

# HONORÉ DE BALZAC

DROLL STORIES —  
VOLUME 2

Оноре де Бальзак

**Droll Stories — Volume 2**

«Public Domain»

**де Бальзак О.**

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# Honoré de Balzac

## Droll Stories — Volume 2

### PROLOGUE

Certain persons have reproached the Author for knowing no more about the language of the olden times than hares do of telling stories. Formerly these people would have been vilified, called cannibals, churls, and sycophants, and Gomorrah would have been hinted at as their natal place. But the Author consents to spare them the flowery epithets of ancient criticism; he contents himself with wishing not to be in their skin, for he would be disgusted with himself, and esteem himself the vilest of scribblers thus to calumniate a poor little book which is not in the style of any spoil-paper of these times. Ah! ill-natured wretches! you should save your breath to cool your own porridge! The Author consoles himself for his want of success in not pleasing everyone by remembering that an old Tourainian, of eternal memory, had put up with such contumely, that losing all patience, he declared in one of his prologues, that he would never more put pen to paper. Another age, but the same manners. Nothing changes, neither God above nor men below. Thereupon of the Author continues his task with a light heart, relying upon the future to reward his heavy labours.

And certes, it is a hard task to invent *A Hundred Droll Tales*, since not only have ruffians and envious men opened fire upon him, but his friends have imitated their example, and come to him saying "Are you mad? Do you think it is possible? No man ever had in the depths of his imagination a hundred such tales. Change the hyperbolic title of your budget. You will never finish it." These people are neither misanthropes nor cannibals; whether they are ruffians I know not; but for certain they are kind, good-natured friends; friends who have the courage to tell you disagreeable things all your life along, who are rough and sharp as currycombs, under the pretence that they are yours to command, in all the mishaps of life, and in the hour of extreme unction, all their worth will be known. If such people would only keep these sad kindnesses; but they will not. When their terrors are proved to have been idle, they exclaimed triumphantly, "Ha! ha! I knew it. I always said so."

In order not to discourage fine sentiments, intolerable though they be, the Author leaves to his friends his old shoes, and in order to make their minds easy, assures them that he has, legally protected and exempt from seizure, seventy droll stories, in that reservoir of nature, his brain. By the gods! they are precious yarns, well rigged out with phrases, carefully furnished with catastrophes, amply clothed with original humour, rich in diurnal and nocturnal effects, nor lacking that plot which the human race has woven each minute, each hour, each week, month, and year of the great ecclesiastical computation, commenced at a time when the sun could scarcely see, and the moon waited to be shown her way. These seventy subjects, which he gives you leave to call bad subjects, full of tricks and impudence, lust, lies, jokes, jests, and ribaldry, joined to the two portions here given, are, by the prophet! a small instalment on the aforesaid hundred.

Were it not a bad time for a biblioplists, bibliomaniacs, bibliographers, and bibliothèques which hinder bibliolatriy, he would have given them in a bumper, and not drop by drop as if he were afflicted with dysury of the brain. He cannot possibly be suspected of this infirmity, since he often gives good weight, putting several stories into one, as is clearly demonstrated by several in this volume. You may rely on it, that he has chosen for the finish, the best and most ribald of the lot, in order that he may not be accused of a senile discourse. Put then more likes with your dislikes, and dislikes with your likes. Forgetting the niggardly behaviour of nature to story-tellers, of whom there are not more than seven perfect in the great ocean of human writers, others, although friendly, have been of opinion that, at a time when everyone went about dressed in black, as if in mourning for something, it was necessary to concoct works either wearisomely serious or seriously wearisome;

that a writer could only live henceforward by enshrining his ideas in some vast edifice, and that those who were unable to construct cathedrals and castles of which neither stone nor cement could be moved, would die unknown, like the Pope's slippers. The friends were requested to declare which they liked best, a pint of good wine, or a tun of cheap rubbish; a diamond of twenty-two carats, or a flintstone weighing a hundred pounds; the ring of Hans Carvel, as told by Rabelais, or a modern narrative pitifully expectorated by a schoolboy. Seeing them dumbfounded and abashed, it was calmly said to them, "Do you thoroughly understand, good people? Then go your ways and mind your own businesses."

The following, however, must be added, for the benefit of all of whom it may concern: — The good man to whom we owe fables and stories of sempiternal authority only used his tool on them, having taken his material from others; but the workmanship expended on these little figures has given them a high value; and although he was, like M. Louis Ariosto, vituperated for thinking of idle pranks and trifles, there is a certain insect engraved by him which has since become a monument of perennity more assured than that of the most solidly built works. In the especial jurisprudence of wit and wisdom the custom is to steal more dearly a leaf wrested from the book of Nature and Truth, than all the indifferent volumes from which, however fine they be, it is impossible to extract either a laugh or a tear. The author has licence to say this without any impropriety, since it is not his intention to stand upon tiptoe in order to obtain an unnatural height, but because it is a question of the majesty of his art, and not of himself — a poor clerk of the court, whose business it is to have ink in his pen, to listen to the gentleman on the bench, and take down the sayings of each witness in this case. He is responsible for workmanship, Nature for the rest, since from the Venus of Phidias the Athenian, down to the little old fellow, Godenot, commonly called the *Sieur Breloque*, a character carefully elaborated by one of the most celebrated authors of the present day, everything is studied from the eternal model of human imitations which belongs to all. At this honest business, happy are the robbers that they are not hanged, but esteemed and beloved. But he is a triple fool, a fool with ten horns on his head, who struts, boasts, and is puffed up at an advantage due to the hazard of dispositions, because glory lies only in the cultivation of the faculties, in patience and courage.

As for the soft-voiced and pretty-mouthed ones, who have whispered delicately in the author's ear, complaining to him that they have disarranged their tresses and spoiled their petticoats in certain places, he would say to them, "Why did you go there?" To these remarks he is compelled, through the notable slanders of certain people, to add a notice to the well-disposed, in order that they may use it, and end the calumnies of the aforesaid scribblers concerning him.

These droll tales are written — according to all authorities — at that period when Queen Catherine, of the house of Medici, was hard at work; for, during a great portion of the reign, she was always interfering with public affairs to the advantage of our holy religion. The which time has seized many people by the throat, from our defunct Master Francis, first of that name, to the Assembly at Blois, where fell M. de Guise. Now, even schoolboys who play at chuck-farthing, know that at this period of insurrection, pacifications and disturbances, the language of France was a little disturbed also, on account of the inventions of the poets, who at that time, as at this, used each to make a language for himself, besides the strange Greek, Latin, Italian, German, and Swiss words, foreign phrases, and Spanish jargon, introduced by foreigners, so that a poor writer has plenty of elbow room in this Babelish language, which has since been taken in hand by Messieurs de Balzac, Blaise Pascal, Furetiere, Menage, St. Evremonde, de Malherbe, and others, who first cleaned out the French language, sent foreign words to the rightabout, and gave the right of citizenship to legitimate words used and known by everyone, but of which the *Sieur Ronsard* was ashamed.

Having finished, the author returns to his lady-love, wishing every happiness to those by whom he is beloved; to the others misfortune according to their deserts. When the swallows fly homeward, he will come again, not without the third and fourth volume, which he here promises to

the Pantagruelists, merry knaves, and honest wags of all degrees, who have a wholesome horror of the sadness, sombre meditation and melancholy of literary croakers.

