

The True Witness,

AND

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XXI.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 23, 1871.

NO. 45.

THE MERCHANT OF MARSEILLES.

(Concluded from our last.)

Just as the creditor opened his lips to reply, a howling blast of wind shook the windows of the room, and moaned wildly down the wide chimney. He paused and started.

"My son is at sea; God grant there is no storm!"

He approached the easement and gazed anxiously forth. Evidently he thought only of his young sailor, nothing of the suffering debtor at his feet. The debtor rose.

"The wind is fair for the Volant; heaven send her safe to port!"

A voice was heard upon the quay beneath.

"The Volant! The Volant!"

Creditor and debtor rushed to the window.

"What of the Volant? What news of the Volant?" shouted St. Victor from the easement.

There was an eager group on the quay; many had friends or relatives in the expected vessel; some had shares in the rich freightage; fifty telescopes were leveled at the horizon; a hundred voices were rich in assertion, denial, conjecture; but all agreed in one point, that a vessel was in sight and making towards the port.

"'Tis the Volant, five days before her time!" said an old sailor who had been gazing long and eagerly through his glass. "I would swear to her topgallant sails among a thousand."

"And I may yet be saved!" murmured the debtor.

The creditor turned fiercely upon him.

"Triumph not yet, St. Victor!" he said, "she is yet far away; the perils of the deep are many, and between her present course and this harbor the sands are shifting and the rocks are dangerous. Triumph not yet!"

But St. Victor wild with hope, heeded him not; and the old man, muttering angry threats and denunciations, quitted the hotel and took his way home.

His residence was also on the quay, not far from the Hotel Victor, with his windows also looking upon the busy scene of the harbor—upon the dark distance of these. As with slow and feeble steps he retraced his way, he passed among a throng now momentarily increasing on the pier. Even to his feeble vision, a dim, white speck was visible just between the deep blue of the sky and the deep purple of the ocean.

"If it is the Volant," said one, "we shall soon hear the gun for the pilot."

The old man turned away.

"I would that she and her cargo were deep within the sea!"

He reached his own door; as he paused ere entering, some one addressed him. It was Jean the pilot, whose turn it would be to answer the signal gun of the Volant.

"Hast thou any commands, master Devereux?" asked Jean.

Devereux made no reply, but opening his door he ascended the stairs. The pilot followed. Devereux entered his apartment and closed the door; Jean stood within.

He leaned his hand upon the spring lock of an ancient bureau, and the carved portals flew wide open at his touch; and there were many bags of gold within.

"The half of this," said Devereux. "I would give that the Volant were deep within the sea."

The pilot spoke:

"Give me all, and it shall be done."

Devereux hesitated for a moment.

"I will give thee all."

The gun sounded and the pilot hurried to his post. The pilot boat sped merrily across the waves; but night was falling over blackening waves and whitening foam, and ere she reached the Volant, neither boat nor ship was visible.

The dawn of morning showed the Volant stranded on those dangerous rocks so well known to the pilot of the sea, the rocks on the right to the entrance of the harbor. But with the morning came a calm; the wind fell, the turbulence of the ocean subsided to a gentle swell; and so near was the Volant to the shore, so hushed was the tempest, that the voices of those within could be distinctly heard upon the pier.

All that day boats went to and fro between the wreck and the shore; all the rich cargo, the heavy ore, the rich caskets of diamonds, were safely landed and consigned to the warehouses of St. Victor; even the good ship herself, lightened of her load, somewhat strained, but still sound and buoyant—was saved.

The pilot stood before Devereux claiming his reward, but the latter said:

"The freightage and vessel were saved."

"No fault of mine," muttered Jean. "I have done my best, but the tempest fell, and she lived through the night."

Devereux threw him the gold; he dared not resist the claim. As the pilot was passing from the presence of the old man, he turned and said:

"One life has been lost!"

Devereux was indifferent to this; he made no comment. The pilot continued:

"Not one of the crew, but a youth they

were bringing home—a lad of Marseilles; his vessel had stranded in the Straits."

