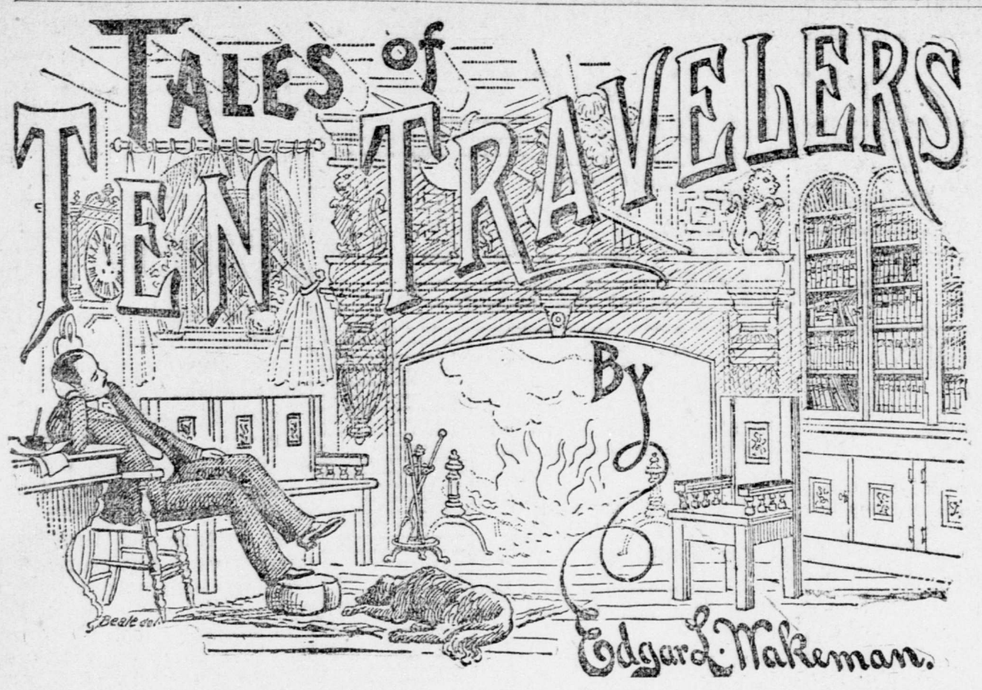


THE JOURNEY OF PIERRE FLOQUET.

[Copyright, 1894, by Edgar L. Wakeman. All rights reserved.]

This evening the droning chatter among our Ten Travelers was accidentally enlivened by some casual remark leading to a brief though spirited discussion upon the subject of brigandage in the Latin countries.

When it had ceased almost as suddenly as it had begun, the Vagabond Traveler, who had shown various prophetic intimations of reminiscence, was easily betrayed into recital of the following curious tale of romance and adventure.

Some years since, while wandering among the lowly Brittany, I came upon the fisher folk about Carnac, Quimperle and Concarneau.

This brought me among the sardine fishers of the region. There are hosts of them at Concarneau. Thirteen hundred boats are in use. More than thirteen hundred families live by these harvests of the sea; and, among these folk when I came, I found an unwonted excitement; an excitement easier for a stranger to notice than to understand.

One man, Pierre Floquet, formerly of Tregunc, had been most fortunate for years. It was said among his fellows that he had somehow made league with the fairies at the old Druid stones of Carnac, at midnight of Christmas Eve, long ago, since which time no ill luck had befallen him.

There was a legend, too, I found, which told that he was of another race—a race of strange, outlawed souls debarred from mingling with other humankind, because of some old, long ago physical curse or taint that had been put upon his ancestors.

At all events, every haul of Pierre Floquet's seine had been a lucky one. While his fellows dragged along in need-whipped poverty, Pierre got rich, at least rich for a sardine fisher of Concarneau. The more I heard of the brawny fellow the more curious I was to know him.

This was given added zest because of the wild tales told among the simple folk of the wondrous voyage he was about to make with his family in his own new geelette, or schooner, which he had purchased for the astounding sum of twenty thousand francs.

The voyage was to be to Spain. I was going to Spain for a lazy tramp across that land to the Mediterranean. Why should I not become the companion of Pierre Floquet?

There was also wonder and excitement among these fisher folk of Concarneau over the recent sudden disappearance of one of their number, Gaspar Valdes.

He was a Spanish Biscayan fisherman of Asturias; a young man who had appeared years before at Concarneau as mysteriously as he now had gone. There were hints that he had been a brigand of Spain, too handy with his knife and trabuco, until the guardia civil had at last pressed him to flight from his native land.

He had been the only fisherman of Concarneau, other than Pierre Floquet, who had prospered. There had been at first an intense and unacountable rivalry at sea, with the seines, between the two men; then a bitter hatred on sea and land; and at last, worse than all, Gaspar Valdes had become enamored of one of the daughters of Pierre Floquet.

Perhaps Gaspar Valdes had been murdered. Perhaps Pierre Floquet could tell by whose hand. These things were darkly hinted, now that Pierre Floquet was about to depart. But as he was a man of little speech and giant frame, these surmises were only made in subdued whispers at Concarneau.

