Dickens Charles

Pearl-Fishing; Choice Stories from Dickens' Household Words; First Series

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Содержание

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I.
Loaded Dice

SEVERAL years ago, I made a tour through some of the Southern Counties of England with a friend. We travelled in an open carriage, stopping for a few hours a day, or a week, as it might be, wherever there was anything to be seen; and we generally got through one stage before breakfast, because it gave our horses rest, and ourselves the chance of enjoying the brown bread, new milk, and fresh eggs of those country road-side inns, which are fast becoming subjects for archæological investigation.

One evening my friend said, “To-morrow we will breakfast at T – . I want to inquire about a family named Lovell, who used to live there. I met the husband and wife, and two lovely children, one summer at Exmouth. We became very intimate, and I thought them particularly interesting people, but I have never seen them since.”

The next morning's sun shone as brightly as heart could desire, and after a delightful drive, we reached the outskirts of the town about nine o'clock.

"Oh, what a pretty inn!" said I, as we approached a small white house, with a sign swinging in front of it, and a flower-garden on one side.

"Stop, John," cried my friend, "we shall get a much cleaner breakfast here than in the town, I dare say; and if there is anything to be seen there, we can walk to it;" so we alighted, and were shown into a neat little parlor, with white curtains, where an unexceptionable rural breakfast was soon placed before us.

"Pray do you happen to know anything of a family called Lovell?" inquired my friend, whose name, by the way, was Markham. "Mr. Lovell was a clergyman."

"Yes, Ma'am," answered the girl who attended us, apparently the landlord's daughter, "Mr. Lovell is the vicar of our parish."

"Indeed! and does he live near here?"

"Yes, Ma'am, he lives at the vicarage. It's just down that lane opposite, about a quarter of a mile from here; or you can go across the fields, if you please, to where you see that tower; it's close by there."

"And which is the pleasantest road?" inquired Mrs. Markham.

"Well, Ma'am, I think by the fields is the pleasantest, if you don't mind a stile or two; and, besides, you get the best view of the Abbey by going that way."

"Is that tower we see part of the Abbey?"

"Yes, Ma'am," answered the girl, "and the vicarage is just the other side of it."

Armed with these instructions, as soon as we had finished our breakfast we started across the fields, and after a pleasant walk of twenty minutes we found ourselves in an old churchyard, amongst a cluster of the most picturesque ruins we had ever seen. With the exception of the gray tower, we had espied from the inn, and which had doubtless been the belfry, the remains were not considerable. There was the outer wall of the chancel, and the broken step that had led to the high altar, and there were sections of aisles, and part of a cloister, all gracefully festooned with mosses and ivy; whilst mingled with the grass-grown graves of the prosaic dead, there were the massive tombs of the Dame Margerys and the Sir Hildebrands of more romantic periods. All was ruin and decay, but such poetic ruin! such picturesque decay! And just beyond the tall gray tower, there was the loveliest, smiling, little garden, and the prettiest cottage, that imagination could picture. The day was so bright, the grass so green, the flowers so gay, the air so balmy with their sweet perfumes, the birds sang so cheerily in the apple and cherry trees, that all nature seemed rejoicing.

"Well," said my friend, as she seated herself on the fragment of a pillar, and looked around her, "now that I see this place, I understand what sort of people the Lovells were."

"What sort of people were they?" said I.

"Why, as I said before, interesting people. In the first place,

they were both extremely handsome."

"But the locality had nothing to do with their good looks, I presume," said I.

"I am not sure of that," she answered; "when there is the least foundation of taste or intellect to set out with, the beauty of external nature, and the picturesque accidents that harmonize with it, do, I am persuaded, by their gentle and elevating influence on the mind, make the handsome handsomer, and the ugly less ugly. But it was not alone the good looks of the Lovells that struck me, but their air of refinement and high breeding, and I should say high birth – though I know nothing about their extraction – combined with their undisguised poverty and as evident contentment. Now, I can understand such people finding here an appropriate home, and being satisfied with their small share of this world's goods; because here the dreams of romance writers about Love in a Cottage might be somewhat realized; poverty might be graceful and poetical here; and then, you know, they have no rent to pay."

"Very true," said I; "but suppose they had sixteen daughters, like a half-pay officer I once met on board a steam-packet?"

"That would spoil it certainly," said Mrs. Markham; "but let us hope they have not. When I knew them they had only two children, a boy and a girl called Charles and Emily; two of the prettiest creatures I ever beheld!"

As my friend thought it yet rather early for a visit, we had remained chattering in this way for more than an

hour, sometimes seated on a tomb-stone, or a fallen column; sometimes peering amongst the carved fragments that were scattered about the ground, and sometimes looking over the hedge into the little garden, the wicket of which was immediately behind the tower. The weather being warm, most of the windows of the vicarage were open and the blinds were all down; we had not yet seen a soul stirring, and were wondering whether we might venture to present ourselves at the door, when a strain of distant music struck upon our ears. "Hark!" I said, "how exquisite! It was the only thing wanting to complete the charm."

"It's a military band, I think," said Mrs. Markham, "you know we passed some barracks before we reached the Inn."

Nearer and nearer drew the sound, solemn and slow; the band was evidently approaching by the green lane that skirted the fields we had come by. "Hush," said I, laying my hand on my friend's arm, with a strange sinking of the heart; "they are playing the Dead March in Saul! Don't you hear the muffled drums? It's a funeral, but where's the grave?"

"There," said she, pointing to a spot close under the hedge where some earth had been thrown up; but the aperture was covered with a plank, probably to prevent accidents.

There are few ceremonies in life at once so touching, so impressive, so sad, and yet so beautiful, as a soldier's funeral! Ordinary funerals with their unwieldy hearses and feathers, and the absurd looking mutes, and the "inky cloaks" and weepers of hired mourners, always seem to me like a mockery of the dead;

the appointments border so closely on the grotesque; they are so little in keeping with the true, the only view of death that can render life endurable! There is such a tone of exaggerated, forced, heavy, over-acted gravity about the whole thing, that one had need to have a deep personal interest involved in the scene, to be able to shut one's eyes to the burlesque side of it. But a military funeral, how different! There you see death in life and life in death! There is nothing over-strained, nothing overdone. At once simple and silent, decent and decorous, consoling, yet sad. The chief mourners, at best, are generally true mourners, for they have lost a brother with whom "they sat but yesterday at meat;" and whilst they are comparing memories, recalling how merry they had many a day been together, and the solemn tones of that sublime music float upon the air, we can imagine the freed and satisfied soul wafted on those harmonious breathings to its Heavenly home; and our hearts are melted, our imaginations exalted, our faith invigorated, and we come away the better for what we have seen.

I believe some such reflections as these were passing through our minds, for we both remained silent and listening, till the swinging-to of the little wicket, which communicated with the garden, aroused us; but nobody appeared, and the tower being at the moment betwixt us and it, we could not see who had entered. Almost at the same moment, a man came from a gate on the opposite side, and advancing to where the earth was thrown up, lifted the plank, and discovered the newly-made grave. He

was soon followed by some boys, and several respectable-looking persons came into the enclosure, whilst nearer and nearer drew the sound of the muffled drums, and now we descried the firing party and their officer, who led the procession with their arms reversed, each man wearing above the elbow a piece of black crape and a small bow of white satin ribbon; the band still playing that solemn strain. Then came the coffin, borne by six soldiers. Six officers bore up the pall, all quite young men; and on the coffin lay the shako, sword, side-belt, and white gloves of the deceased. A long train of mourners marched two and two, in open file, the privates first, the officers last. Sorrow was imprinted on every face; there was no unseemly chattering, no wandering eyes; if a word was exchanged, it was in a whisper, and the sad shake of the head showed of whom they were discoursing. All this we observed as they marched through the lane that skirted one side of the churchyard. As they neared the gate the band ceased to play.

"See there," said Mrs. Markham, directing my attention to the cottage, "there comes Mr. Lovell. Oh, how he is changed!" and whilst she spoke, the clergyman entering by the wicket, advanced to meet the procession at the gate, where he commenced reading the funeral service as he moved backwards towards the grave, round which the firing party, leaning on their firelocks, now formed. Then came those awful words, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," the hollow sound of the earth upon the coffin, and three volleys fired over the grave, finished the solemn ceremony.