Devereux reeked little of his death. Why did the pilot persist in talking of it.

He resumed the subject:

"The boy was washed from the deck by a wave, just as she was struck; it was dark, and there was no means of saving him."

Devereux coolly replied.

"Poor youth, I'm sorry!" Then turning to his previous occupation, he showed that he desired the absence of the pilot.

But the man still spoke:

"They have tried all means of restoration, but in vain; it is a pity, for he is a fair youth, and seems of gentle blood."

Now Devereux became impatient. Why should the pilot linger, still tormenting him with his idle recital? What was all this to him?

The pilot repeated the last sentence:

"He seems of gentle blood," and he added, "and he is the only child of his father."

The old man laid down his pen, struck by the pertinacity of the pilot, and gazed at him with a look of inquiry. A noise was heard below—a noise of feet, staggering as though beneath a burden—a noise of many voices speaking in hurried whispers.

"They are bringing the drowned man here," said the pilot, as he turned and departed.

With a sharp, wild cry, the old man rose to his feet. The truth with all its terror and its anguish, broke upon his soul at once; he had murdered his own son!

The old man lived for many years after this day, but he never became conscious of what had passed; he was blest beyond his desert, in complete forgetfulness.

Every day he seated himself opposite the window that looked upon the ocean.

"The wind is rising," he would say. "God grant there be no storm! My son is at sea."

Then when night fell he would say:

"It is late, and I can see the white sails no longer; but if the wind is fair, he will come to-morrow. Drowning is a fearful death. God grant there be no storm!"

St. Victor gradually recovered from his embarrassments, and gaining prudence from past difficulties, became again the great merchant of Marseilles—the prosperous St. Victor.

But his name and race are now extinct; and the splendor and the wealth, and the prosperity of the great house have passed away forever.

A NOBLE SACRIFICE;

OR,

THE THREE FRIENDS OF VAUX VILAINE.

AN EPISODE OF THE LATE WAR.

In the month of July of this last festive year, there did not exist a more tranquil, sunny spot in all France than the little village of Vaux Vilaïne. Very rural and primitive it was, and the echoes from the great tumultuous world without came few and faint among the green fields and purple vineyards, where the birds sang so merrily and the summer winds sighed so softly through the rustling trees.

It possessed several substantial farm-houses among its humblest cottages, and a pretty little church, served by an old cure, who, in his broad hat and black *sataue*, walked, breviary in hand from house to house, and was a veritable father and friend to every man, woman, and child in the place. The population was entirely agricultural, and the magnates of the village were a few thriving farmers, who sent their sons to the cure for a few hours' daily teaching, which gave them some intellectual advantages above the rest of the *jeunesse* of Vaux Vilaïne.

Among these farmers' sons were three young men about the same age, who were for some years under the good priest's tuition, and who had at that period of their boyhood contracted a friendship for each other, which they had preserved intact through the years that had intervened since then.

Sunday, the 10th of July, 1870, was a glorious summer day, but intensely hot, and when the benediction service, at which the cure generally gave his people a little address, was finally over that evening, these three young men—Martel Lepelletier, Jules Desmarcets and Evariste Rossel—sauntered away to a large tree which stood in a retired part of the churchyard, and throw themselves down under its spreading branches to enjoy the soft evening air; while they conversed together in free and happy confidence.

Now, their talk was of the future; it is not often of anything else with most of us in those hopeful days of youth, when the unknown life is full of golden possibilities, and no shadow from failure or disappointment has dimmed the sunshine which expectant fancy sheds on all that is to come.

"How gloomy the *bon pere* was in his sermon to-night!" said Martel, a stalwart youth, with blue eyes and curling fair hair, and a bright, frank expression of face; "he could talk of nothing but the uncertainty of life, and the necessity of preparing ourselves for all sorts of possible trials and troubles. *Ma foi!* I see no uncertainty in it, and I do not anticipate

any trials. My fate is settled for me, and I am very well contented with it."

