

TWO ROADS TO MARY'S HOUSE.

A mother sat at her cottage door,
Though the bell for nine had tolled,
And she silently watched the floating clouds,
Where the moon in grandeur rolled;
And she sighed, "Ah, me! where can he be?
My boy was never so late!
With the bell's first stroke I always list
His hand on the garden gate."

Then the crickets chirped, "He is lost—is lost!"
While the birds in the old elm tree
Peeped over the rims of their great brown nests,
And twittered, "Where can he be?"
And the house-dog came and gazed in her face,
With kindly, pitying eyes,
And solemnly marched to the close-latched
gate,
And whined his grave surprise.

And the good man mused in his chair alone,
While his smoke rolled in wreaths away,
And wondered what mother could see in the
moon,
And what led the boy to stay.
And John?—Six feet of muscle and frame,
Rounded out on the amplest plan,
The old couple still fondly termed the boy,
But the girls—a nice young man!

But hark! his echoing, manly tread,
Rings out on the still night air.
Click, click, and his hand, on the swinging
gate,
Soothes their hearts like an evening prayer;
And in answer to questioning looks he says,
"You know Mary was down to-night,
And I thought I would see her safely home!
I'll be up with the morning's light."

"Humph!" said the old man, "that road
grows long!
When a lad, his nimble feet
Flew over and back, as an arrow wings
Its way on a mission fleet.
Now, when he might measure at every stride
A league, he starts at seven,
To take Mary over the self-same road,
And can't get home till eleven!"

Then the good wife smiled as her thoughts flew
back
O'er their vanished spring-time hours,
When they, too, had loitered along life's way,
And plucked the nodding flowers.
And she tenderly thought of a withered spray
That her Bible clasped around,
Though she spoke no word, for she felt her boy
Was treading on holy ground.

John knew they spoke of the dusty track
That men plodded up and down;
The smooth, straight road, that led past both
homes,
And then stretched away through the town.
But the rippling smiles like sunlight flashed
O'er a face all alight before,
As he thought of a winding, emerald path,
That led to Mary's door.

That path was a long, bright, blossoming way,
And an arm had encircled her waist,
The better for whispering Love's tale in her ear,
The better Love's sweets to taste;
And while tardy feet had prolonged the bliss
True lovers delight to live o'er,
He had won a bride to go forth with him,
Some day, from Mary's door.

A WEIRD STORY OF BRUGES.

Six months ago, when in Bruges, that "quaint old town of art and song," as Longfellow styles it—a town all unchanged since the ancient days of Flanders—I became cognisant of the following events, by happening to be present at the examination of the chief actor in them, before one of the two burgomasters who govern the city.

With a Belgian friend, I had been lounging in a window of the club-house that overlooks the spacious square known as the Grande Place (above which towers the wonderful belfry, from whence one may look down on the frontiers of Holland as on a map, and from whence, it is said, the mouth of the Thames may be seen on a clear day), when a police escort with swords drawn conducted a prisoner past, towards the Palais de Justice. He was a young man of the better class, apparently, very pale, very sad, and depressed in aspect, very handsome in face, graceful in bearing, and most unlike a criminal. His hands, however, were manacled, and a crowd of workmen and children clattered noisily around him in their wooden sabots.

As the rumor spread that a terrible assassination had just been committed, we followed the escort to the magnificent old hall in that edifice, which was whither the Palais du Franc de Bruges, and which contains a chimney-piece occupying one entire side of it, with gigantic statues carved in wood, and marble bas-reliefs representing chastely the story of Susannah and the Elders, as the reader may find in his "John Murray."

From that which transpired at the examination of the prisoner, and what I read in a few subsequent numbers of the little local paper named "La Patrie," I gleaned the substance of the following story, which, in some of its features,

reminds one of the case of Oriental metempsychosis mentioned in the "Spectator"—the passing of the soul from body to body, including the influences of mesmeric, crystalline, and magnetic forces, though I do not pretend to know anything of the learned and mysterious jargon concerning those matters; but much of which I heard that day referred to in the Palais de Justice.