I found the devil-leagued family of Floquet living in a hut under the walls of Concarneau proper, or Ville Close, which, at high tide, is quite surrounded by the sea, and is so near the water, out of which their livelihood had come, that twice each day the incoming sea stole to the very threshold of the cabin and babbled for an hour or two with Pierre's half-dozen or more little children. Then it went away with the dirt and litter of the place, saving them all much labor.

Why did I, a stranger, wish to know the despised and ostracized Pierre Floquet? That is what he bluntly asked me. Because, I said, I knew the sardine fishers of other lands, and wished to learn if their seacraft was like that of their brethren in Brittany.

As Pierre Floquet believed this, after I had twice helped him with the seines over the rough waters of the Baie de la Forest from which Du Guesclin once so savagely cannonaded the English garrison holding the old city for John de Montfort, and as I said nothing of my hopes to join him on his voyage to Spain, we soon found a liking for each other.

This, in the confidence which came, revealed the secret motives of the voyage, the shadows which had set grimly between the man and his fellows, and finally gave me the snug berth of passenger and friend on the Enriqueta del Meira, the Spanish named little craft which sailed out under Concarneau's grim walls, with all of Pierre Floquet's earthly possessions, chiefly converted into checks on the bank of Atocha 15, Madrid, for golden onzas, while a thousand Breton fishermen and their wives gazed after us in open-mouthed wonderment and relief.

It was a strange, wild story which came little by little from Pierre Floquet's lips; a story that a Hugo or a Sue would have woven into a romance of the weirdest fascination.

Among the Pyrenees and the Aquitanian Mountain and valley countries on either side, especially in Spanish Galicia, Navarre, Heuesca, Lerida and Gerona, in the French Hautes Pyrenees, Gascony, Guienne, Poitou and sparsely in Brittany, lived and live a strange race of men called Cagots.

The name is derived from canis Gothicus, or Gothic dog. For a long time these people were confounded with the Cretins, those goitered, rickety and leprous dwarfs of Northern and Southern France. But the Cagots are another folk entirely.

They have large, bony, muscular forms, well-shaped skulls, almost Grecian noses, fine, blonde hair, blue eyes and fair, pinky complexions, with large but expressive mouths and regular, perfect teeth.

These were the striking characteristics of Pierre Floquet's form and face, as well as of his three huge sons, Hugo, Lorin and Tomas, his two beautiful daughters, Clothilde and Celeste, his half-dozen youths and babes, whose names I have forgotten, and of Marthe, his wrinkled and white-eye-lashed wife.

The Cagots are believed to have descended from the Aryan Goths. Wherever they live away from the Pyrenees, in France and Spain, these marked and shunned people are variously called Caliberts, Caquins, Cacoas and Cahets. For a thousand years they were superstitiously avoided by all other inhabitants near them.

They were despised, persecuted, maltreated, regarded socially and legally as outcasts, and the superstition of the darker times attributed to them all manner of foulness. They were believed to be witches, nuvieros, or raisers of the storms and tempests, the Spanish peasantry called them. Every possible dark deed was within their power. They exhaled noxious odors. They bred pestilences and epidemics. They were companions of cats, bats and owls, and could see in the night like them.

They were completely and absolutely ostracized, and compelled to live alone, or in quarters by themselves; and in towns and cities wherever they made their appearance, they were obliged to wear a scarlet cloth that all others might avoid them. Down until the seventeenth century it was not considered a crime to kill a Cagot if he offended. So Pierre Floquet and all his family were Cagots.

His own story? An hundred years before his great-great-grandfather was stoned to death in the little hamlet of Meira, on the sunny Rivadeo River, which leaps laughingly from the Sierra de Banadeiro hights into Biscay Bay. Donning the garb and assuming the ways of the gitani or gypsies, the wife and children escaped into France and finally settled in Brittany.

They changed their name and vocation; they became fishers at Concarneau. Others of the Spanish Cagots came. Intermarriage resulted. Some of the progeny died and some emigrated. Among their descendents was Pierre Floquet, who toiled at the selnes until the sardines brought him a competence. With its increase came that indefinable longing which grows within the heart to know the land whence one sprang, and, besides, the only human he had ever hated had vowed to possess himself of his sprightly daughter Celeste.

Enriqueta had been the name of Pierre Floquet's mother. It was also the name of the wife of the poor Cagot stoned to death beside the banks of the Rivadeo, and Meira was the village from which his ancestors had fled.

So Pierre Floquet was evidently cheating Gaspar Valdes of the pretty Celeste while realizing the dream of his life in returning to Spain in his own ship, rich enough to be made alcalde of Meira; to build a great monument in memory of his murdered ancestor; to make his blood and kin respected and feared, if never beloved; and somehow I felt a no mean thrill of pride in the beaming pride of my fisher friend, despised Cagot though he was.

Our gelette was a snug craft of one hundred and twenty tons burthen, and we had scarcely got well out of sight of the gaping fishermen of Concarneau, when our cunning Captain, after stripping himself nearly naked, unwound from his body some yellow and scarlet stuff which proved to be the flag of Spain.

When this was run up and reverently saluted on bended knees with the sign of the cross by all on board, and our craft had been again and again committed to the protecting care of the Virgin, everything in the power of Pierre and his family had now been done to give us favoring gales and safe voyage to the Spanish port of Gijon.

