MONSIEUR LE COMPTE.

Perhaps I had better explain at once that it was myself who bestowed upon him the title, to which his only claim was the grandeur of his manner and his foreign accent. It was at a "jumble" sale in behalf of some charity or other that I first made his asquaintance. He pushed his way through the jostling, elbowing crowd of would-be purchasers to the hat stall at which I was selling—a tall, old man, with a gaunt, erect figure, clad in the shabbiest of tail-coats, that seemed to have been made for a person half his size, the sleeves reaching only about half way down his arms.

"Mademoiselle is surprised to see me here," he said, with a low bow and an apologetic smile, as he removed the shabby cloth cap he wore; "but I thought I might perhaps get a leetle present for a friend, who is in what you call adverse circumstances. The days have been when it was not here I would come for a present for a friend; but I myself—." Here he shrugged his shoulders expressively and heaved a deep sigh, adding the next moment, with a sudden change of tone and manner, "Well, well, we must not complain! Things might always be worse!"

Meantime he was examining, in the most leisurely and minute way, the hats I had placed before him, trying them on one after the other, slowly and deliberately; for, as he informed me in an aside, his friend's head was about the size of his own. When he had at last selected a hat—a tall one—he thrust his hand into his greasy trouser pocket with an air of lordly magnificence and drew out a sixpenny piece, which he laid upon the table.

"Never mind the change!" he said, in a tone at once jauntily reckless and magnanimously dignified, not having apparently caught my remark that sixpence was the price of the hat—"never mind the change—it is for a good cause. Will madamoiselle take down my address? Ah, you do not send. That is a pity. In that case"—here he paused and wrinkled his brow in perplexed reflection—"in that case I shall have to put it on myself. Mademoiselle understands that I could not carry it. Good-day." And, placing his new purchase on his head, he strode away, dignified and erect.

It was not until some months later that I came across him again. I had advertised for a studio. As my home was in the suburbs, I wanted a room with a good light in the central part of the town, where I should be within reach of possible buyers and possible pupils. Among those who replied to my advertisement was M. le Comte. He did not, of course, sign himself so, and I did not recognize him from his letter, though the grandiose tone in which it was written corresponded with the magnificent manner of my friend of the jumble sale; but almost the moment I saw him I knew him again. The address given in his letter was that of a side street in a busy neighborhood, where there were many offices and studios. After mounting three stairs I found on the third landing a door bearing a brass plate with the inscription:

M. ANDRE PICOTIN,
Professor of the French Language.

I knocked; and after a few moments the door was opened by no less a person than M. le Comte himself, wearing a tall hat—no doubt the very one I had sold him, looking none the better for its three months' wear since. He removed it at once, however, on seeing me, and made a deep bow.

"Ah, the lady whom I accommodate with an apartment as studio!" he exclaimed politely, when I had explained my errand; and turning back into the narrow, dark lobby, he called out in a dignified, authoritative tone, "Janett, Janett!"

As no one, however, appeared in answer to the call, he returned to the door, saying, with an apologetic smile:

"I fear I must myself be your cicerone—my good Janett must have gone out. Will mademoiselle give herself the trouble to follow me?" As he spoke he took two or three steps along the lobby, and with a lofty air flung wide open a door on the left hand. "This," he said, in a gracious tone, as of a person conferring a favor—"this is my drawing room, the salon, which I resign to mademoiselle. I always like to accommodate the ladies—place aux dames is my motto."

I cast a look around the room. It was small, and absolutely bare, save for two wooden chairs, one of which wanted a leg, and a small wooden table. For the rest, the window looked to the north, and the coloring of the walls was tolerably good. The room would suit my purpose well enough, and I said so.

"But," I added, "I should not like to deprive you of your drawing room."

"Mademoiselle is very good," he replied. "It gives me pleasure to oblige her. And for this room—here he shrugged his shoulders and elevated his eyebrows—"as mademoiselle sees, it is not in use. Madame does not receive for some years; she is what you call delicate—confined to her room for the most part. The salon is altogether at the service of mademoiselle!" This with a low bow, and an outward movement of the arms, expressive of a magnanimous generosity that disclaimed all merit, and would not even accept thanks.

To speak of such a vulgar thing as money seemed actually indelicate, if not insulting. Still it had to be done; so, as delicately as I could, I hinted that I should like to know what rent was expected.

"Ah, mademoiselle will excuse me—I do not interfere in such matters. But here comes my good Janett—you ladies will be able to settle everything between you."

As he was speaking, I had heard the sound of a very slow, very heavy step approaching up the stairs; and there now entered the room an old woman, clad in an extremely shabby bonnet and woolen shawl and carrying a market basket. She was a large-made, large-boned woman, who must have been tall before the weight of years of toil bent her broad back into the shape of a bow. Her head shook slightly from side to side, and her face, which was heavy and large-featured, wore the dull, patient expression of an overworked horse.

"Janett," said M. le Comte, "I have promised to accommodate mademoiselle here with the use of the salon."