When the procession entered the churchyard, we had retired behind the broken wall of the chancel, whence, without being observed, we had watched the whole scene with intense interest. Just as the words, "Ashes to ashes! dust to dust!" were pronounced, I happened to raise my eyes towards the gray tower, and then, peering through one of the narrow slits, I saw the face of a man – such a face! Never to my latest day can I forget the expression of those features! If ever there was despair and anguish written on a human countenance, it was there! And yet so young! so beautiful! A cold chill ran through my veins as I pressed Mrs. Markham's arm. "Look up at the tower!" I whispered.

"My God! What can it be?" she answered, turning quite pale! "And Mr. Lovell, did you observe how his voice shook? at first, I thought it was illness; but he seems bowed down with grief. Every face looks awe-struck! There must be some tragedy here – something more than the death of an individual!" and fearing, under this impression, that our visit might prove untimely, we resolved to return to the inn, and endeavor to discover if anything unusual had really occurred. Before we moved, I looked up at the narrow slit – the face was no longer there; but as we passed round to the other side of the tower, we saw a tall, slender figure, attired in a loose coat, pass slowly through the wicket, cross the garden, and enter the house. We only caught a glimpse of the profile; the head hung down upon the breast; the eyes were bent upon the ground; but we knew it was the same face we had seen above.

We went back to the inn, where our inquiries elicited some information, which made us wish to know more; but it was not till we went into the town that we obtained the following details of this mournful drama, of which we had thus accidentally witnessed one impressive scene.

Mr. Lovell, as Mrs. Markham had conjectured, was a man of good family, but no fortune; he might have had a large one, could he have made up his mind to marry Lady Elizabeth Wentworth, the bride selected for him by a wealthy uncle who proposed to make him his heir; but preferring poverty with Emily Dering, he was disinherited. He never repented his choice, although he remained vicar of a small parish, and a poor man all his life. The two children whom Mrs. Markham had seen, were the only ones they had, and through the excellent management of Mrs. Lovell, and the moderation of her husband's desires, they had enjoyed an unusual degree of happiness in this sort of graceful poverty, till the young Charles and Emily were grown up, and it was time to think what was to be done with them. The son had been prepared for Oxford by the father, and the daughter, under the tuition of her mother, was remarkably well educated and accomplished; but it became necessary to consider the future: Charles must be sent to college, since the only chance of finding a provision for him was in the Church, although the expense of maintaining him there could be ill afforded; so, in order in some degree to balance the outlay, it was, after much deliberation, agreed that Emily should accept a situation as governess in London. The proposal

was made by herself, and the rather consented to, that, in case of the death of her parents, she would almost inevitably have had to seek some such means of subsistence. These partings were the first sorrows that had reached the Lovells.

At first, all went well; Charles was not wanting in ability nor in a moderate degree of application; and Emily wrote cheerfully of her new life. She was kindly received, well treated, and associated with the family on the footing of a friend. Neither did further experience seem to diminish her satisfaction. She saw a great many gay people – some of whom she named; and, amongst the rest, there not unfrequently appeared the name of Herbert. Mr. Herbert was in the army, and being a distant connexion of the family with whom she resided, was a frequent visitor at their house. "She was sure papa and mamma would like him." Once the mother smiled, and said she hoped Emily was not falling in love; but no more was thought of it. In the meantime Charles had found out that there was time for many things at Oxford, besides study. He was naturally fond of society, and had a remarkable capacity for excelling in all kinds of games. He was agreeable, lively, exceedingly handsome, and sang charmingly, having been trained in part-singing by his mother. No young man at Oxford was more *fêté*; but alas! he was very poor, and poverty poisoned all his enjoyments. For some time he resisted temptation; but after a terrible struggle – for he adored his family – he gave way, and ran in debt, and although the imprudence only augmented his misery, he had not resolution to retrace his steps, but advanced

further and further on this broad road to ruin, so that he had come home for the vacation shortly before our visit to T – , threatened with all manner of annoyances if he did not carry back a sufficient sum to satisfy his most clamorous creditors. He had assured them he would do so, but where was he to get the money? Certainly not from his parents; he well knew they had it not; nor had he a friend in the world from whom he could hope assistance in such an emergency. In his despair he often thought of running away – going to Australia, America, New Zealand, anywhere; but he had not even the means to do this. He suffered indescribable tortures, and saw no hope of relief.

It was just at this period that Herbert's regiment happened to be quartered at T – . Charles had occasionally seen his name in his sister's letters, and heard that there was a Herbert now in the barracks, but he was ignorant whether or not it was the same person; and when he accidentally fell into the society of some of the junior officers, and was invited by Herbert himself to dine at the mess, pride prevented his ascertaining the fact. He did not wish to betray that his sister was a governess. Herbert, however, knew full well that their visitor was the brother of Emily Lovell, but partly for reasons of his own, and partly because he penetrated the weakness of the other, he abstained from mentioning her name.

Now, this town of T – was, and probably is, about the dullest quarter in all England! The officers hated it, there was no flirting, no dancing, no hunting, no anything. Not a man of them knew

what to do with himself. The old ones wandered about and played at whist, the young ones took to hazard and three-card-loo, playing at first for moderate stakes, but soon getting on to high ones. Two or three civilians of the neighborhood joined the party, Charles Lovell among the rest. Had they begun with playing high, he would have been excluded for want of funds; but whilst they played low, he won, so that when they increased the stakes, trusting to a continuance of his good fortune, he was eager to go on with them. Neither did his luck altogether desert him; on the whole, he rather won than lost; but he foresaw that one bad night would break him, and he should be obliged to retire, forfeiting his amusement and mortifying his pride. It was just at this crisis, that, one night, an accident, which caused him to win a considerable sum, set him upon the notion of turning chance into certainty. Whilst shuffling the cards, he dropped the ace of spades into his lap, caught it up, replaced it in the pack, and dealt it to himself. No one else had seen the card, no observation was made, and a terrible thought came into his head!

Whether loo or hazard was played, Charles Lovell had, night after night, a most extraordinary run of luck. He won large sums, and saw before him the early prospect of paying his debts and clearing all his difficulties.

Amongst the young men who played at the table, some had plenty of money and cared little for their losses; but others were not so well off, and one of these was Edward Herbert. He, too, was the son of poor parents who had straitened themselves to

put him in the army, and it was with infinite difficulty and privation that his widowed mother had amassed the needful sum to purchase for him a company, which was now becoming vacant. The retiring officer's papers were already sent in, and Herbert's money was lodged at Cox and Greenwood's; but before the answer from the Horse-Guards arrived, he had lost every sixpence. Nearly the whole sum had become the property of Charles Lovell.

Herbert was a fine young man, honorable, generous, impetuous, and endowed with an acute sense of shame. He determined instantly to pay the debts, but he knew that his own prospects were ruined for life; he wrote to the agents to send him the money and withdraw his name from the list of purchasers. But how was he to support his mother's grief? How meet the eye of the girl he loved? She, who he knew adored him, and whose hand it was agreed between them he should ask of her parents as soon as he was gazetted a captain! The anguish of mind he suffered then threw him into a fever, and he lay for several days betwixt life and death, and happily unconscious of his misery.

Meantime, another scene was being enacted elsewhere. The officers, who night after night found themselves losers, had not for some time entertained the least idea of foul play, but at length, one of them observing something suspicious, began to watch, and satisfied himself, by a peculiar method adopted by Lovell in "throwing his mains," that he was the culprit. His suspicions were whispered from one to another, till they nearly

all entertained them, with the exception of Herbert, who, being looked upon as Lovell's most especial friend, was not told. So unwilling were these young men to blast, forever, the character of the visitor whom they had so much liked, and to strike a fatal blow at the happiness and respectability of his family, that they were hesitating how to proceed, whether to openly accuse him or privately reprove and expel him, when Herbert's heavy loss decided the question.