## THE THREE CLERKS OF ST. NICHOLAS

The *Inn of the Three Barbels* was formerly at Tours, the best place in the town for sumptuous fare; and the landlord, reputed the best of cooks, went to prepare wedding breakfasts as far as Chatelherault, Loches, Vendome, and Blois. This said man, an old fox, perfect in his business, never lighted lamps in the day time, knew how to skin a flint, charged for wool, leather, and feathers, had an eye to everything, did not easily let anyone pay with chaff instead of coin, and for a penny less than his account would have affronted even a prince. For the rest, he was a good banterer, drinking and laughing with his regular customers, hat in hand always before the persons furnished with plenary indulgences entitled *Sit nomen Domini benedictum*, running them into expense, and proving to them, if need were, by sound argument, that wines were dear, and that whatever they might think, nothing was given away in Touraine, everything had to be bought, and, at the same time, paid for. In short, if he could without disgrace have done so, he would have reckoned so much for the good air, and so much for the view of the country. Thus he built up a tidy fortune with other people's money, became as round as a butt, larded with fat, and was called Monsieur. At the time of the last fair three young fellows, who were apprentices in knavery, in whom there was more of the material that makes thieves than saints, and who knew just how far it was possible to go without catching their necks in the branches of trees, made up their minds to amuse themselves, and live well, condemning certain hawkers or others in all the expenses. Now these limbs of Satan gave the slip to their masters, under whom they had been studying the art of parchment scrawling, and came to stay at the hotel of the Three Barbels, where they demanded the best rooms, turned the place inside out, turned up their noses at everything, bespoke all the lampreys in the market, and announced themselves as first-class merchants, who never carried their goods with them, and travelled only with their persons. The host bustled about, turned the spits, and prepared a glorious repast, for these three dodgers, who had already made noise enough for a hundred crowns, and who most certainly would not even have given up the copper coins which one of them was jingling in his pocket. But if they were hard up for money they did not want for ingenuity, and all three arranged to play their parts like thieves at a fair. Theirs was a farce in which there was plenty of eating and drinking, since for five days they so heartily attacked every kind of provision that a party of German soldiers would have spoiled less than they obtained by fraud. These three cunning fellows made their way to the fair after breakfast, well primed, gorged, and big in the belly, and did as they liked with the greenhorns and others, robbing, filching, playing, and losing, taking down the writings and signs and changing them, putting that of the toyman over the jeweller's, and that of the jeweller's outside the shoe maker's, turning the shops inside out, making the dogs fight, cutting the ropes of tethered horses, throwing cats among the crowd, crying, "Stop thief!" And saying to every one they met, "Are you not Monsieur D'Enterfesse of Angiers?" Then they hustled everyone, making holes in the sacks of flour, looking for their handkerchiefs in ladies' pockets, raising their skirts, crying, looking for a lost jewel and saying to them —

"Ladies, it has fallen into a hole!"

They directed the little children wrongly, slapped the stomachs of those who were gaping in the air, and prowled about, fleecing and annoying every one. In short, the devil would have been a gentleman in comparison with these blackguard students, who would have been hanged rather than do an honest action; as well have expected charity from two angry litigants. They left the fair, not fatigued, but tired of ill-doing, and spent the remainder of their time over dinner until the evening when they recommenced their pranks by torchlight. After the peddlers, they commenced operations on the ladies of the town, to whom, by a thousand dodges, they gave only that which they received, according to the axiom of Justinian: *Cuique jus tribuere*. "To every one his own juice;" and afterwards jokingly said to the poor wenches —

"We are in the right and you are in the wrong."



At last, at supper-time, having nothing else to do, they began to knock each other about, and to keep the game alive, complained of the flies to the landlord, remonstrating with him that elsewhere the innkeepers had them caught in order that gentleman of position might not be annoyed by them. However, towards the fifth day, which is the critical day of fevers, the host not having seen, although he kept his eyes wide open, the royal surface of a crown, and knowing that if all that glittered were gold it would be cheaper, began to knit his brows and go more slowly about that which his high-class merchants required of him. Fearing that he had made a bad bargain with them, he tried to sound the depth of their pockets; perceiving which the three clerks ordered him with the assurance of a Provost hanging his man, to serve them quickly with a good supper as they had to depart immediately. Their merry countenances dismissed the host's suspicions. Thinking that rogues without money would certainly look grave, he prepared a supper worthy of a canon, wishing even to see them drunk, in order the more easily to clap them in jail in the event of an accident. Not knowing how to make their escape from the room, in which they were about as much at their ease as are fish upon straw, the three companions ate and drank immoderately, looking at the situation of the windows, waiting the moment to decamp, but not getting the opportunity. Cursing their luck, one of them wished to go and undo his waistcoat, on account of a colic, the other to fetch a doctor to the third, who did his best to faint. The cursed landlord kept dodging about from the kitchen into the room, and from the room into the kitchen, watching the nameless ones, and going a step forward to save his crowns, and going a step back to save his crown, in case they should be real gentlemen; and he acted like a brave and prudent host who likes halfpence and objects to kicks; but under pretence of properly attending to them, he always had an ear in the room, and a foot in the court; fancied he was always being called by them, came every time they laughed, showing them a face with an unsettled look upon it, and always said, "Gentlemen, what is your pleasure?" This was an interrogatory in reply to which they would willingly have given him ten inches of his own spit in his stomach, because he appeared as if he knew very well what would please them at this juncture, seeing that to have twenty crowns, full weight, they would each of them have sold a third of his eternity. You can imagine they sat on their seats as if they were gridirons, that their feet itched and their posteriors were rather warm. Already the host had put the pears, the cheese, and the preserves near their noses, but they, sipping their liquor, and picking at the dishes, looked at each other to see if either of them had found a good piece of roguery in his sack, and they all began to enjoy themselves rather woefully. The most cunning of the three clerks, who was a Burgundian, smiled and said, seeing the hour of payment arrived, "This must stand over for a week," as if they had been at the Palais de Justice. The two others, in spite of the danger, began to laugh.

"What do we owe?" asked he who had in his belt the heretofore mentioned twelve sols and he turned them about as though he would make them breed little ones by this excited movement. He was a native of Picardy, and very passionate; a man to take offence at anything in order that he might throw the landlord out the window in all security of conscience. Now he said these words with the air of a man of immense wealth.

"Six crowns, gentlemen," replied the host, holding out his hand.

"I cannot permit myself to be entertained by you alone, Viscount," said the third student, who was from Anjou, and as artful as a woman in love.

"Neither can I," said the Burgundian.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" replied the Picardian "you are jesting. I am yours to command."

"Sambreguoy!" cried he of Anjou. "You will not let us pay three times; our host would not suffer it."

"Well then," said the Burgundian, "whichever of us shall tell the worst tale shall justify the landlord."

"Who will be the judge?" asked the Picardian, dropping his twelve sols to the bottom of his pocket.

"Pardieu! our host. He should be capable, seeing that he is a man of taste," said he of Anjou. "Come along, great chef, sit you down, drink, and lend us both your ears. The audience is open."

Thereupon the host sat down, but not until he had poured out a gobletful of wine.

"My turn first," said the Anjou man. "I commence."

"In our Duchy of Anjou, the country people are very faithful servants to our Holy of Catholic religion, and none of them will lose his portion of paradise for lack of doing penance or killing a heretic. If a professor of heresy passed that way, he quickly found himself under the grass, without knowing whence his death had proceeded. A good man of Larze, returning one night from his evening prayer to the wine flasks of Pomme-de-Pin, where he had left his understanding and memory, fell into a ditch full of water near his house, and found he was up to his neck. One of the neighbours finding him shortly afterwards nearly frozen, for it was winter time, said jokingly to him —

"Hulloa! What are you waiting for there?"

"'A thaw', said the tipsy fellow, finding himself held by the ice.

"Then Godenot, like a good Christian, released him from his dilemma, and opened the door of the house to him, out of respect to the wine, which is lord of this country. The good man then went and got into the bed of the maid-servant, who was a young and pretty wench. The old bungler, bemuddled with wine, went ploughing in the wrong land, fancying all the time it was his wife by his side, and thanking her for the youth and freshness she still retained. On hearing her husband, the wife began to cry out, and by her terrible shrieks the man was awakened to the fact that he was not in the road to salvation, which made the poor labourer sorrowful beyond expression.

"'Ah! said he; 'God has punished me for not going to vespers at Church.'

"And he began to excuse himself as best he could, saying, that the wine had muddled his understanding, and getting into his own bed he kept repeating to his good wife, that for his best cow he would not have had this sin upon his conscience.

"'My dear', said she, 'go and confess the first thing tomorrow morning, and let us say no more about it.'

"The good man trotted to confessional, and related his case with all humility to the rector of the parish, who was a good old priest, capable of being up above, the slipper of the holy foot.

"'An error is not a sin,' said he to the penitent. 'You will fast tomorrow, and be absolved.'

"'Fast! — with pleasure,' said the good man. 'That does not mean go without drink.'

"'Oh!' replied the rector, 'you must drink water, and eat nothing but a quarter of a loaf and an apple.'

"Then the good man, who had no confidence in his memory, went home, repeating to himself the penance ordered. But having loyally commenced with a quarter of a loaf and an apple, he arrived at home, saying, a quarter of apples, and a loaf.