"Hoots, get awa' wi' your Frenchifield havers!" exclaimed the old woman, who spoke with a broad Scotch accent, and in a slow, deep, almost masculine voice, that contrasted strangely with monsieur's light and jaunty tones. "I never ken what he means when he gets on to his French," she added, turning to me. "Was it a studio you was wanting, mem?"

Behind her back, while she was speaking, monsieur was shrugging his shoulders and looking at me with an amused, indulgent expression on his face.

"A privileged pairson, you see, mademoiselle—a privileged pairson," he said to me in a deprecating aside, which was not overheard by the deaf old woman. "Well, ladies," he added, louder, "I think I shall just leave you to settle the affairs of the Nation." And with a bow to me he walked quickly out of the room.

"Ay, it's weel for them that can get ither folk to dae a'thing for them," the old woman muttered with a short, deep laugh as he retreated from the room. And then, turning to me, she asked abruptly:

"What rent was ye thinking to gi'e for the room?"

Evidently there was no reluctance here to speak of money matters! However, I found her reasonable, and even modest, in her demands, and we soon came to terms. About the cleaning of the room and the lighting of the fire there seemed at first to be some difficulty.

"You see, I'd (the it myself," she said, "but I'm aye oot in the morning the noo. I've gotten wark frae Wilson, the upholsterer in West street there—fower shillings a week for cleaning out the premises, and as mony sticks as I can carry awa' fae the yaird. It's no' that bad pay; but I'm getting ower auld noo for wark—I'm getting ower auld." And her voice died away in a low mutter, which I could not follow.

"You deserve a rest, now," I said, in order to say something.

"Ay, that I dae!" she answered. But I can na get it. I maun work, I maun work, and a' for—" And she gave a bitterly expressive nod of her head toward the wall which separated the room we were in from the next, while once more her voice trailed off into the low muttered monologue which seemed to be habitual with her. "But"—suddenly waking up to a consciousness of my presence—"I'll see that your room's cleaned and your fire lichted for you—never you fash yourself about it! If I can na dae it, he maun jist dae it; he may as weel earn the saut to his parritch!"

was, but concluded it could not possibly be M. le Comte who was meant. However, before many weeks were over, during which I had been comfortably installed in my new studio, I was to make the discovery that it was no other than he. Coming into the room one morning earlier than usual, I found that my fire was not yet lighted. While I was looking about for matches there was a knock at the door, which was followed by the entrance of monsieur himself.

"Mademoiselle is early astir this morning," he said, as he made a deep bow with all his usual dignity and jauntiness of manner, in spite of the fact that in one hand he carried an iron "blower," and in the other a shovel; while from under one arm there protruded a pair of bellows, and from under the other a hearth brush. "My good Janett is out this morning, so I must myself render mademoiselle the little service of lighting her fire."

I offered to light it myself, but he was quite indignant at the suggestion.

"Impossible, impossible—I could not permit mademoiselle to soil her fair fingers!" he exclaimed, with a deprecating outward wave of the hands containing the shovel and the blower, which dislodged the bellows and the brush from under his arms, and caused them to fall with a crash to the ground.

"I have much experience of this work these last years," he said with a sigh, as he proceeded to light the fire in a methodical way, "though once—" Here another deep sigh cut short his sentence. "But, madame, you see, is delicate. I rise and light the fire in her room every morning."

"Ah, you are a good husband," I exclaimed.

"Well, I might be better—I might be better!" was the reply, in a tone of dignified humility. "But I try to do my duty at any rate. I try to do my duty—and no man can do more." Here there was a return to the light and jocular tone, which in M. le Comte alternated so strangely with the stately and dignified. "Well, mademoiselle, I think you will do now. I shall leave you to your own meditations." And, gathering up his miscellaneous belongings, he retreated to the doorway, and there made one of his deepest bows. "By the by," he lingered in the doorway to say, "I hope mademoiselle is not disturbed by my pupils. You see, in these evil days I am obliged to give private tuition in my own language. Ah, that is well," as I reassured him on that point. "I know that any disturbance is apt to interfere with the divine inflatus."

Perhaps it is needless to say that during the weeks which followed, I suffered no disturbance whatever from monsieur's pupils. They must have come at hours when I was not at the studio—if they came at all—for I never heard their steps. Once a day I heard the slow, heavy tread of the good Janett, as she retired from cleaning out the upholsterer's premises; once a day, the light, jaunty steps of monsieur setting out for his constitutional; but no others—not even those of a message boy. One morning, indeed, when I arrived at my usual hour, I found a butcher's boy at the door, and monsieur himself—no less a personage—taking something out of his basket—something gray and soft, I knew not what till monsieur himself explained in his light, yet stately way.

