

LA MARSEILLAISE

[LONDON MINSTREL.]

One hundred years ago, in the bitter December of 1791, two men were standing face to face in the drawing-room of a grand house in the old city of Strasbourg.

The drawing room was large and full of mirrors. A pair of silver Cupids, poised on their brands, supported the wood fires in the deep chimney. The bare oak floor shone like glass.

At the opposite end of the hearth stood the lieutenant—a pale, slender youth, with chestnut hair curling loose about his clear-cut serious face.

“Sir,” said the baron, in a disdainful voice, “it is true that the times are bad—that the nobles of France have suffered, and are still suffering, unspokeable insults from the canaille; but, thank Heaven! the day has not yet dawned when we give our daughters to peasants. Parbleu! go your way, fellow—you must be mad!”

“Baron, I will take no answer from you!” he said. “I love your daughter. I ask permission to tell her so with my own lips.”

“You love my daughter,” repeated the baron, in a withering tone. “Yes, you sent her amorous verses—you play strange airs within the sound of her windows by night—for you are a poet and musician, it seems, as well as a soldier! Ma foi! With other sans culottes and revolutionaries, you are seeking to destroy the nobility. At the same time you adore it in the person of Mlle. de Launay. Abominable paradox!”

“Well,” continued the baron sternly, “since you will have it so, monsieur, my daughter shall be summoned to the drawing-room.”

“She was a true daughter of the noblesse, a dazzling blonde, graceful and slender as a reed. She wore a dress of dull blue brocade, of Louis XV. pattern, over a petticoat of figured satin. In her fair hair was a sprinkling of powder, which, as Georges Sand says, gives a noble air to all women. At sight of her De Lisle grew as pale as ashes. He made a deep, silent bow.”

“Mademoiselle, you see this man!” said the baron, with a contemptuous gesture towards his visitor. “He declares himself to be a suitor for your hand. He has had the audacity to write to you madrigals and rondeaux—to follow your carriage through the streets—to adore you in your box at the theatre—to play musical instruments by night on the terraces of the garden. And now he will take no answer from me—you father—but demands that you give him one yourself.”

“I love you, mademoiselle! I claim the right to tell you of that love! It is not a time to discuss questions of rank. I am a man, you are a woman; and that is enough. It is true that I have followed your carriage washed you in your opera box—passed whole nights in walking up and down by this house which shelters you. Can you condemn me for these things? I live only in the thoughts of you. What is the accident of birth to love like mine? As sand under the hoofs of a desert horse!”

“Monsieur,” and her violet eyes flashed ominously, “do not mention the word ‘love’ in my presence! It is unparliamentary! I still believe in rank, for I am an aristocrat, not a revolutionary, and women of my station do not marry men like you. Here are your verses.” She held toward him a roll of paper. “They did not amuse me; on the contrary, I found them exceedingly tiresome.”

Monsieur, your suit is rejected. I give you permission to withdraw at once.”

With a mocking smile, the baron looked at his visitor. Pale as death, De Lisle dropped the unfortunate verses into the fire, and cast a look of raging anguish and reproach at Mlle. de Launay. She answered with these words:

“Monsieur, I am the daughter of a race that may be cast down, but never humbled. We shall carry our pride to the prison and the scaffold.”

It was a bleak December night. A young moon shone upon the citadel, the bastioned line of ramparts and the seven gates of Strasbourg. The famous cathedral tower of brown stone stood up against the sky—a dream of beauty, over which the whole world had marvelled for centuries.

Two hundred and fifty miles, away Paris was in uproar. Here, in this quiet city, the revolution also walked. The entire frontier was aflame with it; but to-night an outward appearance of peace reigned everywhere.

Presently he came to a street in a poorer part of the city—narrow, gloomy, dilapidated, and without lamp or foot pavement. The roofs of the old houses almost met overhead; the moonlight fell freely between the uneven lines of wall and bulging windows.

“In the treacherous gutter below the wayfarer slipped and tumbled De Lisle paused where the shadows of the tumble-down dwellings were dark, and leaning against a crumbling wall of masonry, dropped his head on his breast in an attitude of utter dejection.

Hour after hour went by—he did not change his position. The cold grew bitter—he was chilled—benumbed—he did not know it. The hot anguish in his heart deadened him to all outward discomfort.

“After my mother’s death,” continued the old man, “I was sent to an uncle in a neighbouring parish. The cure there gave me musical instruction—taught me many things. My uncle was arrested for smuggling a few pounds of beef, against our will. He was fined three hundred livres. He could not pay the sum, and was flogged and branded. Great God! when life becomes one long day of wretchedness men cease to value it. My uncle smuggled salt a second time. He was hanged.”