Herbert himself, overwhelmed with despair, had quitted the room, the rest were still seated around the table, when having given each other a signal, one of them, called Frank Houston, arose and said: "Gentlemen, it gives me great pain to have to call your attention to a very strange – a very distressing circumstance. For some time past there has been an extraordinary run of luck in one direction – we have all observed it – all remarked on it. Mr. Herbert has at this moment retired a heavy loser. There is, indeed, as far as I know, but one winner amongst us – but one, and he a winner to a very considerable amount; the rest all losers. God forbid that I should rashly accuse any man! Lightly blast any man's character! But I am bound to say, that I fear the money we have lost has not been fairly won. There has been foul play! I forbear to name the party – the facts sufficiently indicate him."

Who would not have pitied Lovell, when, livid with horror and conscious guilt, he vainly tried to say something? "Indeed – I assure you – I never" – but words would not come; he faltered and rushed out of the room in a transport of agony. They did pity him;

and when he was gone, agreed amongst themselves to hush up the affair; but unfortunately, the civilians of the party, who had not been let into the secret, took up his defence. They not only believed the accusation unfounded, but felt it as an affront offered to their townsman; they blustered about it a good deal, and there was nothing left for it but to appoint a committee of investigation. Alas! the evidence was overwhelming! It turned out that the dice and cards had been supplied by Lovell. The former, still on the table, were found on examination to be loaded. In fact, he had had a pair as a curiosity long in his possession, and had obtained others from a disreputable character at Oxford. No doubt remained of his guilt.

All this while Herbert had been too ill to be addressed on the subject; but symptoms of recovery were now beginning to appear; and as nobody was aware that he had any particular interest in the Lovell family, the affair was communicated to him. At first he refused to believe in his friend's guilt, and became violently irritated. His informants assured him they would be too happy to find they were mistaken, but that since the inquiry no hope of such an issue remained, and he sank into a gloomy silence.

On the following morning, when his servant came to his room door, he found it locked. When, at the desire of the surgeon, it was broken open, Herbert was found a corpse, and a discharged pistol lying beside him. An inquest sat upon the body, and the verdict brought in was *Temporary Insanity*. There never was one

more just.

Preparations were now made for the funeral – that funeral which we had witnessed; but before the day appointed for it arrived, another chapter of this sad story was unfolded.

When Charles left the barracks on that fatal night, instead of going home, he passed the dark hours in wandering wildly about the country; but when morning dawned, fearing the eye of man, he returned to the vicarage, and slunk unobserved to his chamber. When he did not appear at breakfast, his mother sought him in his room, where she found him in bed. He said he was very ill – and so indeed he was – and begged to be left alone; but as he was no better on the following day, she insisted on sending for medical advice. The doctor found him with all those physical symptoms that are apt to supervene from great anxiety of mind; and saying he could get no sleep, Charles requested to have some laudanum; but the physician was on his guard, for although the parties concerned wished to keep the thing private, some rumors had got abroad that awakened his caution.

The parents, meanwhile, had not the slightest anticipation of the thunderbolt that was about to fall upon them. They lived a very retired life, were acquainted with none of the officers – and they were even ignorant of the amount of their son's intimacy with the regiment. Thus, when news of Herbert's lamentable death reached them, the mother said to her son: "Charles, did you know a young man in the barracks called Herbert; a lieutenant, I believe? By-the-bye, I hope it's not Emily's Mr. Herbert."

"Did I know him," said Charles, turning suddenly towards her, for, under pretence that the light annoyed him, he always lay with his face to the wall. "Why do you ask, mother?"

"Because he's dead! He had a fever, and – "

"Herbert dead!" cried Charles, suddenly sitting up in the bed.

"Yes, he had a fever, and it is supposed he was delirious, for he blew out his brains; there is a report that he had been playing high, and lost a great deal of money. What's the matter, dear? Oh, Charles, I shouldn't have told you! I was not aware that you knew him!"

"Fetch my father here, and, mother, you come back with him!" said Charles, speaking with a strange sternness of tone, and wildly motioning her out of the room.

When the parents came, he bade them sit down beside him; and then, with a degree of remorse and anguish that no words could portray, he told them all; whilst they, with blanched cheeks and fainting hearts, listened to the dire confession.

"And here I am," he exclaimed, as he ended, "a cowardly scoundrel that has not dared to die! Oh, Herbert! happy, happy, Herbert! Would I were with you!"

At that moment the door opened, and a beautiful, bright, smiling, joyous face peeped in. It was Emily Lovell, the beloved daughter, the adored sister, arrived from London in compliance with a letter received a few days previously from Herbert, wherein he had told her that by the time she received it, he would be a captain. She had come to introduce him to her parents

as her affianced husband. She feared no refusal; well she knew how rejoiced they would be to see her the wife of so kind and honorable a man. But they were ignorant of all this, and in the fulness of their agony, the cup of woe ran over, and she drank of the draught! They told her all before she had been five minutes in the room. How else could they account for their tears, their confusion, their bewilderment, their despair!

Before Herbert's funeral took place, Emily Lovell was lying betwixt life and death in a brain fever. Under the influence of a feeling easily to be comprehended, thirsting for a self-imposed torture, that by its very poignancy should relieve the dead weight of wretchedness that lay upon his breast, Charles crept from his bed, and slipping on a loose coat that hung in his room, he stole across the garden to the tower, whence, through the arrow-slit, he witnessed the burial of his sister's lover, whom he had hastened to the grave.

Here terminates our sad story. We left T – on the following morning, and it was two or three years before any further intelligence of the Lovell family reached us. All we then heard was, that Charles had gone, a self-condemned exile, to Australia; and that Emily had insisted on accompanying him thither.

II.
The Serf of Pobereze

THE materials for the following tale were furnished to the writer while travelling last year near the spot on which the events it narrates took place. It is intended to convey a notion of some of the phases of Polish, or rather Russian serfdom (for, as truly explained by one of the characters in a succeeding page, it is Russian), and of the catastrophes it has occasioned, not only in Catherine's time, but occasionally at the present. The Polish nobles – themselves in slavery – earnestly desire the emancipation of their serfs, which Russian domination forbids.

The small town of Pobereze stands at the foot of a stony mountain, watered by numerous springs in the district of Podolia, in Poland. It consists of a mass of miserable cabins, with a Catholic chapel and two Greek churches in the midst, the latter distinguished by their gilded towers. On one side of the market-place stands the only inn, and on the opposite side are several shops, from whose doors and windows look out several dirtily-dressed Jews. At a little distance, on a hill covered with vines and fruit-trees, stands the Palace, which does not, perhaps, exactly merit such an appellation, but who would dare to call otherwise the dwelling of the lord of the domain?

On the morning when our tale opens, there had issued from

this palace the common enough command to the superintendent of the estate, to furnish the master with a couple of strong boys, for service in the stables, and a young girl, to be employed in the wardrobe. Accordingly, a number of the best-looking young peasants of Olgogrod assembled in the broad avenue leading to the palace. Some were accompanied by their sorrowful and weeping parents, in all of whose hearts, however, rose the faint and whispered hope, "Perhaps it will not be *my* child they will choose!"

Being brought into the court-yard of the palace, the Count Roszynski, with the several members of his family, had come out to pass in review his growing subjects. He was a small and insignificant-looking man, about fifty years of age, with deep-set eyes and overhanging brows. His wife, who was nearly of the same age, was immensely stout, with a vulgar face and a loud disagreeable voice. She made herself ridiculous in endeavoring to imitate the manners and bearing of the aristocracy, into whose sphere she and her husband were determined to force themselves, in spite of the humbleness of their origin. The father of the "Right Honorable" Count Roszynski was a valet, who, having been a great favorite with his master, amassed sufficient money to enable his son, who inherited it, to purchase the extensive estate of Olgogrod, and with it the sole proprietorship of 1,600 human beings. Over them he had complete control; and, when maddened by oppression, if they dared resent, woe unto them! They could be thrust into a noisome dungeon, and chained by one

hand from the light of day for years, until their very existence was forgotten by all except the jailer who brought daily their pitcher of water and morsel of dry bread.