A mile or so on the level highway beyond the beautiful round towers of the loop-holed and embattled Porte St. Croix, one of the still remaining barriers of the old fortifications, there stands at a little distance from the road, a quaint old Flemish dwelling-house built of red brick, and almost hidden among chestnut and apple trees. If we are to believe the "Chronyke Van Vladeren," it was once a shooting-box of Charles the Bold, and near it Mary of Burgundy received the fall from her horse which proved so fatal. Be all this as it may, it is a house with many pointed gables, strange outshots and beams of quaintly-carved oak, and therein, with his nephew, Hendrik, and an old house-keeper, resided Dr. Van Gansendonck, called Doctor, not from his profession, but for his learning, as he enjoyed the reputation of understanding all languages, living and dead, and being master of every science, human and divine; and was regarded by the simple and religious Bruguiois as altogether a miracle of a man in some respects.

Some there were who deemed him a dangerous dupe to his own powers, and these were the clergy especially, who, with something of repugnance, drew their black cloaks closer about them when "the doctor" passed them on the highway or in the narrow unpaved streets, as it was notorious that he never crossed the threshold of a church, or was known to lift his hat either to them or to the numerous Madonnas that decorate every street corner, and many a doorway too, in Bruges.

The Herr Doctor, now past his sixtieth year, had, in some respects, decidedly a bad reputation, and a hundred and fifty years ago or so, might have ended his studies amid a blaze of tar-barrels in the Grande Place as a wizard, but in this our age of steam and telegraphy he was viewed as simply a learned eccentric, and as a dabbler in mesmerism, clairvoyance, the occult light, and second sight; but these occult mysteries, which the church condemns, he would seem to have carried to a length that seems strangely out of place in these days of hard facts and practical common-sense.

A forehead high and bald, a head tumbled round by a fringe of silvery hair, eyes keen and quick as those of a rattlesnake—eyes that seemed to glare through his gold-rimmed glasses, made the face of Herr Van Gansendonck so remarkable, that those who saw it never failed to be impressed by its strange expression of intellectual power, tinged with somewhat of insanity; but his visitors were few. His time was chiefly spent in his library; and as he was rich, being proprietor of more than one of those gigantic mills, the sails of which overshadow the grassy ramparts, he could afford to please himself by living as he chose, and seclusion was his choice. He seemed to have but one favorite only—Hendrik—a brother's orphan son, whom he had adopted, educated, and who was to be his heir.

Hendrik was now in his twentieth year, decidedly handsome, but with dreamy blue eyes that had an expression in them one could not easily forget; yet the lad's temperament was poetic and enthusiastic, and now he had but recently returned to Bruges, after undergoing a course of study, and attending those lectures which are given on science, literature, and art at the library of the Museum of Brussels.

The grim old student hailed the return of the younger one with a pleasure that he did not conceal, and there was at least one more in Bruges that did so with joy.

This was Lenora, the daughter of Madame Van Eyck, a widow lady, residing in one of those quaint old houses at the Quai Espagnol. To her he had been betrothed, and the monetary plans of his uncle alone were awaited for their marriage, young though Hendrik was. (Bruges, according to an old monkish rhyme, has ever been celebrated for its pretty girls, but Lenora Van Eyck, a bright blonde of eighteen, was more than pretty—she was charming, with that wonderful bloom of complexion which is so truly Belgian; light, laughing, hazel eyes that were full of merriment, and all her ways and modes of expression piquant and attractive.)

She had been one of the six young ladies who, clothed and veiled in white, were selected on the last Corpus Christi day to bear the gilt Madonna through the streets before the bishop. Lenora had been with her family at Blankenberg—the little Brighton of the Bruguiois—for several weeks after the return of Hendrik to the house of his uncle; and when again they met at their favorite trysting place, the long walk of stately poplars by the canal near the Porte St. Croix, she soon became conscious of a strange and painful change in the bearing, the manner, and the eyes of her lover. Languor seem to pervade every action; his face had become pale, his eyes more dreamy than ever, and he was unusually taciturn and abstracted.

Why was this? Lenora asked of herself, while she watched him with keenness of eye and anxiety of heart that are born of love and tenderness, for there was a singular mystery now about the once happy Hendrik that filled her with grave perplexity. Had his love for her changed? His eyes, though sad, were loving in expression as ever, when they met hers—yet even his smile was sad—so very sad!

Again and again, in her most winning way, she would implore Hendrik to reveal to her any secret that weighed upon his mind, but in vain. Why was it, she asked, that he, whom she had left so lively in bearing and happy in spirit, had now become so moody? and why was it that there were times when he seemed to feel himself compelled, as it were, to leave her suddenly and in haste, without a word of explanation, apology, or excuse? She pleaded without avail; Hendrik could but avert his pallid face, or cover his eyes with his hand, as if to shut out some painful vision or crush some worrying thought.