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“Rouget!” he cried, shaking the inert figure listlessly; “are you asleep, man, or have you been drinking wine? No, that cannot be! Oh! The cold has gone to your head—you are perishing here; arouse yourself!”

“Dierick!” he muttered, “and little Bettine! I see. The hour is late—you are returning from the theatre, Pass on, and leave me alone.”

“No!” said Bettine firmly; “you are freezing. The night is terrible. Some evil is upon you, Rouget. Come with us—come at once.”

Her warm friendly hand closed upon his own. He made no resistance, but, suffered her to lead him along the narrow street and on to the door of a small, poor house where the Diericks lived. The trio entered a room on the ground floor. The walls were whitewashed; the wind whistled through the chinks in the doors.

There were oak chairs, with rush bottoms, standing about, and the table was simply a board laid on cross-bars. A harpsichord and some rolls of music filled a corner. Bettine, kneeling on the hearth, stirred the dead ashes, and uncovered a few red embers. On these she hung an armful of wood. A bright flame leaped up, and diffused a grateful warmth through the place. Bettine led Citizen Rouget to a chair by the fire.

“Sit here,” she said, “and thaw yourself, I see that you are ill.”

For months the young lieutenant of Engineers had been a frequent guest in this poor house. Old Dierick played the violin in the orchestra of the Strasbourg Theatre; his motherless daughter sang on the stage. Songs which himself was no mean musician. He wrote excellent poetry, he composed good music. In his tedious garrison life he often sought the society of the Diericks; kindred tastes united the trio in firm friendship.

Now, in spite of his strange appearance, father and daughter forebore to annoy Rouget with questions. The old man, with thread-bare suit of snuff-colored cloth which seemed but a poor protection against the cold of the night, put down his violin case and hastened to warm himself by the fire.

to move up to the table with his friends. The young lieutenant aroused himself a little, glanced with a friendly air at the dark, brilliant-eyed girl on the other side of the board.

“I will write it, my good Dierick,” he answered. Old Andre passed his guest a glass of wine.

“Let us drink,” he said solemnly, “to Liberty and the new day that is drawing upon France.”

“With my whole heart!” answered Rouget, and he tossed off the wine with enthusiasm.

As Dierick put down his glass a shadow fell upon his thin old face. He assumed a gloomy introspective look.

“Citizen Rouget,” he began, “with your eyes you have seen in more than one village the carraen erected, with the chain an iron collar, symbol of the arrogance of the nobility and the slavery of this miserable people.”

“Mark you, there was an edict which prohibited weeding and hoeing lest the young birds should be disturbed; another against mowing before a certain date and taking away the stubble, which might deprive the birds of shelter. Our tyrants broke the hand-mill with which they ground our grain, and forced us to buy of the seigneur the annual right to bruise betwixt two stones a measure of buck-wheat or barley.”

“Under pain of various fines, every man was forced to buy a certain amount of salt porcum, whether he wanted it or not—to press his grapes at the seigneur’s press, to bake his bread in his oppressor’s oven. There was a seigneurial tax upon fires—upon every half sester of corn—upon the smallest morsel that passed our miserable lips.”

“Serritude, outrage, violence, were our daily portion. The seigneur’s deer trampled my father’s scanty field. In trying to save food for his children he one day killed a stag. For that crime he was sent to the galleys. When, at the age of thirty, my mother died of misery and despair, she had the bent body and the white head of a woman of seventy.”

“Long live Rouget de Lisle! Long live the man who has given us the Hymn of France!”

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“Rouget followed. Perhaps the old musician had guessed the cause of the younger man’s silence and gloom, at any rate, he cried in a loud voice: “These seigneurs! Their horrible law, their oppression and cruelty, their rotten justice—yes, I know it all! Mon Dieu! it is no time for a man to think of his own pleasure or his own sorrow. France is in the throes of a new birth; in her misery we must forget our own.”

“He leaned wearily back in his chair. The fire was now burning low. The candles cast a stately light in the room. Bettine sat on one side of the hearth, silent, motionless, watching Rouget with her great sad eyes. Her slender brown hands were looked about her knees. Her long hair curled, black and lustrous, upon her shoulders. In her thin brown face the fire of genius smouldered.

“The words came with the music—which was born first in his brain he never knew. His heart burned, his head seemed bursting. Now the air roared before the words; then the words took form and sound before the air. Bettine listened, wondered, trembled. Tears gathered in her great eyes. She hardly dared to breathe. The room seemed full of battle and vengeance.

“The wrongs of ages cried out to Heaven—at last the wretched people were rising against their tyrants. A strange and terrible indignation filled the air. The Revolution had found its own friends. The Baron de Lisle—something that was never to die—a fragment of immortality—was struggling into birth beneath old Andre Dierick’s humble roof.

