

The Storyteller.

THE TREASURE.

1
A YOUNG girl and an old man were sitting in a very humble garret, very meanly furnished, but so neatly kept as to show that poverty had not brought despair. Order, neatness, and good taste gave a sort of elegance to the poor apartment, everything was in its place, and in the perfection of cleanliness, while the white muslin curtains had been so often darned as to give the effect of embroidery. Some pots of common flowers were arranged before the open window, and their sweet scent pervaded the room.

The setting sun lighted up the room, touched the sweet face of the girl, and played in the white locks of the old man, who was leaning back in his armchair of cane, which a kind hand had furnished with cushions stuffed with tow, and covered with cotton patchwork. An old stove, transformed into a footstool, supported the mutilated feet, and his only remaining arm leaned on a little round table, where reposed his meerschaum pipe and tobacco pouch, worked with colored beads. The old soldier had a hard and wrinkled face, too frank and open to look severe. A grey moustache partly hid the smile which half opened his lips as he looked at the young girl. She was about 20 years old, and had one of those expressive countenances which, like clear water, show all that is contained in the depth below. She was reading the paper to the old man, when suddenly she stopped and listened.

"What is it?" asked the old man.

"Nothing," answered the girl, looking disappointed.

"You thought you heard Charles," said the soldier.

"Yes," she answered, blushing a little; "it is time for his day's work to be done, and for him to come home."

"When he does come home," interrupted Vincent, in a tone full of sorrow.

Susan was opening her lips to defend her cousin, but her judgment must have given her a check, for she stopped in embarrassment and fell into a fit of thinking.

The invalid passed his hand over his moustache, and began to twist it, as he always did when he was vexed.

"Our conscript is marching the wrong way," he said at last. "he leaves his work to go to feasts and public houses, and all that will have a bad end for him and for us."

"Don't say that, my dear uncle, you will bring him bad luck. It is but a bad moment with him; he will get over it, I hope. He has had some notions in his head lately, he has had no heart to work."

"Why is that?"

"Because he says there is nothing to look forward to: all the efforts of a workman are useless for the future, and so he thinks he may as well get on from day to day without care or forethought."

"Oh! that's his system, is it?" replied the old man, whose forehead had contracted. "Well, he has not the honor of having invented it. We had many such reasoners in our regiment who excused themselves from setting out because the way was long, and so they idled at the depots, while the regiments marched to Madrid, Vienna, or Berlin. Your cousin, you see, does not know that by simply putting one foot before the other, the shortest legs will get to Rome in time."

"Ah! if you could but make him understand that," said Susan, with restless eagerness.

"I tried to bring him round by showing him how much an expert

bookbinder may save, but he only shrugs his shoulders, and says women do not understand calculation."

"And then you despair my poor girl," continued Vincent, with a tender smile. "I see now why your eyes are so often red."

"My dear uncle, I assure you—"

"And why you forget to water your flowers, and have left off singing."

"Uncle! Susan looked down in confusion, and rolled up a corner of the newspaper.

"Come, come, do not fancy that I am scolding you," he said, in a friendly sort of gruff manner, laying his hand upon her head; "it is quite natural that you should be interested about Charles, who is now your cousin and will one day be—"

Susan made a gesture.

"Well, no, we will not talk of that. I am always forgetting that we must pretend to be ignorant of what we know so well; we will say no more about it, and come back to this fellow for whom you have some friendship, if that is the right word, and who has some for you."

Susan shook her head.

"He had once," she said, "but for some time past he has been cold to me, and always seems tired of my company."

"Yes," said Vincent, "when once noisy pleasures are pursued, home seems dull; it is like drinking poor, flat stuff after choice wine, that is well known, my child; most of us have come through that."

"But they have been cured, and so may Charles, too; if you would but speak to him, that would be enough."

"The old man looked as if he did not think so, and said: 'These things are to be cured by acts, not by words. A good man is not made in a hurry, any more than a good soldier; he must have experience, must have known what fatigue is, and been where cannon-balls are flying. Your cousin, you see, wants the inclination to work, because he does not see the use of it, and an object for him, but it is not easy—I will think about it.'"