Some of the old peasants say that Sava, father of the young peasant girl, who stands by the side of an old woman, at the head of her companions in the court-yard, is immured in one of these subterranean jails. Sava was always about the Count, who, it was said, had brought him from some distant land, with his little motherless child. Sava placed her under the care of an old man and woman, who had the charge of the bees in a forest near the palace, where he came occasionally to visit her. But once, six long months passed, and he did not come! In vain Anielka wept, in vain she cried, "Where is my father?" – No father appeared. At last it was said that Sava had been sent to a long distance with a large sum of money, and had been killed by robbers. In the ninth year of one's life the most poignant grief is quickly effaced, and after six months Anielka ceased to grieve. The old people were very kind to her, and loved her as if she were their own child. That Anielka might be chosen to serve in the palace never entered their head, for who would be so barbarous as to take the child away from an old woman of seventy and her aged husband?

To-day was the first time in her life that she had been so far from home. She looked curiously on all she saw, – particularly on a young lady about her own age, beautifully dressed, and a youth of eighteen, who had apparently just returned from a ride on horseback, as he held a whip in his hand, whilst walking up

and down and examining the boys who were placed in a row before him. He chose two amongst them, and the boys were led away to the stables.

"And I choose this young girl," said Constantia Roszynski, indicating Anielka; "she is the prettiest of them all. I do not like ugly faces about me."

When Constantia returned to the drawing-room, she gave orders for Anielka to be taken to her apartments, and placed under the tutelage of Mademoiselle Dufour, a French maid, recently arrived from the first milliner's shop in Odessa. Poor girl! when they separated her from her adopted mother, and began leading her towards the palace, she rushed, with a shriek of agony, from them, and grasped her old protectress tightly in her arms! They were torn violently asunder, and the Count Roszynski quietly asked, "Is it her daughter, or her grand-daughter?"

"Neither, my lord, – only an adopted child."

"But who will lead the old woman home, as she is blind?"

"I will, my lord," replied one of his servants, bowing to the ground; "I will let her walk by the side of my horse, and when she is in her cabin she will have her old husband, – they must take care of each other."

So saying, he moved away with the rest of the peasants and domestics. But the poor old woman had to be dragged along by two men; for in the midst of her shrieks and tears she had fallen to the ground, almost without life.

And Anielka? They did not allow her to weep long. She had

now to sit all day in the corner of a room to sew. She was expected to do everything well from the first; and if she did not, she was kept without food or cruelly punished. Morning and evening she had to help Mdlle. Dufour to dress and undress her mistress. But Constantia, although she looked with hauteur on everybody beneath her, and expected to be slavishly obeyed, was tolerably kind to her poor orphan. Her true torment began, when, on leaving her young lady's room, she had to assist Mdlle. Dufour. Notwithstanding that she tried sincerely to do her best, she was never able to satisfy her, or draw from her aught but harsh reproaches.

Thus two months passed.

One day Mdlle. Dufour went very early to confession, and Anielka was seized with an eager longing to gaze once more in peace and freedom on the beautiful blue sky and green trees, as she used to do when the first rays of the rising sun streamed in at the window of the little forest cabin. She ran into the garden. Enchanted by the sight of so many beautiful flowers, she went farther and farther along the smooth and winding walks, till she entered the forest. She who had been so long away from her beloved trees, roamed where they were thickest. Here she gazes boldly around. She sees no one! She is alone! A little further on she meets with a rivulet which flows through the forest. Here she remembers that she has not yet prayed. She kneels down, and with hands clasped and eyes upturned she begins to sing, in a sweet voice, the Hymn to the Virgin.

As she went on, she sang louder and with increased fervor. Her breast heaved with emotion, her eyes shone with unusual brilliancy; but when the hymn was finished she lowered her head, tears began to fall over her cheeks, until at last she sobbed aloud. She might have remained long in this condition, had not some one come behind her, saying, "Do not cry, my poor girl; it is better to sing than to weep." The intruder raised her head, wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, and kissed her on the forehead.

It was the Count's son, Leon!

"You must not cry," he continued; "be calm, and when the filipony (pedlars) come, buy yourself a pretty handkerchief." He then gave her a rouble and walked away. Anielka, after concealing the coin in her corset, ran quickly back to the palace.

Fortunately, Mdlle. Dufour had not yet returned, and Anielka seated herself in her accustomed corner. She often took out the rouble to gaze fondly upon it, and set to work to make a little purse, which, having fastened to a ribbon, she hung round her neck. She did not dream of spending it, for it would have deeply grieved her to part with the gift of the only person in the whole house who had looked kindly on her.

From that time Anielka remained always in her young mistress's room; she was better dressed, and Mdlle. Dufour ceased to persecute her. To what did she owe this sudden change? Perhaps to a remonstrance from Leon. Constantine ordered Anielka to sit beside her while taking her lessons from her music-masters, and on her going to the drawing-room, she was left in

her apartments alone. Being thus more kindly treated, Anielka lost by degrees her timidity; and when her young mistress, whilst occupied over some embroidery, would tell her to sing, she did so boldly and with a steady voice. A greater favor awaited her. Constantia, when unoccupied, began teaching Anielka to read in Polish; and Mdlle. Dufour thought it politic to follow the example of her mistress, and began to teach her French.

Meanwhile, a new kind of torment commenced. Having easily learnt the two languages, Anielka acquired an irresistible passion for reading. Books had for her the charm of the forbidden fruit, for she could only read by stealth at night, or when her mistress went visiting in the neighborhood. The kindness hitherto shown her, for a time, began to relax. Leon had set off on a tour, accompanied by his old tutor, and a bosom friend as young, as gay, and as thoughtless as himself.

So passed the two years of Leon's absence. When he returned, Anielka was seventeen, and had become tall and handsome. No one who had not seen her during the time, would have recognized her. Of this number was Leon. In the midst of perpetual gaiety and change it was not possible he could have remembered a poor peasant girl; but in Anielka's memory he had remained as a superior being, as her benefactor, as the only one who had spoken kindly to her, when poor, neglected, forlorn! When in some French romance she met with a young man of twenty, of a noble character and handsome appearance, she bestowed on him the name of Leon. The recollection of the kiss he had given her,

ever brought a burning blush to her cheek, and made her sigh deeply.

One day Leon came to his sister's room. Anielka was there, seated in a corner at work. Leon himself had considerably changed; from a boy he had grown into a man. "I suppose Constantia," he said, "you have been told what a good boy I am, and with what docility I shall submit myself to the matrimonial yoke, which the Count and Countess have provided for me?" and he began whistling, and danced some steps of the Mazurka.

"Perhaps you will be refused," said Constantia, coldly.

"Refused! Oh, no. The old Prince has already given his consent, and as for his daughter she is desperately in love with me. Look at these moustachios, could anything be more irresistible?" and he glanced in the glass and twirled them round his fingers; then continuing in a graver tone, he said, "To tell the sober truth, I cannot say that I reciprocate. My intended is not at all to my taste. She is nearly thirty, and so thin that whenever I look at her, I am reminded of my old tutor's anatomical sketches. But thanks to her Parisian dress-maker, she makes up a tolerably good figure, and looks well in a Cachemere. Of all things, you know, I wished for a wife of an imposing appearance, and I don't care about love. I find it's not fashionable, and only exists in the exalted imagination of poets."

"Surely people are in love with one another sometimes," said the sister.

"Sometimes," repeated Anielka, inaudibly. The dialogue had

painfully affected her, and she knew not why. Her heart beat quickly, and her face was flushed, and made her look more lovely than ever.

"Perhaps. Of course we profess to adore every pretty woman," Leon added abruptly. "But, my dear sister, what a charming ladies' maid you have!" He approached the corner where Anielka sat, and bent on her a coarse familiar smile. Anielka, although a serf, was displeased, and returned it with a glance full of dignity. But when her eyes rested on the youth's handsome face, a feeling, which had been gradually and silently growing in her young and inexperienced heart, predominated over her pride and displeasure. She wished ardently to recall herself to Leon's memory, and half unconsciously raised her hand to the little purse which always hung round her neck. She took from it the rouble he had given her.

"See!" shouted Leon, "what a droll girl; how proud she is of her riches! Why, girl, you are a woman of fortune, mistress of a whole rouble!"

"I hope she came by it honestly," said the old Countess, who at this moment entered.

At this insinuation, shame and indignation kept Anielka, for a time, silent. She replaced the money quickly in its purse, with the bitter thought that the few happy moments which had been so indelibly stamped upon her memory, had been utterly forgotten by Leon. To clear herself, she at last stammered out, seeing they all looked at her inquiringly, "Do you not remember, M. Leon,

that you gave me this coin two years ago in the garden?"