"Then, to purify his soul, he set about accomplishing his fast, and his good woman having given him a loaf from the safe, and unhooked a string of apples from the beam, he set sorrowfully to work. As he heaved a sigh on taking the last mouthful of bread hardly knowing where to put it, for he was full to the chin, his wife remonstrated with him, that God did not desire the death of a sinner, and that for lack of putting a crust of bread in his belly, he would not be reproached for having put things in their wrong places.

"'Hold your tongue, wife!' said he. 'If it chokes me, I must fast.'"

"I've payed my share, it's your turn, Viscount," added he of Anjou, giving the Picardian a knowing wink.

"The goblets are empty. Hi, there! More wine."

"Let us drink," cried the Picardian. "Moist stories slip out easier."

At the same time he tossed off a glassful without leaving a drop at the bottom, and after a preliminary little cough, he related the following: —

"You must know that the maids of Picardy, before setting up housekeeping, are accustomed honestly to gain their linen, vessels, and chests; in short, all the needed household utensils. To accomplish this, they go into service in Peronne, Abbeville, Amiens, and other towns, where they are tire-women, wash up glasses, clean plates, fold linen, and carry up the dinner, or anything that there is to be carried. They are all married as soon as they possess something else besides that which they naturally bring to their husbands. These women are the best housewives, because they understand the business and everything else thoroughly. One belonging to Azonville, which is the land of which I am lord by inheritance, having heard speak of Paris, where the people did not put themselves out of the way for anyone, and where one could subsist for a whole day by passing the cook's shops, and smelling the steam, so fattening was it, took it into her head to go there. She trudged bravely along the road, and arrived with a pocket full of emptiness. There she fell in, at the Porte St. Denise, with a company of soldiers, placed there for a time as a vidette, for the Protestants had assumed a dangerous attitude. The sergeant seeing this hooded linnet coming, stuck his headpiece on one side, straightened his feather, twisted his moustache, cleared his throat, rolled his eyes, put his hand on his hips, and stopped the Picardian to see if her ears were properly pierced, since it was forbidden to girls to enter otherwise into Paris. Then he asked her, by way of a joke, but with a serious face, what brought her there, he pretending to believe she had come to take the keys of Paris by assault. To which the poor innocent replied, that she was in search of a good situation, and had no evil intentions, only desiring to gain something.

"'Very well; I will employ you,' said the wag. 'I am from Picardy, and will get you taken in here, where you will be treated as a queen would often like to be, and you will be able to make a good thing of it.'

"Then he led her to the guard-house, where he told her to sweep the floor, polish the saucepans, stir the fire, and keep a watch on everything, adding that she should have thirty sols a head from the men if their service pleased her. Now seeing that the squad was there for a month, she would be able to gain ten crowns, and at their departure would find fresh arrivals who would make good arrangements with her, and by this means she would be able to take back money and presents to her people. The girl cleaned the room and prepared the meals so well, singing and humming, that this day the soldiers found in their den the look of a monk's refectory. Then all being well content, each of them gave a sol to their handmaiden. Well satisfied, they put her into the bed of their commandant, who was in town with his lady, and they petted and caressed her after the manner of philosophical soldiers, that is, soldiers partial to that which is good. She was soon comfortably ensconced between the sheets. But to avoid quarrels and strife, my noble warriors drew lots for their turn, arranged themselves in single file, playing well at Pique hardie, saying not a word, but each one taking at least twenty-six sols worth of the girl's society. Although not accustomed to work for so many, the poor girl did her best, and by this means never closed her eyes the whole night. In the morning, seeing the soldiers were fast asleep, she rose happy at bearing no marks of the sharp skirmish, and although slightly fatigued, managed to get across the fields into the open country with her thirty sols. On the route to Picardy, she met one of her friends, who, like herself, wished to try service in Paris, and was hurrying thither, and seeing her, asked her what sort of places they were.

"'Ah! Perrine; do not go. You want to be made of iron, and even if you were it would soon be worn away,' was the answer.

"Now, big-belly of Burgundy," said he, giving his neighbour a hearty slap, "spit out your story or pay!"

"By the queen of Antlers!" replied the Burgundian, "by my faith, by the saints, by God! and by the devil, I know only stories of the Court of Burgundy, which are only current coin in our own land."

"Eh, ventre Dieu! are we not in the land of Beaufremont?" cried the other, pointing to the empty goblets.

"I will tell you, then, an adventure well known at Dijon, which happened at the time I was in command there, and was worth being written down. There was a sergeant of justice named Franc-Taupin, who was an old lump of mischief, always grumbling, always fighting; stiff and starchy, and never comforting those he was leading to the hulks, with little jokes by the way; and in short, he was just the man to find lice in bald heads, and bad behaviour in the Almighty. This said Taupin, spurned by every one, took unto himself a wife, and by chance he was blessed with one as mild as the peel of an onion, who, noticing the peculiar humour of her husband, took more pains to bring joy to his house than would another to bestow horns upon him. But although she was careful to obey him in all things, and to live at peace would have tried to excrete gold for him, had God permitted it, this man was always surly and crabbed, and no more spared his wife blows, than does a debtor promises to the bailiff's man. This unpleasant treatment continuing in spite of the carefulness and angelic behaviour of the poor woman, she being unable to accustom herself to it, was compelled to inform her relations, who thereupon came to the house. When they arrived, the husband declared to them that his wife was an idiot, that she displeased him in every possible way, and made his life almost unbearable; that she would wake him out of his first sleep, never came to the door when he knocked, but would leave him out in the rain and the cold, and that the house was always untidy. His garments were buttonless, his laces wanted tags. The linen was spoiling, the wine turning sour, the wood damp, and the bed was always creaking at unreasonable moments. In short, everything was going wrong. To this tissue of falsehoods, the wife replied by pointing to the clothes and things, all in a state of thorough repair. Then the sergeant said that he was very badly treated, that his dinner was never ready for him, or if it was, the broth was thin or the soup cold, either the wine or the glasses were forgotten, the meat was without gravy or parsley, the mustard had turned, he either found hairs in the dish or the cloth was dirty and took away his appetite, indeed nothing did she ever get for him that was to his liking. The wife, astonished, contented herself with stoutly denying the fault imputed to her. 'Ah,' said he, 'you dirty hussy! You deny it, do you! Very well then, my friends, you come and dine here to-day, you shall be witnesses of her misconduct. And if she can for once serve me properly, I will confess myself wrong in all I have stated, and will never lift my hand against her again, but will resign to her my halberd and my breeches, and give her full authority here.'

"'Oh, well,' said she, joyfully, 'I shall then henceforth be both wife and mistress!'

"Then the husband, confident of the nature and imperfections of his wife, desired that the dinner should be served under the vine arbor, thinking that he would be able to shout at her if she did not hurry quickly enough from the table to the pantry. The good housewife set to work with a will. The plates were clean enough to see one's face in, the mustard was fresh and well made, the dinner beautifully cooked, as appetising as stolen fruit; the glasses were clear, the wine was cool, and everything so nice, so clean and white, that the repast would have done honour to a bishop's chatterbox. Just as she was standing before the table, casting that last glance which all good housewives like to give everything, her husband knocked at the door. At that very moment a cursed hen, who had taken it into her head to get on top of the arbor to gorge herself with grapes, let fall a large lump of dirt right in the middle of the cloth. The poor woman was half dead with fright; so great was her despair, she could think of no other way of remedying the thoughtlessness of the fowl then by covering the unseemly patch with a plate in which she put the fine fruits taken at random from her pocket, losing sight altogether of the symmetry of the table. Then, in order that no one should notice it, she instantly fetched the soup, seated every one in his place, and begged them to enjoy themselves.

"Now, all of them seeing everything so well arranged, uttered exclamations of pleasure, except the diabolical husband, who remained moody and sullen, knitting his brows and looking for a straw on which to hang a quarrel with his wife. Thinking it safe to give him one for himself, her relations being present, she said to him, 'Here's your dinner, nice and hot, well served, the cloth is clean, the salt-cellar full, the plates clean, the wine fresh, the bread well baked. What is there lacking? What do you require? What do you desire? What else do you want?'

"Oh, filth!" said he, in a great rage.

"The good woman instantly lifted the plate, and replied —

"There you are, my dear!"