He dared not tell her—lest she should deem him mad, and so shrink from him—that his uncle, the Herr Van Gansendonck, had, mesmerically, acquired a mysterious and terrible influence over him, and that by the mere power of will he could summon him to his presence at all times, wherever he might be, or with whomsoever he was engaged—even with herself; and that he, Hendrik, found himself totally powerless and incapable of effecting his emancipation from the bodily and mental thralldom under which he writhed!

He dared not tell her all this, or, further, that Herr Van Gansendonck had the power to set him asleep on a chair in his library, and then to cause his spirit (for this was alleged in the Palais de Justice) to disengage itself from the body, and go on distant missions through the air for thousands of miles in the course of a few minutes, or that when thus put to sleep, the Herr, by exciting his organ of ideality, could obtain such information as he wished on strange and abstruse subjects.

That he had become a helpless and nerve-shattered mesmeric medium, he thought at times he might confide to her; but even in this his courage failed him, for other and more terrifying convictions were creeping upon him; thus he shrank from telling the girl who loved him so dearly, that when his spiritual essence was despatched to distant lands, the Herr, by the same power, permitted other spirits to enter his body and use its members for purposes of their own. The horror of this idea, it was alleged, made the youth's life insupportable, for on awaking from these strange and involuntary trances, he would at times find on his person cuts and bruises he was all unconscious of receiving; sometimes his purse would be gone, or in its place might be found strange money and letters to and from individuals of whose existence he knew nothing.

All this was done by one whose power he could neither repel nor defy; and now he had the natural dread that if his body was made to obey the behests of these spiritual intruders, he might be led into some horrible predicament—the commission of a dreadful crime. Another might even come in his place and meet Lenora!

One evening as they sat on the grassy rampart that overlooked the great canal, the girl strove to rouse or soothe him by singing with great sweetness one of Jan Van Beer's Flemish songs; but the music of her voice and the poetry of the author of "Zeik Jongeling" fell on Hendrik's ear in vain. When she paused,

"I dreamt of you last night, darling Lenora," said the young man, looking at her with inexpressible tenderness; "but such dreams are so tantalising, even more so than the dreams one has by day."

"All your life seems one hazy dream now, Hendrik," said Lenora somewhat petulantly.

"Forgive me, dearest, you know not what you talk of. My mind, I grant you, is a chaos, full of strange terrors, perplexity, and confusion; and times there are when I fear for my reason," he added wildly, passing a hand over his forehead, and looking aside.

"Dear Hendrik, do not speak thus, I implore you."

"I must—in whom can I confide, if not in you? And yet I dare not—I dare not!"

After a pause he spoke again, but with his eyes fixed, not on her, but on the still, deep water of the shining canal.

"This much I will tell you, Lenora. Yesterday, my uncle sent me on some business of his to the house of an advocate, Père Baas, near the Béguinage, a house in which I had never been before, and I was shown into a room to wait. On looking round, to my astonishment, every article in it—and the room itself—the ceiling, the stove, the little windows, and the paintings—especially one by Hans Hemling—were all familiar to me, and I seemed to recognise every object there. 'I was never here before,' thought I; 'and yet I must have been—but when? If so, there is a little window behind this picture, which opens to the gardens of the Béguinage.' I turned the picture, and lo! there was the window in question; I saw through it the garden with all its cherry-trees and two or three béguines flitting about. Oh, Lenora, there is indeed some power beyond matter, proving that the soul is independent of the body!"

"It must have been a dream."

"It was no dream," replied Hendrik gloomily.

"But how do you account for the strange fancy?"

"My disembodied spirit must have been there, sent on some accursed errand by my uncle!"

"But you would die, Hendrik."

"Not if another tenant were at hand," replied Hendrik, gnashing his teeth.

Then the girl wept to hear him, as she naturally deemed it, raving thus.

"Such things cannot be," said she, sobbing.

"My uncle says they may; and the theory is as old as the days of Pythagoras."

"I know nothing of Herr Pythagoras; but

this I know, that the Herr Van Gansendonck is a strange and bad man. Pardon me, dear Hendrik; but he never enters a church door, nor has he been to mass or confession for years. Leave him, and Bruges too, rather than become the victim of such dreadful delusions."

