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Select Tale.

Translated for the True American.

THE PRICE OF LIFE.

FROM THE FRENCH OF EUGENE SCRIBE.

Joseph opening the drawing-room door, came to tell us that the post-chaise was ready. My mother and sisters threw themselves into my arms.

'There is yet time,' said they, 'renounce this journey and remain with us.'

'I am a man of noble descent, mother; I am twenty years of age; I must be talked of in the country; I must make my way either to the army or to the Court.'

'Tell me, Bernard, when you are gone, what will become of me?'

'You will be happy and proud in learning the success of your son.'

'And if you should be killed in some battle?'

'What does it matter? What is life? Do people think only of it? A man thinks only of glory when he is twenty years old, and of noble descent. And shall you not see me, mother, return to you in a few years, a colonel or *marchal de camp*, or else with a high station at Versailles?'

'Well, what will come from this?'

'It will come to pass that I shall be regarded and respected here.'

'And after that?'

'That everybody will take off his hat to me.'

'And after that?'

'That I shall marry my cousin Henriette, and give in marriage my young sisters; and that we shall all live with you, tranquil and happy, on my Bretagne lands.'

'And what pretends you from commencing so to-day? Has not your father left you the richest fortune of the country?—Is there, for ten leagues around, a richer domain, and a more magnificent castle than that of la Roche-Bernard? Have you not thought of your tenants? Is there one who will neglect to salute you, and to take off his hat to you, when you pass through the village? Do not quit us, my son; remain with your friends, with your sisters, with your old mother, whom, perhaps, you will not find at your return. Do not spend in vain glory, or shorten by cares, or torments of every kind, days which already are passing away so fast. Life is sweet, and the sun of Bretagne is so beautiful!'

Saying this, she showed me through the drawing-room windows, the beautiful walks of my park, the old chestnut trees in bloom, the lilacs, the honey-suckles, whose perfume made fragrant the air, and whose verdure sparkled in the sun. In the ante-chamber were the gardener and his whole family, who, sad and silent, seemed also to say to me, 'Do not depart, our young master, do not depart!' Hortense, my elder sister, clasped me in her arms, and Amelia, my little sister, who was in a corner of the drawing-room, looking at the engravings in a volume of La Fontaine, approached me and handed me the book.

'Read, read, my brother,' said she, weeping.

It was the fable of the Two Pigeons; I rose up hastily and pushed them all back.

'I am twenty years old; I am of noble descent. I must have honor and glory. Let me set out.'

I rushed into the post-chaise, when a woman appeared on the stairway steps. It was Henriette! She wept not, she spoke not a word—but, pale and trembling, she with difficulty stood up. With her white handkerchief, which she held in her hand, she made me a last sign of adieu, and fell consciousness. I ran to her, raised her up; I clasped her in my arms, I swore to her my love for life; and, at the moment consciousness was returning, leaving her to the care of my mother and sister, I ran to my conveyance without stopping, without turning around my head. If I had looked at Henriette, I would not have left.

A few minutes after the post-chaise rolled along the high-road. For a long time, I thought only upon my sisters, upon Henriette, upon my mother, and upon all the happiness which I had left behind me; but these thoughts were effaced as the turrets of la Roche-Bernard disappeared from my sight, and soon dreams of ambition and glory took possession of my mind. What

projects! what air castles! what glorious deeds! I created for myself in my post-chaise! Riches, honors, dignities, success in everything, I denied myself nothing; I deserved and granted myself all. At last, elevating myself in rank, as I advanced on the way, I became duke and peer, provincial governor, and marshal of France. When I arrived at my inn in the evening, the voice of my servant, who modestly called me *monsieur le chevalier*, alone forced me to abdicate and return to myself.

The next and following days, I had the same dreams, the same intoxication, for my journey was long. I was going to the Duke of C—, an old friend of my father and protector of my family. He was to take me with him to Paris, where he was expected at the end of the month, to present me at Versailles, and procure for me a company of dragoons, through the credit of his sister, the marchioness de F—, a young and charming woman, designated by general opinion for the survivorship of Madame de Pompadour—a place the title of which she claimed with so much the more of justice, as she had for a long time fulfilled its honorable functions. I arrived at Sedan in the evening, and not being able, at that hour to go to the castle of my protector, I put off my visit till the next day, and went to lodge at the *Armes de France*, the finest hotel of the town, and the ordinary rendezvous of all officers, for Sedan is a garrisoned town—a strong place. The streets have a warlike aspect, and the citizens a martial *tonnure*, which seems to say to strangers, 'we are compatriots of the great Turenne.' I supped at the ordinary, and inquired the way to the castle of the Duke de C—, situated three leagues from the town.

They answered me: 'Every person can point it out to you; it is so well known in the country. It was in this castle died a great warrior, a celebrated man—Marshal Fabert.'

