

The Tarboro' Southernner.

BE SURE YOU ARE RIGHT; THEN GO AHEAD.—D Crockett.

VOL. 67. NO. 29.

TARBORO', N. C., THURSDAY, JULY 18 1889.

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LINK BY LINK!

A Thrilling Tale of the Franco-Prussian War.

BY MAURICE LELAND.

CHAPTER XVII.

"CONDEMNED!"

In the darkness of his close and small cell, with the heavy tramp of guards alone waking the stillness around, Pierre Leroux lay through-out that weary night. Whith consciousness came back the memory of all his folly had brought upon him—the words of his foe—the sweetness of the knowledge of her innocence that even gave him gladness in this hour of martyrdom.

"Oh, God!" he prayed, again and again, "to be free for only one hour! To see her face once more, and tell her I believe in her at last."

But when freedom might have been his, the bond of his word fettered him with iron, and now in the eyes of all men he was a traitor, and arraigned on the heaviest charge that could be laid against a liar. The hopelessness of his fate came home to him at last with a bitterness he had never deemed possible.

But now he knew her guiltless, stainless, pure, as when he had taken her to his heart; and his whole soul went out in that intense longing—that fierce, imploring cry, "To be free—only for one hour!"

He looked down at his fettered limbs in mute agony. Of his suffering, weakness, pain, even of the fate in store for him, he did not think—only of her. He had longed for her so deeply, judged her so harshly, and through all she had loved him with a love whose depth and purity he had never fathomed before.

He grew delirious at his agony as he thought of it. As he pictured her now—lashed, oppressed, pursued by ruthless foes, by a passion merciless and cruel as the grave, the violence of his hatred against this powerful enemy increased to fever point. It was not for himself that he would have recalled the blow, whose penalty his life would pay—but for her. For her who would be at his trial, henceforward, for her whose youth and beauty and wealth of love and faith were all sacrificed because of his want of trust. "If she had only told me," he moaned in his feverish remorse, "How could I dream it was her father she sheltered?"

For he was in ignorance as yet of the oath she had taken, of the cowardly desertion and traitorous betrayal of which this man had been guilty. He knew nothing of the struggle between a daughter's duty and a wife's love that had so perplexed and tortured the girl's young, loving heart. He knew nothing of the cause that had induced her to accompany her father in his hour of peril, seeing that her husband no longer believed in her, and had forsaken her—first! Now it was all too late. He had no hope left. With the morrow the court martial would sit—his fate would be decided and then—

As the thought crossed his mind he threw himself on his knees—his fettered hands upraised to heaven—the hot tears raining down his white, sunken cheeks. "Oh, God!" he prayed, "if in Thy courts above there is atonement for earth's sufferings, or forgetfulness of earth's pain, let me meet her there since here we may not ever meet in life again."

With the next day's noon the trial began.

The case was brief, clear, indefensible. The plan of escape fortunately gave no names, bore no address, but the fact of its being in his possession was conclusive evidence. The soldiers gave witness as to hearing the struggle between the Prussian officer and the prisoner. Colonel Brandstein swore to the assault, stating that the man was evidently desirous of regaining possession of his papers by violence. "The statements were concise and plain enough. When Leroux was asked if he had anything to say, he merely replied that the provocation given him had been too strong for any man to resist, and that Von Brandstein had, in the first place, seized him by the throat and given him the lie direct. When questioned as to the plan of escape, he refused to say from whence it had come or who contrived to deliver it, but said that being on parole, he had declined taking any steps in the matter, and if he had intended to escape, he would not have waited three weeks before making the attempt. He knew that what he had done was unjustifiable in military law, but he begged the judges to take into consideration the provocation and anxiety to which he had been subjected ever

since his entrance into the garrison. His enemies themselves could bear witness to that, and therefore he considered himself morally exonerated, if for once he had dealt with his tyrant and traitor as man to man, and not as soldier to officer.