"I should think so, indeed!" said Jules who was tall and slender, with keen dark eyes, and a look of great intelligence and vivacity.—"Who would wish anything better than to have that *gentille* Vevette for *fiancée*, and the prettiest farm in Vaux Vilaïne for your home and possession; your father gives his home up to you when you marry, does he not?"

"Yes, he means to retire to my grandfather's old house, and leave me to manage the farm, and you shall see what success I mean to have. I have some famous plans, which will astonish all our old farmers not a little I expect."

"And your wedding is to be on All Saints' Day, is it not?"

"Yes, on the 1st of November, without fail. I wanted it sooner, but Vevette's mother declared she could not possibly, before that date get ready the fine store of linen she means to give us for our new *menage*."

"In the mean time you see Vevette every day, so you are not much to be pitied, *mon ami*."

"No, indeed, nor you either for the matter of that, Monsieur Jules. I suppose you will be off to your uncle as soon as my marriage is over."

"That I shall! Paris! Paris!" exclaimed Jules, starting up, and taking a flying leap over the nearest grave, as an outlet to the excitement which the very name of the gay capital woke in him. "I promised to dance at your *noce*, Martel, so I will wait for that, but I do not stay here a day after it. My uncle said I might come in November, and he will have the honor of receiving me on the 2nd of that month."

"Is it true that he means to make you his heir?"

"So he hints, and he is rich. Ah! delightfully rich; he is a horse-dealer, you know, and he gets guineas without number from the Milors Anglais, who come to Paris for their amusement. I shall have horses to ride whenever I please, that is the glorious part of it. I am to take them out for exercise, and I shall take good care they have enough of that, I promise you," and Jules looked at his friends with a roguish smile.

"It is a pleasant prospect, I must say," replied Martel. "Well! the cure had surely no need to talk to us of the trials and miseries of life—unless you have reason to anticipate them, Evariste," he added, turning to the next young man, who had not yet spoken.

Evariste was smaller and more delicately made than either of his companions, and had very refined features and soft hazel eyes, which were shaded with a certain pensiveness that hardly amounted to melancholy: as he turned to Martel a peculiarly sweet smile lit up his face.

"No," he answered. "I have no fears, nor any special plans formed for life; but I have day-dreams," he added, in a lower tone.

"Ah! let us hear them then," exclaimed Jules. "You are somewhat poetic, Evariste, *mon ami*, and perhaps you mean to go about the country like a troubadour, winning the hearts of all the fair ladies with your sweet songs."

Evariste shook his head, smiling, but did not answer.

"Come tell us what your ambition is," said Martel; "I am sure you have some great scheme."

"You will mock yourselves of me if I do tell you," said Evariste, while a faint tinge of color spread over his face.

"No! no!" they both exclaimed, "why should we?"

"You know you are far more learned than either of us," said Jules; "we never studied as you did in the old days when the cure labored so hard to hammer a little knowledge into our brains. I dare say you have flown far over our heads in your dreams. Come! give us the benefit of them."

"Well," said Evariste, somewhat reluctantly, "I only want to do something for my fellow-creatures before I leave the world. I do not want to live just to amuse myself, and then die to be forgotten. I should like to follow the example of the heroes of old who died for their country; or, better still, of the martyrs who died for Christ." And his face became flushed with a glow of enthusiasm.

"Tiens! that is an idea which would not have come to me," said Jules. "I prefer to live."

"Well, I should not object to die a glorious death," said Martel, "but I must first live a long, happy life with Vevette, *bien entendu*." It would be pleasant enough to know that one's name would be honored by posterity; but let me take my pleasure out of existence first."

"But, Martel," said Evariste, "it is not in old age, for the most part, that we can make a sacrifice. Life has come to an end by that anyhow."

"Sacrifice! old age! death!" exclaimed Jules; "why, Evariste, you are worse than the cure, with your gloomy ideas; but happily they are only ideas after all. With all those fine sentiments, *mon ami*, I think I know pretty well what will be your fate—you will be

a *bon pere de famille*, like your father before you. Do you think I did not observe Leonie Michon's pretty blue eyes glancing your way all through benediction this evening? And you love her, Evariste. You need not deny it."

