

THE TWO FISHERMEN.

Paris was blockaded—furnished—at the point of death. Even the sparrows on the house tops were few and far between, and the very sewers were in danger of becoming depopulated. People ate anything they could get.

Monsieur Morisot, watchmaker by trade, was walking early one bright January morning down the boulevards, his hands in the pockets of his overcoat, feeling hungry and depressed, when he unexpectedly met a friend. He recognized Monsieur Sauvage, an old time chum of the river side.

Every Sunday before the war Morisot used to start at daybreak with his bamboo fishing rod in his hand, his tin bait and tackle upon his back. He used to take the train to Colombes, and to walk from there to the island of Maranthe. No sooner had he arrived at the river than he used to begin to fish and continue fishing until evening. Here every Sunday he used to meet Monsieur Sauvage, a linen draper from Paris, but stout and jovial withal, as keen a fisherman as he was himself.

Often they would sit side by side, their feet dangling over the water, for half a day at a time and say scarcely a word, yet little by little they became friends. Some times they never spoke at all. Occasionally they launched out into conversation, but they understood each other perfectly without its aid, for their tastes and ideas were the same.

On a spring morning in the bright sunshine, when the light and delicate mist hovered over the river, and these two fishermen enjoyed a foretaste of real summer weather, Morisot would say to his neighbor: 'Hein! not bad, eh?'

And Sauvage would reply: 'I know nothing to beat it.'

This interchange of sentiments was quite enough to engender mutual understanding and esteem.

In autumn, toward evening, when the setting sun reddened the sky and cast shadows of the fleeting clouds over the water, when the river was decked in purple, when the whole horizon was lighted up and the figures of the two friends were illumined as with fire, when the russet brown of the trees was lightly tinged with gold, and the trees themselves shivered with a wintry shake, Monsieur Sauvage would smile at Monsieur Morisot and say, 'What a sight, eh?'

And Monsieur Morisot, without even raising his eyes from his float, would answer, 'Better than the boulevards, hein!'

This morning, as soon as they had recognized each other, they shook hands warmly, quite overcome at meeting again under such different circumstances.

Monsieur Sauvage sighed and murmured, 'A nice state of things.'

Monsieur Morisot, gloomy and sad, answered, 'And what weather! To-day is New Year's day.' The sky was clear, bright and beautiful.

They began to walk along, sorrowful and pensive. Said Morisot, 'And our fishing, eh? What times we used to have!'

Sauvage replied, 'When shall we have them again?'

They went into a cafe and had a glass of absinthe, and then started again on their walk.

They stopped at another cafe. When they came out again they were slightly dazed, like people who had fasted long and then partaken too freely.

It was lovely weather; a soft breeze fanned their faces. Monsieur Sauvage, upon whom the fresh air was beginning to take effect, suddenly said: 'Suppose we were to go.'

'Go where?'

'Why, fishing!'

'But where?'

'To our island, of course. The French outposts are at Colombes. I know Col. Dumoulin; he will let us pass through easily enough.'

Morisot trembled with delight at the very idea. 'All right, I am your man.'

They separated to fetch their rods.

An hour afterward they were walking fast along the high road toward the town commanded by Col. Dumoulin.

He smiled at their request, but granted it, and they went on their way rejoicing in the possession of the password.

Soon they had crossed the lines, passed through deserted Colombes and found themselves in the vineyard leading down to the river. It was about eleven o'clock.

On the other side the village of Argenteuil seemed as if it were dead. The hills of Orgremont and Saumons commanded the whole country round. The great plain stretching out as far as Nanterre was empty as air. Nothing in sight but cherry trees and stretches of gray soil.

Monsieur Sauvage pointed with his finger to the heights above and said, 'The Prussians are up there,' and a vague sense of uneasiness seized upon the two friends.