"I know I stand at a disadvantage here," he said. "I am a prisoner at the mercy of my enemies. I can hardly expect you to believe that with the means of escape at hand, I refuse to profit by them; yet with death before me, I solemnly swear I speak but the truth. The story may be hushed up—doubtless it will—but truth, sooner or later, comes to the fore; and then, in other lands and in other tongues, my wrongs be proclaimed at last, and men will learn how Germany allows private animosity to take the lead of public justice, when dealing with a conquered foe."

There was an instance's silence. The faces of the judges grew sterner and paler. Something in the noble bearing, the calm, heroic face of the prisoner touched them with compassion. Yet they "knew his doom was sealed." Military justice is stern in its exactness, undeviating in its decrees. With the close of that day sentence was pronounced. The must die.

He who had so long prayed for death as the sweetest boon man could bestow, trembled as he heard his doom. Then his eyes turned to his foe and met his malicious, extending glance with the calmness of despair.

"You have your triumph," he said, so low that scarce any one heard him. "Then he was led back to his cell, there to await the end of his martyrdom."

"She is weak with long illness. Ninette lay in her close, crowded room. The confinement, the absence of air, the loathing of life, all combined to weaken the vigor of a fame used to the freedom of fields, the freshness of cool, sweet winds, the width of meadow and forest, and whose eyes yearned for the sight of far-stretching skies, unbounded by a city's myriad roofs."

All the inborn instincts of her fierce, glad pleasure life returned. She thought of the millstream song—of the foam-bells dashing on the great brown timbers of the turning wheel—of the radiance of summer flowers and the rich scents of the roses round the porch—of the gleam of the snow white lilies, in whose cups the butterflies loved to hover and rest—of the coo of the bright-plumaged pigeons as they flew to and fro from their little arched homes—of the veer chiming from the village church nestled in those quiet fields. All these thoughts and memories came back to her as she lay there alone, with the ban and curse of a cruel fate upon her young, desolate heart, and an utter hopelessness and despair in her soul.

Through the silence around her, a voice suddenly pierced—a voice that made her start and tremble as she heard it, and forced from her lips a cry of intense fear. Another instant, and amidst the shrill clamor of the old woman's cries, and the sturdy resistance of Gretchen, the door was thrown violently open, and Leon Monprat stood before her.

"Father! burst from the girls' pale lips. He threw himself before her, and caught the folds of her dress in his hands.

"Oh, Ninette! can you ever forgive me?"

"What is it?" she gasped in terror; "he is with you?"

"He! No. Coward, villain, traitor that he is, he has betrayed me!"

"How have you discovered me?" she asked.

"By a strange chance—a soldier of the garrison is suspected of planning the escape of a prisoner. Brandstein had him watched and you were discovered. I have done you an injustice at my life—let me atone for it now. Fly with me—I have passports—all is ready. I had a friend who stole me for the sake of services long past. I have a plan—I will seek the king himself—he is close to Berlin—to-morrow he enters. Come, child, for Go's sake—time is precious. Oh, Ninette! do not refuse me now!"

"She threw herself calmly, proudly away. "Father, you deceived me once. I can never trust you again."

"Do not say that," he implored. "I know you fear I will lead you to ruin. I swear I will not; every word I utter is true to the letter. Oh, Ninette, be merciful to yourself, if not to me. How can I leave you in this ruffian's power?"

"Is it not rather late in the day to think of that?"

"Child, you torture me. Will nothing move you? Even if I tell you your husband's salvation de-

pends on your acting as I counsel?"

"My husband—Pierre? What do you mean?"

"He is condemned to die. At daybreak, to-morrow, the sentence will be executed. They hurry it for the king may reprieve him."

"To die—he? What is his crime?"

"Von Brandstein discovered the plan for his escape. He insulted him and Pierre struck him."

"Oh my God! my hand again deals him his fate," moaned the wretched girl, as she sank on her bed and gazed at his father's face with blank unseeing eyes.

"Will you not come?" he urged again. She started as if a blow had struck her.

"Come!" she cried wildly. "Flee like a coward and leave him to die? Oh heaven! what do you think I am?"

"You might see the king, you might save him," he pleaded, with a pitiful weakness that roused all her scorn.