"Seeing which, the husband was dumbfounded, thinking that the devil was in league with his wife. He was immediately gravely reproached by the relations, who declared him to be in the wrong, abused him, and made more jokes at his expense than a recorder writes words in a month. From that time forward the sergeant lived comfortably and peaceably with his wife, who at the least appearance of temper on his part, would say to him —

"Do you want some filth?"

"Who has told the worst now?" cried the Anjou man, giving the host a tap on the shoulder.

"He has! He has!" said the two others. Then they began to dispute among themselves, like the holy fathers in council; seeking, by creating a confusion, throwing the glasses at each other, and jumping about, a lucky chance, to make a run of it.

"I'll settle the question," cried the host, seeing that whereas they had all three been ready with their own accounts, not one of them was thinking of his.

They stopped terrified.

"I will tell you a better one than all, then you will have to give ten sols a head."

"Silence for the landlord," said the one from Anjou.

"In our fauborg of Notre-dame la Riche, in which this inn is situated, there lived a beautiful girl, who besides her natural advantages, had a good round sum in her keeping. Therefore, as soon as she was old enough, and strong enough to bear the matrimonial yoke, she had as many lovers as there are sols in St. Gatien's money-box on the Paschal-day. The girl chose one who, saving your presence, was as good a worker, night and day, as any two monks together. They were soon betrothed, and the marriage was arranged; but the joy of the first night did not draw nearer without occasioning some slight apprehensions to the lady, as she was liable, through an infirmity, to expel vapours, which came out like bombshells. Now, fearing that when thinking of something else, during the first night, she might give the reins to her eccentricities, she stated the case to her mother, whose assistance she invoked. That good lady informed her that this faculty of engineering wind was inherent in the family; that in her time she had been greatly embarrassed by it, but only in the earlier period of her life. God had been kind to her, and since the age of seven, she had evaporated nothing except on the last occasion when she had bestowed upon her dead husband a farewell blow. 'But,' said she to her daughter, 'I have ever a sure specific, left to me by my mother, which brings these surplus explosions to nothing, and exhales them noiselessly. By this means these sighs become odourless, and scandal is avoided.'

"The girl, much pleased, learned how to sail close to the wind, thanked her mother, and danced away merrily, storing up her flatulence like an organ-blower waiting for the first note of mass. Entering the nuptial chamber, she determined to expel it when getting into bed, but the fantastic element was beyond control. The husband came; I leave you to imagine how love's conflict sped. In the middle of the night, the bride arose under a false pretext, and quickly returned again; but when climbing into her place, the pent up force went off with such a loud discharge, that you would have thought with me that the curtains were split.

"Ha! I've missed my aim!" said she.

"Sdeath, my dear!" I replied, 'then spare your powder. You would earn a good living in the army with that artillery.'

"It was my wife."

"Ha! ha! ha!" went the clerks.

And they roared with laughter, holding their sides and complimenting their host.

"Did you ever hear a better story, Viscount?"

"Ah, what a story!"

"That is a story!"

"A master story!"

"The king of stories!"

"Ha, ha! It beats all the other stories hollow. After that I say there are no stories like the stories of our host."

"By the faith of a Christian, I never heard a better story in my life."

"Why, I can hear the report."

"I should like to kiss the orchestra."

"Ah! gentlemen," said the Burgundian, gravely, "we cannot leave without seeing the hostess, and if we do not ask to kiss this famous wind-instrument, it is a out of respect for so good a story-teller."

Thereupon they all exalted the host, his story, and his wife's trumpet so well that the old fellow, believing in these knaves' laughter and pompous eulogies, called to his wife. But as she did not come, the clerks said, not without frustrative intention, "Let us go to her."

Thereupon they all went out of the room. The host took the candle and went upstairs first, to light them and show them the way; but seeing the street door ajar, the rascals took to their heels, and were off like shadows, leaving the host to take in settlement of his account another of his wife's offerings.

## THE CONTINENCE OF KING FRANCIS THE FIRST

Every one knows through what adventure King Francis, the first of that name, was taken like a silly bird and led into the town of Madrid, in Spain. There the Emperor Charles V. kept him carefully locked up, like an article of great value, in one of his castles, in the which our defunct sire, of immortal memory, soon became listless and weary, seeing that he loved the open air, and his little comforts, and no more understood being shut up in a cage than a cat would folding up lace. He fell into moods of such strange melancholy that his letters having been read in full council, Madame d'Angouleme, his mother; Madame Catherine, the Dauphine, Monsieur de Montmorency, and those who were at the head of affairs in France knowing the great lechery of the king, determined after mature deliberation, to send Queen Marguerite to him, from whom he would doubtless receive alleviation of his sufferings, that good lady being much loved by him, and merry, and learned in all necessary wisdom. But she, alleging that it would be dangerous for her soul, because it was impossible for her, without great danger to be alone with the king in his cell, a sharp secretary, the Sieur de Fizes, was sent to the Court of Rome, with orders to beg of the pontiff a papal brief of special indulgences, containing proper absolutions for the petty sins which, looking at their consanguinity, the said queen might commit with a view to cure the king's melancholy.

At this time, Adrian VI., the Dutchman, still wore the tiara, who, a good fellow, for the rest did not forget, in spite of the scholastic ties which united him to the emperor, that the eldest son of the Catholic Church was concerned in the affair, and was good enough to send to Spain an express legate, furnished with full powers, to attempt the salvation of the queen's soul, and the king's body, without prejudice to God. This most urgent affair made the gentleman very uneasy, and caused an itching in the feet of the ladies, who, from great devotion to the crown, would all have offered to go to Madrid, but for the dark mistrust of Charles the Fifth, who would not grant the king's permission to any of his subjects, nor even the members of his family. It was therefore necessary to negotiate the departure of the Queen of Navarre. Then, nothing else was spoken about but this deplorable abstinence, and the lack of amorous exercise so vexatious to a prince, who was much accustomed to it. In short, from one thing to another, the women finished by thinking more of the king's condition, than of the king himself. The queen was the first to say that she wished she had wings. To this Monseigneur Odet de Chatillon replied, that she had no need of them to be an angel. One that was Madame l'Amirale, blamed God that it was not possible to send by a messenger that which the poor king so much required; and every one of the ladies would have lent it in her turn.

"God has done very well to fix it," said the Dauphine, quietly; "for our husbands would leave us rather badly off during their absence."

So much was said and so much thought upon the subject, that at her departure the Queen of all Marguerites was charged, by these good Christians, to kiss the captive heartily for all the ladies of the realm; and if it had been permissible to prepare pleasure like mustard, the queen would have been laden with enough to sell to the two Castiles.

While Madame Marguerite was, in spite of the snow, crossing the mountains, by relays of mule, hurrying on to these consolations as to a fire, the king found himself harder pressed by unsatisfied desire than he had ever been before, or would be again. In this reverberation of nature, he opened his heart to the Emperor Charles, in order that he might be provided with a merciful specific, urging upon him that it would be an everlasting disgrace to one king to let another die for lack of gallantry. The Castilian showed himself to be a generous man. Thinking that he would be able to recuperate himself for the favour granted out of his guest's ransom, he hinted quietly to the people commissioned to guard the prisoner, that they might gratify him in this respect. Thereupon a certain Don Hiios de Lara y Lopez Barra di Pinto, a poor captain, whose pockets were empty in spite of his genealogy, and who had been for some time thinking of seeking his fortune at the Court of France, fancied

that by procuring his majesty a soft cataplasm of warm flesh, he would open for himself an honestly fertile door; and indeed, those who know the character of the good king and his court, can decide if he deceived himself.

When the above mentioned captain came in his turn into the chamber of the French king, he asked him respectfully if it was his good pleasure to permit him an interrogation on a subject concerning which he was as curious as about papal indulgences? To which the Prince, casting aside his hypochondriacal demeanour, and twisting round on the chair in which he was seated, gave a sign of consent. The captain begged him not to be offended at the licence of his language, and confessed to him, that he the king was said to be one of the most amorous men in France, and he would be glad to learn from him if the ladies of the court were expert in the adventures of love. The poor king, calling to mind his many adventures, gave vent to a deep-drawn sigh, and exclaimed, that no woman of any country, including those of the moon, knew better than the ladies of France the secrets of this alchemy and at the remembrance of the savoury, gracious, and vigorous fondling of one alone, he felt himself the man, were she then within his reach, to clasp her to his heart, even on a rotten plank a hundred feet above a precipice.