"How odd?" exclaimed Leon, laughing, "do you expect me to remember all the pretty girls to whom I have given money? But I suppose you are right, or you would not have treasured up this unfortunate rouble as if it were a holy relic. You should not be a miser, child; money is made to be spent."

"Pray, put an end to these jokes," said Constantia impatiently; "I like this girl, and I will not have her teased. She understands my ways better than any one, and often puts me in good humor with her beautiful voice."

"Sing something for me, pretty damsel," said Leon, "and I will give you another rouble, a new and shining one."

"Sing instantly," said Constantia imperiously.

At this command Anielka could no longer stifle her grief; she covered her face with her hands, and wept violently.

"Why do you cry?" asked her mistress impatiently; "I cannot bear it; I desire you to do as you are bid."

It might have been from the constant habit of slavish obedience, or a strong feeling of pride, but Anielka instantly ceased weeping. There was a moment's pause, during which the old Countess went grumbling out of the room. Anielka chose the Hymn to the Virgin she had warbled in the garden, and as she sung, she prayed fervently; – she prayed for peace, for deliverance from the acute emotions which had been aroused within her. Her earnestness gave an intensity of expression to the melody, which affected her listeners. They were silent for

some moments after its conclusion. Leon walked up and down with his arms folded on his breast. Was it agitated with pity for the accomplished young slave? or by any other tender emotion? What followed will show.

"My dear Constantia," he said, suddenly stopping before his sister and kissing her hand, "will you do me a favor?"

Constantia looked inquiringly in her brother's face without speaking.

"Give me this girl."

"Impossible!"

"I am quite in earnest," continued Leon, "I wish to offer her to my future wife. In the Prince her father's private chapel they are much in want of a solo soprano."

"I shall not give her to you," said Constantia.

"Not as a free gift, but in exchange. I will give you instead a charming young negro – so black. The women in St. Petersburg and in Paris raved about him: but I was inexorable; I half-refused him to my princess."

"No, no," replied Constantia; "I shall be lonely without this girl, I am so used to her."

"Nonsense! you can get peasant girls by the dozen; but a black page, with teeth whiter than ivory, and purer than pearls; a perfect original in his way; you surely cannot withstand. You will kill half the province with envy. A negro servant is the most fashionable thing going, and yours will be the first imported into the province."

This argument was irresistible. “Well,” replied Constantia, “when do you think of taking her?”

“Immediately; to-day at five o’clock,” said Leon; and he went merrily out of the room. This then was the result of his cogitation – of Anielka’s Hymn to the Virgin. Constantia ordered Anielka to prepare herself for the journey, with as little emotion as if she had exchanged away a lap-dog, or parted with a parrot.

She obeyed in silence. Her heart was full. She went into the garden that she might relieve herself by weeping unseen. With one hand supporting her burning head, and the other pressed tightly against her heart, to stifle her sobs, she wandered on mechanically till she found herself by the side of the river. She felt quickly for her purse, intending to throw the rouble into the water, but as quickly thrust it back again, for she could not bear to part with the treasure. She felt as if without it she would be still more an orphan. Weeping bitterly, she leaned against the tree which had once before witnessed her tears.

By degrees the stormy passion within her gave place to calm reflection. This day she was to go away; she was to dwell beneath another roof, to serve another mistress. Humiliation! always humiliation! But at least it would be some change in her life. As she thought of this, she returned hastily to the palace that she might not, on the last day of her servitude, incur the anger of her young mistress.

Scarcely was Anielka attired in her prettiest dress, when Constantia came to her with a little box, from which she took

several gay-colored ribbons, and decked her in them herself, that the serf might do her credit in the new family. And when Anielka, bending down to her feet thanked her, Constantia, with marvellous condescension, kissed her on her forehead. Even Leon cast an admiring glance upon her. His servant soon after came to conduct her to the carriage, and showing her where to seat herself, they rolled off quickly towards Radapol.

For the first time in her life Anielka rode in a carriage. Her head turned quite giddy, she could not look at the trees and fields as they flew past her; but by degrees she became more accustomed to it, and the fresh air enlivening her spirits, she performed the rest of the journey in a tolerably happy state of mind. At last they arrived in the spacious court-yard before the Palace of Radapol, the dwelling of a once rich and powerful Polish family, now partly in ruin. It was evident, even to Anielka, that the marriage was one for money on the one side, and for rank on the other.

Among other renovations at the castle, occasioned by the approaching marriage, the owner of it, Prince Pelazia, had obtained singers for the chapel, and had engaged Signor Justiniani, an Italian, as chapel-master. Immediately on Leon's arrival, Anielka was presented to him. He made her sing a scale, and pronounced her voice to be excellent.

Anielka found that, in Radapol, she was treated with a little more consideration than at Olgogrod, although she had often to submit to the caprices of her new mistress, and she found less

time to read. But to console herself, she gave all her attention to singing, which she practiced several hours a day. Her naturally great capacity, under the guidance of the Italian, began to develop itself steadily. Besides sacred, he taught her operatic music. On one occasion Anielka sung an aria in so impassioned and masterly a style, that the enraptured Justiniani clapped his hands for joy, skipped about the room, and not finding words enough to praise her, exclaimed several times, "Prima Donna! Prima Donna!"

But the lessons were interrupted. The Princess's wedding-day was fixed upon, after which event she and Leon were to go to Florence, and Anielka was to accompany them. Alas! feelings which gave her poignant misery still clung to her. She despised herself for her weakness; but she loved Leon. The sentiment was too deeply implanted in her bosom to be eradicated; too strong to be resisted. It was the first love of a young and guileless heart, and had grown in silence and despair.

Anielka was most anxious to know something of her adopted parents. Once, after the old prince had heard her singing, he asked her with great kindness about her home. She replied, that she was an orphan, and had been taken by force from those who had so kindly supplied the place of parents. Her apparent attachment to the old bee-keeper and his wife so pleased the prince, that he said, "You are a good child, Anielka, and to-morrow I will send you to visit them. You shall take them some presents."

Anielka, overpowered with gratitude, threw herself at the feet of the prince. She dreamed all night of the happiness that was in store for her, and the joy of the poor, forsaken, old people; and when the next morning she set off, she could scarcely restrain her impatience. At last they approached the cabin; she saw the forest, with its tall trees, and the meadows covered with flowers. She leaped from the carriage, that she might be nearer these trees and flowers, every one of which she seemed to recognize. The weather was beautiful. She breathed with avidity the pure air which, in imagination, brought to her the kisses and caresses of her poor father! Her foster-father was, doubtless, occupied with his bees; but his wife?

Anielka opened the door of the cabin; all was silent and deserted. The arm-chair on which the poor old woman used to sit, was overturned in a corner. Anielka was chilled by a fearful presentiment. She went with a slow step towards the bee-hives; there she saw a little boy tending the bees, whilst the old man was stretched on the ground beside him. The rays of the sun, falling on his pale and sickly face, showed that he was very ill. Anielka stooped down over him, and said, "It is I, it is Anielka, your own Anielka, who always loves you."

The old man raised his head, gazed upon her with a ghastly smile, and took off his cap.

"And my good old mother, where is she?" Anielka asked.

"She is dead!" answered the old man, and falling back he began laughing idiotically. Anielka wept. She gazed earnestly on

the worn frame, the pale and wrinkled cheeks, in which scarcely a sign of life could be perceived; it seemed to her that he had suddenly fallen asleep, and not wishing to disturb him, she went to the carriage for the presents. When she returned, she took his hand. It was cold. The poor old bee-keeper had breathed his last!

Anielka was carried almost senseless back to the carriage, which quickly returned with her to the castle. There she revived a little; but the recollection that she was now quite alone in the world, almost drove her to despair.

Her master's wedding and the journey to Florence were a dream to her. Though the strange sights of a strange city slowly restored her perceptions, they did not her cheerfulness. She felt as if she could no longer endure the misery of her life; she prayed to die.

"Why are you so unhappy?" said the Count Leon kindly to her, one day.

To have explained the cause of her wretchedness would have been death indeed.