"A delicacy for madam, you see," he said. "She cannot eat your English roshif—nor I either; we require something light and delicate, if mademoiselle suffers at all from the stomach. I would advise you to buy a sheep's bag." And he held up the gray thing in his hand. "Ah, stop a minute"—as the boy was moving away from the door—"here is a bawbee for yourself—i't's a long stair to come up!" As he spoke he plunged his hand into his pocket with the grandest air of careless generosity, but evidently without finding what he wanted. "Strange," he exclaimed, as he tried one pocket after the other. "I seem to have no small change to-day. Perhaps mademoiselle would be so kind? Just a copper—such a long stair—ah, thank you! And be sure to tell Mr. Smith"—to the boy—"that I am much obliged to him for sending it. You see"—turning to me—"I generally carry up any little thing like this myself in a piece o' paper—the stair is so long. But Mr. Smith has been obliging enough to send—a very obliging man, Mr. Smith."

Evidently the visits of the message boys were not frequent at monsieur's. The little episode set me thinking about "madam," the delicate wife of whom I heard so much and saw nothing. I wondered what she could be like, how she managed to pass her day, and above all, where she lived. As far as I could judge, the mansion of Monsieur le Compte consisted of only one other room besides the salon which I occupied—at least, I knew there was only one other door besides my own opening off the little narrow lobby. Did monsieur and madam, and the good Janett, all inhabit the same room? I wondered; but during the winter that I occupied the salon I got no nearer solving the mystery.

The following spring I went to Paris in order to study in the studio of a celebrated master, and so lost sight entirely of monsieur for several months. It was on a bright day early in the autumn of the next year that, as I happened to be passing through a quiet terrace in the suburb in which I lived, my attention was attracted towards the garden of one of the houses by seeing a small crowd of message boys and message girls gazing into it through the railings. At the windows of the house a number of faces of women and children were eagerly looking out toward the lawn, on which an old man was going through a number of extraordinary movements apparently meant for dancing—hopping and skipping, advancing and retreating, crossing his feet and then uncrossing them, sidling and tiptoeing, bowing and bending. I could not be mistaken in the green and greasy tail-coat (greener and greasier than when I had last seen it), in that rusty tall hat of jumble-sale celebrity, and, above all, in that light, erect figure and jaunty, yet dignified, bearing—it was M. le Comte!

Just as I stopped to look on the windows were thrown open and a handful of coppers was flung out. Monsieur stooped and gathered up the coins, preserving his balance and his dignity in a way which, considering his age and the attitude, was truly wonderful.

"Good morning, M. Picoton," I said, placing myself in his way as he stepped out of the garden gate, looking flushed with his exertions.

"Ah, madamoiselle," he exclaimed in a tone of pleased recognition. "I am glad to see you again." And he removed the tall hat and gave me one of the deep bows I remembered so well. "I have just been giving these young people there a dancing lesson," he added, in a careless, off-hand tone. "It is terrible to see how the art of terpsichore is neglected in this barbarous country."

Of course, I agreed with him, and then proceeded to question him as to how he and "madame" were getting on. I learned that they were still in the old place, and that madame was very poorly, "confined to her bed these last three days," he said. I promised to go to see her, and I kept my promise.

It was not without some feeling of excitement and curiosity at the prospect of seeing the mysterious "madame" that I mounted the stairs to her dwelling the following day. The outer door of monsieur's mansion stood open, as it generally used to do, and I noticed, as I passed into the dark little passage, that the brass plate had disappeared. Evidently monsieur had discontinued his private tuition in French. I knocked at the inner door, within which I had never as yet penetrated. There was no reply, and it was not until I had two or three times repeated my knock that a deep voice, which I seemed to recognize as that of the good Janett, called, "Come in."

I turned the handle and entered. The door, as it opened, just grazed the foot of a large wooden tent bed, which concealed the view of anything else in the room. So I had walked direct into a sleeping room. The discovery for a moment made me hesitate; but by and by I took courage to advance a step or two and look around me. Evidently the room was used for other purposes besides a sleeping apartment; opposite me as I stood was the window, a press in which some plain, coarse dishes were set out, while under the press was a sink with taps for water. Another step brought me round the corner of the bed in view of the fireside. As I stepped forward there suddenly started up from the wooden armchair by the fire no less a person than M. le Comte, though looking strangely unlike himself. Round his head, entirely concealing one eye, there was tied a rather dirty red cotton handkerchief, while the eye visible glared at me with a rather startled look. Evidently I had awoke him out of a doze in his chair. He recovered himself almost at once, however.

"Ah, mademoiselle!" he exclaimed, bowing with his usual dignity and nonchalance. "Delighted to see you. It is not often you honor us with a visit."

I replied that I had come to ask for "madame." "But I am sorry to see that you, too, are suffering," I added.

"A trifle, a trifle!" he replied lightly, but I thought also somewhat shamefacedly. "An accident in the street—pavement so slippery—the authorities ought really——" He had gradually recovered his usual self-satisfaction and dignity of manner while he was speaking, and had reached the stage of righteous indignation when he was here suddenly interrupted.

"Ahcident!" exclaimed a low, gruff voice from the bed, with a short, ironical laugh—"ahcident! I'm thinking you might as well tell the truth and say it was whisky!"