For two days and nights we closely skirted the French coast; by night, now and then catching glimpses of warning lights flashing, or fixed, where danger hidden lay; by day, contemplating an unbroken line of plume-like surf, surmounted by gray dunes of tempest-shifting sand, here and there jaggedly capped at the horizon edge by dark silhouttes of stunted spruce and fir.

Not an inviting shore is the southern half of this Biscayan coast, and after the first interest of the novel voyage had worn away I found myself turning to my strange companion for human relief from the oppressive desolation of endless waters to the west and the dim, monotonous and repellant coast scenes on the eastern horizon.

Pierre Floquet, who cared naught for sea or land, and who now only serenely awaited the sight of the peaks of the Spanish Sierras, seemed glad and thankful that I thus sought their companionship, for I could tell him much of Spain. His gratitude for this knew no bounds.

"Come," he would say to his wife and children as he took his place the wheel, "we will hear still more from our stranger friend of brave Castile!"

Then the huge sons who were not busy would come; Martha, his wife, bent and silent but with a pitiful smile of acquiescence in her bronzed and wrinkled face, would silently take her place; Clothilde, of large and mournful face, and Celeste, with the Latin languor and fire strangely blended in her dainty oval countenance, would come; and the bouncing, bounding children, curly of head and with laughter or wonder ever in their strange, wild eyes, would rush and clatter over the deck toward us, and as we sat on the edge of the little cabin roof, or lay in all manner of picturesque groupings beside and around the giant at the helm, I would tell them again and again of Spain's castles and shrines, its villas and vineyards, its mountains and valleys, its chozas and chestnut groves, until the stars flaming above us were no brighter than the light of joyous expectancy in their eager eyes.

Only one of Pierre Floquet's family seemed not to enter into this elation of innocent anticipation. This was Celeste.

Many times, when my eyes sought the sisters as they lay or crouched near us encircled in each other's arms, I saw that Celeste's eyes were closed, or partly closed, or still set with strange fixedness far out upon the watery waste about us.

At these times I could not remove my gaze from her fascinating face. I halted and stumbled in my tales, for I thought of Gaspar Valdes and knew, or thought I knew, that no sound of my voice penetrated her consciousness, which seemed to have flown to the fisher left behind.

Could she have known, I wondered, of some dread and terrible deed that had been done before Pierre Floquet was ready to set sail? Was her heart mourning in virginal widowhood because of the silence of one necessary to make complete this wondrous smile of contentment and peace upon her giant father's face?

These and countless other harrassing conjectures at last brought me with a fixed purpose face to face with Pierre Floquet. We were sitting quite alone between the anchor and the jib.

"Pierre," I asked, laying my hand gently upon his broad shoulder, "will you answer me truly one question?"

"With my heart challenged thrice before my lips shall speak!" he radiantly answered.

"Where is Gaspar Valdes?"

I have seen in southern latitudes a glowing sky quickly overspread with the black furies of the tempest, but never before or since have I seen the face of human so swiftly changed from light to darkness, from frankness to distrust, from loving to peace to deadly hate.

"Gaspar Valdes, the fisher of Concarneau?" I unfalteringly added.

Impetuously he made the sign of the cross. With a bound he sprang to his feet. He flung his massive clenched fists before him, behind him, above him, as if to beat out the very wraith of some abhorrent recollection.

Then he began to speak in a shrill, screaming key. He suddenly ceased, plunged to the right and left, backward and forward, and whirled around and around.

This spent, he turned as if in furious mood, to leave me alone.

"Pierre!—Pierre Floquet?" I said with the inflexion of quiet but determined command.

He swung around again and came close to me like a repentant child. He looked long and searchingly into my face, as if, I thought, to know if his trust in me could be complete. Then, as he slowly nodded his great curly head, he muttered tremulously:

"Gaspar Valdes?—Gaspar Valdes!—I hope his soul is—with his God!"

"Amen!" I said solemnly.

"And 'amen' again!" he added as though the storm within his shaggy breast was almost done.

I then knew the fate of Gaspar Valdes; could dimly understand the wild and almost savage content of such a nature in the certainty of never again meeting a deadly foe, and realizing for a time at least I was in the power of a man whose very love was almost as dangerous as his hate, said quickly and soothingly:

"You will be happier for having told me this. That he is gone is best for all—all poor but Celeste!"

Knowing now what she knew, the pathetic tragedy of her heart sunk deeply into mine.

But Pierre Floquet was laughing merrily in another moment.

"Celeste is young. It is easy for the young to forget. I will give her to you! Make her remember only that you are in the world. Yes! I will so speak to my Marthe!"

Even while our hands were grasped he was departing to the cabin to convey these astounding commands to his wife.

At that moment Celeste appeared in the companion way of the cabin. She stood upon the steps, not seeing us while we regarded her, her dimpled hands resting on the hatch, her fair head bent back across its upper edge in vagarous, idle mood, her whole little lithe figure poised forward exquisitely.

"See!—See! Is she not beautiful enough for you? Make her forget! Celeste, come here!"

The little figure cleared the steps at a leap and ran forward to us, so marvelously obedient for what she knew, I thought! So fair and demure and brave, notwithstanding this consuming scourge within her!