"I do not wish to deny it," he answered, quietly. "I do love her better than my life. Still I think I could give up love, with life, if I were chosen by Heaven to be a hero or a martyr."

"But if you are not chosen, which does not seem likely in these commonplace times, you will marry Leonie and rock the baby's cradle in due course, will you not?" said Jules, looking at him laughingly.

"I dare say I shall," he answered with a bright smile, "and be thankful enough that I was allowed to be happy in life, instead of glorious in death."

"So! we are all three provided for, in spite of the cure," said Martel, "*et pas mal*, I must say; and after a little more conversation on different subjects, the three friends separated, and walked away to their different homes.

A few days more—during which the birds still sang among the sunlit trees, and the grapes ripened on the vines, and the inhabitants of Vaux Vilaïne went to and fro in happy security, and talked of the prospects of the harvest as the most important subject in the world—and then the pastoral quiet of that most peaceful home was awfully broken by the stunning thunders of the great war news, which all knew to be, in truth, the death-knell of thousands upon thousands of the bravest hearts in France.

Was there a spot in all that fair and pleasant country, however, secluded and remote, to which the dreadful tidings failed to bring anguish and terror, even before a shot had been fired or a single life sacrificed? Surely not one; and Vaux Vilaïne was no exception, though, for the first two months, the tide of war rolled far away from its green fields and tranquil homes. But there was scarce a family who had not a relation with the army; and day after day brought tidings which told of beloved faces that would be seen no more—of national disaster, and heroic self-devotion that courted death, but failed to retrieve the terrible disgrace.

Jules, Martel and Evariste had each a brother in the army; but they themselves, for various family reasons, had as yet been held exempt, greatly to their indignation and annoyance; for even the special ties which bound Martel and Evariste to the homes that held Vevette and Leonie, did not prevent them feeling quite as strongly as Jules did, the burning desire to throw their young lives into the balance, and help to turn the scale in favor of their beautiful and unfortunate France, in whose ultimate success and glory they could not cease to believe, in face of the worst reverses.

Still, though there was lamentation and disquiet in Vaux Vilaïne, and many a significant notice on the church door asking the faithful, of their charity, to pray for the soul of some brave soldier lying in his last cold sleep on the blood-drenched soil of Woerth or Wissembourg, yet the ordinary life of the villagers went on much as usual; no one prevented them from continuing their accustomed employments; the harvest and vintage were gathered in with a little additional toil, because the numbers of the men who remained to accomplish that pleasant task were so much fewer than they had ever been before. And the domestic events in the various families proceeded as they had ever done; children were christened, young maidens given in marriage, and old men peacefully buried, whose last sigh had been for their dear and fair France, so sorely worsted in the gigantic conflict.

Among other plans which had undergone no alteration, the marriage of Martel was still to take place on the day originally fixed; but he and Vevette were not alone in their happiness now. Evariste and Leonie were to be united on the same day; and Jules often declared that of the three he was the only victim of the war, as it was, to say the least, very doubtful whether he would be able to join his uncle in the besieged capital at the time he proposed; though with the irrepressible buoyancy and confidence of a Frenchman, he declared that Trochu and his brave soldiers would have broken through the Prussian lines and utterly routed the enemy long before November came.

After the investment of Paris had taken place, however, the surging waves of the great combat that was flooding France began to draw nearer and nearer to Vaux Vilaïne.

Prussian troops, hastening down to join the besieging army, constantly passed quite close to the village. Occasionally some of the nondescript stragglers who followed in the rear would make a raid upon the little shops in the main street, and carry off all they could lay their hands upon. This exasperated the peasants, already furious at the national disgrace; and the cure in vain preached patience, and impressed on his people that the forgiveness of injuries was the noblest of Christian virtues. There were not a few turbulent spirits who declared that, if they could get the chance, they would have their revenge on these "*maudits*

Prussiens," and knock the life out of some of them, at least. These threats gave great anxiety to the wiser and more experienced inhabitants; for rumors had reached the village of the terrible reprisals exacted by the Prussians for every attempt at defence on the part of the peasantry.