"Go you and seek the king!" she cried with sudden passion, "and look you, if he die I count you his murderer!" Then she turned and seized her cloak, and flew feet as an antelope from the house and on through the dark and silent streets with a restless speed that made all pursuit useless.

He lingered there a moment, then went forth and confronted the pale and frightened woman in the adjoining room.

"This is my daughter," he said, with the strange, dazed eyes of a man half asleep, "and her husband dies to-morrow in the garrison you der at sunrise."

They heard him in silence, too terrified by any words. Then he drew a pistol from his coat and on him went out on his errand of danger, knowing each step, each movement now was fraught with deadly peril and beset by watchful foes.

She meanwhile hurried on, quivering as one under physical torture, her strained eyes fastened on the empty air, her heart throbbing as if it would burst. She had scarce sense or knowledge of what she did. She had but one thought—to see his judges, to proclaim her share in the plot and his innocence and refusal to share in it. It was a wild, mad idea, but the thought of a woman desperate, loving, faithful to death. She went on and on, striving her pace forward with steps that quickened as it whenever she was alone. She knew nothing of the way and dared not ask. From some chance word that Bohmer had once dropped she knew the garrison lay southward of her place of concealment, and she took her way there by the sheer instinct.

The hour was late. She heard a faint strike in a clock in some church steeple near by, and the count filled her heart with terror. At sunrise he was to die. Could she each him—plead for him—save him?—still on she flew, shrinking back in the shadows of porches at the approach of night patrol, and hurrying forward with steps that quickened as it whenever she was alone. She knew nothing of the way and dared not ask. From some chance word that Bohmer had once dropped she knew the garrison lay southward of her place of concealment, and she took her way there by the sheer instinct.

Her face was white and stern, set in martyr's courage, a soldier's endurance. That she would save him or die with him she was resolved. She would still walk the language of long love, and she knew she was still far from her destination.

Before her in the road she saw a vehicle waiting. He tumbled horse stool with a dropping head. The man on the box was asleep. She came to his side.

"Will you meet me to the garrison?" she implored. "Is it far?"

"The man started at her wild, sleepy stupor eyes. "He said, 'Will you ride?' With the desperation of her own great need, urging her on, she gave no heed to her own poverty—her own inability to offer him payment—for in her conveyance—she sprung in without an instant's hesitation."

"Drive there!" she said and the man obeyed.

She drew her forehead, the seat and pressed her hand against her throbbing head. Her brain a numb sense of that one mad resolve—her

eyes no gaze, save for that dreaded signal—the first faint rose-flush in the east.

"We are here," said the man. "Two thalers, you please." She gazed at him, bewildered, then instinctively put her hand to search for her money.

"I have but one," she said offering it.

He swore rudely and angrily. She paid no heed. She sprung from the cab and hurried to the entrance gates with a terror and gladness in her eyes that silenced his fierce complaints. The sentinel stopped her.

"Who goes there?" he raged out his challenge in the stillness of the gray wintry dawn. She would have passed on in her blindness and ignorance, but again the voice stayed her steps.

"Halt, or I fire."

"For the love of Heaven bear me!" she cried. "There is a man here—a prisoner—condemned to die, is there not? I have brought information that will save him. Can I see the commandant?"

"At this hour? At this time! You must be mad! Be off! I can hold no party while on duty."

"Oh stay she cried in an agony of earnestness that silenced his rough words and thrilled to his heart in its inspiring and pitiless despair.

"Think what you do. It is a human life you would sacrifice, and an innocent one. If you were in his place what would you say to the man who denied you common justice, even at the last hour?"

Despite himself the man was touched. He looked at her doubtfully.

"What are you to him?" he asked.

"I am sorry for you, but I can do nothing. Even to speak to you now is a risk. Stay—I will pass you on, perhaps the Lieutenant may allow you to see your husband ere his sentence is executed."

A moment afterward Ninette was with the fortress, and in charge of another soldier, to whom she gave the same message. She must see the commandant on a matter of life and death.

The message passed from one official to another. Each an ill-received it with the same wonder, but to all hearts, that lovely, piteous, imploring face appeared more strongly than any words.

