

will become of him? and especially, what will become of us?"

"We will drink his wine, all the same, good fellow that he is! But Pierre had as lief commit suicide as not commit matrimony; and who would not? Look here, Pierre Philibert," continued the old soldier, addressing him with good-humored freedom. "Matrimony is clearly your duty, Pierre; but I need not tell you so; it is written on your face, plain as the way between Peronne and St. Quentin—a good, honest way as ever was trod by shoe leather, and as old as Chinon in Touraine! Try it soon, my boy. Quebec is a sack full of pearls!" Hortense pulled him mischievously by the coat, so he caught her hand and held it fast in his, while he proceeded: "You put your hand in the sack and take out the first that offers. It will be worth a Jew's ransom! If you are lucky to find the fairest, trust me it will be the identical pearl of great price for which the merchant went, and sold all that he had and bought it. Is not that Gospel, Father de Berey? I think I have heard something like that preached from the pulpit of the Recollets?"

"Matter of brimborion, Chevalier! not to be questioned by laymen! Words of wisdom for my poor brothers of St. Francis, who, after renouncing the world, like to know that they have renounced something worth having! But not to preach a sermon on your parable, Chevalier, I will promise Colonel Philibert that when he has found the pearl of great price"—Father de Berey, who knew a world of secrets, glanced archly at Amelie as he said this—"the bells of our monastery shall ring out such a merry peal as they have not rung since fat Brother Le Gros broke his wind, and short Brother Bref stretched himself out half a yard pulling the bell ropes on the wedding of the Dauphin."

Great merriment followed the speech of Father de Berey. Hortense rallied the Chevalier, a good old widower, upon himself not travelling the plain way between Peronne and St. Quentin, and jestingly offered herself to travel with him, like a couple of gypsies carrying their budget of happiness pick-a-back through the world.

"Better than that!" La Corne exclaimed. Hortense was worthy to ride on the baggage-wagons in his next campaign! Would she go? She gave him her hand. "I expect nothing else!" said she. "I am a soldier's daughter, and expect to live a soldier's wife, and die a soldier's widow. But a truce to jest. It is harder to be witty than wise," continued she. "What is the matter with cousin Le Gardeur?" Her eyes were fixed upon him as he read a note just handed to him by a servant. He crushed it in his hand with a flash of anger, and made a motion as if about to tear it, but did not. He placed it in his bosom. But the hilarity of his countenance was gone.

There was another person at the table whose quick eye, drawn by sisterly affection, saw Le Gardeur's movement before even Hortense. Amelie was impatient to leave her seat and go beside him, but she could not at the moment leave the lively circle around her. She at once conjectured that the note was from Angelique des Meloises. After drinking deeply two or three times, Le Gardeur arose, and with a faint excuse that did not impose on his partner, left the table. Amelie rose quickly, also, excusing herself to the Bourgeois, and joined her brother in the park, where the cool night air blew fresh and inviting for a walk.

Pretty Cecile Tourangeau had caught a glimpse of the handwriting as she sat by the side of Le Gardeur, and guessed correctly whence it had come, and why her partner so suddenly left the table.

She was out of humor; the red mark upon her forehead grew redder, as she pouted in visible discontent.

But the great world moves on, carrying alternate storms and sunshine upon its surface. The company rose from the table—some to the ballroom, some to the park and conservatories. Cecile was a happy disposition, easily consoled for her sorrows. Every trace of her displeasure was banished and almost forgotten from the moment the gay, handsome Jumonville de Villiers invited her out to the grand balcony, where, he said, the rarest pastime was going on.

And rare pastime it was! A group of laughing but half-serious girls were gathered round Doctor Gauthier, urging him to tell their fortunes by consulting the stars, which to-night shone out with unusual brilliancy.

At that period, as at the present, and in every age of the world, the female sex, like the Jews of old, asks signs, while the Greeks—that is, the men—seek wisdom.

The time never was, and never will be, when a woman will cease to be curious—when her imagination will not forecast the decrees of fate in regard to the culminating event of her life and her whole nature—marriage. It was in vain Doctor Gauthier protested his inability to read the stars without his celestial eye-glasses.

The ladies would not accept his excuses; he knew the heavens by heart, they said, and could read the stars of destiny as easily as the Bishop his breviary.

In truth, the worthy doctor was not only a believer but an adept in astrology. He had favored his friends with not a few horoscopes and nativities, when pressed to do so. His good-nature was of the substance of butter; anyone that liked could spread it over their bread. Many good men are eaten up in that way by greedy friends.

Hortense de Beauharnais urged the Doctor so merrily and so perseveringly, promising to marry him herself if the stars said so, that he laughingly gave way, but declared he would tell Hortense's fortune first, which deserved to be good enough to make her fulfil her promise just made.

She was resigned, she said, and would accept any fate, from the rank of a queen to a cell among the old maids of St. Cyr! The girls of Quebec hung all their hopes on the stars, bright and particular ones, especially. They were too loving to live single, and too proud to live poor. But she was one who would not wait for ships to land that never came, and plums to drop into her mouth that never ripened. Hortense would be ruled by the stars, and wise Doctor Gauthier should to-night declare her fate.

They all laughed at this free talk of Hortense. Not a few of the ladies shrugged their shoulders and looked askance at each other, but many present wished they had courage to speak like her to Doctor Gauthier.

"Well, I see there is nothing else for it but to submit to my ruling star, and that is you, Hortense!" cried the Doctor; "so please stand up before me while I take an inventory of your looks as a preliminary to telling your fortune."

Hortense placed herself instantly before him. "It is one of the privileges of our dry study," remarked he, as he looked admiringly on the tall, charming figure and frank countenance of the girl before him.

"The querent," said he gravely, "is tall, straight, slender, arms long, hands and feet of the smallest, hair just short of blackness; piercing, roving eyes, dark as night and full of fire, sight quick, and temperament alive with energy, wit, and sense."

"Oh, tell my fortune, not my character! I shall shame of energy, wit, and sense, if I hear such flattery, Doctor!" exclaimed she, shaking herself like a young eagle preparing to fly.

"We shall see what comes of it, Hortense!" replied he gravely, as with his gold-headed cane he slowly quartered the heavens like an ancient augur, and noted the planets in

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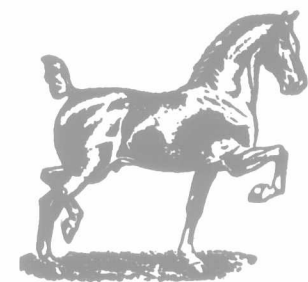
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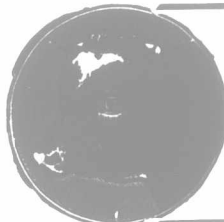
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