I did not need to look toward the bed in order to know that the speaker was the good Janett. As I glanced toward her she was leaning forward on her elbow, her head supported on one hand, while the other, with its expression of age, hard work and endurance, lay out on the patchwork quilt. On her large, heavy featured face, over which struggled a few stray locks of gray hair from underneath the nightcap she wore, illness had thrown an ashen-gray hue, and had drawn some fresh, deep lines. She looked very old, very frail, very weary.

"It's aye the drink when he gets ony money," she went on in her strange, deep voice, like a hoarse and muffled murmur. "I never lets him get ony when I'm weel, but yesterday he gaed oot and got some—I dinna ken hoo." (Here monsieur cast a hasty look at me, which I interpreted as a request not to tell anything I knew.) "And ye see!" She pointed as she spoke, with an expressive gesture, first at the handkerchief round monsieur's head, and then at the floor beside his chair, where lay his hat—the hat—bruised, and bent, and battered, almost past recognition. "His guid hat!" she exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest distress. "If it hadna been for the drink! But it's aye the drink that's been his ruin!" And she sank back on the bed, muttering to herself.

Here was a blow for the dignified M. le Comte! At first I did not care to look at him; but when I did venture, half guiltily, to glance in his direction, he was standing with his back to the fire, his arms folded and his head bent, with an air of humility, indeed, but it was the humility of a man owning a trivial error in judgment, rather than that of one confessing himself guilty of a degrading vice.

"True, true, my good Janett," he murmured, with a gentle sadness. Then raising his head, he gazed fixedly before him into space with his one visible eye. "If it had not been for that, I should be in a very different position, to-day!" Here he heaved a deep sigh, addingly immediately afterwards, with a sudden change of tone to the light and cheerful, "Well, well, we all have our little failings, no doubt, even the [illegible] of us. None of us is infallible, not even mademoiselle herself, I dare say!" And he laughed lightly.

I turned to the good Janet, and asked her about her health. "It was "that 'fenzy" that was the matter with her, she told me; and then she trailed off into a long, muttered list of her ailments—pains in her bones, headache, weakness. She was not "fit to stand;" but she must go out to her work next day, otherwise she would lose it altogether.

"I maun wark, ye see," she said. "He does naething."

"Yes, she must work—she's the lion's provider," here put in monsieur cheerfully, as if the position of "lion's provider" were one to be grateful for.

"And madame?" I asked. "She is ill too?"

"Yer mamaw," queried the deaf old woman. "Is she ill tae? Is't the 'fenzy?"

"I mean madame—Mme. Picoton," I explained.

"Eh, what—what's she saying?" she asked, looking toward monsieur.

But he did not seem to hear the question. He had seated himself on his chair again, with his back turned towards us, and was now busily engaged trying to bend out the bruises in his hat.

"Monsieur here told me she was ill," I put in.

"Hoots, ye might as wael call him by his air name!" she ejaculated. "He's plain Andra Pigott. I never gave in with his Frenchified nonsense—I couldna see what guid it was to dae us—but he was aye for giving French lessons—French lessons, and him nae mair French nor you and me! And that brass plate! I only got one-and-sixpence for it when I sellt it, and it cost, I'm sure—" Her voice went trailing on in a low monologue; but I did not follow any further. I was reflecting on what I had just heard. So M. le Comte was no Frenchman after all! The discovery did not surprise me much as it would have done when I first made his acquaintance, for it had struck me more than once that his French accent was by no means so marked as it used to be. I was wondering whatever could have induced him to assume a French name and accent, when my reflections were interrupted by Janett asking abruptly:

"Wha did he tell you was ill?"

"Madame—Madame Picoton—I mean his wife."

"His wife!" and the old woman raised herself up in bed, and stared at me in amazement—"his wife! Why, that's me!"

"You! Oh, I thought—I understand—" But I could get no further; I could not tell her that I had thought she was his servant; I could not tell him that he had lied.

I ventured to steal a furtive glance at him. To all appearance he was quite unconcerned by the revelation which had been made. He shrugged his shoulders carelessly, and shook his head.

"One of my follies, you see, mademoiselle," he said lightly, in a voice too low to reach the old woman's deaf ear—"one of my youthful follies. Young men will be young men, you know. But you'll be a faithful soul," he added condescendingly—"a faithful soul."

So I had at last unraveled the mystery! Afterward, when I was alone, I laughed heartily to think that "madame," who "did not receive," who was "delicate" and "kept her room," should turn out to be no other than the good Janett!

I saw her frequently during the following weeks, during which I was once more installed in the salon with my easel and my canvases, and gradually learned, from the rambling monologues in which she often indulged, the main events of monsieur's life. As a boy he had been page, and afterward footman, to a lady who traveled a good deal; then he had been valet to a delicate gentleman, who usually wintered in the south of France. After leaving this situation, which he took through the enmity which afterward pursued him through life—love of drink—he led a restless life full of changes and vicissitudes. At one time he formed one of a band of strolling actors; then he was a gold-digger in California; then he returned home, and was for awhile on the police force, during which time he married; afterwards he started a restaurant of his own, which failed; and then he acted as waiter in some one else's. But each new trial always ended the same way.