"I am going to give you a treat," continued Leon. "A celebrated singer is to appear to-night in the theatre. I will send you to hear her, and afterwards you shall sing to me what you remember of her performances."

Anielka went. It was a new era in her existence. Herself, by this time, an artist, she could forget her griefs, and enter with her whole soul into the beauties of the art she now heard practised in perfection for the first time. To music a chord responded in

her breast which vibrated powerfully. During the performances she was at one moment pale and trembling, tears rushing into her eyes, at another, she was ready to throw herself at the feet of the cantatrice, in an ecstasy of admiration. "Prima donna," – by that name the public called on her to receive their applause, and it was the same, thought Anielka, that Justiniani had bestowed upon her. Could *she* also be a prima donna? What a glorious destiny! To be able to communicate one's own emotions to masses of entranced listeners; to awaken in them, by the power of the voice, grief, love, terror.

Strange thoughts continued to haunt her on her return home. She was unable to sleep. She formed desperate plans. At last she resolved to throw off the yoke of servitude, and the still more painful slavery of feelings which her pride disdained. Having learnt the address of the prima donna, she went early one morning to her house.

On entering she said, in French, almost incoherently, so great was her agitation – "Madam, I am a poor serf belonging to a Polish family who have lately arrived in Florence. I have escaped from them; protect, shelter me. They say I can sing."

The Signora Teresina, a warm-hearted, passionate Italian, was interested by her artless earnestness. She said, "Poor child! you must have suffered much," – she took Anielka's hand in hers. "You say you can sing; let me hear you." Anielka seated herself on an ottoman. She clasped her hands over knees, and tears fell into her lap. With plaintive pathos, and perfect truth of

intonation, she prayed in song. The Hymn to the Virgin seemed to Teresina to be offered up by inspiration.

The Signora was astonished. "Where," she asked, in wonder, "were you taught?"

Anielka narrated her history, and when she had finished, the prima donna spoke so kindly to her that she felt as if she had known her for years. Anielka was Teresina's guest that day and the next. After the opera, on the third day, the prima donna made her sit beside her, and said: —

"I think you are a very good girl, and you shall stay with me always."

The girl was almost beside herself with joy.

"We will never part. Do you consent, Anielka?"

"Do not call me Anielka. Give me instead some Italian name."

"Well, then, be Giovanna. The dearest friend I ever had – but whom I have lost – was named Giovanna," said the prima donna.

"Then, I will be another Giovanna to you."

Teresina then said, "I hesitated to receive you at first, for your sake as well as mine; but you are safe now. I learn that your master and mistress, after searching vainly for you, have returned to Poland."

From this time Anielka commenced an entirely new life. She took lessons in singing every day from the Signora, and got an engagement to appear in inferior characters at the theatre. She had now her own income, and her own servant – she, who had till then been obliged to serve herself. She acquired the Italian

language rapidly, and soon passed for a native of the country.

So passed three years. New and varied impressions failed, however, to blot out the old ones. Anielka arrived at great perfection in her singing, and even began to surpass the prima donna, who was losing her voice from weakness of the chest. This sad discovery changed the cheerful temper of Teresina. She ceased to sing in public; for she could not endure to excite pity where she had formerly commanded admiration.

She determined to retire. "You," she said to Anielka, "shall now assert your claim to the first rank in the vocal art. You will maintain it. You surpass me. Often, on hearing you sing, I have scarcely been able to stifle a feeling of jealousy."

Anielka placed her hand on Teresina's shoulder, and kissed her.

"Yes," continued Teresina, regardless of everything but the bright future she was shaping for her friend. "We will go to Vienna – there you will be understood and appreciated. You shall sing at the Italian Opera, and I will be by your side – unknown, no longer sought, worshipped – but will glory in your triumphs. They will be a repetition of my own; for have I not taught you? Will they not be the result of my work?"

Though Anielka's ambition was fired, her heart was softened, and she wept violently.

Five months had scarcely elapsed when a *furore* was created in Vienna by the first appearance, at the Italian Opera, of the Signora Giovanna. Her enormous salary at once afforded her the

means of even extravagant expenditure. Her haughty treatment of male admirers only attracted new ones; but in the midst of her triumphs, she thought often of the time when the poor orphan of Pobereze was cared for by nobody. This remembrance made her receive the flatteries of the crowd with an ironical smile; their fine speeches fell coldly on her ear, their eloquent looks made no impression on her heart: *that*, no change could alter, no temptation win.

In the flood of unexpected success a new misfortune overwhelmed her. Since their arrival at Vienna, Teresina's health rapidly declined, and in the sixth month of Anielka's operatic reign she expired, leaving all her wealth, which was considerable, to her friend.

Once more Anielka was alone in the world. Despite all the honors and blandishments of her position, the old feeling of desolateness came upon her. The new shock destroyed her health. She was unable to appear on the stage. To sing was a painful effort; she grew indifferent to what passed around her. Her greatest consolation was in succoring the poor and friendless, and her generosity was most conspicuous to all young orphan girls without fortune. She had never ceased to love her native land, and seldom appeared in society, unless it was to meet her countrymen. If ever she sang, it was in Polish.

A year had elapsed since the death of the Signora Teresina when the Count Selka, a rich noble of Volkynia, at that time in Vienna, solicited her presence at a party. It was impossible

to refuse the Count and his lady, from whom she had received great kindness. She went. When in their saloons, filled with all the fashion and aristocracy in Vienna, the name of Giovanna was announced, a general murmur was heard. She entered, pale and languid, and proceeded between the two rows made for her by the admiring assembly, to the seat of honor, beside the mistress of the house.

Shortly after, the Count Selka led her to the piano. She sat down before it, and thinking what she should sing, glanced round upon the assembly. She could not help feeling that the admiration which beamed from the faces around her was the work of her own merit, for had she neglected the great gift of nature, her voice, she could not have excited it. With a blushing cheek, and eyes sparkling with honest pride, she struck the piano with a firm hand, and from her seemingly weak and delicate chest poured forth a touching Polish melody, with a voice pure, sonorous, and plaintive. Tears were in many eyes, and the beating of every heart was quickened.

The song was finished, but the wondering silence was unbroken. Giovanna leaned exhausted on the arm of the chair, and cast down her eyes. On again raising them, she perceived a gentleman who gazed fixedly at her, as if he still listened to echoes which had not yet died within him. The master of the house, to dissipate his thoughtlessness, led him towards Giovanna. “Let me present to you, Signora,” he said, “a countryman, the Count Leon Roszynski.”

The lady trembled; she silently bowed, fixed her eyes on the ground, and dared not raise them. Pleading indisposition, which was fully justified by her pallid features, she soon after withdrew.

When, on the following day, Giovanna's servant announced the Counts Selka and Roszynski, a peculiar smile played on her lips; and when they entered, she received the latter with the cold and formal politeness of a stranger. Controlling the feelings of her heart, she schooled her features to an expression of indifference. It was manifest from Leon's manner, that without the remotest recognition, an indefinable presentiment regarding her possessed him. The Counts had called to know if Giovanna had recovered from her indisposition. Leon begged to be permitted to call again.

Where was his wife? why did he never mention her? Giovanna continually asked herself these questions when they had departed.

A few nights after, the Count Leon arrived, sad and thoughtful. He prevailed on Giovanna to sing one of her Polish melodies, which she told him she had been taught, when a child, by her nurse. Roszynski, unable to restrain the expression of an intense admiration he had long felt, frantically seized her hand, and exclaimed, "I love you!"

She withdrew it from his grasp, remained silent for a few minutes, and then said slowly, distinctly, and ironically, "But I do not love *you*, Count Roszynski."

Leon rose from his seat. He pressed his hands to his brow, and

was silent. Giovanna remained calm and tranquil. “It is a penalty from Heaven,” continued Leon, as if speaking to himself, “for not having fulfilled my duty as a husband towards one whom I chose voluntarily, but without reflection. I wronged her, and am punished.”