"To do either is to leave and to lose you! I am his heir: and we have but to wait his pleasure—or, it may be, his death, to be so happy," replied Hendrik sadly; and then they relapsed into silence. With Lenora it was silence induced by sorrow and alarm, while her lover seemed to let his thoughts slip away into dream-land.

The sultry summer evening breeze rustled the leaves near them; the honey-bees buzzed and hummed among the wild flowers and buttercups that grew on the old rampart; and far away could be heard the ceaseless chirping of the crickets.

Lenora's head rested on Hendrik's shoulder, and he was lost in thought, though mechanically toying with her hair, which shone like ripples of gold in the light of the setting sun.

He was aware that Lenora had begun to speak to him again; her voice seemed to mingle with the drowsy hum of the bees and the evening chimes or carillons in the distant spires; but he heard her as if he heard her not; till suddenly a thrill seemed to pass over him, as a secret and intuitive sense or knowledge that his terrible relation required his immediate presence, made him start from the grassy bank, snatch a hasty kiss, and hurry away by the arch of the Porte St. Croix, leaving Lenora mortified, sorrowful, and utterly bewildered by the abruptness of his departure.

"Oh, how changed he is!" thought she, as she proceeded slowly in the other direction towards her home on the Quai Espagnol.

On two or three occasions the unhappy Hendrik had, what he conceived to be, undoubted proof of his body having been, in the intervals of mesmeric trances, tenanted by another spirit than his own; and this strange and wild conviction caused such intense horror and loathing of his uncle that the expressions to which he gave utterance to more than one of his friends—more than all to Lenora—were recalled, most fatally for himself, at a future time.

One day, in the Rue des Augustines, he was accosted by Brother Eusebius, a Capuchin.

"Friend Hendrik," said he, severely and gravely, "was it becoming in you to be royster-ing as you were yesterday at the low estaminet in the market-place, and with such companions—fellows in blouses and sabots?"

"Impossible, Brother Eusebius; I was not there," faltered Hendrik, as the usual fear crept over him.

"I, myself, saw you. And, moreover, you looked at me."

"When—at what hour?"

"Six in the evening."

"Six!"

Hendrik felt himself grow pale. He remembered that at that identical time he was under the hand of his uncle. He groaned in sore and dire perplexity, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, while the Capuchin continued to address him in tones of rebuke and earnest remonstrance.

"Have I a double-ganger, or am I becoming crazed?" urged Hendrik. "Believe me, Brother Eusebius, I was not there!" he added piteously and earnestly.

"At the hour of six?" persisted the unbelieving Capuchin.

"I swear to you that at the hour of six I was, and had been for some time, in one of those unaccountable trances in which my uncle has the power to cast me—one of those hours of bodily torpor that have come upon me," he added, while the perspiration poured in bead-drop from his pallid brow. "I awoke about eight. I heard the chimes ringing in the church of St. Giles, and near me sat my uncle, pen in hand, as if in the act of questioning me and committing to paper that which I had been revealing in my magnetic slumber. Oh! am I the victim of necromancy?"

"Scarcely, in this age of the world," replied the Capuchin, but now with more of pity than rebuke in his manner.

"I swear to you by the Holy Blood that I speak the truth!" continued Hendrik, referring to the famous reliques of the Bruguiois in the little chapel near the Hôtel de Ville. "I last remember hearing the voice of my uncle as I sank into sleep; my arms fell powerless by my side; my eyes closed; waves of magnetic fluid or air seemed to flow over me; and my spirit passed away, at his behest, to other lands."

"What madness—what raving is this, Hendrik?" said the sandalled friar, with sadness and severity. "Do you mean to tell me that your uncle is another Cagliostro—a veritable Balsamo?"

"I fear it—I fear it," said Hendrik, with clasped hands.

"Learn first to fear the potatoes of the estaminet," replied the Capuchin, as he turned coldly and bluntly away, believing that the young man was intoxicated.

On another occasion Hendrik failed to keep an appointment with Lenora Van Eyck, who waited for him anxiously till long past the time named, and then proceeded pensively homeward. As she approached the step and antique bridge that leads from the Rue des Augustines to the Quai Espagnol she saw Hendrik cross it, and look at her calmly and deliberately the while, but without a glance or smile of recognition. Her heart, which at first had beat happily, now became perplexed as he turned abruptly up the opposite bank of the canal, and dropped into a little skiff, which he proceeded to un-