"Ay, the drink has been his ruin," the old woman always winds up, while her head shook sadly from side to side. "And noo I jist takes care that he doesna get ony. But you see I hae's to wark mysel'—I hae to wark!"

Poor old soul, it was very hard to have to work in her frail old age, with her "rheumatics" and her shaking head and trembling limbs! But she never missed a day; every day I heard her slow, heavy step, which seemed to me to be daily growing slower and heavier, coming up the long stair as she returned from her work (for I knew that she had been to daughters, who were well married, in the town); but she turned on me quite indignantly and told me that, so long as she could do "a hand's turn" herself, she would be "beholden to naebody." And I gathered that the daughters, who had made good marriages during the palmy days of the restaurant, were inclined to be ashamed of the old people.

I was glad to help her a little by the rent of my studio, and by the weekly sum I gave for cleaning and fire-lighting. I always paid the money into her own hands on Saturday afternoon; and I felt sure that she laid away half of it at least for the time when she should be able to do "a hand's turn" no longer. But one Saturday afternoon she had not come at her usual hour; and after tapping at my door monsieur (as I must continue to call him) entered with many bows and apologies, to say that there were "a few purchases" to be made for the next day, and if it were "quite the same for mademoiselle," etc.; in short, he wanted me to pay him. In a moment of thoughtlessness I did so—and I have never ceased to regret it.

I stayed at the studio much longer than usual that day; the light had long gone; but there was a good fire burning, and after I had ceased attempting to paint, it was much more pleasant to rest on a comfortable seat before the blaze than to set out into the storm of wind and rain outside. When at last the fire sank low, and I prepared to go, the room was almost in complete darkness. As I descended the stairs I met Janett slowly toiling upwards, her back almost bent double. She was looking very tired; some loose gray hairs were blown about her face by the wind, and her head shook more than usual. After a few words of greeting, I was passing on, when she stopped me with the question:

"Were you forgetting that this is Saturday?"

"Saturday!" I exclaimed, in surprise. "Oh, yes, I see—the rent! I gave it to monsieur."

"You gi'ed it to him?" And she fixed her eyes on my face with a look of surprise and alarm. "Is he in the hoose the noo?" she asked, eagerly.

"No," I answered, for I had heard him go out a long time before, and I knew he had not yet come in.

She placed her rough and wrinkled old hand on my left side, and stood silent for a few moments, breathing hard, while her poor head shook painfully.

"Eh!" she exclaimed by and by, with a long-drawn sigh, "I was feared that something wad gae wrang the day! Lassie, lassie, what for did ye gi'e him the siller?" And she turned, and began slowly descending the stairs.

My conscience smote me now for what I had done; but it was too late for repentance to do any good. I followed the old woman, and laid my hand on her arm, urging her to go home and make herself a cup of tea—monsieur would turn up soon all right, I said, and she was too tired to go out again. But she shook me off, and continued to descend.

"I maun gae seek him," she said stubbornly. "He'll be awa' drinking at the Three Bells."

The Three Bells was a public house situated in a side street no great distance away. Short though the distance was, however, it took the old woman a long time to make her way against the strong wind that blew in her face, fluttering the ends of her old shawl, and flapping her skirts about her stiff old legs. Every now and then she would stop to take breath, pressing her hand to her side.

As we neared the foot of the street in which the Three Bells was situated I noticed a small crowd of people gathered round the railing at the corner, apparently gazing down into the area. A sudden thought flashed into my mind, casting a chill over me. I glanced at Janett to see if it had occurred to her. As I looked at her, she stopped suddenly, and stood still for an instant peering eagerly before her, her hand pressed hard to her side. Then she moved on again toward the little crowd, walking more rapidly than I could have believed possible.

I said there were railings around the corner, but in front, where the block of building at the corner faced the main street, there was an opening in the railings at the top of a broad flight of steps leading down to a shop in the basement. From the windows of this shop, which were filled with small articles such, as penknives, corkscrews and nutmeg graters, and contained a notice to the effect that "Every article in this shop" was 6½d, a flood of light was pouring onto the steps that glistened with the rain, and on to a pool of something red that lay in the area at the foot. Somehow, I never doubted for an instant—I seemed to know at once what had happened, but I questioned one of the bystanders aside. Yes, I learned, there had been an accident—an old man, evidently the worse of drink, had fallen down the steps. They had taken him to the hospital.

I turned from the speaker to look for Janett. She had asked no questions of any one, but was walking down the steps into the area—heavily, indeed, but more quickly than I had ever seen her walk before. I watched her and saw her stoop to pick up something in the dark corner of the area. Then she made her way up the steps again, slowly and with apparent difficulty, carrying something under her shawl. When she reached the top she crossed the pavement to the street lamp that stood a few paces away; and, turning her back upon the crowd, she drew from beneath her shawl the object she carried. When I reached her side she was wiping it with a corner of her shawl in a dazed, mechanical way, while her poor head shook more than I had seen it do before. Befouled though the thing was with mud, and deformed with innumerable bands and bruises, I recognized at once the tall hat of M. le Comte, for it somehow seemed to bear about it that air of dignity and importance of which no amount of poverty and humiliation could ever deprive its owner.