The Prussians! They had never set eyes upon them, but for months past they had

felt their presence near, encircling their beloved Paris, ruining their beloved France, pillaging, massacring, insatiable, invincible, invisible, all-powerful, and as they thought on them a sort of superstitious terror seemed to mingle with the hate they bore towards their unknown conquerors. Morisot murmured, 'Suppose we were to meet them,' and Sauvage replied, with the instinctive gallantry of the Parisian, 'Well! we would offer them some of our fish for supper.'

All the same they hesitated before venturing into the country, intimidated as they were by the all-pervading silence.

Eventually Monsieur Sauvage plucked up courage, 'Come along, let's make a start; but we must be cautious.'

They went through the vineyard, crawling along from bush to bush, ears and eyes upon the alert.

Only one strip of ground lay between them and the river. They began to run, and when they reached the bank they crouched down among the dry reeds for shelter.

Morisot laid his ear to the ground to listen for the sound of foot steps, but he could hear nothing. They were alone, quite alone; gradually they felt reassured and began to fish.

The deserted island of Maranthe hid them from the opposite shore. The little restaurant was closed, and looked as if it had been neglected for years.

Monsieur Sauvage caught the first gudgeon, Monsieur Morisot the second. And every minute they pulled up their lines with a little silver object dangling and struggling on the hook. Truly, a miraculous draught of fishes. As the fish were caught they put them in a net which floated in the water at their feet. They positively revelled in enjoyment of a long forbidden sport. The sun shone warm upon their backs. They heard nothing—they thought of nothing—the rest of the world was as nothing to them. They simply fished.

Suddenly a smothered sound, as it were under ground, made the earth tremble. The guns had recommenced firing. Morisot turned his head and saw above the bank, far away to the left, the vast shadow of Mont Valerien and over it the white wreath of smoke from the gun which had just been fired. Then a jet of flame burst forth from the fortress in answer, a moment later followed by another explosion. Then others till every second as it seemed the mountain breathed out death and the white smoke formed a funeral pall above it.

Monsieur Sauvage shrugged his shoulders. 'They are beginning again,' he said.

Monsieur Morisot, anxiously watching his float bob up and down, was suddenly seized with rage against the belligerents and shouted out: 'How idiotic to kill one another like that.'

Monsieur Sauvage: 'It is worse than the brute beasts.'

Monsieur Morisot, who had just hooked a bleak, said: 'And to think that it will always be thus so long as there are such things as governments.'

Monsieur Sauvage stopped him: 'The republic would not have declared war.'

Monsieur Morisot in his turn: 'With kings we have foreign wars; with the republic we have civil wars.'

Then in a friendly way they began to discuss politics with the calm common sense of reasonable and peace-loving men, agreeing on the one point, that no one would ever be free. And Mont Valerien thundered unceasingly, demolishing with its cannon balls French houses, crushing out French lives, ruining many a dream, many a joy, many a hope deferred, wrecking much happiness and bringing to the hearts of women, girls and mothers in France and elsewhere sorrow and suffering which would never have an end.

'It's life,' said Monsieur Morisot.

'Say rather that it's death,' said Monsieur Sauvage.

They started, scared out of their lives, as they felt that some one was walking close behind them. Turning round, they saw four men, four tall, bearded men, dressed as servants in livery and wearing flat caps upon their heads. These men were covering the two fishermen with rifles.

The rods dropped from their frightened hands and floated aimlessly down the river. In an instant the Frenchmen were seized, bound, thrown into a boat and ferried over to the island.

Behind the house they had thought uninhabited was a picket of Prussian soldiers. A hairy giant, who was sitting astride a chair and smoking a porcelain pipe, asked them in excellent French if they had had good sport.

A soldier placed at the feet of the officer the net full of fish which he had brought away with him.

'Not bad, I see. But we have other fish to fry. Listen and don't alarm yourselves. You are a couple of French spies sent out to watch my movements, disguised as fish

ermen. I take you prisoners and I order you to be shot. You have fallen into my hands—so much the worse for you. It is the fortune of war. Inasmuch, however, as you came through the lines you are certainly in possession of the password. Otherwise you could not get back again. Give me the word and I will let you go.'

