

THE ALAMANCE GLEANER.

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NO. 45

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Druggists

MASTER and SLAVE

By T. H. Thorpe

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The victor received the congratulations of his admirers at Dede's with profuse entertainment of gumbo and rum, but with the tranquillity of a strategist who had foreseen success planned through feigned retreat. Prateau's lips and eyes were beyond control and continued to dance long after the hot rum had stilled his tongue. Oakfell assembled his friends and, explaining that the decision could be used as an effective weapon against him in the convention, requested their leave to withdraw his candidacy. After much discussion the justice of his view was conceded, and the consent he desired was given. A formal note was received from Prateau demanding the return to his client Quilbert of the slave Leon, who the writer said, was harbored by Oakfell. It was assigned to the fames. A little letter came through the local post saying, "I suffer for poor Odette's grief, but more because you suffer and through my fault." This was not assigned to the flames.

France. A strange companionship came to be observed. Evariste Oakfell and Quilbert were seen much together and not infrequently at Dede's cabaret, but so engrossed were the neighbors with the growing miseries of their isolation that they were only silent wonder. The rumor that the two were partners in contraband adventures was received with mere shrugging of shoulders and turning up of eyes, save by Estelle, who repelled them as malicious and whose trusting heart was satisfied with Evariste's explanation that his intimacy with Quilbert and the cabaret was intended to enable him, the better to guard her grandfather, for it was true that Leonidas was almost daily the third of the trio at Dede's testing the fortune of cards with Quilbert; that he made periodical settlements of losses by giving promissory notes, and habitually reached his gate stumped by potatoes of rum.

He was annoyed not a little. "Very well," said he; "if you wish it so very much, mademoiselle, I can volunteer and march to the battlefield, gaining the credit for two recruits instead of one." "No, you must not; you shall not," said Laure, suddenly dropping her gaily and showing alarm. "It is not your fight. You own neither slave nor land to fight for. Even the gains of your ventures are for the benefit of me, and I must account for your here brother if he returns, for they were made by the use of his money." "Laure, why are you continually saying things which you know vex me?" "Because I want you to realize your situation, learn the truth, see your interest and know who are your friends. Does that girl over there," extending her arm in the direction of Estelle's home, "ever tell you a truth for your profit?" "She does not presume to advise me," Evariste replied. "A little presumption in the way of good advice would be all right return for your devoted protection of herself and her devoted grandfather, protection so disinterested and costing so much self sacrifice on your part." Laure laughed contemptuously, assuming a mock attitude of humility and lifting her saucy eyes to the young man's burning face. "Do you make bold to insinuate that I am acting selfishly?" "Oh, I do not call it making bold to say what I know or what I think, and I never insinuate." "How, then, can you know my motives save as they are indicated by my acts?" "I am the granddaughter of the doctor," she said haughtily. "Bah!" exclaimed Evariste. "Have a care, Evariste; have a care. The doctor must not be insinuated." Laure's warning was so serious and dramatic that Evariste involuntarily checked the impetuosity of his manner. He said: "Laure, I mean no insult, no disrespect. Her relationship to you would forbid that. We are friends."

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divide with you all I own. Such is still my purpose. Perhaps it should have been done in form before this, but you have never intimated the wish, and I have been much distracted by other matters. But it is here provided for." Giving him a sealed envelope, he continued: "If I fall, open this and act upon it. A second and last pledge you must give me. I told you three affections have made life sweet to me. The last, Evariste, is my love for Estelle Lalotais." Evariste's heart suddenly ceased to beat. He felt himself falling from his chair, but clutched the arms with lightning grasp and by a supreme effort of will rested his self command without drawing his brother's notice. The latter continued: "I need not tell you that this love is to me. You can well understand that it is more than food, drink, air, rest or sleep. It is all that makes life. Yet I have never told her of my love." "You have not?" Evariste exclaimed quickly. "I have not." "But you will before you go?" he asked anxiously. "I will not," replied Horace, and Evariste breathed freely. "The fate that awaits me as a soldier," Horace resumed, "is so uncertain that it would be unjust to leave her pledged, though I knew my love to be returned, and I have no such knowledge. Now, Evariste, you are well aware of the weakness of her old grandfather and how profidious to her in his guardianship—indeed, how audacious she needs protection against his invidiousness; also you cannot be ignorant of the baneful influence exercised over the old gentleman by that conscienceless wretch Quilbert. Swear to me, brother, by all you hold most sacred that you will advise, aid and protect her against the mischiefs these two may work to her fortune and defend her from danger and harm in every form. I place you on guard; give her in charge to you. Swear you will preserve her safe till my return." Oakfell's feelings had mastered him, and his eloquent eyes welled over. "I make the promise and swear to keep it," said Evariste. "A wealth of gratitude shall be your reward," Horace cried, embracing him warmly, and the brothers spoke good night.