Say which, this good king, a ribald fellow, if ever there was one, shot forth so fiercely life and light from his eyes, that the captain, though a brave man, felt a quaking in his inside so fiercely flamed the sacred majesty of royal love. But recovering his courage he began to defend the Spanish ladies, declaring that in Castile alone was love properly understood, because it was the most religious place in Christendom, and the more fear the women had of damning themselves by yielding to a lover, the more their souls were in the affair, because they knew they must take their pleasure then against eternity. He further added, that if the Lord King would wager one of the best and most profitable manors in the kingdom of France, he would give him a Spanish night of love, in which a casual queen should, unless he took care, draw his soul from his body.

"Done," said the king, jumping from his chair. "I'll give thee, by God, the manor of Ville-aux-Dames in my province of Touraine, with full privilege of chase, of high and low jurisdiction."

Then, the captain, who was acquainted with the Donna of the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo requested her to smother the King of France with kindness, and demonstrate to him the great advantage of the Castilian imagination over the simple movement of the French. To which the Marchesa of Amaesguy consented for the honour of Spain, and also for the pleasure of knowing of what paste God made Kings, a matter in which she was ignorant, having experience only of the princes of the Church. Then she became passionate as a lion that has broken out of his cage, and made the bones of the king crack in a manner that would have killed any other man. But the above-named lord was so well furnished, so greedy, and so will bitten, he no longer felt a bite; and from this terrible duel the Marchesa emerged abashed, believing she had the devil to confess.

The captain, confident in his agent, came to salute his lord, thinking to do honour for his fief. Thereupon the king said to him, in a jocular manner, that the Spanish ladies were of a passable temperature, and their system a fair one, but that when gentleness was required they substituted frenzy; that he kept fancying each thrill was a sneeze, or a case of violence; in short, that the embrace of a French woman brought back the drinker more thirsty than ever, tiring him never; and that with the ladies of his court, love was a gentle pleasure without parallel, and not the labour of a master baker in his kneading trough.

The poor captain was strongly piqued at his language. In spite of the nice sense of honour which the king pretended to possess, he fancied that his majesty wished to bilk him like a student, stealing a slice of love at a brothel in Paris. Nevertheless, not knowing for the matter of that, if the Marchesa had not over-spanished the king, he demanded his revenge from the captive, pledging him his word, that he should have for certain a veritable fay, and that he would yet gain the fief. The king was too courteous and gallant a knight to refuse this request, and even made a pretty and right royal speech, intimating his desire to lose the wager. Then, after vespers, the guard passed fresh and warm into



the king's chamber, a lady most dazzlingly white — most delicately wanton, with long tresses and velvet hands, filling out her dress at the least movement, for she was gracefully plump, with a laughing mouth, and eyes moist in advance, a woman to beautify hell, and whose first word had such cordial power that the king's garment was cracked by it. On the morrow, after the fair one had slipped out after the king's breakfast, the good captain came radiant and triumphant into the chamber.

At sight of him the prisoner then exclaimed —

"Baron de la Ville-aux-Dames! God grant you joys like to mine! I like my jail! By'r lady, I will not judge between the love of our lands, but pay the wager."

"I was sure of it," said the captain.

"How so?" said the King.

"Sire, it was my wife."

This was the origin of Larray de la Ville-aux-Dames in our country, since from corruption of the names, that of Lara-y-Lopez, finished by becoming Larray. It was a good family, delighting in serving the kings of France, and it multiplied exceedingly. Soon after, the Queen of Navarre came in due course to the king, who, weary of Spanish customs, wished to disport himself after the fashion of France; but remainder is not the subject of this narrative. I reserve to myself the right to relate elsewhere how the legate managed to sponge the sin of the thing off the great slate, and the delicate remark of our Queen of Marguerites, who merits a saint's niche in this collection; she who first concocted such good stories. The morality of this one is easy to understand.

In the first place, kings should never let themselves be taken in battle any more than their archetype in the game of the Grecian chief Palamedes. But from this, it appears the captivity of its king is a most calamitous and horrible evil to fall on the populace. If it had been a queen, or even a princess, what worse fate? But I believe the thing could not happen again, except with cannibals. Can there ever be a reason for imprisoning the flower of a realm? I think too well of Ashtaroth, Lucifer, and others, to imagine that did they reign, they would hide the joy of all the beneficent light, at which poor sufferers warm themselves. And it was necessary that the worst of devils, *id est*, a wicked old heretic woman, should find herself upon a throne, to keep a prisoner sweet Mary of Scotland, to the shame of all the knights of Christendom, who should have come without previous assignation to the foot of Fotheringay, and have left thereof no single stone.

## THE MERRY TATTLE OF THE NUNS OF POISSY

The Abbey of Poissy has been rendered famous by old authors as a place of pleasure, where the misconduct of the nuns first began, and whence proceeded so many good stories calculated to make laymen laugh at the expense of our holy religion. The said abbey by this means became fertile in proverbs, which none of the clever folks of our day understand, although they sift and chew them in order to digest them.

If you ask one of them what the *olives of Poissy* are, they will answer you gravely that it is a periphrase relating to truffles, and that the *way to serve them*, of which one formerly spoke, when joking with these virtuous maidens, meant a peculiar kind of sauce. That's the way the scribblers hit on truth once in a hundred times. To return to these good recluses, it was said — by way of a joke, of course — that they preferred finding a harlot in their chemises to a good woman. Certain other jokers reproached them with imitating the lives of the saints, in their own fashion, and said that all they admired in Mary of Egypt was her fashion of paying the boatmen. From whence the raillery: To honour the saints after the fashion of Poissy. There is still the crucifix of Poissy, which kept the stomachs warm; and the matins of Poissy, which concluded with a little chorister. Finally, of a hearty jade well acquainted with the ways of love, it was said — She is a nun of Poissy. That property of a man which he can only lend, was The key of the Abbey of Poissy. What the gate of the said abbey was can easily be guessed. This gate, door, wicket, opening, or road was always half open, was easier to open than to shut, and cost much in repairs. In short, at that period, there was no fresh device in love invented, that had not its origin in the good convent of Poissy. You may be sure there is a good deal of untruth and hyperbolic emphasis, in these proverbs, jests, jokes, and idle tales. The nuns of the said Poissy were good young ladies, who now this way, now that, cheated God to the profit of the devil, as many others did, which was but natural, because our nature is weak; and although they were nuns, they had their little imperfections. They found themselves barren in a certain particular, hence the evil. But the truth of the matter is, all these wickednesses were the deeds of an abbess who had fourteen children, all born alive, since they had been perfected at leisure. The fantastic amours and the wild conduct of this woman, who was of royal blood, caused the convent of Poissy to become fashionable; and thereafter no pleasant adventure happened in the abbeys of France which was not credited to these poor girls, who would have been well satisfied with a tenth of them. Then the abbey was reformed, and these holy sisters were deprived of the little happiness and liberty which they had enjoyed. In an old cartulary of the abbey of Turpenay, near Chinon, which in those later troublous times had found a resting place in the library of Azay, where the custodian was only too glad to receive it, I met with a fragment under the head of The Hours of Poissy, which had evidently been put together by a merry abbot of Turpenay for the diversion of his neighbours of Usee, Azay, Mongaugar, Sacchez, and other places of this province. I give them under the authority of the clerical garb, but altered to my own style, because I have been compelled to turn them from Latin into French. I commence: — At Poissy the nuns were accustomed to, when Mademoiselle, the king's daughter, their abbess, had gone to bed... It was she who first called it *faire la petite oie*, to stick to the preliminaries of love, the prologues, prefaces, protocols, warnings, notices, introductions, summaries, prospectuses, arguments, notices, epigraphs, titles, false-titles, current titles, scholia, marginal remarks, frontispieces, observations, gilt edges, bookmarks, reglets, vignettes, tail pieces, and engravings, without once opening the merry book to read, re-read, and study to apprehend and comprehend the contents. And she gathered together in a body all those extra-judicial little pleasures of that sweet language, which come indeed from the lips, yet make no noise, and practised them so well, that she died a virgin and perfect in shape. The gay science was after deeply studied by the ladies of the court, who took lovers for *la petite oie*, others for honour, and at times also certain ones who had over them the right of high and low jurisdiction, and were masters of everything — a state of things much preferred. But to

continue: When this virtuous princess was naked and shameless between the sheets, the said girls (those whose cheeks were unwrinkled and their hearts gay) would steal noiselessly out of their cells, and hide themselves in that of one of the sisters who was much liked by all of them. There they would have cosy little chats, enlivened with sweetmeats, pasties, liqueurs, and girlish quarrels, worry their elders, imitating them grotesquely, innocently mocking them, telling stories that made them laugh till the tears came and playing a thousand pranks. At times they would measure their feet, to see whose were the smallest, compare the white plumpness of their arms, see whose nose had the infirmity of blushing after supper, count their freckles, tell each other where their skin marks were situated, dispute whose complexion was the clearest, whose hair the prettiest colour, and whose figure the best. You can imagine that among these figures sanctified to God there were fine ones, stout ones, lank ones, thin ones, plump ones, supple ones, shrunken ones, and figures of all kinds. Then they would quarrel amongst themselves as to who took the least to make a girdle, and she who spanned the least was pleased without knowing why. At times they would relate their dreams and what they had seen in them. Often one or two, at times all of them, had dreamed they had tight hold of the keys of the abbey. Then they would consult each other about their little ailments. One had scratched her finger, another had a whitlow; this one had risen in the morning with the white of her eye bloodshot; that one had put her finger out, telling her beads. All had some little thing the matter with them.