The two friends, livid with fear, stood side by side, their hands nervously twitching, but they answered not a word.

The officer continued: 'No one need ever know it. You will go home quietly and your secret will go with you. If you refuse it is death for you both and that instantly. Take your choice.'

They neither spoke nor moved.

The Prussian calmly pointed to the river and said: 'Reflect, in five minutes you will be at the bottom of that water. I suppose you have families.'

Mont Valerien thundered unceasingly.

The two Frenchmen stood perfectly still and silent.

The officer gave an order in German. Then he moved his chair farther away from the prisoners, and a dozen soldiers drew up in line twenty paces off.

'I will give you one minute,' he said, 'not one second more.'

He got up leisurely and approached the two Frenchmen. He took Morisot by the arm and said, in an under tone: 'Quick! Give me the word. Your friend will know nothing. I will appear to give way.'

Monsieur Morisot did not answer.

The Prussian took Monsieur Sauvage aside and said the same thing to him.

Monsieur Sauvage did not answer.

They found themselves once more side by side.

The officer gave another order; the soldiers raised their guns.

By accident Morisot's glance fell upon the net full of fish on the ground a few steps off. A ray of sunshine lit up their glittering bodies and a sudden weakness came over him. 'Good bye, Monsieur Sauvage,' he whispered.

'Good bye, Monsieur Morisot,' replied Monsieur Sauvage. They pressed each other's hands, trembling from head to foot.

'Fire,' said the officer.

Monsieur Sauvage fell dead on his face. Monsieur Morisot, of stronger build, staggered, stumbled and then fell right across the body of his friend, with his face turned upward to the sky, his breast riddled with balls.

The Prussian gave another order. His men dispersed for a moment, returning with cords and stones. They tied the stones to the feet of the dead Frenchmen and carried them down to the river.

Mont Valerien thundered unceasingly.

Two soldiers took Morisot by the head and feet. Two others did the same to Sauvage. The bodies swung to and fro, were launched into space, described a curve and plunged feet first into the river.

The water bubbled, boiled, then calmed down and the little wavelets, tinged with red, circled gently toward the bank.

The officer, impassive as ever, said, 'It is the fishes turn now.'

His eyes fell upon the gudgeon lying on the grass. He picked them up and called out 'Wilhelm.' A soldier in a white cap appeared. He threw the fish towards him.

'Fry these little animals for me at once while they are still alive and kicking. They will be delicious.'

Then he began smoking again.

A Cute Yankee Trick.

The ingenuity of Americans is truly marvellous. Here is a story of an evasion of the McKinley tariff law, which is certainly amusing enough. A man living on the border of Mexico is said to have contrived to get the better of the duty imposed on eggs. He had a long shed constructed, one end of which was in Mexico and the other in the United States. In the Mexican portion a number of hens were fed on the cheap grain of that country. In the American end temptingly comfortable nests were placed. In this way the hens were invited to become smugglers in behalf of their owner, who, it is said, is a yankee from Maine.

She Would Sing Something Appropriate.

Will you kindly sing something appropriate, he said, after a somewhat prolonged pause in the conversation.

What shall I sing? she asked, running her fingers carelessly over the keys of the instrument.

Anything—something appropriate.

Something appropriate, she repeated, looking at the clock; then I will sing a lullaby.

A Good Reason.

Little Johnny Fizzletop has the habit of waking up every night and demanding something to eat. At last his mother said to him: 'Look here, Johnny, I never want to eat anything in the night.' 'Well, I don't think I'd care much to eat anything either in the night if I kept my teeth in a mug of water.'

Teacher—In the sentence, your father calls you, what is the object of the verb calls? Johnny—I don't know, but I know what is the object of my father.

A STUDY IN THRIFT.