Giovanna turned her eyes upon him. Leon continued, “Young, and with a heart untouched, I married a princess about ten years older than myself, of eccentric habits and bad temper. She treated me as an inferior. She dissipated the fortune hoarded up with so much care by my parents, and yet was ashamed, on account of my origin, to be called by my name. Happily for me, she was fond of visiting and amusements. Otherwise, to escape from her, I might have become a gambler, or worse; but to avoid meeting her, I remained at home – for there she seldom was. At first from ennui, but afterwards from real delight in the occupation, I gave myself up to study. Reading formed my mind and heart. I became a changed being. Some months ago my father died, my sister went to Lithuania, whilst my mother, in her old age, and with her ideas, was quite incapable of understanding my sorrow. So when my wife went to the baths for the benefit of her ruined health, I came here in the hope of meeting with some of my former friends – I saw you – ”

Giovanna blushed like one detected; but speedily recovering herself, asked, with calm pleasantry, “Surely you do not number *me* among your former friends?”

“I know not. I have been bewildered. It is strange; but from

the moment I saw you at Count Selka's, a powerful instinct of love overcame me; not a new feeling; but as if some latent, long-hid, undeveloped sentiment had suddenly burst forth into an uncontrollable passion. I love, I adore you. I – "

The Prima Donna interrupted him – not with speech, but with a look which awed, which chilled him. Pride, scorn, irony sat in her smile. Satire darted from her eyes. After a pause she repeated slowly and pointedly, "Love *me*, Count Roszynski?"

"Such is my destiny," he replied. "Nor, despite your scorn, will I struggle against it. I feel it is my fate ever to love you; I fear it is my fate never to be loved by you. It is dreadful."

Giovanna witnessed the Count's emotion with sadness. "To have," she said mournfully, "one's first, pure, ardent, passionate affection unrequited, scorned, made a jest of, is indeed a bitterness, almost equal to that of death."

She made a strong effort to conceal her emotion. Indeed she controlled it so well as to speak the rest with a sort of gaiety.

"You have at least been candid, Count Roszynski; I will imitate you by telling a little history that occurred in your country. There was a poor girl born and bred a serf to her wealthy lord and master. When scarcely fifteen years old, she was torn from a state of happy rustic freedom – the freedom of humility and content – to be one of the courtly slaves of the Palace. Those who did not laugh at her, scolded her. One kind word was vouchsafed to her, and that came from the lord's son. She nursed it and treasured it; till, from long concealing and restraining

her feelings, she at last found that gratitude had changed into a sincere affection. But what does a man of the world care for the love of a serf? It does not even flatter his vanity. The young nobleman did not understand the source of her tears and her grief, and he made a present of her, as he would have done of some animal, to his betrothed."

Leon, agitated and somewhat enlightened, would have interrupted her; but Giovanna said, "Allow me to finish my tale. Providence did not abandon this poor orphan, but permitted her to rise to distinction by the talent with which she was endowed by nature. The wretched serf of Pobereze became a celebrated Italian cantatrice. *Then* her former lord meeting her in society, and seeing her admired and courted by all the world, without knowing who she really was, was afflicted, as if by the dictates of Heaven, with a love for this same girl, – with a guilty love" —

And Giovanna rose, as she said this, to remove herself further from her admirer.

"No, no!" he replied earnestly; "with a pure and holy passion."

"Impossible!" returned Giovanna. "Are you not married?"

Roszynski vehemently tore a letter from his vest, and handed it to Giovanna. It was sealed with black, for it announced the death of his wife at the baths. It had only arrived that morning.

"You have lost no time," said the cantatrice, endeavoring to conceal her feelings under an iron mask of reproach.

There was a pause. Each dared not speak. The Count knew – but without actually and practically believing what seemed

incredible – that Anielka and Giovanna were the same person —*his slave*. That terrible relationship checked him. Anielka, too, had played her part to the end of endurance. The long-cherished tenderness – the faithful love of her life, could not longer be wholly mastered. Hitherto they had spoken in Italian. She now said in Polish,

"You have a right, my Lord Roszynski, to that poor Anielka who escaped from the service of your wife in Florence; you can force her back to your palace, to its meanest work, but" —

"Have mercy on me!" cried Leon.

"But," continued the serf of Pobereze, firmly, "you cannot force me to love you."

"Do not mock – do not torture me more; you are sufficiently revenged. I will not offend you by importunity. You must indeed hate me! But remember that we Poles wished to give freedom to our serfs; and for that very reason our country was invaded and dismembered by despotic powers. We must therefore continue to suffer slavery as it exists in Russia; but, soul and body, we are averse to it; and when our country once more becomes free, be assured no shadow of slavery will remain in the land. Curse then our enemies, and pity us that we stand in such a desperate position between Russian bayonets and Siberia, and the hatred of our serfs."

So saying, and without waiting for a reply, Leon rushed from the room. The door was closed. Giovanna listened to the sounds of his rapid footsteps till they died in the street. She would have

followed, but dared not. She ran to the window. Roszynski's carriage was rolling rapidly away, and she exclaimed vainly, "I love you, Leon; I loved you always!"

Her tortures were unendurable. To relieve them she hastened to her desk, and wrote these words: —

"Dearest Leon, forgive me; let the past be forever forgotten. Return to your Anielka. She always has been, ever will be yours."

She despatched the missive. Was it too late? or would it bring him back? In the latter hope she retired to her chamber, to execute a little project.

Leon was in despair. He saw he had been premature in so soon declaring his passion after the news of his wife's death, and vowed he would not see Anielka again for several months. To calm his agitation, he had ridden some miles into the country. When he returned to his hotel after some hours, he found her note. With the wild delight it had darted into his soul, he flew back to her.

On regaining her saloon a new and terrible vicissitude seemed to sport with his passion: – she was nowhere to be seen. Had the Italian cantatrice fled? Again he was in despair; stupefied with disappointment. As he stood uncertain how to act in the midst of the floor, he heard, as from a distance, an Ave Maria poured forth in tones he half-recognized. The sounds brought back to him a host of recollections; a weeping serf, the garden of his own palace. In a state of new rapture he followed the voice. He traced it to an inner chamber, and he there beheld the lovely

singer kneeling in the costume of a Polish serf. She rose, greeted Leon with a touching smile, and stepped forward with serious bashfulness. Leon extended his arms; she sank into them; and in that fond embrace all past wrongs and sorrows were forgotten! Anielka drew from her bosom a little purse, and took from it a piece of silver. It was the rouble. *Now*, Leon did not smile at it. He comprehended the sacredness of this little gift; and some tears of repentance fell upon Anielka's hand.

A few months after, Leon wrote to the steward of Olgogrod to prepare everything splendidly for the reception of his second wife. He concluded his letter with these words: – "I understand that in the dungeon beneath my palace there are some unfortunate men, who were imprisoned during my father's lifetime. Let them be instantly liberated. This is my first act of gratitude to God, who has so infinitely blessed me!"

Anielka longed ardently to behold her native land. They left Vienna immediately after the wedding, although it was in the middle of January.

It was already quite dark when the carriage, with its four horses, stopped in front of the portico of the palace of Olgogrod. Whilst the footman was opening the door on one side, a beggar soliciting alms appeared at the other, where Anielka was seated. Happy to perform a good action, as she crossed the threshold of her new home, she gave him some money; but the man, instead of thanking her, returned her bounty with a savage laugh, at the same time scowling at her in the fiercest manner from beneath

his thick and shaggy brows. The strangeness of this circumstance sensibly affected Anielka, and clouded her happiness. Leon soothed and re-assured her. In the arms of her beloved husband, she forgot all but the happiness of being the idol of his affections.

Fatigue and excitement made the night most welcome. All was dark and silent around the palace, and some hours of the night had passed, when suddenly flames burst forth from several parts of the building at once. The palace was enveloped in fire; it raged furiously. The flames mounted higher and higher; the windows cracked with a fearful sound, and the smoke penetrated into the most remote apartments.

A single figure of a man was seen stealing over the snow, which lay like a winding-sheet on the solitary waste; his cautious steps were heard on the frozen snow as it crisped beneath his tread. It was the beggar who had accosted Anielka. On a rising ground, he turned to gaze on the terrible scene. "No more unfortunate wretches will now be doomed to pass their lives in your dungeons," he exclaimed. "What was *my* crime? Reminding my master of the lowness of his birth. For this they tore me from my only child – my darling little Anielka; they had no pity even for her orphan state; let them perish all!"