"Ah! you have lied to our mother; your nails are marked with white," said one to her neighbour.

"You stopped a long time at confession this morning, sister," said another. "You must have a good many little sins to confess."

As there is nothing resembles a pussy-cat so much as a tom-cat, they would swear eternal friendship, quarrel, sulk, dispute and make it up again; would be jealous, laugh and pinch, pinch and laugh, and play tricks upon the novices.

At times they would say, "Suppose a gendarme came here one rainy day, where should we put him?"

"With Sister Ovide; her cell is so big he could get into it with his helmet on."

"What do you mean?" cried Sister Ovide, "are not all our cells alike?"

Thereupon the girls burst out laughing like ripe figs. One evening they increased their council by a little novice, about seventeen years of age, who appeared innocent as a new-born babe, and would have had the host without confession. This maiden's mouth had long watered for their secret confabulations, little feasts and rejoicings by which the nuns softened the holy captivity of their bodies, and had wept at not being admitted to them.

"Well," said Sister Ovide to her, "have you had a good night's rest, little one?"

"Oh no!" said she, "I have been bitten by fleas."

"Ha! you have fleas in your cell? But you must get rid of them at once. Do you know how the rules of our order enjoin them to be driven out, so that never again during her conventional life shall a sister see so much as the tail of one?"

"No," replied the novice.

"Well then, I will teach you. Do you see any fleas here? Do you notice any trace of fleas? Do you smell an odour of fleas? Is there any appearance of fleas in my cell? Look!"

"I can't find any," said the little novice, who was Mademoiselle de Fiennes, "and smell no odour other than our own."

"Do as I am about to tell you, and be no more bitten. Directly you feel yourself pricked, you must strip yourself, lift your chemise, and be careful not to sin while looking all over your body; think only of the cursed flea, looking for it, in good faith, without paying attention to other things; trying only to catch the flea, which is a difficult job, as you may easily be deceived by the little black spots on your skin, which you were born with. Have you any, little one?"

"Yes," cried she. "I have two dark freckles, one on my shoulder and one on my back, rather low down, but it is hidden in a fold of the flesh."

"How did you see it?" asked Sister Perpetue.

"I did not know it. It was Monsieur de Montresor who found it out."

"Ha, ha!" said the sister, "is that all he saw?"

"He saw everything," said she, "I was quite little; he was about nine years old, and we were playing together..."

The nuns hardly being able to restrain their laughter, Sister Ovide went on —

"The above-mentioned flea will jump from your legs to your eyes, will try and hide himself in apertures and crevices, will leap from valley to mountain, endeavouring to escape you; but the rules of the house order you courageously to pursue, repeating aves. Ordinarily at the third ave the beast is taken."

"The flea?" asked the novice.

"Certainly the flea," replied Sister Ovide; "but in order to avoid the dangers of this chase, you must be careful in whatever spot you put your finger on the beast, to touch nothing else... Then without regarding its cries, complaints, groans, efforts, and writhings, and the rebellion which frequently it attempts, you will press it under your thumb or other finger of the hand engaged in holding it, and with the other hand you will search for a veil to bind the flea's eyes and prevent it from leaping, as the beast seeing no longer clearly will not know where to go. Nevertheless, as it will still be able to bite you, and will be getting terribly enraged, you must gently open its mouth and delicately insert therein a twig of the blessed brush that hangs over your pillow. Thus the beast will be compelled to behave properly. But remember that the discipline of our order allows you to retain no property, and the beast cannot belong to you. You must take into consideration that it is one of God's creatures, and strive to render it more agreeable. Therefore, before all things, it is necessary to verify three serious things — viz.: If the flea be a male, if it be female, or if it be a virgin; supposing it to be a virgin, which is extremely rare, since these beasts have no morals, are all wild hussies, and yield to the first seducer who comes, you will seize her hinder feet, and drawing them under her little caparison, you must bind them with one of your hairs, and carry it to your superior, who will decide upon its fate after having consulted the chapter. If it be a male — "

"How can one tell that a flea is a virgin?" asked the curious novice.

"First of all," replied Sister Ovide, "she is sad and melancholy, does not laugh like the others, does not bite so sharp, has her mouth less wide open, blushes when touched — you know where."

"In that case," replied the novice, "I have been bitten by a male."

At this the sisters burst out laughing so heartily that one of them sounded a bass note and voided a little water and Sister Ovide pointing to it on the floor, said —

"You see there's never wind without rain."

The novice laughed herself, thinking that these chuckles were caused by the sister's exclamation.

"Now," went on Sister Ovide, "if it be a male flea, you take your scissors, or your lover's dagger, if by chance he has given you one as a souvenir, previous to your entry into the convent. In short, furnished with a cutting instrument, you carefully slit open the flanks of the flea. Expect to hear him howl, cough, spit, beg your pardon; to see him twist about, sweat, make sheep's eyes, and anything that may come into his head to put off this operation. But be not astonished; pluck up your courage when thinking that you are acting thus to bring a perverted creature into the ways of salvation. Then you will dextrously take the reins, the liver, the heart, the gizzard, and noble parts, and dip them all several times into the holy water, washing and purifying them there, at the same time imploring the Holy Ghost to sanctify the interior of the beast. Afterwards you will replace all these intestinal things in the body of the flea, who will be anxious to get them back again. Being by this means baptised, the soul of the creature has become Catholic. Immediately you will get a needle and thread and sew up the belly of the flea with great care, with such regard and attention as is due to a fellow Christian; you will even pray for it — a kindness to which you will see it is sensible by its genuflections and

the attentive glances which it will bestow upon you. In short, it will cry no more, and have no further desire to kill you; and fleas are often encountered who die from pleasure at being thus converted to our holy religion. You will do the same to all you catch; and the others perceiving it, after staring at the convert, will go away, so perverse are they, and so terrified at the idea of becoming Christians."

"And they are therefore wicked," said the novice. "Is there any greater happiness than to be in the bosom of the Church?"

"Certainly!" answered sister Ursula, "here we are sheltered from the dangers of the world and of love, in which there are so many."

"Is there any other danger than that of having a child at an unseasonable time?" asked a young sister.

"During the present reign," replied Ursula, raising her head, "love has inherited leprosy, St Anthony's fire, the Ardennes' sickness, and the red rash, and has heaped up all the fevers, agonies, drugs and sufferings of the lot in his pretty mortar, to draw out therefrom a terrible compound, of which the devil has given the receipt, luckily for convents, because there are a great number of frightened ladies, who become virtuous for fear of this love."

Thereupon they huddled up close together, alarmed at these words, but wishing to know more.

"And is it enough to love, to suffer?" asked a sister.

"Oh, yes!" cried Sister Ovide.

"You love just for one little once a pretty gentleman," replied Ursula, "and you have the chance of seeing your teeth go one by one, your hair fall off, your cheeks grow pallid, and your eyebrows drop, and the disappearance of your prized charms will cost you many a sigh. There are poor women who have scabs come upon their noses, and others who have a horrid animal with a hundred claws, which gnaws their tenderest parts. The Pope has at last been compelled to excommunicate this kind of love."

"Ah! how lucky I am to have had nothing of that sort," cried the novice.