The poor old woman had evidently recognized it too, for as she kept stroking it with the corner of her shawl, apparently only half conscious of what she was doing, she murmured every now and then in a deep, hoarse voice—

"Ay, it's him—it's himsel'!" And then in a lower tone, "I aye said the drink wad be his ruin!"

There were no cries, no tears. A casual observer might have thought her callous; but to me, who knew her, the stunned look in the heavy old face, the painfully shaking head, the trembling hands, the breath that came in short gasps, all told another tale.

I called a cab and bade the man drive us to the hospital. As we drove along the old woman sat beside me in a sort of stupefied silence, constantly smoothing the poor battered hat with the corner of her shawl, and only once or twice muttering in her deep, low voice, "I aye said the drink wad be his ruin!"

At the hospital we found that our worst fears were realized: it was, indeed, M. le Comte who lay, stiff and silent, but dignified as ever, in the mortuary. He had died almost immediately on his admission into the wards. While I was questioning nurses and other officials the old woman had kept silently at my side, clasping the hat tightly closely to her beneath her shawl and gazing before her with a vacant, stupefied look; but when we found ourselves once more back in the cab, driving through the streets to her empty home, suddenly a short, hard sob seemed to rend its way upward from her old heart, shaking her from head to foot.

"Eh, ma woman," she cried, "what for did you gi'e him yon siller?"

That was all, but the words, in the tone of bitter pain in which they were uttered, rang in my ears for many long days afterward.

A day or two later M. le Comte was laid in his grave without the help of the parish, his daughters, whom I had at once informed of what had happened, defraying the expenses. And the world went on without him just the same as ever, save for the "faithful soul" whom it had been one of his "youthful follies" to wed. She, it seemed to me, grew daily older and more frail in her appearance, slower and heavier in her movements. She did not return to her work at the upholsterer's premises.

"I dinna need to wark noo," she said, when I remarked on the fact to her.

The spirit which had borne her up during all these months and years past, enabling her to continue toiling in spite of feeble health and increasing age, seemed quite to have left her now. She did not care to exert herself at all. Often, when in going to or coming from my studio I looked into her room, I would find her seated on her wooden armchair before the fire, tenderly smoothing Monsieur's old hat with the corner of her apron, while her head shook mournfully from side to side.

Only a few weeks later she was found seated so before a black fire—dead! her cold hand grasping the old hat. I was absent from home at the time, and on the day I returned to my studio I met the men carrying the long black box down the stairs. In the room, which had for so long been to me an unsolved riddle, the daughters were turning over and packing up, with no too reverent hand, the old articles of clothing and furniture, which somehow still bore about them the look of their late owners, to whom, to me, they almost seemed a part.

Of course I asked the manner of the poor old woman's death.

"And the hat?" I inquired eagerly, when I had learned all that the daughters could tell me. "Did you——"

"Oh, the hat," contemptuously exclaimed the elder woman. "It was fair done. You put it out with the ashes, did you not, Mary?"

Somehow I had been foolish enough to hope that it had been buried with the "faithful soul."

—Blackwood's Magazine.

OWNED BY WHEELS.

Few Bicyclists Take Any Interest in Roadway Scenes.

Boston Transcript.

The Listener would be very much obliged to any wheelman who will tell him why it is that people who ride bicycles pay so little attention to anything but their wheels and the roadway. Lately the Listener has been living in a house close by a roadside. A great manw bicyclers pass every day, so near that their faces can be plainly observed; and he can affirm that all summer long he has not seen one single rider ever take more than a momentary glance at anything else than the earth immediately before him, although this particular spot commands one of the loveliest views in eastern Massachusetts. If the bicycle is responsible for such indifference to the natural world on the part of travelers by road, it is a bad thing. Sometimes these passing wheelmen can be heard conversing with one another, and nine times out of ten their talk is of machines and of roads. And when they talk of roads it is not of waysides and woods, as pedestrians and horsemen generally talk, but of the quality of the roadbed—of the everlasting wheeling. A wheelman to whom the Listener not long ago asked this very question answered that wheeling is in itself such a fascinating exercise that the wheel people do not think of anything else; that they are in love with the motion and the swiftness, and give themselves up to it for the sake of the great pleasure there is in it. But it occurs to the Listener that there are pleasures and pleasures, and that, while he might not be insensible to the fascination of swift and gliding movement, he would not quite exchange the delights that go with calm contemplation of natural beauty for that peculiar intoxication.