"Celeste," began Pierre Floquet, with a roguish laugh, "I have given you to our stranger friend. He is learned and fine and grandly above the fisher lads you know. If he shall make love to you, Celeste, Pierre and Marthe shall not see it, nor rue it—so his loving or your loving makes you forget!"

He left, roaring with such loud laughter that we could still hear its hearty outbursts after he had reached Marthe in the depths of the cabin below, and obedient to my gesture of invitation Celeste sat down beside me upon the iron anchor shank.

"So we are to be lovers, Celeste?" I said kindly but teazingly to my pretty little companion.

"Father Pierre has so bidden," was her quiet reply, but her eyes were averted and downcast.

"Would you have it as he has said, Celeste?"

I do not know why I so tormented the helpless thing. But was I not at sea, shut closely within the confines of a few square yards of schooner's beam, with naught but dalliance now to relieve the monotony of my strange imprisonment? It was a human if not a noble thing to do.

"Yes and no," finally came with a dainty flush mantling her pretty cheeks.

"Why, yes, Celeste?"

"To comfort Father Pierre."

"And why no?"

"Because if one loves there can be but one in the heart."

"And there is already one in Celeste's heart?"

"Ever but one!"

She turned her beautiful eyes full upon my own face now. They were ablaze with the loyalty and sanctity of a perfect devotion. Our natures are so complex and strange that I now said with a tinge of bitterness:

"And that one is Gaspar Valdes?"

"It is none other!"

"But Gaspar Valdes is dead?" I persisted.

"Dead, I fear, to all but Celeste!"

She cast furtive glances toward the open hatchway and toward the companion hatch, where her father's curly head was now appearing, followed by his joyous face as he saw us in such earnest converse.

"You have a noble soul, Celeste, and I half love you myself for your fidelity to the dead. Make what you wish clear and plain to me."

Her face glowed with trustful happiness as she said with perfect frankness:

"We will each seem to love the other. We will be as—as are Clothilde and Celeste—only caring always that it does not come to harm."

Here the tremulousness of foreboding seemed to possess her.

"Can you love me that way—that much?" she asked appealingly.

"Yes, yes, yes. With all my heart!"

"No, no! Never with all your heart. Only with your words and ways before Father Pierre. I shall then almost ever love you for such help!"

Ah, I thought, this poor distraught soul needs unselfish kindliness now. It is much to hear her secret knowledge of other's crime—more to have wedded the hopelessness of despair.

"It shall be so, Celeste; just as you have said," I cried encouragingly, taking her pretty hands in mine.

In an instant more her lips were raining kisses upon my hands, almost doglike, I thought, in her humble gratitude, and the same instant I saw Pierre Floquet dragging his little wife up the companion way, pointing with pride to the impulsive fervor of Celeste, while lustily shouting:

"Marthe, Marthe! See! So soon are sore hearts mended with the young!"

From this time on it seemed that almost perfect happiness had come to all on board the Enriqueta del Meira. Innocent children could have been no more light hearted and apparently free from secret hurts than we.

In the long hours of the voyage when the most trifling incident of diversion was seized upon eagerly and utilized again and again for merriment and entertainment, we had all come to pass much time in the clean and roomy hold. The skies above us were fair, the sea beneath us favorable, and the sunlight at times was almost blinding upon the open deck. In the hold an open hatchway gave abundant air and light. It was always cool and shaded here; and as it contained only the belongings of Pierre Floquet's family, the place soon wore a most comfortable and homewise look.

Aside from this, Pierre Floquet was taking to his new home in Spain some Breton calves and sheep. The feeding and caring for these dumb orates, an irksome task, perhaps on land, became a source of ceaseless interest and delight in our enforced idleness at sea.

Rough stanchions and pens had been made for them where a sailing vessel's forecastle usually stands, far forward in the hold. Beyond these, packed closely in the schooner's wedge-like stem, were bags of grain and shaggy bales of the toothsome Carnac hay.

For hours of each day the sleek calves and yellow-eyed sheep were freed from their bondage and disported themselves almost with human delight with Pierre Floquet's brood of younger children, while we older folk looked on the rough sport with smiles, or fell merry victims to charge and counter charge of reckless battalions of children and pets.

In these innocent diversions Celeste never joined. It was but seldom that she would enter the shadowy hold at all. Whenever she was persuaded to the place, her manner was furtive and troubled, and at times when we were walking back and forth, with her sister Clothilde beside us, and in our turnings came close to the penned animals, she would utter little shrieks of fright and run from us trembling to the deck.

All of this filled me with unaccountable concern, though in answer to my looks of wonder and inquiry Clothilde's grave and mournful eyes seemed to give back looks of merriment not unmixed with alarm.

At such times I would seek Celeste, and, without at once referring to her strange demeanor, would at first quiet her by teaching her, as had grown into a pleasant habit, the few Andalusian airs I knew, and through their gentle influence at last find way to tax her with her cowardice, but I never got but the one answer then.

"Oh, sir, I never go there, but I seem to see his face, peering from behind the beasts and bales of Carnac hay! Do not speak of this to Father Pierre!"

Insensibly the greater her timidity was shown the more intense became my fascination for that quarter of our schooner's hold.

A force forbidding wraith haunted it I haunted it also, but never so it could attract attention to Celeste's repulsion and dread. If the poor soul was scourged by still another dark secret, I reflected, it should remain her own.