The wayfarer going along the Riviere di Lentini, stretched out there like a space of dead sea, and the sere stubble of the Plain of Catania, and the orange trees, always green, of Francofonte, and the gray cork trees of Resecone, and the lonely meadow of Passaneto and Passinatello—if he should ask, in order to divert himself from the weariness of the long dusty road under the sky hazy with heat, at the hour when the bells of the litter ring sadly in the immense country and the mules hang their heads and their tails and the driver of the litter sings his melancholy song in order not to let himself be overcome by the sleep of the malaria, 'Whose is this land?' would have the answer:

'Mazzaro's.'

And passing near a farm as large as a town, with store houses that seem like churches, and hens in flocks sitting in the shade by the well, and women screening their eyes with their hands to see who was going by, 'And this?'

'Mazzaro's.'

And on and on, while the malaria weighed upon your eyelids, and the barking of a dog aroused you suddenly passing by a vineyard that was endless and spread over hill and plain, motionless, as if the dust lay heavy on it, and the keeper of the vineyard, stretched face downward upon his gun, raised his drowsy head and opened one eye to see who it might be:

'Mazzaro's.'

Then came an olive grove thick as a wood, where the grass never sprouted and the harvest lasted until March. They were the olive trees of Mazzaro. And toward evening, when the sun was setting as red as fire and the country was veiled with sadness, there were met the long lines of the ploughs of Mazzaro going slowly homeward from the field and the oxen wading the ford heavily with their muzzles in the dark water; and there were seen in the distant pastures of the Canzira, on the rough slope, the immense whitish patches which were the flocks of Mazzaro; and there was heard the shepherd's whistle echoing in the gorges, and the bell now ringing and now silent, and a lonely song lost in the valley.

All property of Mazzaro.

It seemed as if Mazzaro owned even the setting sun and the chirping locusts and the birds that went with short flights to hide behind the furrows and the cry of the horned owl in the woods. It seemed as if Mazzaro were spread out all over the earth and one walked over his body. Instead of that he was an ugly little man, said the driver of the litter, that you would not give a penny to look at; he had nothing large about him but his paunch, and no one knew how he filled it, for he ate nothing; the truth was, he was rich as a hog, but he had a head that was a jewel, that man.

Indeed with his jewel of a head he had accumulated all those possessions where formerly he used to come to dig or prune or reap from morning to night in the sun, the rain, the wind, without shoes to his feet or a rag of an overcoat; everybody remembered having given him kicks behind, the same persons who now called him 'your excellency' and spoke to him with cap in hand.

More than five thousand mouths, without counting the birds of the sky and the animals of the earth, that ate upon his land and without counting his own mouth, that ate less than any; he was contented with twopence worth of bread and a bit of cheese, swallowed in hurry and haste standing in a corner of the store house large as a church, in midst of the dust from the grain, so that one could not see, while the peasants emptied the sacks; or on top of a straw stack, when the wind swept over the frozen country at sowing time, or with his head inside a basket in the hot days of harvest. He did not drink wine, he did not smoke or use tobacco, although his plantations along the river side produced tobacco with large leaves as tall as a boy, such as sells at ninety-five lire. He never had had any woman to support but his mother, who had cost him twelve tari extra when he was obliged to have her carried to the graveyard.

It was that he had thought and thought, again and again, what property means, when he went without shoes to work on the land that was now his own; and he had experienced what it is to earn three tari a day in the month of July, to keep the back bent for fourteen hours with the overseer on horseback after you, that takes you with his whip if you straighten up for a moment. For this he had not let pass a minute of his life that was not employed in getting riches, and now his plows were numerous as the long line of crows that arrive in November, and other lines of mules that seemed endless carried seed for sowing. The women who crouched in the mud from October to March to gather his olives were countless, as countless as the magpies that came to steal the olives; and at the time of the vintage whole villages gathered about his vines, and as far as singing was heard in the country it was for the grape gathering of Mazzaro. At harvest the reapers of Mazzaro seemed

like an army of soldiers. To maintain all those people with biscuit in the morning and bread and bitter orange at breakfast and the luncheon and the lasagne in the evening there was needed money by hand-fuls, and the lasagne were dished in bread troughs as large as tubs. So now, when he rode behind the line of his mowers with whip in hand, he did not lose one of them from sight and kept repeating, 'Bend to it, boys!'