“Instinctively the girl seized a burnt coal from the hearth, and on the wall beside her jotted down the song as Rouget composed it.

“Old Dierick slept on. The candles went out. Only the fire gave light in the room. Outside the window, the wind whistled and complained, as if in sympathy with the mood of the musician. And still the pair sat there on the hearth, and the man composed

and the girl listened and wrote both words and music on the wall beside her. In the east dawn at last began to appear. Rouget, deadly pale, put down the violin. Bettine was looking at him with dilated eyes.

“At last,” she said, “you have fulfilled your promise—you have written a song for me to sing!”

“He did not seem to hear her. He arose to his feet like a man in a dream, seized his hat, and, without a word, staggered out of Dierick’s house, and home to his quarters.

“On the following night Bettine Dierick sang Rouget’s song at the Strasbourg Theatre. Her voice was the first to give the Hymn of France to the world.

“At the same hour the young lieutenant sat to his dreary lodgings, a prey to terrible depression. In crossing one of the public squares at sunset he had encountered the carriage of Mlle. de Launay. The lovely aristocrat turned upon him a look full of cold contempt; it was like a dagger in his heart. The Diericks were now forgotten and all that had happened at their fireside on the previous night. A frenzy of misery seized him—his longer for creation on.

“The night wore on. He sat alone at a table, on which a solitary candle burned. Before him lay a loaded pistol. His hand clutched it convulsively. A deadly purpose filled his haggard young face.

“Why should I live?” he muttered. “This inane passion dishonours me, yet I cannot cast it out. I love, in return I am despised! Oh, weak fool that I am—in death alone can I find release from my folly!”

“He was very poor, but such valuables as he possessed he made into a bundle, wrote a letter of farewell, and directed both to his mother at Lonel-Saunier in the Jura. Then he grasped the pistol and turned the muzzle to his forehead.

“As he did so a great uproar arose in the street outside—a noise like the raging of the sea. Rouget listened. He heard his own name, and nearer. He heard his own name shouted by a multitude of voices. He dropped the pistol and rushed to the window.

“An immense crowd, with the Maire of Strasbourg at its head, stood before Rouget’s door, swinging aloft lighted torches, and calling upon the young lieutenant to come forth. In the midst of the dense mass of people, borne on a triumphal chair, he saw Bettine Dierick, her brown head crowned with a laurel wreath. The vast throng shouted, wept, roared with enthusiasm.

“Long live Rouget de Lisle! Long live the man who has given us the Hymn of France!”

“Till that moment he had quite forgotten the song. Even now he was too amazed and bewildered to understand. But the people surrounded him, filled his ears with a thunder of praise, and crowned him with laurel, as they already crowned Bettine Dierick. In the very act of seeking death Rouget found himself famous. By the flaring torchlight he looked into Bettine’s large, soft eyes.

“And you carried my song to the theatre?” he said. “While I was shut up here meditating a cowardly evil, you brave, sweet child, were winning renown for us both?”

“I smiled sadly.

“That night at Strasbourg was only the beginning of the tremendous applause which everywhere greeted the new song. Like wildfire it flew through the cities of France. It was sung at all public gatherings, at the clubs and at the theatres, by soldiers in the field, by victims on their way to the scaffold.

“The terrible men of Marseilles thundered it all the way, on their famous march from the Mediterranean to Paris. In notes alternately sharp and flat, they shook the kingdom with this hymn of glory, which was also the shriek of vengeance and death. That wild, bronzed horde, with eyes of fire their head crowned with the ‘bonnet rouge,’ entered Paris by the Faubourg St. Antoine on the 30th of July, 1793, and, headed by Santerre, the brewer marched to the Champs Elysees, dragging their guns behind them, making the capital tremble with De Lisle’s hymn.

“It was the men of Marseilles who gave the song the name by which it has ever since been known; and at the hour when they roared ‘Aux armes!’ in the street of Paris the last remnant of royalty perished.

“The Revolution moved rapidly. Like Saturn, it began to devour its own children. Old Andre Dierick went to the guillotine to the sound of the song which had been written at his own fireside. The Baron de Launay and his beautiful young daughter also perished together on the scaffold to the music of Rouget’s hymn.

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“The Marseillaise,” answered the man. In this hymn, which has immortal spring had been christened by the nation.

“He was apprehended in the peasant’s hut, and thrown into prison. For a while it seemed certain that the author of the song which France has engraved on her heart was destined to go to the guillotine, to the accompaniment of his own martial strains. But Fate ordered otherwise, Rouget de Lisle was saved by the 9th Thermidor.