Hearing this souvenir of love, the sisters suspected that the little one had gone astray through the heat of a crucifix of Poissy, and had been joking with the Sister Ovide, and drawing her out. All congratulated themselves on having so merry a jade in their company, and asked her to what adventure they were indebted for that pleasure.

"Ah!" said she, "I let myself be bitten by a big flea, who had already been baptised."

At this speech, the sister of the bass note could not restrain a second sign.

"Ah!" said Sister Ovide, "you are bound to give us the third. If you spoke that language in the choir, the abbess would diet you like Sister Petronille; so put a sordine in your trumpet."

"Is it true that you knew in her lifetime that Sister Petronille on whom God bestowed the gift of only going twice a year to the bank of deposit?" asked Sister Ursula.

"Yes," replied Ovide. "And one evening it happened she had to remain enthroned until matins, saying, 'I am here by the will of God.' But at the first verse, she was delivered, in order that she should not miss the office. Nevertheless, the late abbess would not allow that this was an especial favour, granted from on high, and said that God did not look so low. Here are the facts of the case. Our defunct sister, whose canonisation the order are now endeavouring to obtain at the court of the Pope, and would have had it if they could have paid the proper costs of the papal brief; this Petronille, then, had an ambition to have her name included in the Calendar of Saints, which was in no way prejudicial to our order. She lived in prayer alone, would remain in ecstasy before the altar of the virgin, which is on the side of the fields, and pretend so distinctly to hear the angels flying in Paradise, that she was able to hum the tunes they were singing. You all know that she took from them the chant *Adoremus*, of which no man could have invented a note. She remained for days with her eyes fixed like the star, fasting, and putting no more nourishment into her body than I could into my eye. She had made a vow never to taste meat, either cooked or raw, and ate only a crust of bread a day; but on great feast days she would add thereto a morsel of salt fish, without any sauce. On this diet she became

dreadfully thin, yellow and saffron, and dry as an old bone in a cemetery; for she was of an ardent disposition, and anyone who had had the happiness of knocking up against her, would have drawn fire as from a flint. However, little as she ate, she could not escape an infirmity to which, luckily or unluckily, we are all more or less subject. If it were otherwise, we should be very much embarrassed. The affair in question, is the obligation of expelling after eating, like all the other animals, matter more or less agreeable, according to constitution. Now Sister Petronille differed from all others, because she expelled matter such as is left by a deer, and these are the hardest substances that any gizzard produces, as you must know, if you have ever put your foot upon them in the forest glade, and from their hardness they are called bullets in the language of forestry. This peculiarity of Sister Petronille's was not unnatural, since long fasts kept her temperament at a permanent heat. According to the old sisters, her nature was so burning, that when water touched her, she went frist! like a hot coal. There are sisters who have accused her of secretly cooking eggs, in the night, between her toes, in order to support her austerities. But these were scandals, invented to tarnish this great sanctity of which all the other nunneries were jealous. Our sister was piloted in the way of salvation and divine perfection by the Abbot of St. Germaine-des-Pres de Paris — a holy man, who always finished his Injunctions with a last one, which was to offer to God all our troubles, and submit ourselves to His will, since nothing happened without His express commandment. This doctrine, which appears wise at first sight, has furnished matter for great controversies, and has been finally condemned on the statement of the Cardinal of Chatillon, who declared that then there would be no such thing as sin, which would considerably diminish the revenues of the Church. But Sister Petronille lived imbued with this feeling, without knowing the danger of it. After Lent, and the fasts of the great jubilee, for the first time for eight months she had need to go to the little room, and to it she went. There, bravely lifting her dress, she put herself into a position to do that which we poor sinners do rather oftener. But Sister Petronille could only manage to expectorate the commencement of the thing, which kept her puffing without the remainder making up its mind to follow. In spite of every effort, pursing of the lips and squeezing of body, her guest preferred to remain in her blessed body, merely putting his head out of the window, like a frog taking the air, and felt no inclination to fall into the vale of misery among the others, alleging that he would not be there in the odour of sanctity. And his idea was a good one for a simple lump of dirt like himself. The good saint having used all methods of coercion, having overstretched her muscles, and tried the nerves of her thin face till they bulged out, recognised the fact that no suffering in the world was so great, and her anguish attaining the apogee of sphincterial terrors, she exclaimed, 'Oh! my God, to Thee I offer it!' At this orison, the stoney matter broke off short, and fell like a flint against the wall of the privy, making a *croc, croc, crooc, paf!* You can easily understand, my sisters, that she had no need of a torch-cul, and drew back the remainder."

"Then did she see angels?" asked one.

"Have they a behind?" asked another.

"Certainly not," said Ursula. "Do you not know that one general meeting day, God having ordered them to be seated, they answered Him that they had not the wherewithal."

Thereupon they went off to bed, some alone, others nearly alone. They were good girls, who harmed only themselves.

I cannot leave them without relating an adventure which took place in their house, when Reform was passing a sponge over it, and making them all saints, as before stated. At that time, there was in the episcopal chair of Paris a veritable saint, who did not brag about what he did, and cared for naught but the poor and suffering, whom the dear old Bishop lodged in his heart, neglecting his own interests for theirs, and seeking out misery in order that he might heal it with words, with help, with attentions, and with money, according to the case: as ready to solace the rich in their misfortunes as the poor, patching up their souls and bringing them back to God; and tearing about hither and thither, watching his troop, the dear shepherd! Now the good man went about careless of the state of his cassocks, mantles, and breeches, so that the naked members of the church were covered. He was

so charitable that he would have pawned himself to save an infidel from distress. His servants were obliged to look after him carefully. Ofttimes he would scold them when they changed unasked his tattered vestments for new; and he used to have them darned and patched, as long as they would hold together. Now this good archbishop knew that the late *Sieur de Poissy* had left a daughter, without a sou or a rag, after having eaten, drunk, and gambled away her inheritance. This poor young lady lived in a hovel, without fire in winter or cherries in spring; and did needlework, not wishing either to marry beneath her or sell her virtue. Awaiting the time when he should be able to find a young husband for her, the prelate took it into his head to send her the outside case of one to mend, in the person of his old breeches, a task which the young lady, in her present position, would be glad to undertake. One day that the archbishop was thinking to himself that he must go to the convent of *Poissy*, to see after the reformed inmates, he gave to one of his servants, the oldest of his nether garments, which was sorely in need of stitches, saying, "Take this, *Saintot*, to the young ladies of *Poissy*," meaning to say, "the young lady of *Poissy*." Thinking of affairs connected with the cloister, he did not inform his varlet of the situation of the lady's house; her desperate condition having been by him discreetly kept a secret. *Saintot* took the breeches and went his way towards *Poissy*, gay as a grasshopper, stopping to chat with friends he met on the way, slaking his thirst at the wayside inns, and showing many things to the breeches during the journey that might hereafter be useful to them. At last he arrived at the convent, and informed the abbess that his master had sent him to give her these articles. When the varlet departed, leaving with the reverend mother, the garment accustomed to model in relief the archiepiscopal proportions of the continent nature of the good man, according to the fashion of the period, beside the image of those things of which the Eternal Father had deprived His angels, and which in the good prelate did not want for amplitude. Madame the abbess having informed the sisters of the precious message of the good archbishop they came in haste, curious and hustling, as ants into whose republic a chestnut husk has fallen. When they undid the breeches, which gaped horribly, they shrieked out, covering their eyes with one hand, in great fear of seeing the devil come out, the abbess exclaiming, "Hide yourselves my daughters! This is the abode of mortal sin!"

The mother of the novices, giving a little look between her fingers, revived the courage of the holy troop, swearing by an Ave that no living head was domiciled in the breeches. Then they all blushed at their ease, while examining this habitavit, thinking that perhaps the desire of the prelate was that they should discover therein some sage admonition or evangelical parable. Although this sight caused certain ravages in the hearts of those most virtuous maidens, they paid little attention to the flutterings of their reins, but sprinkling a little holy water in the bottom of the abyss, one touched it, another passed her finger through a hole, and grew bolder looking at it. It has even been pretended that, their first stir over, the abbess found a voice sufficiently firm to say, "What is there at the bottom of this? With what idea has our father sent us that which consummates the ruin of women?"

"It's fifteen years, dear mother, since I have been permitted to gaze upon the demon's den."