However, each year all those store houses, large as churches, were filled with grain, so that it was necessary to raise the roofs to contain it all; and every time that Mazzaro sold the wine it took more than a day to count the money, all in silver pieces of twelve lari, for he would not have dirty paper money for his goods, and went to buy the dirty paper only when he had to pay the king or other persons; and at the fairs the herds of Mazzaro covered the whole field and crowded the roads, so that it took half a day to let them pass, and the image of the saint, with the band of music, had to change their road and yield the way to him.

All this property he had earned for himself with his own hands and head, with losing sleep at night, with taking fevers from the malaria, with labor from dawn to darkness. When one is like that it means that he is made for property.

In this way, little by little, Mazzaro became master of all the property which formerly belonged to a spendthrift baron, and the latter parted first with the olive grove, then with the vines, then with the pasture and then with the farm, and finally with his palace itself, so that a day did not pass in which he did not sign a legal paper, and Mazzaro put below his worthy X mark. The baron had nothing left but the stone shield that formerly was over his door, and it was the only thing that he had not been willing to sell, saying to Mazzaro, 'This only of all my property will not do for thee.' And it was true; Mazzaro did not know what to do with it and would not have paid twopence for it.

'This is a fine thing to have the fortune that Mazzaro has,' people said; and they did not know what it had taken to grasp that fortune; how many thoughts, how many fatigues, how many falsehoods, how many perils of going to the galleys, and how that head that was a jewel had worked day and night, steadier than a millstone, to get riches; and if the owner of a neighboring field persisted in not giving it up to him and wanted to take Mazzaro by the neck, he had to find a stratagem to constrain the owner to sell and make him fall into the trap, despite of the distrust of the peasant nature. He would go and boast, for example, of the fertility of a land rent which did not even produce lupines, and succeeded in making the poor fellow believe it to be a promised land, so that he let himself be induced to hire it as a speculation, and afterward lost his rent, his house and his field, which Mazzaro took—for a piece of bread.

One thing alone grieved him, that he was beginning to grow old and he must leave the earth behind him. This is an injustice of God, he thought, that after having worn out your life in gaining property, when you have succeeded in getting it, so that you would like more, you have to leave it. And he would remain for hours seated on a basket, with his chin in his hands, looking at his vines that grew green before his eyes and the fields that waved with heads of wheat like a sea and the olive groves that veiled the mountain like a cloud; and if a half naked boy passed in front of him, bent under his burden like a weary ass, he would thrust his stick between the boy's legs for envy and murmur, 'Look who has length of days! that fellow who has nothing!'

So that when they told him that it was time to leave his property in order to think of his soul, he went out into the court yard like a madman, staggering, and went about killing his ducks and turkeys with blows of his stick and screaming, 'My property, come along with me!—Translated for 'Short Stories' from the Italian of Verga by E. Cavazza.

The Vanderbilt System and Its Managers.

More than 7,000 miles of railroad are absolutely controlled and operated by the Vanderbilt family. The roads which are advertised as the Vanderbilt system are the New York Central and Hudson River, the Michigan Central, the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern, the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis, the West Shore, and the New York, Chicago and St. Louis. These six roads with their leased lines and the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg, which has been purchased by the Vanderbilts, have 7,800 miles of line and represent a capital stock of more than \$150,000,000. Their bonded indebtedness will aggregate nearly \$300,000,000. These roads are under the absolute control and personal direction of Cornelius Vanderbilt. As his principal aids in managing this property Cornelius Vanderbilt has surrounded himself with four brainy men. They are Chauncey M. Depeew, John Newell, Henry B. Ledyard and Melville E. Ingalls.—Chicago Herald.