“After the Reign of Terror he went to Paris. There he again met Bettine Dierick, who had become a favourite actress at the Theatre Francaise. The dark, sad-eyed girl had developed into a marvellously beautiful woman. At sight of Rouget she became deathly pale.

“You,” she said. “Ah! I thought you had forgotten me.”

“For years your memory has been with me continually, Bettine,” he answered. “We were good friends in the old days at Strasbourg?”

“A little colour came back to handsome face.

“Do you remember the night of that first triumph, which you won for yourself and for me? You were a child then, and as such not ashamed to say that you sang my song well because you loved me. Those words have followed me ever since—in prison, in war, in peace. I have kept them in my inmost heart. You are now a woman, Bettine famous and beautiful—ah, do you love me still?”

“My hearth has never held a thought for any other being,” she answered. “I love you, Rouget, and you only!”

“He married her soon after, and carried her away to Lonel-Saunier on the Jura.

Kidney Talk.

Why is a person over seriously ill? Impure blood, nearly every time. What is pure blood? It is the vital fluid which, in passing through the kidneys, is made many times every hour, carries with it no impurity—perfectly filtered.

“Well, watch this paper and you can read of many great cures of these so-called incurable diseases by using Dodd’s Kidney Pills.

“But greater care, we think, are the simple ones, the cure of the small beginnings, where the misery and the harm to the constitution is escaped.

“A man by the name of Joshua Clark, living at 114 West street, this city, came in the other day. He had saved his life by using two boxes of Dodd’s Kidney Pills.

“It took him seven weeks to regain his health and avoid pupils. No one could hear him talk and not take courage, he be ever so sick.

“To be a real comforter, a person must have profound sympathies; but profound sympathies are always in association with keen sensibilities, and keen sensibilities expose their possessor to a sense of anguish utterly unintelligible to ordinary souls. As is the capacity to be a heavenly comforter, such is the capacity to be an awful sinner.

OCTOBER MAGAZINES.

An exhaustive article from the pen of Mr. John S. Ewart, Q.C. on the Scotch Question in Manitoba is a distinguishing feature of the new number of the American Catholic Quarterly Review.

It is to be hoped that the Provincial Government will, during the interval, agree to remedy the grievances. If it do not, there can be little doubt that remedial legislation will be passed at the next session of the Federal Parliament. This may, and no doubt will lead to further action by the stronger hand of the Dominion north of the border, and justice, so long delayed, be awarded to the Roman Catholic minority in the Province of Manitoba. The ghost must down again.

Dr. St. George Mivart, the learned and determined aviator of a religious system of evolution, contributes to the Review the paper which is given the place of honor. This is an indication that the English giant is not content to bear in silence the severe criticisms of his views, which many American writers have indulged in. If they fly high, he will fly higher. Here he takes the ground that the true system of evolution will justify the name it bears. He says: “To all the knowledge which is merely direct and immediate, succeeds knowledge which is more and more reflective, self-conscious and deliberate till under, and through Divine inter-position, no less omnipotent because imperceptible, the highest activities of which human nature is capable are attained. Since the Universe, as being essentially one, could never have been submitted to the action of any sort of natural selection, its power and properties must have been due to the creative will of God, and the results of their action on the world of man’s free will excepted must have been likewise pre-ordained. Our knowledge is His gift, and our most important knowledge is that of our true relationship to Him, and thus what is at once the most important and the highest end of evolution, as rationally understood, is and must be, that which reveals to our duties and our privileges—namely religion.

Popular Astronomy. This most excellent guide to the heavens is as usual full of practical and most interesting information. One of the best articles treats of the planets and constellations for November, and tells us that in the middle of this month all the planets will be in one half of the celestial sphere. At sunrise all will be above the horizon, at sunset none. A beautiful object in the morning sky is Venus, which is in its best position for observation during this month. She is seen after 3 o’clock a. m. towards the east. The phase of Venus will be an increasing crescent until the evening of the last day of the month, when she reaches her greatest distance west from the sun, and just half of her disc will be illuminated. A planisphere map of the constellations for 9 o’clock p. m. on November 1st is issued with the present number. The most important article deals with the discovery of the continuous variation of latitude. This constitutes a triumph of geodesy and astronomy. Observations continued through many years, and in no less degree a triumph of skilful mathematical analysis.

Godley’s Magazine makes a point of having at least one article of weighty importance each month. The November number contains a timely and suggestive discussion of “The Vatican and the Peace of Europe,” by Jesse Albert Lockwood. A planisphere map of the constellations for 9 o’clock p. m. on November 1st is issued with the present number. The most important article deals with the discovery of the continuous variation of latitude. This constitutes a triumph of geodesy and astronomy. Observations continued through many years, and in no less degree a triumph of skilful mathematical analysis.

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