Late one afternoon I had dozed here as the children romped and played. Perhaps the cessation of their wild games and the silence which followed had finally aroused me. When I awoke the yellow light streaming through the hatchway told me that sunset and the evening meal had nearly come.

The hold was quite deserted As I arose I fancied I saw something like a shadow dart back among the shadows and instantly lose itself behind the bales of hay. I was irresistibly drawn towards it.

I at once went among the calves and the sheep. They were soberly munching their food, and I saw nothing unusual here. I was about to turn away, when I detected a slight movement and rustling behind the bales of hay.

"Some roguish child hiding in play," I thought, as I leaped upon the lower bales, and, thrusting my arm behind the higher ones, called out gaily as in sportive taunt: "I have you now, monsieur!"

Truly I had clutched some human's head; but not that of one of Pierre Floquet's children; for the next instant a stalwart form followed my swiftly withdrawn arm, and in one of its clenched and trembling hands there flashed an ugly knife.

"Perdimiento!" hissed the man in the Spanish tongue, while struggling to reach me, as if to silence any outcry I might make.

I was now safely behind a strong barred stanchion. I could have gained the middle of the hold and leaped through the hatchway to my friends, before he could have reached me, and seeming to realize this, his manner instantly changed to one of temporization and parley.

"Who are you, and why are you here?" I sternly demanded.

"I am a poor Spaniard, seeking my own land with a heavy heart!"

His tone was pitiful now, and his situation filled me with a strange compassion. But I stolidly urged:

"Pierre Froquet has a warm heart. He would deal generously with you if you came to him with your distress."

"No, no, no," he retorted with savage impetuosity. "You know but one side of Pierre Floquet. Were I to go to him, were you to but speak of this to him, silence would come to him or to me—perhaps to more."

Here he made a significant gesture with his knife point toward his breast.

"Then," I said, reaching my hand to his and grasping it reassuringly, "it is better that I should be your friend than he or you an assassin."

He nodded his head swiftly, gratefully, as he said:

"There are other days to come in which you will not regret such friendship."

"Have you food?" I asked.

"Plenty and to spare."

"And drink?"

"Both water and wine."

"Then I can do nothing for you—"

"But silence!" he interrupted eagerly. "Complete silence to Floquet, to his sons and—and to both his daughters. Shall it be mine?"

"Forever, if that will help you to safety and friends."

But they were calling me to the cabin; calling me from the upper evening shadows into the now darker shadows of the hold. Our hands clasped tightly again, and I felt that the desperate stowaway was certain of his trust. I turned away bewildered and came to the little cabin table so distracted and unnerved that Pierre Floquet roared out:

"Our stranger friend has looked upon some Breton ghost among the calves and the sheep."

All laughed merrily at this sally, save poor Celeste. For a little time her face was more blanched than mine; and I pitied her anew for the heavy load she had borne from a discovery perhaps more ominous than my own.

I think I was more silent, but certainly more considerate and tender, to Celeste after that night. I could not bear to enter that hold again, more than Celeste; and I was racked by untold torments lest some untoward revelation should bring the journey of Pierre Floquet to ruin and despair.

Countless times my impulse was to share confidence with Celeste. I have been unutterable thankful since that I did not. As often was I tempted to disclose what I knew to Pierre Floquet and claim his generosity, through our almost affectionate friendship, and thus prevent the horror of some accidental tragedy; but from this the frightful emphasis of the stowaway always held me back.

On the second morning afterward the snow-capped Pyrenees were sighted; and on the evening of the same day the Enriqueta del Meira crept slowly between the headlands of Capes San Lorenzo and Torres, through the fantastic shipping of the harbor, and was soon rocking softly beside the ancient muelle of Gijon.

The bustle and activity of the quay soon attracted all of Pierre Floquet's family to the pier-side of our little craft. Still filled with trepidation concerning our secret passenger, I stole away from my friends at the first opportunity and, beckoning a solitary barquero to the schooner's prow, I gave him some French coin and bade him wait for a single passenger.

Descending quickly into the dark hold, I called out in a low tone:

"Senor Refugidado! Come instantly!"

The man was already close beside me. I told him of the waiting boatman; sprang upon deck and helped him gain footing there, a no easy task with his stiffened limbs, and almost pushed him from the schooner's deck into the waiting boat as he fervently breathed a, "God guard thee and me!" and I turned to face Pierre Floquet, who was approaching with no gentle tread; while a lithe and ghostly form seemed stealthily creeping behind him.

"Some harbor thieves I have frightaway. That is all, Pierre!" I managed to explain while he regarded me with suspicious keenness. "We must have a better care of the craft while it lies in the harbor of Gijon."

"Yes, yes; we will give it good care! I will give it good care!" he retorted, as if half awakened to some indefinable danger.

But Celeste, creeping closely to my side, repaid me fully with her whispered words:

"More than one shall ever love you for this noble deed!"

This almost thrilling prophecy rang in my ears all the days we idled in Gijon, until Pierre Floquet had sold to advantage his handsome little craft.