It may be answered that wheelmen do sometimes enjoy the country along the road, as well as the road itself; but the Listener certainly does not see them do it. Now, we know that a pedestrian has nothing else in the world to do but enjoy the country about him. A horseback rider, too, gets into a peculiar communion with the scenes along the way through the horse. Whenever the horse pricks up his ears at a group of his kind in a far-distant pasture the rider looks that way, too, and feels his senses sharpened by the horse's keen sight—a feeling as if he shared the horse's fleetness in his own human body rushes over him. He need not watch the horse, except in an incidental way; he is free with a double freedom, and strong with a strength ten times his own. If any bicycle rider feels the exhilaration and joy, the sense of wildness and power, that one may get in riding a good horse over a fine country, he undoubtedly has compensation for the necessity of scrutinizing every rod of his road. But how anyone can have such a sense when mounted on a mere machine, the Listener cannot quite understand.

P. S.—Going home last night, after all this above was written, the Listener saw a young man in knickerbockers leaning upon a fence in a spot which commands an exquisite view of the lake. It is a place which overlooks a long, curving beach of yellow sand, at the farther end of which is a grove of tall pine trees. Far along the shore, at the foot of two pines whose branching tops are beautifully outlined against the sky, a canoe had been drawn up. The lake was like glass; the pine trees were mirrored in it. This young man had a refined face, betokening the artistic temperament. It was no surprise to see a man of that type wrapped up in contemplation of such a scene; but what was surprising to the Listener was the fact that by the young man's side, leaning against the fence, was a bicycle. He was a wheelman, and he had actually stopped and dismounted in order to enjoy fully a beautiful scene by the way. But it was positively the first time the Listener had ever seen a wheelman do this. He was making the wheel his servant instead of his master, as generally seems to be the case. The Listener can understand that it might be of advantage to own a wheel. But he would not like to be one of the immense army who are owned by their wheels.

But It Isn't So.

Detroit Journal.

"If you will take notice," said a tenant of the New York Chamber of Commerce, "you will see that there are no flies on us, or in our office. Haven't seen one since we moved in. I was commenting on this fact the other day, when an old inhabitant told me that flies will not stay at an elevation of over thirty feet above the ground. Since then I have kept watch, and have come to the conclusion that he knew what he was talking about."

ONE SIDE OF THE PORTIERE.

Being Just Half of a Conversation; with Apologies to Mrs. Parker.

New York Mail and Express.

. . . . "All right, Min, now hurry. We must get to this dinner at a respectable hour; remember we were nearly half an hour late at the Clinton-Forbeses last Tuesday. It would never do to . . . . What, I? Not a bit of it. It was all your fault. Didn't you ask me to wait a moment at least ten times? . . . . Of course you deny it. Why, I can dress in . . . . no, I cannot do wonders, but I can hurry when necessity de . . . . that's the way, draw the portiere. That's just like a woman, but you can hear quite as well now . . . . What? . . . . As you please, my dear, but I'm quite sure you cannot fix your hair and stop your ears at one and the same time. Hurry, Minnie, there's a good girl. Let's try to be on time for once. (Soft whistling.) I say, Min, have you seen my—never mind, here it is. (More whistling.)

. . . . "What . . . . Why, it's—er—twenty—eighteen minutes after six. Hurry, Minnie. (Sings.)

"'I re-mem-ber, I re-mem-ber an old gar—den—(pause)—gar—den'

"Ha! ha! . . . At Admiral Bardon's latest bon mot. Just happened to think of it. Tommy Hardwick was arguing with him at the club last night. I don't remember just what it was all about, but Tommy made some extravagant statements that the Admiral pooh-poohed in a haughty sort of way. Tommy got angry and said, 'Admiral, I'll have you know I'm a man of some caliber—you know Tommy's excited manner—and then the Admiral leaned back in his chair and replied, 'Yes, you are some what of a bore.' Now don't ask me to explain it . . . Oh, you do? I'm glad you do.

"Confound it! . . . What's the matter? Why, I've—great Scott! Look here, Mrs. Parker, is it possible, can it be possible that you have been sharpening lead pencils with my . . . No, of course not, you never seem to have seen anything of mine, and yet I found this very razor on your table yesterday morn—. . . . I don't know who put it there, of course, but I didn't. Just look at my chin! There's absolutely no more edge on this thing than there is on my comb . . . What? . . . Your hair! What use in the world could I have for your hair pins? . . . On whose bureau, mine? . . . No—yes, here they are, three of them. Goodness, Minnie, your things get scattered about so I wonder you know where to find anything. Here, I'll hand them to you. Get them? . . . I'm sorry. They slipped out of my hand. Now please never let those things wander in here again. Is there anything else belonging to you in here? If so let me return it before I begin shaving again.

"Caesar's ghost! Look at my chin! whe-ew, ouch—i tell you it will be much better for you if you lock up those curling tongs of yours . . . because I am now registering a solemn oath to drive nails and all sorts of things with them the very first chance I get . . . . Won't it? Then why do you use them . . . . Oh, your sister's, are they? Ha! . . . No, I'm not, I'm in the best humor in the world—except for this terrible razor. Are you hurrying, Min? . . . It's twenty-five minutes before 7. No, I set it this afternoon. (Sings.)