The fierce rough-voiced chief came at last. He started aghast at this strange intruder, yet ere word or question could escape she was at his feet pouring out her tale in breathless eager words. Then he laughed and said: "Well, what of that? The plot was none the less of his participation. Moreover, the chief offense for which he is to suffer is the blow to his superior. That admits no appeal."

"You do not know he was provoked," she cried. "You do not know what he has suffered—and all for me! Oh for the love of Heaven do not make me his murderer!"

"You pretty fool! Why fret for the loss of one man? There are hundreds of as fine fellows as he in this land. Leave your old lover alone and take a new one—that is the best advice I can give you."

"Am you quite merciless?" she pleaded. "Can nothing move you?"

"Will you not even delay the execution of his sentence till the return of the king? Oh, if you would but kill me and let the guiltless go."

"That would be a pity, indeed; you are far too pretty to be sent out of the world yet."

She turned on him with scorn and disdain that fired his eyes and flushed her cheeks, and made her tenfold more beautiful than she had been in her weakness and despair.

"Will nothing move you, bribe you?" she cried.

"You might bribe me if you would," he said, with a glance that made her shiver from him with a shudder of loathing. "You are brave, indeed, to force your way in hither. Such captives as yourself would make our garrison life bearable."

She started back with a cry so terrible that it curdled the blood of all who heard it.

"Follow with the glance of her eyes she saw through the narrow barred window the first line of light in the eastern sky. He rose and called a soldier to his side.

"Guard this woman," he said curtly, "I must go."

She did not speak or move, but crouched down on the floor and buried her face in her hands in the anguish of dread, in the hopelessness of misery. The man looked at her with deep compassion. The sympathy of the whole garrison was with the condemned man, and the sight of this beautiful girl who was bound to him by so close a tie, and for whose unjust effort he was to suffer so terrible a fate, moved him to an intense and uncontrolable pity.

"Take heart," he said kindly, in his rough German accents, "it is better that he die thus than that he lives on to bear the life he has led here."

She raised her head and looked at him. So might the dying look he thought, with that unearthly horror in their glazed eyes, that mute despair upon their silent lips.

In the stillness came the sound of marching feet, the rattle of musketry the long solemn roll of a drum. That sound awoke her from her trance. She sprung to her feet and gazed wildly round. The soldier had turned to the window to watch the procession. She looked over his shoulder, and the sight froze her blood to ice, and held her limbs nerveless and powerless in the horror and remorse that consumed all other feelings.

She saw the man she loved as he walked slowly, steadily by. A priest by his side, murmuring the service of the church—his executors beside and around him. In the open square they passed, turned, halted. Her eyes saw every movement—her ears caught every sound. She saw them bend his eyes. She saw the golden sunlight pour down its rays on his head—his erect and tranquil form. She saw the leveled muskets awaiting the signal, while over that mockery of justice, that tragedy of revenge, she saw the rosy warmth of the glad new day.

"Wait—oh wait!"

The cry burst from her lips! With the next instant she was on the spot—her arms around his neck—her head on his breast, while through the air a crash of sound thrilled and shattered, and a heavy rain of heavy smoke hid them both from sight. As the crashing echoes died away, there came a command, loud, stern, and ominous.

"Wait—in the King's name!" An orderly, with breathless haste and armed with a missile, whose purport some could doubt, stood before them.

The commandant approached, pale and troubled. "I regret you are too late," he said, the sentence has just been executed."

He pointed to where the smoke waves still hung in heavy, misty folds; but even as he pointed a great cry rent the air, for there before them stood the man erect, and unharmed, and clasped in his arms was a woman's slender form. In that moment all discipline was forgotten. This silent, rigid, phalanx threw aside their muskets and rushed to that spot where, with an agony and dread beyond all they had yet known, Pierre Leroux bent over that lifeless and silent figure.

"You have killed her!" he cried in his wild and terrible grief. "My love, my life, my own! What was my life worth that you should seek to preserve it at such cost?"