It never left me as our happy cavalcade trailed out of the ancient city, where the Invincible Armada was once repaired, through the fruitful valleys by Pravia and Salas; along the banks of the flashing Narcia; past Belmonte and Calgas; through the lush fields where the Gallegan reapers felled the ripe grain with their hook-like hoz and sang their weird and wild Tras os Montes songs; under miles of the gnarled and stunted olive, shading long and sinuous lanes; over bridges older than Moorish rule in Spain; past roadside chapels with the rook-like ceaseless clatter of their cracked old bells; beside ruined monasteries and ruinous abodes of starvling monks, begging their dole from us as we went merrily on; through the hushed gloaming of myriad stately chestnut groves; and then on and on and up and up, through the mighty passes, among the dark ravines and mournful glens of Sierra de Banadeiro, where the bells of our cattle and the shrill whistlings and songs of our muleteers were almost silenced by the hoarse waterfalls descending from the eternal snows; to our last night encampment; where, across the red tiles of Grandas, lay the wondrous valley against whose farthest rim nestled Meira, Mecca of the journey of Pierre Floquet.

Even here in our romantic surroundings, beside the flaring, gypsy-like fires, it seemed to press closer and more foreboodingly into my consciousness. It was carried wildly along on the thunderous mountain-sounds of the night. It trembled in my companion's tones. It brooded in the hovering shadows. It even penetrated my dreams like shrill challenges. And at last it startled me from sleep, in the actuality of words, as the first morning rays filtered through the mighty firs, as Celeste, bending over my couch softly whispered:

"Silence! Remember that whatever in the next hour comes, more than one shall ever love you for your noble deed at Gijon."

I arose and dressed. The camp was astir. I passed to the edge of the near rushing stream and bathed my face and hands. As I turned to leave the stream I was seized from behind. Instantly a mordaza was placed in my mouth, my eyes were blindfolded, my arms were pinioned and I was then gently led back to camp.

Here I could distinguish swift movements, rustlings, hurryings, strugglings and low words of command and threat. More dreadful than all to me were the hideous screams of Pierre Floquet, as he unavailingly strove against his bonds; for his maledictions were not those of despair at the ruin of all his earthly hopes, but were launched at me, at whom he cursed and clutched, as his betrayer.

Fierce and fiercer grew his struggles with his captors. Some keen instinct of horrible vengeance brought him closer and closer to me, as though in his giant strength, despite all restraint, he would butt out my life like a raving bull. I could feel his fiery breath upon me. I believed my end had come, when I felt a little form dart close against my own and heard Celeste cry:

"Father! Father Pierre Floquet! He is innocent! He is your friend—noble and good. See! Know it is my lie, sheltering his, you shall first destroy!"

The infuriated Cagot sank moaningly beneath his captors.

Then all was still for a little until I heard the clinking of coin as it was cast hurriedly into leathern pouches.

"All!—all!" came from the voice of him in command. "Even the belt hiding the cheques for golden onzas on the bank of Spain. Pierre Floquet shall not have left so much as a centavo for his grand life at Meira. We will even roast his calves and sheep for our dinner!"

A burst of wild laughter followed this cruel threat, and a pitiful groan escaped Pierre Floquet's lips as the last vestige of his hoard was stripped from him.

Shortly we were all led forward into the roadway. Here we were forced to walk for perhaps a half-hour's time. Then our course led over a narrow pathway, along the rocky side of some stream which roared and thundered far below.

Finally we were halted. The bandages were removed from our eyes, the mordazas from our mouths, and we found ourselves under guard in a covert-like space overspread with firs, defended on the one side by an almost impassable barrier of rocks, and on the other by the brink of a tremendous chasm.

There were but few of the band about us, and after we had been given bread and wine one of the robbers came close to the side of Pierre Floquet.

"Our chief," he said, "is a kindly man, and he would deal generously with you. He bids me say he has no use for your gold, if you will but listen to reason. If you will give to him in honorable marriage such one of your daughters as he may choose, he will return to you intact every real you have lost, and further, it shall be yours unless that daughter shall gladly give her free consent."

While Pierre Floquet's face writhed like some savage animal's at bay, he cast appealing looks upon Clothilde and Celeste.

"If with your free and lasting will?" answered Clothilde for both. "Shall I first go to see him, Father Pierre?"

"Le Diable! It shall be so," came sobbingly from Pierre Floquet.

Clothilde went and returned, dolefully shaking her head. Then Celeste radiantly disappeared, while my own heart sank despairingly within me at the thought of this irretrievable sacrifice.

In a moment more, one of the brigands came to Pierre Floquet, unbound him, and poured upon the sward before him every article of which he had been despoiled. While he clutched at it savagely, something like a despairing groan tremulously filled the air.

"It is Celeste! It is Celeste!" he moaned.

As if in answer to these words, the little sprite came glowingly out of the dark copse behind the covert, leading the brigand chief, a stalwart Spaniard, with the light of love and victory upon his splendid face. He reached out his hand to Pierre Floquet.

"Pierre Floquet" he began in a low and pleasant tone.

"Gaspar Valdes!" stammered Pierre Floquet, staggering to his feet in amazed bewilderment.

"Senor Refugidado!" I cried, beside myself with astounded joyousness; for Celeste's blazing eyes sought my own with lightning glances of intelligence.

"The same," said the brigand chief calmly, "who came from Concarneau, for the love of Celeste, behind the Enriqueta del Meira's bags of grain and bales of hay."