"'I re-mem-ber an old gar—'

"Minnie, I don't believe you said one word to that laundry woman last week. . . . Well, then it had no effect whatsoever. How can one expect a civilized human being to hear a—. . . . that's exactly what I shall do, and forcibly, too. I know what this will amount to, it will amount to my running down town every week and buying a box of starch . . . . not a bit, not at all. I'll buy two boxes if I can, will wait for a change. . . . swearing? Did I swear? Then it hopped out accidentally, but this worry week after week makes a man want to swear at everything from his mother-in-l—Hmm! . . . Oh, nothing . . . Indeed? No, you must have misunderstood me. (Mumbles something.) The way I've tied this cravat it looks like a dishrag. Don't you think the house is terribly warm to-night? I'm in a perfect fever — There, that's the end of that one. Minnie, where did you put those other white cravats of mine? . . . No, I can tie it myself, thanks. I wish this cut on my chin would stop smarting . . . . of course I'm hurrying, it's almost 7 o'clock. By the way, Minnie, what time is this dinner? . . . no, you have the note, it's sticking in your mirror. You must have seen it constantly for the last half hour, vanitas vanitatum . . . Um, instead of hurling maledictions at my poor head you should be thankful you have so pretty an image to gaze back at you . . . at half past seven, eh? Only half an hour more, Min. Hurry, dearie. I'm almost ready.

"* * * Are they, for what charity? I suppose Mrs. Clan-Alpine has the whole thing in charge. She's a very energetic, good old soul. I understand she sold three hundred tickets last year for Our Boys.' What part has you? * * * Is that so? * * * No, not for worlds, madam. Once was quite enough for me. You'll not catch me in theatricals again. * * * Well, if it was a success it was through no brilliancy on my part. I never had such a time in my life. I told you before I went on that the graceless things would slip. But, alas, you assured me everything was all right. * * * Yes, you may laugh now, it was no doubt it seemed very funny, but it was agony for me. Just as I heard my cue I gave the things a last tug—and the string snapped, the top one, you remember. Well, that let the pillow drop about a foot. I couldn't catch hold of it and it began working down to my knees instead of staying where it belonged. They all wanted to know why I sat down most of that act. Believe me, Minnie, when I say that the fat-old-man part is a delusion and a snare. I'll play the lovesick Romeo or shift scenery, but no pillow-puffed old man for me. * * * Yes, get him; he would do admirably. You'll not need to pad him out very much to fill the part, so to speak.

" . . . . Who, Jack Hender—oh, Anderson. Bully Anderson, you mean . . . Um. I didn't know he was a . . . What, marry? . . . marry whom? . . . Is it possible? Why, she's three years older than he. . . . Yes, I know, but she may not get it until her uncle dies. Well, well, well, Andy to be married. I remember he was never away from her side last summer, but I had no idea either one of them meant anything. . . . Yes, he has a fairly large income, but nothing to compare with hers. I say, Min, where did you hear this? . . . Ah, that gives another aspect to the story. They gabble all sorts of things at that woman's receptions. . . . No, I don't say you gabble, my dear, but you surely cannot fail to hear the others gabble. I'll speak to Andy about it. . . . No, no. I'll say a little bird told me. Ha! ha!

" . . . Which dress? Let me see. Near that yellow figured one with the fluffy things all down the front—you know what I mean. I don't know what the scientific term for it is, but—er—fluffy white things expresses it. I'm jolly glad I don't have to worry over such things.

" . . . "Is she? Then I'm trusting most sincerely that it will not fall to my lot to sit beside her. If you remember the Hunts dinner, I had her there and she . . . Oh, yes, magnificent education and all that, but too much of it, entirely too much. Over the oysters she regaled me with a long harangue on the migratory tendencies of the dodo bird, that wonderful prehistoric fowl in the encyclopedias. With each sip of the Sauterne she evolved some startling and original plan for doing something to the Australian ballot system. She is such a nice girl, Minnie. I talked about dodo birds and ballot boxes in what I considered a most comprehensive manner, but she completely undid me by asking me what I thought of her ability to box the mariner's compass. . . . Indeed, she did, forward and backward. That performance lasted until the ices were served. What took place after that is, to this day, a wild, vague jumble in my mind. I remember fortifying myself with coffee after dinner, and then I went back to her, prepared for anything. She began something about the inconsistencies of modern medical jurisprudence. . . . No, those things might not happen again, but I'd rather not risk it. . . . Was she? Then I feel rather safe in saying that she failed signally, because once, when she was off her guard, I brought the conversation around to dodos again, and when I got warmed up I told her some things about dodos that made her wince. I said that during our visit to Norway we raised a modest, unassuming brood in the back yard, and that I had given especial attention to the migratory tendency. She will not talk dodos with me again. When she gives a dinner, Min, you and I will begin quizzing each other a week in advance on eccentricities in the inborn affections of penguins, murder as a fine art and the joys of aerial navigation. We live and learn, you know.

"I'll see in a moment, Minnie—now, by my watch and the clock, too, it's sixteen minutes after seven. What's the mat