"Hush! he said a voice in his ear; "if she be indeed dead, it is not soon that she will be raised from the dead."

Leon Monprat had for once performed a courageous action. At imminent risk he had sought and secured admission to the presence of the victorious and returned sovereign, and with utter forgetfulness of self poured out to him the history of his daughter and her husband.

With stern love of justice and equity his stern, Prussian monarch heard him with deep attention, and moved by the story of the man's patient heroism and the girl's long martyrdom, he sent an order for the delay of his sentence, until he himself had inquired of its details. That order would have come too late save for the fact of Ninette's desperate sacrifice and Bohmer's artful stratagem determined to give his unfortunate friend a last chance of escaping his fate, and with some mad superstitious idea that Heaven must intervene ere a sentence so unjust could be carried out, he had unknown to all, drawn the bullets from the muskets of those soldiers appointed to carry out the sentence, and when the reprieve came Leroux was saved, and Ninette had only fainted from the shock of fearful ordeal she had undergone. Angry as the commandant was, he could say nothing in the face of that powerful mandate, and when Von Brandstein heard of all that had occurred, and knew what the inquiry that would follow might mean for himself, he sent in his resignation and left Berlin with all possible speed.

The fate of Pierre Leroux was soon decided. With the king might not have been due to any pension, he yielded to the lovely and pitiful entreaties of the girl who had suffered so deeply and so long. With the conclusion of the war he gave them permission to return to their own country and their own home, not even allowed of a ransom

reunited, happy, safe, the long tried husband and wife once more found themselves in their own fair home, with the freedom and the peace, and the sweet delicious sense of liberty and love alone filling their hearts.

Like an exile restored to his birthright, so Pierre Leroux feasted his eyes on the waving golden fields, the glad green dewy earth, that had never seemed so full of peace and beauty as it seemed now.

This joy overstepped on the fair face beside him—on the deep instruous eyes from whence all shadow of suffering had departed, leaving only love!

Sweet as the light of the day looked the future before them, all the sweeter for pain long endured—for sorrow's weary martyrdom.

"Nothing shall part us again, dear love," he murmured tenderly, "nothing need have done so had I but trusted you more. Now we have endured so much, it seems as if our very joy had been snatched from the jaws of the grave."

It does not that make it double precious," she asked, clinging yet more closely to the arm she held.

And she was right; for there is no love like that which rises victorious over doubt and pain, and in the cruelty of despair, lives on and on, unconquered and undiminished, to find its paradise of joy even amidst the shadows of death.

(THE END.)

A charming story "Petticoats and Slippers," will soon be begun in the SOUTHERNER.

His name is R. J. McKinney; his residence is Woodbury, Hill county, Texas; his statement May, 1889: My son was cured by S. S. S. of bad sores and ulcers, the result of a general breaking down of his health from fever. He was considered incurable, but two bottles of Swift's Specific brought him out all right.

Mr. John King, of Jackson, Miss., says that he was cured of Rheumatism in his feet and legs by taking Swift's Specific. This was after he had tried many other remedies, both internal and external, and paid many doctor's bills.

B. O. GILBERT, of Purdy, Mo., says Swift's Specific cured him of Eczema on his limbs and body. He took only two small bottles.

In Burgon's account of Dean Mansel, it is said the metaphysician was once driving out with Professor Chandler and others, including a little girl, who suddenly exclaimed, apropos of a donkey by the roadside: "Look at that donkey! He has got his head into a barrel and can't get it out!" Mansel was heard to mutter: "Then it will be a case of as-phyxia." Equally good was his suggestion, on seeing the figure of Neptune in St. Paul's Cathedral, that the only Christianity it had to do with it would be, "Tridentine." On a student stammering vaguely through an answer in class, he is said to have addressed him with the words: "Really, sir, if you cannot be definite you had better be dumb in it." But best of all, for neatness and brevity, was his remark on the appearance of a candidate having for his Christian name "Field flowers." That man, said Mansel, was born to be either plowed or plucked." Only he was neither, and said to be now a colonial bishop.

TO ADVERTISERS—A list of new newspapers divided into