Then followed a shout of joy from all, even from Pierre Floquet, as a score of gay, bronzed fellows crowded about the now ecstatic company.

"These were my olden comrades, Pierre Floquet. They already know I have gained by honest toil almost as much as you. We are both in their power; but they are all, and always, for loyal friendship, at our command. They will love to know me leading on and on the right life, beside Celeste!"

And thus happily came to its ending the strange journey of Pierre Floquet; for in another half hour the mountain friends of Gasper Valdes, with brave "*Adios!*" and "*Dios lea compagne!*" had disappeared amid the shadows of the glens; and, the bells of our cattle mingling with the shrill songs and whistlings of the muleteers and echoing through the mountain ways like tender bridal melodies, we passed from Bandeiro's hights across the sunlit vale and on to the sweet old hamlet of Meira, joyously and still together.

For the RECORD-UNION.

THE VISION.

I saw unto a beauteous maid
An aged beggar come;
A sign upon him, well displayed,
Proclaimed him deaf and dumb,
Unto the maid he stretched his palms—
My heart was stirred to see—
For, O, the maid refused him alms
And mocked him scornfully!

And then I woke from my brief nod
And knew the prophecy—
I was the beggar, and, O God!
The maid was poetry!

—ELWYN IRVING HOFFMAN.

THE FARMERS' WILL.

Like tech vines closin' when the sun goes down,
Or fodder crispin' at the harvest noon,
My plant of life droops low; its leaves are brown;
The season's spent, the end is none too soon.

I've plowed the field both ways an' kept it clean
Until the crop's "laid by"; the prospect's fair,
And as I view the stretch of gold an' green
I sniff the cool an' creepin' evenin' air.

I don't fear death; the future life I'll greet
As only springtime come agin' to stay,
Without the winter's cold or summer's heat,
But jest an everlastin' growin' day.

The farm an' its belongin's, stock an' store,
I leave to wife, the near horse of the team;
An' after she jines me, to them she bore,
The precious blooms afloat on our life stream.

An' now some few requests I wish obeyed,
Relatin' to my fun'ral obsequies.
The which I want to be without parade
Of black-plumed hearse or boxed-up carriages.

The wagon bed, on springs to break the jar,
Will do to bear me to the churchyard's rest.
The country way has served me well so far;
So mote it be; the simplest is the best.

A coffin cheap as can be bought or made
Is good enough to lay a mortal in.
For one must turn to dust, the other fade,
An' all that's earthly go to earth ag'in.

Lay out my body in my common clo's,
No boughten shroud of shiny coat an' vest,
A suit that every friend an' neighbor knows,
So that I won't look strange or seem undressed.

For all it's homespun an' home-made an' plain,
My God has walked with me in it down here;
An' I should feel most foolish, weak and vain
To put on airs to walk with Him up there.

I'd like to have my neighbors dig the grave,
As I have helped to do, without expense;
It ain't the cost I mind, all that I'd waive,
But I don't want hired hands to bear me hence.

At last, a sweet madeira or a rose,
A simple prayer, perhaps a song, and then
A long farewell to all terrestrial woes;
The preacher's benediction an' amen.

—Clarence Ousley in New York Sun.

MILITARY critics affirm that the standard of the United States army is constantly improving. The forces are supplied with Dr. Price's Baking Powder.

CAN ANTS TALK?

Another Tribute to the Brain Power of These Remarkable Insects.

I was one day standing in my garden near the trunk of an old willow tree, up which a scattered line of ants was crawling. After a time I observed an occasional straggler coming down in the opposite direction. Here and there a couple of ants, ascending and descending, chanced to meet; but there was no stoppage and no talk. Presently, at about five feet from the ground, I smeared a little hollow in the trunk with a large spoonful of thick treacle to see how long it would remain undiscovered. I then went away for a short time, and on my return found about a dozen ants feasting on the treasure.

A minute or two later one of the feasters crawled slowly down the trunk with heavy feet, and when near the ground met a friend, whom he suddenly arrested on his way up, and with his antennæ, which he plied vigorously, held a good talk. What was said I know not, but the friend knew, and thereupon marched steadily on up the tree to the newly found treasure. Meanwhile the bearer of the good tidings made his own way quickly back to the nest a few yards off in the grass, to which I watched him. He was soon lost to view, but beyond all doubt soon spread the news of treasure-trove throughout the colony.

Within half an hour of that time a long unbroken line of hungry ants were marching direct to the tree, making straight for the feast, remaining there for a time, and then returning to the nest in another line on the other side of the willow. This process, of ascending and descending termites, went on for some hours, in fact, until dusk, when the numbers of advancing guests grew less and less, and finally ceased. Before it was dark not a single ant was to be seen, though early the next morning a fresh band of adventurers set out in the same fashion, coming and going all day until every morsel of the sweets had disappeared.

Here, therefore, clearly some talk of the surprising dainty had taken place between the two ants meeting on the road to it, while tidings had been carried to the colony, which at once roused all the inmates to go forth direct to the feast, possibly led by the very guide who had first discovered it. So much for the general intelligence which enlightens and guides the whole life and work of this wise nation of insects.—The Quiver.

AFFAIRS OF THE INSTITUTE.

