The bronze Venus! the statue of M. de Peyrehorade. Since ever that statue has been in the country every body dreams of it . . . But I must go on with the statement of the unfortunate mad woman. At the sight of this spectacle she lost consciousness, and probably for some time had parted with her reason. She cannot in any way tell how long she remained unconscious. When she came to herself, she saw again the phantom, or the statue, immovable, the legs and lower part of the body in the bed, the bust and arms extended in front, her husband in its arms, but making no movement. A cock crew. Then the statue left the bed, dropped the corpse, and departed. Madame Alphonse held on to the bell, and you know the rest."

They brought in the Spaniard; he was quite calm, and defended himself with a great deal of coolness and presence of mind. He did not deny the expression I had heard him use; but he explained it, maintaining that

he meant nothing more than that on the next day, having rested, he would have won a game of tennis with his conqueror. I recollect that he added:

"An Aragonias, when he is insulted, does not wait till the morrow to revenge himself. Had I thought that M. Alphonse wished to insult me, on the spot I would have plunged my knife into him."

They compared his shoes with the impressions of the footprints in the garden; his shoes were much larger.

Finally, the hotel-keeper where this man had lodged, affirmed that he passed the whole night in rubbing and physicing one of his mules that was sick.

Besides, this Aragonias was a man of good repute; well known in the country whither he came every year to trade.

They let him go, making apologies for his arrest.

I forgot the deposition of a domestic, who was the last to see M. Alphonse alive.

It was just as he was going up stairs to his wife; calling this man, he asked him with an air of anxiety, if he knew where I was. The domestic replied that he had not seen me. Then M. Alphonse sighed and remained for a few minutes without speaking. At last he said; ah ha! *the devil will have taken him also!*

I asked this man if he noticed that M. Alphonse had his diamond ring when he spoke to him. The domestic hesitated before replying; at last he said he believed not, though he had not paid any attention.

"If he had had this ring on his finger," added he, returning to the subject, "I would have noticed it, for I believed that he had given it to Madame Alphonse."

In questioning this man I manifested a little of the superstitious terror which the deposition of Madame Alphonse had spread through the whole house. The Crown Attorney looked at me to re-assure me, and I placed myself on my guard.

Some hours after M. Alphonse's funeral, I made preparations to leave Ille. M. de Peyrehorade's carriage was to take me to Perpignan.

Notwithstanding his feeble condition, the old man insisted on accompanying me to his garden gate.

We crossed the garden in silence, he dragging himself along with difficulty, leaning on my arm. At the moment of our separation I threw a last look at the Venus. I foresaw clearly that my host, although he did not share the terror or the hatred of the statue which inspired a part of his family, he would have been pleased to get rid of an object which could never cease to recall a terrible misfortune. I thought of persuading him to place it in a museum, but hesitated to broach the subject. Presently, however, M. de Peyrehorade turned his head mechanically to the spot whereon he saw me intently gazing. He perceived the statue and immediately burst into tears.

I embraced him, and without saying a single word, leapt into the carriage.

Since my departure I have not learned that any new light has been thrown on this mysterious matter.

M. de Peyrehorade died some months after his son. By his will he bequeathed to me his manuscripts, which I shall perhaps one day publish.

I have not found among them the memoir relating to the inscriptions on the Venus.

P. S.—My friend M. de P. has just written me from Perpignan informing me that the statue is no longer in existence. After the death of her husband the first act of Madame de Peyrehorade was to have it melted into a bell, and in this new form it serves the church at Ille. But, adds M. de P., it seems that an evil destiny pursues those who possess this bronze. Since the ringing of this bell at Ille, the vines have been twice frozen.

THE END.

## MUSIC.

THE battle between Italian Opera, with its objectionable concomitant, the "Star system," and the highest type of dramatic music as represented by German Opera, will be well-fought, and perhaps settled for this side of the Atlantic, in New York this season. There have been several agencies at work for some years past to bring down Italian Opera from the place it once held in public estimation. One of these is the fact that the finest operas are no longer written by Italians, therefore it seems unreasonable to require all such works to be translated into a foreign language before they may be heard, especially as most of the singers engaged in their interpretation are not Italians. Another very potent cause of the decadence of this form of art is the pernicious "Star system" alluded to. Prima Donna worship has of late years increased to such an absurd extent that the terms asked by a great Soprano are sufficiently large to pay an entire company, so that when a Patti or a Nilsson is engaged the chorus has to be inferior, the *mise en scene* slovenly, and the *ensemble* second-rate, because the leading lady exacts such an exorbitant fee that there is not sufficient left to allow of putting work on the stage in proper style. This is the reason why chorus-singing is occasionally heard at Covent Garden and Her Majesty's Theatre that would be a disgrace to a provincial choral society. Then again the public are condemned to listen year after year to the same well-worn operas, because they give certain celebrated vocalists a chance for the display of their own particular styles; therefore other meritorious works are left in obscurity that the greed and vanity of that objectionable creation known as a Prima Donna may be indulged. German Opera on the other hand demands equal efficiency from the whole company, and, as it represents the highest type of dramatic music, will undoubtedly have the good wishes of all musicians for its success at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, under Dr. Damrosch.

The list of operas to be performed is as follows:—"Rienzi," "Flying Dutchman," "Tannhauser," "Lohengrin," and "Die Walkure," by Richard