Suddenly a young and beautiful creature rushes wildly to one of the principal windows: she makes a violent effort to escape. For a moment her lovely form, clothed in white, shines in terrible relief against the background of blazing curtains and walls of fire, and as instantly sinks back into the blazing element. Behind

her is another figure, vainly endeavoring to aid her, – he perishes also; neither are ever seen again!

This appalling tragedy horrified even the perpetrator of the crime. He rushed from the place; and as he heard the crash of the falling walls, he closed his ears with his hands, and darted on faster and faster.

The next day some peasants discovered the body of a man frozen to death, lying on a heap of snow, – it was that of the wretched incendiary. Providence, mindful of his long, of his cruel imprisonment and sufferings, spared him the anguish of knowing that the mistress of the palace he had destroyed, and who perished in the flames, was his own beloved daughter – the Serf of Pobereze!

III.
My Wonderful Adventures in Skitzland

I AM fond of Gardening. I like to dig. If among the operations of the garden any need for such a work can be at any time discovered or invented, I like to dig a hole.

On the 3d of March, 1849, I began a hole behind the kitchen wall, whereinto it was originally intended to transplant a plum tree. The exercise was so much to my taste, that a strange humor impelled me to dig on. A fascination held me to the task. I neglected my business. I disappeared from the earth's surface. A boy who worked a basket by means of a rope and pulley, aided me; so aided, I confined my whole attention to spade labor. The centripetal force seemed to have made me its especial victim. I dug on until Autumn. In the beginning of November I observed that, upon percussion, the sound given by the floor of my pit was resonant. I did not intermit my labor, urged as I was by a mysterious instinct downwards. On applying my ear, I occasionally heard a subdued sort of rattle, which caused me to form a theory that the centre of the earth might be composed of mucus. In November, the ground broke beneath me into a hollow, and I fell a considerable distance. I alighted on the box-seat of a four-horse coach, which happened to be running at

that time immediately underneath. The coachman took no notice whatever of my sudden arrival by his side. He was so completely muffled up, that I could observe only the skilful way in which he manipulated reins and whip. The horses were yellow. I had seen no more than this, when the guard's horn blew, and presently we pulled up at an inn. A waiter came out, and appeared to collect four bags from the passengers inside the coach. He then came round to me.

"Dine here, Sir?"

"Yes, certainly," said I. I like to dine – not the sole point of resemblance between myself and the great Johnson.

"Trouble you for your stomach, Sir."

While the waiter was looking up with a polite stare into my puzzled face, my neighbor, the coachman, put one hand within his outer coat, as if to feel for money in his waistcoat pocket. Directly afterwards his fingers came again to light, and pulled forth an enormous sack. Notwithstanding that it was abnormally enlarged, I knew by observation of its form and texture that this was a stomach, with the œsophagus attached. This, then, the waiter caught as it was thrown down to him, and hung it carelessly over his arm, together with the four smaller bags (which I now knew to be also stomachs) collected from the passengers within the coach. I started up, and as I happened to look round, observed a skeleton face upon the shoulders of a gentleman who sat immediately behind my back. My own features were noticed at the same time by the guard, who now came forward touching

his hat.

"Beg your pardon, Sir, but you've been and done it."

"Done what?"

"Why, Sir, you should have booked your place, and not come up in this clandestine way. However, you've been and done it!"

"My good man, what have I done?"

"Why, Sir, the Baron Terroro's eyes had the box seat, and I strongly suspect you've been and sat upon them."

I looked involuntarily to see whether I had been sitting upon anything except the simple cushion. Truly enough, there was an eye, which I had crushed and flattened.

"Only one," I said.

"Worse for you, and better for him. The other eye had time to escape, and it will know you again, that's certain. Well, it's no business of mine. Of course you've no appetite now for dinner? Better pay your fare, Sir. To the Green Hippopotamus and Spectacles, where we put up, it's ten-and-six."

"Is there room inside?" I inquired. It was advisable to shrink from observation.

"Yes, Sir. The inside passengers are mostly skeleton. There's room for three, Sir. Inside, one-pound-one."

I paid the money, and became an inside passenger.

Professor Essig's Lectures on Anatomy had so fortified me, that I did not shrink from entering the Skitzton coach. It contained living limbs, loose or attached to skeletons in other respects bare, except that they were clothed with broadcloth

garments, cut after the English fashion. One passenger only had a complete face of flesh, he had also one living hand; the other hand I guessed was bony, because it was concealed in a glove obviously padded. By observing the fit of his clothes, I came to a conclusion that this gentleman was stuffed throughout; that all his limbs, except the head and hand, were artificial. Two pair of Legs, in woollen stockings, and a pair of Ears, were in a corner of the coach, and in another corner there were nineteen or twenty Scalps.

I thought it well to look astonished at nothing, and, having pointed in a careless manner to the scalps, asked what might be their destination? The person with the Face and Hand replied to me; and although evidently himself a gentleman, he addressed me with a tone of unconcealed respect.

"They are going to Skitzton, Sir, to the hairdresser's."

"Yes, to be sure," I said. "They are to make Natural Skin Wigs. I might have known."

"I beg your pardon, Sir. There is a ball to-morrow night at Culmsey. But the gentry do not like to employ village barbers, and therefore many of the better class of people send their hair to Skitzton, and receive it back by the return coach properly cut and curled."

"Oh," said I. "Ah! Oh, indeed!"

"Dinners, gentlemen!" said a voice at the window, and the waiter handed in four stomachs, now tolerably well filled. Each passenger received his property, and pulling open his chest with

as much composure as if he were unbuttoning his waistcoat, restored his stomach, with a dinner in it, to the right position. Then the reckonings were paid, and the coach started.

I thought of my garden, and much wished that somebody could throw Professor Essig down the hole that I had dug. A few things were to be met with in Skitzland which would rather puzzle him. They puzzled me; but I took refuge in silence, and so fortified, protected my ignorance from an exposure.

"You are going to court, Sir, I presume?" said my Face and Hand friend, after a short pause. His was the only mouth in the coach, excepting mine, so that he was the only passenger able to enter into conversation.

"My dear Sir," I replied, "let me be frank with you. I have arrived here unexpectedly out of another world. Of the manners and customs, nay, of the very nature of the people who inhabit this country, I know nothing. For any information you can give me, I shall be very grateful."

My friend smiled incredulity, and said,

"Whatever you are pleased to profess, I will believe. What you are pleased to feign a wish for, I am proud to furnish. In Skitzland, the inhabitants, until they come of age, retain that illustrious appearance which you have been so fortunate as never to have lost. During the night of his twenty-first birthday, each Skitzlander loses the limbs which up to that period have received from him no care, no education. Of those neglected parts the skeletons alone remain, but all those organs which he

has employed sufficiently continue unimpaired. I, for example, devoted to the study of the law, forgot all occupation but to think, to use my senses, and to write. I rarely used my legs, and therefore Nature has deprived me of them."

"But," I observed, "it seems that in Skitzland you are able to take yourselves to pieces."

"No one has that power more largely than yourself. What organs we have we can detach on any service. When dispersed, a simple force of Nature directs all corresponding members whither to fly that they may re-assemble."

"If they can fly," I asked, "why are they sent in coaches? There were a pair of eyes on the box-seat."

"Simply for safety against accidents. Eyes flying alone are likely to be seized by birds, and incur many dangers. They are sent, therefore, usually under protection, like any other valuable parcel."

"Do many accidents occur?"

"Very few. For mutual protection, and also because a single member is often all that has been left existing of a fellow Skitzlander, our laws, as you, Sir, know much better than myself, estimate the destruction of any part absent on duty from its skeleton as a crime equivalent to murder – "

After this I held my tongue. Presently my friend again inquired whether I was going up to Court?

"Why should I go to Court?"

"Oh, Sir, it pleases you to be facetious. You must be aware

that any Skitzlander who has been left by Nature in possession of every limb, sits in the Assembly of the Perfect, or the Upper House, and receives many State emoluments and dignities."

"Are there many members of that Upper Assembly?"

"Sir, there were forty-two. But if you are now travelling to claim your seat, the number will be raised to forty-three."

"The Baron Terroro – " I hinted.

"My brother, Sir. His eyes are on the box-seat under my care. Undoubtedly he is a Member of the Upper House."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.