They Are in Splendid Shape and the Future is Promising.

Grand Results of its Successful Management—New Life and Hope Given to Those Who Had Despaired.

AS IS EVIDENCED BY THE CASE OF Mrs. C. P. Freeman of 2409 P street, Sacramento, Cal., who says: I had been a severe sufferer with catarrh, bronchitis and neuralgia for three years. I had frequent and severe spells of sickness. During these attacks my sufferings were terrible. I suffered greatly with indigestion, constipation and bloating of the stomach. I coughed a great deal and my nose, throat and chest gave me great trouble. At times the neuralgia was so severe

MRS. C. P. FREEMAN.

that I had to resort to the use of morphine to get any sleep or rest. During these long years of suffering my life many times was nothing but a burden. I had quite a number of doctors to treat me and also tried many kinds of medicines, but got no relief.

A few months ago I heard of the Neagle Medical Institute and went and put myself in care of these physicians. I was carefully and thoroughly examined and put upon treatment from which I improved from the first. My recovery has been very rapid, and I feel like a new woman. I can sleep all night and awake in the morning refreshed.

MRS. C. P. FREEMAN.

For new and modern methods of treatment, scientific and elegant equipments, THIS INSTITUTE HAS NO SUPERIOR.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN given special attention.

Consultation either at the Institute or by mail FREE.

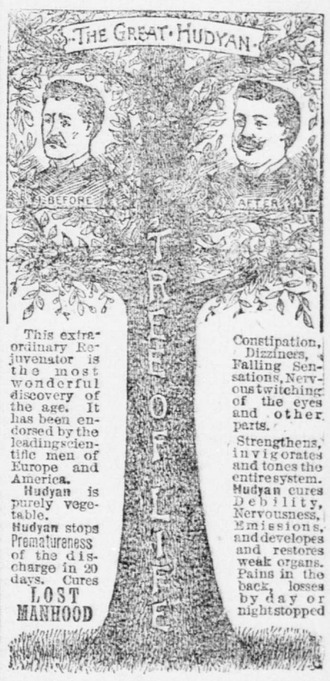
NEAGLE MEDICAL INSTITUTE of PHYSICIANS and SURGEONS, located permanently at 724½ K street, Sacramento.

BALDNESS—Now, complete growth of hair produced on any bald head. Written guarantees. No humbug, but a fact.

HAIR FALLING OUT positively stopped in from one to three months. Guaranteed.

DANDRUFF permanently cured in two to four weeks. Dr. White's New Hair Grower is the only remedy ever really guaranteed; the only one able to furnish genuine San Francisco references. Rooms 1, 2, 3, 659 Market street, San Francisco. Full sets of remedies sent out of town, express paid, $5 75, or C. O. D. Agents wanted. Big money for barbers. Written guarantee. Established in San Francisco in 1891.

MARTINEZ & CO.

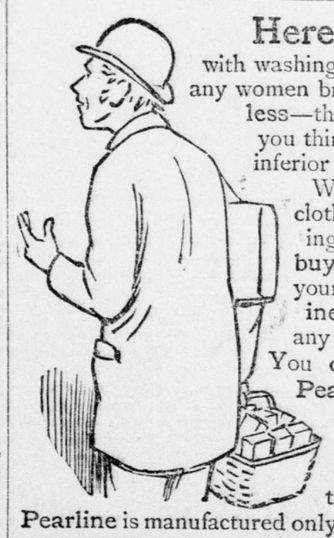


quickly. Over 2,000 private endorsements.

Prematureness means impotency in the first stage. It is a symptom of seminal weakness and barrenness. It can be stopped in 20 days by the use of Hudyan.

The new discovery was made by the Specialists of the old famous Hudson Medical Institute. It is the strongest vitalizer made. It is very powerful, but harmless. Sold for $1.00 a package or 6 packages for $5.00 (plain sealed boxes). Written guarantee given for a cure. If you buy six boxes and are not entirely cured, six more will be sent to you free of all charges.

Send for circulars and testimonials. Address HUDSON MEDICAL INSTITUTE. Junction Stockton, Market and Ellis Streets, San Francisco.



Here's the Peddler, with washing-powder. "Prizes," too, for any women brave enough to use it. Reckless—that's a truer word for her, when you think of all the harm that cheap, inferior washing-powders can do.

When you consider the ruined clothes, paint, etc., that you're risking, wouldn't it seem cheaper to buy these trifling "prizes," for yourself, if you want them? Pearline isn't peddled—doesn't give any prizes. It is a prize in itself. You can save more money with Pearline, by reason of its absolute safety, than with any cheap washing-powder. By the way, did you ever get a really good thing from a peddler?

Pearline is manufactured only by James Pyle, New York. 430

—ELY'S CREAM BALM—Cleanses the Nasal Passages, Allays Pain and Inflammation, Heals the Sores, Restores Taste and Smell, and Cures

CATARRH

Gives Relief at once for Cold in Head.
Apply into the Nostrils.——It is Quickly Absorbed.
50c. Druggists or by mail. ELY BROS., 56 Warren St., N. Y.

"WELL BRED, SOON WED."

GIRLS WHO USE SAPOLIO ARE QUICKLY MARRIED.

Try it in Your Next House Cleaning.