"Now this time it is really he," interrupted Susan, who had heard upon the stairs the hasty footsteps of her cousin.

"Silence in the ranks, then, do not let us appear to be talking of anything in particular; go on reading."

Susan obeyed; but her trembling voice would have betrayed her emotion to an attentive observer. While her eyes and voice followed the printed lines, her ear, and her thoughts were all for her cousin, who had just opened the door, and put down his cap on the table. He made the reading an excuse for not speaking to either uncle or cousin, and walking to the window leaned on his two arms crossed.

Susan went on without understanding what she said. She was in the midst of the 'Miscellaneous Articles,' that compound where, under the title, bits of news are often found contradicting each other.

Charles paid no attention at first, but by degrees he began to listen. After a string of murders, accidents, and thefts, came this article: 'A poor pedlar at Besancon, named Pierre Lefevre, resolved upon making a fortune, determined to go to India, the country, as he heard, of gold and diamonds. He sold all that he possessed, and going to Bordeaux, was taken as helper to the cook in an American vessel. Nothing was heard of him for 13 years. At last his relations received a letter, telling them that he was coming, after incredible hardships, with the loss of

an arm and an eye, but possessed of two millions of money.'

Charles had listened attentively to this, and exclaimed: 'Two millions!'

"That would serve him to buy a glass eye and a false hand," observed the old soldier.

"What happiness!" the workman said, without listening to his uncle.

"Thirteen years of incredible hardships!" Susan repeated these expressions of the paper.

"What signifies that, with fortune at the end?" said Charles with vivacity. "What is difficult is, not the travelling in bad weather, and bad roads, with a good home at the end, but travelling on to arrive nowhere."

"So," said Susan, timidly, raising her eyes to her cousin, "you envy the pedlar; you would give up youth, health, and limbs."

"To be sure I would; find me a purchaser, Susan, at this price, and your pin-money should soon be settled."

There was a long silence, each of the three pursuing the same train of thought, till the clock striking nine, Susan spread the frugal supper, of which neither she nor Charles could partake; Charles, having been half the day at the public-house with his friends, and Susan having lost her appetite.

War had taught the old soldier that emotions must not interfere with the stomach, so he alone despatched his meal, and soon returned to his armchair. Susan, as soon as she had put everything away, wished him good-night and retired, leaving him alone with the young workman. He also was departing, when the old man told him to bolt the door, and listen to something particular he had to say to him.

II.
Charles, expecting reproaches, stood before the old man, who desired him to sit down, and asked him if he had well considered what he had just been saying. "Are you capable of making a sustained effort to secure a fortune in the end?"

"Can you doubt it, uncle?" said Charles, surprised at the question.

"So you would consent to be patient and work diligently, and change your bad habits?"

"If it would be of any use, but why do you ask?"

"You shall hear," said the invalid, opening the drawer where he kept the old journals his friends supplied him with. After searching for some time, he found one, which he opened, and showed Charles an article which he had marked. This was it.

"The Spanish Government have been taking steps to secure a deposit hid in the banks of the Douro after the battle of Salamanca. After that famous retreat, a company of the first division, which had charge of several chests, was separated from the rest of the troops, and so hemmed in by superior numbers of the enemy that resistance was vain. The commanding officer, seeing that there was no hope of cutting a way through the enemy took advantage of the night to have the chests hidden by those of his men in whom he had most confidence; then, certain that they would not be discovered, he ordered his little troop to disperse, and escape as well as they could through the enemy's lines. Some succeeded, but the officer and the men who knew the place where the chests were deposited all perished in the flight. It is said that these chests contained all the treasure of that division of the army, and amounted to three millions of money."

Charles stopped and looked at the invalid with sparkling eyes.

"Were you one of this company?" he cried.

"I was," replied Vincent.

"You knew of this?"

"I was one of those employed by the Captain to hide them, and I was—"