"Silence, my daughter. You prevent me thinking what is best to be done."

Then so much were these archiepiscopal breeches turned and twisted about, admired and re-admired, pulled here, pulled there, and turned inside out — so much were they talked about, fought about, thought about, dreamed about, night and day, that on the morrow a little sister said, after having sung the matins, to which the convent had a verse and two responses — "Sisters, I have found out the parable of the archbishop. He has sent us as a mortification his garment to mend, as a holy warning to avoid idleness, the mother abbess of all the vices."

Thereupon there was a scramble to get hold of the breeches; but the abbess, using her high authority, reserved to herself the meditation over this patchwork. She was occupied during ten days, praying, and sewing the said breeches, lining them with silk, and making double hems, well sewn, and in all humility. Then the chapter being assembled, it was arranged that the convent should testify by a pretty souvenir to the said archbishop their delight that he thought of his daughters in God. Then

all of them, to the very youngest, had to do some work on these blessed breeches, in order to do honour to the virtue of the good man.

Meanwhile the prelate had had so much to attend to, that he had forgotten all about his garment. This is how it came about. He made the acquaintance of a noble of the court, who, having lost his wife — a she-fiend and sterile — said to the good priest, that he had a great ambition to meet with a virtuous woman, confiding in God, with whom he was not likely to quarrel, and was likely to have pretty children. Such a one he desired to hold by the hand, and have confidence in. Then the holy man drew such a picture of Mademoiselle de Poissy, that this fair one soon became Madame de Genoilhac. The wedding was celebrated at the archiepiscopal palace, where was a feast of the first quality and a table bordered with ladies of the highest lineage, and the fashionable world of the court, among whom the bride appeared the most beautiful, since it has certain that she was a virgin, the archbishop guaranteeing her virtue.

When the fruit, conserves, and pastry were with many ornaments arranged on the cloth, Saintot said to the archbishop, "Monseigneur, your well-beloved daughters of Poissy send you a fine dish for the centre."

"Put it there," said the good man, gazing with admiration at an edifice of velvet and satin, embroidered with fine ribbon, in the shape of an ancient vase, the lid of which exhaled a thousand superfine odours.

Immediately the bride, uncovering it, found therein sweetmeats, cakes, and those delicious confections to which the ladies are so partial. But of one of them — some curious devotee — seeing a little piece of silk, pulled it towards her, and exposed to view the habitation of the human compass, to the great confusion of the prelate, for laughter rang round the table like a discharge of artillery.

"Well have they made the centre dish," said the bridegroom. "These young ladies are of good understanding. Therein are all the sweets of matrimony."

Can there be any better moral than that deduced by Monsieur de Genoilhac? Then no other is needed.



## HOW THE CHATEAU D'AZAY CAME TO BE BUILT

Jehan, son of Simon Fourniez, called Simonnin, a citizen of Tours — originally of the village of Moulinot, near to Beaune, whence, in imitation of certain persons, he took the name when he became steward to Louis the Eleventh — had to fly one day into Languedoc with his wife, having fallen into great disgrace, and left his son Jacques penniless in Touraine. This youth, who possessed nothing in the world except his good looks, his sword, and spurs, but whom worn-out old men would have considered very well off, had in his head a firm intention to save his father, and make his fortune at the court, then holden in Touraine. At early dawn this good Tourainian left his lodging, and, enveloped in his mantle, all except his nose, which he left open to the air, and his stomach empty, walked about the town without any trouble of digestion. He entered the churches, thought them beautiful, looked into the chapels, flicked the flies from the pictures, and counted the columns all after the manner of a man who knew not what to do with his time or his money. At other times he feigned to recite his paternosters, but really made mute prayers to the ladies, offered them holy water when leaving, followed them afar off, and endeavoured by these little services to encounter some adventure, in which at the peril of his life he would find for himself a protector or a gracious mistress. He had in his girdle two doubloons which he spared far more than his skin, because that would be replaced, but the doubloons never. Each day he took from his little hoard the price of a roll and a few apples, with which he sustained life, and drank at his will and his discretion of the water of the Loire. This wholesome and prudent diet, besides being good for his doubloons, kept him frisky and light as a greyhound, gave him a clear understanding and a warm heart for the water of the Loire is of all syrups the most strengthening, because having its course afar off it is invigorated by its long run, through many strands, before it reaches Tours. So you may be sure that the poor fellow imagined a thousand and one good fortunes and lucky adventures, and what is more, almost believed them true. Oh! The good times! One evening Jacques de Beaune (he kept the name although he was not lord of Beaune) was walking along the embankment, occupied in cursing his star and everything, for his last doubloon was with scant respect upon the point of quitting him; when at the corner of a little street, he nearly ran against a veiled lady, whose sweet odour gratified his amorous senses. This fair pedestrian was bravely mounted on pretty pattens, wore a beautiful dress of Italian velvet, with wide slashed satin sleeves; while as a sign of her great fortune, through her veil a white diamond of reasonable size shone upon her forehead like the rays of the setting sun, among her tresses, which were delicately rolled, built up, and so neat, that they must have taken her maids quite three hours to arrange. She walked like a lady who was only accustomed to a litter. One of her pages followed her, well armed. She was evidently some light o'love belonging to a noble of high rank or a lady of the court, since she held her dress high off the ground, and bent her back like a woman of quality. Lady or courtesan she pleased Jacques de Beaune, who, far from turning up his nose at her, conceived the wild idea of attaching himself to her for life. With this in view he determined to follow her in order to ascertain whither she would lead him — to Paradise or to the limbo of hell — to a gibbet or to an abode of love. Anything was a glean of hope to him in the depth of his misery. The lady strolled along the bank of the Loire towards Plessis inhaling like a fish the fine freshness of the water, toying, sauntering like a little mouse who wishes to see and taste everything. When the page perceived that Jacques de Beaune persistently followed his mistress in all her movements, stopped when she stopped, and watched her trifling in a bare-faced fashion, as if he had a right so to do, he turned briskly round with a savage and threatening face, like that of a dog whose says, "Stand back, sir!" But the good Tourainian had his wits about him. Believing that if a cat may look at king, he, a baptised Christian, might certainly look at a pretty woman, he stepped forward, and feigning to grin at the page, he strutted now behind and now before the lady. She said nothing, but looked at the sky, which was putting on its nightcap, the stars, and everything which could give her pleasure. So things went on.

At last, arrived outside Portillon, she stood still, and in order to see better, cast her veil back over her shoulder, and in so doing cast upon the youth the glance of a clever woman who looks round to see if there is any danger of being robbed. I may tell you that Jacques de Beaune was a thorough ladies' man, could walk by the side of a princess without disgracing her, had a brave and resolute air which please the sex, and if he was a little browned by the sun from being so much in the open air, his skin would look white enough under the canopy of a bed. The glance, keen as a needle, which the lady threw him, appeared to him more animated than that with which she would have honoured her prayer-book. Upon it he built the hope of a windfall of love, and resolved to push the adventure to the very edge of the petticoat, risking to go still further, not only his lips, which he held of little count, but his two ears and something else besides. He followed into the town the lady, who returned by the Rue des Trois-Pucelles, and led the gallant through a labyrinth of little streets, to the square in which is at the present time situated the Hotel de la Crouzille. There she stopped at the door of a splendid mansion, at which the page knocked. A servant opened it, and the lady went in and closed the door, leaving the Sieur de Beaune open-mouthed, stupefied, and as foolish as Monseigneur St. Denis when he was trying to pick up his head. He raised his nose in the air to see if some token of favour would be thrown to him, and saw nothing except a light which went up the stairs, through the rooms, and rested before a fine window, where probably the lady was also. You can believe that the poor lover remained melancholy and dreaming, and not knowing what to do. The window gave a sudden creak and broke his reverie. Fancying that his lady was about to call him, he looked up again, and but for the friendly shelter of the balcony, which was a helmet to him, he would have received a stream of water and the utensil which contained it, since the handle only remained in the grasp of the person who delivered the deluge. Jacques de Beaune, delighted at this, did not lose the opportunity, but flung himself against the wall, crying "I am killed," with a feeble voice. Then stretching himself upon the fragments of broken china, he lay as if dead, awaiting the issue. The servants rushed out in a state of alarm, fearing their mistress, to whom they had confessed their fault, and picked up the wounded man, who could hardly restrain his laughter at being then carried up the stairs.

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