He was waiting for the first time his military uniform. Oakfell paid his visit of adieu to Estelle on the eve of the company's departure. Both had schooled themselves for the ordeal, she to appear brave and he to keep back the words of love that were ever rising from his heart to his lips. As is usual in such trials, the result was diluted with emotion. It is safe to say each understood the other better than if free rein had been given to speech. "Mademoiselle," Oakfell said on taking leave, "I have perhaps been somewhat officious concerning your affairs, but when I explain my action I beg you to approve. M. Lalotais, your only kinsman, your sole authoritative protector and adviser, is growing old and as you have admitted to me, is, through his amiable weakness, to some extent subject to Quilbert's domination. I have charged my brother to be especially watchful of your welfare and in all things to stand between you and harm." "And has M. Evariste accepted the charge?" Estelle asked. "Most willingly, and bravely he will keep it," Oakfell answered. "His soul is a noble one, his heart as true as steel. Rely upon him and trust him implicitly, mademoiselle, should any peril or crisis arise. I have chosen him for this because I know his lofty character and love him next to his mother's memory." "I will be guided by him because you tell me so," Estelle said, her trembling voice forbidding more of reply. "Wear this," she added, pinning to his coat a tiny cockade of red, white and red. "And wear you this," Oakfell answered, passionately kissing her hand. "An revoir, and God bless you." "An revoir, and God bless you," Estelle could say no more, but there her arms about Odette, who stood behind her, and eyes as if her heart were broken, Oakfell saw the action. His grief was akin to joy.

Look to your own interests. Come to my house. When this war is ended and I have finished the harvest it yields to me, I may go back to France to end my days. Perhaps we may then marry." And Laure had replied: "No; we will not marry then or ever, but I will go and keep your house. I have no kin here. It is nothing to me what the neighbors say. I can truly speak worse of the times than they of me, and they know it. I am not beholden to any one and will make my way according to my own notions, not those of others." In the autumn of 1862 news percolated into Marksville and thence spread rapidly that a terrible battle had been fought near Perryville, in Kentucky, between divisions of the armies commanded by General Buell on the Union side and General Bragg on the Confederate side and Judge Tallour and Horace Oakfell had been slain and left on the bloody field by their retreating comrades. For many months the report could not be verified or tested, communication with the army of the south-west being cut off by the Federal lines east of the Mississippi, but general credence was given to it. An additional gloom settled upon the people. Father Girbe strove in vain to prevent these tidings from reaching Estelle. She staggered as if under a bludgeoning blow, but tears came not to her relief. Odette knelt beside her and repeated like a devotee telling beads: "There is no proof Mr. Horace is dead. Then, mistress, do not believe it." And by dint of her strange persistency she lodged a doubt in Estelle's mind, which brought her the consolation of a frail hope. Quilbert gave the intelligence to Laure with a chuckle and observed: "The obliging Yankee took the job off my hands so far as Oakfell was concerned." "I suppose," Laure commented, "Evariste will now think he can persuade Estelle Lalotais to marry him and will send his steps accordingly." "I hope so," said Quilbert, still pleased. "It would be a fit punishment for her, and my vengeance would be satisfied." "He shall not marry her," Laure exclaimed hotly. "And you shall not marry him," retorted Quilbert in sudden rage. "Let him say that, not you. My grandmother never used 'shall' or 'will' to me. Then do not waste your energy in laying commands upon me. You cannot steal my liberty as you did the negro Joe's."

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CHAPTER XIII. TURBID WATERS. TIME now seemed to quicken its flight. Events trod on the heels of events in a scramble and hurry of occurrence. Disintegration of institutions, social, political and religious, public and social, appeared everywhere like a corroding disease, and demoralization was the rankest of growths. Secession, civil war, suspension of industries, gatherings and departures of volunteers, dimensions and suspicions, dread of the negro—dumb cause of contention—gave somber color to the life of fair Avoylettes.

CHAPTER XIV. THE SLAVE OF A.S. WITH the line of Federal occupation extending along the Mississippi from New Orleans to Vicksburg and the Confederate army of the transmississippi department hovering about the western and northern borders of Louisiana, the people of Avoylettes were in a state of insolation which made life harder day by day and at times appeared to paralyze even the very possibilities of escape. Commercial activities of the river, which they depended for most of their supplies, was stopped. A number of the largest planters had taken refuge with their slaves and animals in Texas and the Indian Territory. The scarcity of all staples of food and clothing increasing from month to month, labor was but poorly sustained and diminished crops were cultivated under forbidding conditions. Dying and maimed soldiers were a constant sight. Privateers and suffering were present actualities. Selfishness grew sparse, community interests waned, social phases disappeared, and indifference to neighborhood concerns prevailed. And thus it was that, though a numerous cortege attended the obsequies of Mother DeLottais, the doctor, who was found dead in her throbbing chair, with Egyptian cotton in her hands and an unshod foot in her lap, yet when Laure accepted the protection of Quilbert and became his housekeeper, an event which in normal times would have set the entire parish by the ears, the spirit of the guest and courtesy materialized now in mere arrangements of shoulder and shakings of hands. On returning to the cottage after the funeral Quilbert had said to her: "You cannot live here alone. Your father and I were friends. I am older than he would be if alive. Do not mind what these dolts about here may say."

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