At length, one evening, when the autumn days were growing dark and cold, an unusually large number of Prussian troops marched past the village, and bivouacked for the night within a quarter of a mile from Vaux Vilaïne.—They had never been so near before, and scarcely was their presence known when a Prussian colonel with a small escort rode haughtily up to the house of Lepelletier, Martel's father, who acted as mayor, and made a requisition of food and wine for his men, which could only be obeyed at the cost of impoverishing the whole inhabitants of the village for some months to come.

Remonstrances and entreaties were all in vain, and every family sullenly yielded up their best, till the exorbitant demand was satisfied, and then the Germans rode away, followed by the curses of every man in the place. There were some, however, who were not content with maledictions, and uttered ominous threats which caused Lepelletier, as the chief personage in the place, to make an harangue to the assembled people, in which he implored them not, by any rash act, to bring down upon their unprotected village the wrath of the whole vast host who lay encamped so near them. He could see that some of the younger men listened to him with ill-suppressed impatience; but he could do no more, and, calling to his son, who was standing near with Jules and Evariste, he made them all three enter his house with him, lest they should be led away by any of the ill-advised proposals which were circulating among the crowd.

Several of the principal inhabitants of Vaux Vilaïne, both men and women, followed Lepelletier into his sitting-room, and remained in sorrowful conversation for some time over the disaster of their unhappy country and their own present wrongs. Among them were Vevette and Leonie, with their parents; and their presence tended greatly to reconcile Martel and Evariste to the injunction to which they were doomed, even with the hated enemy lying so near to them.

Jules, meanwhile, who was not naturally eloquent, was talking eagerly with Lepelletier and some of the gray heads of the village on the remedies which, in his inexperience and self-confidence, he thought might rectify the dreadful state of matters in France.

Suddenly, as they were all thus engaged, and the conversation was waxing more and more excited, there came a sound, clear and ringing, though distant, which caused the voices of the speakers to cease as if a thunderbolt had fallen among them. It was a shot coming from the direction in which the Prussians lay, and followed in succession by one or two more as if from the discharge of a revolver. There was consternation on every face as the sound died away, and for a few minutes no one spoke; and then one of the women hazarded, in a trembling voice, the remark, that perhaps one of the "*maudits Prussiens*" had killed some of their people; and while the other women cried out in horror at the idea, Lepelletier shook his head, and answered gloomily—

"If only it be nothing worse than what you fear. But I doubt not there is that in the sound we have heard which may cause our whole village to be burned over our heads. Stop!" he exclaimed, as Jules and one or two others sprang to the door with the intention of ascertaining what had happened—"Stay where you are, one and all, I charge you. Let not a man from Vaux Vilaïne be seen near the spot where that shot was fired, if you would have any one of us left alive by this time to-morrow?"

Suppressed shrieks from the women followed these words as the young men drew back from the door. Vevette threw herself into Martel's arms, and Leonie lifted up her blue eyes, swimming in tears to Evariste, and became suddenly awed and tranquilized by the peculiar expression of his face. His soft hazel eyes, wide open, appeared to be looking far away into scenes unperceived by others, and his lips were parted with a calm, sweet smile, which seemed full of hidden meaning. All agitation, she felt, was misplaced in presence of such a look as Evariste wore, yet Leonie trembled with some dark, mysterious foreboding, even as he gazed, and wished with all her heart that he would look less beautiful and noble, and more like the joyous, light-hearted *fiancee* with whom she hoped to pass all the years of her earthly life.

For an hour or so the persons assembled a Farmer Lepelletier's remained talking together, the women in tears, the men sullen and disquieted; and then in groups of two or three they crept away silently to their homes.

Before day broke over Vaux Vilaïne next morning it was known throughout the village—none could have told how—that the Prussian colonel had been shot dead by an unseen foe as he rode round the outposts the evening before, and it was whispered cautiously that two of the hottest spirits among the young men of Vaux Vilaïne were missing from their homes.