The conversation turned on Marshal Fabert. Among young soldiers it was very natural. They spoke of his battles, of his exploits, of his modesty, which caused him to refuse letters of nobility, which Louis XIV. tendered him. Above everything they talked of the inconceivable happiness, which, from a simple soldier, had brought him to the rank of Marshal of France; him, a man of no family, and the son of a printer. This was the only example they could then cite, of a like fortune, which, even in the time of Fabert, appeared so extraordinary, that the common people did not hesitate to ascribe his elevation to supernatural causes. It was said that from his infancy, he applied himself to magic and sorcery; that he had made a compact with the devil. And our innkeeper, who, to the silliness of a Champenois, joined the credulity of our peasants of Bretagne, averred to us with great coolness, that at the castle of the Duke de C—, where Fabert died, a black man, whom no person knew, had been seen to penetrate his chamber and disappear, carrying away with him the soul of the Marshal, which he had hitherto purchased, and which belonged to him; and that even now in the month of May, the epoch of Fabert's death, there might be seen in the evening, a small light carried by the black man.

This story enlivened our dessert, and we drank a bottle of Champagne to the familiar demon of Fabert, beseeching it to take us also under its protection, and to give us battles like those of Collioure and La Marfe.

The next day I arose at an early hour, and went to the castle of the Duke de C—, an immense Gothic manor, which at any other time, I would not have remarked, but which I regarded, I acknowledge with a curiosity mingled with emotion, recalling to memory the story which, the evening before, the innkeeper of the *Armes de France* had told us. The valet to whom I spoke, replied that he did not know whether his master was to be seen, and especially whether he could receive me. I gave him my name and he went out, leaving me alone in a kind of fencing-school room, decorated with the emblems of the chase and with family portraits. I waited some time and no one came. This career of glory and honor of which I had dream-

ed, commenced then through the ante-chamber! said I to myself; and, a dissatisfied solicitor, impatience overcame me. I had already counted two or three times all the family portraits and all the beams of the ceiling, when I heard a slight noise in the wainscoting. It was a door badly shut, which the wind had just blown open. I looked and I perceived a very pretty *boudoir*, lighted by two large windows and a glass door which looked out upon a magnificent park. I made some steps into this apartment, and stopped at the sight of a spectacle which had not at first struck my eyes. A man with his back turned towards the door through which I had just entered, was lying upon a sofa. He rose up, and without perceiving me, ran quickly to the window. Tears were trickling down his cheeks and a deep despair appeared to be imprinted on his features. For some time he remained motionless, with his face hid in his hands; then he commenced to promenade the apartment with hasty strides. I was then near him; he perceived me and started up; I, myself, grieved and completely stunned by my indiscretion, stammering some words of excuse, wished to withdraw.

'Who are you? What do you want?' said he to me in a loud voice, holding me by the arm.

'I am Chevalier Bernard, of la Roche-Bernard, and I come from Bretagne.'

'I know, I know,' said he to me, and he threw himself into my arms, made me be seated at his side, talked to me lively of my father and of my whole family, whom he knew so well, that I did not doubt but that he was the liege-lord of the castle.

'Are you M. de C—?' said I to him. He rose up and looking at me with pride, replied: 'I was, but I am no longer; I am nothing; and seeing my astonishment, he cried: 'Not one word more, young man; do not interrogate me.'

'Yes, Monsieur; I have been a witness of your chagrin and grief, without desiring it; and if my devotion and friendship can bring you some relief—'

'Yes, yes, you are right; not that you can in any thing change my destiny, but you will receive at least my last will and my last wishes. This is the only service I expect from you.'

He closed the door and seated himself near me. Agitated and trembling, I awaited his words, which were grave and solemn. His physiognomy especially, wore an expression which I had never before seen on any person. His brow, which I had attentively examined, seemed marked by fatality. His face was pale; his black eyes darted lightning, and from time to time, his features, although altered by suffering, were contracted by an ironical and infernal smile.

'What I am about to tell you,' said he, 'will confound your reason. You will doubt—you will not believe—sometimes I doubt it myself—I would wish so, at least; but the proofs are here, and there is in everything which surrounds us, in our organization, many other mysteries, which we are obliged to undergo, without being able to comprehend them.'

He stopped an instant, as if to collect his thoughts, passed his hand over his brow, and continued:

'I was born in this castle; I have two brothers older than myself, to whom must revert the possessions and honors of our family. I had nothing to expect but the mantle of the priest; yet thoughts of ambition and glory fermented in my brain, and made my heart beat. Rendered unhappy by my obscurity, and greedy of fame, I dreamed only of the means of acquiring it, and this idea rendered me insensible to all the pleasures and comforts of life. The present was naught to me; I existed only in the future, and this future was presented to me under the most somber aspect. I was near thirty years of age, and was still nothing. Then, and from all sides, some literary reputations were rising in the capital, the glory of which resounded even to our province. Ah! I often said to myself, if I could only make myself a name in the career of letters! This will always belong to my fame, and it only is happiness.'

'For a confidant of my chagrins, I had an old servant, an old negro, who lived in this castle long before my birth. He was

certainly the oldest about the house; for no one recollected the time when he first entered it. The people of the country even pretended that he knew Marshal Fabert, and assisted at his death—'

At this moment my interlocutor made a gesture of surprise; he paused and asked me what ailed me.

'Nothing,' I replied. But in spite of myself I thought upon the black man, of whom our innkeeper had spoken the preceding evening.

Monsieur de C— continued:

'One day, in the presence of Yago—that was the name of the negro—I gave up to my despair on my obscurity and the inutilty of my days, and I exclaimed: *I will give ten years of my life to be placed in the first rank of our authors.*'

'Ten years!' said he coldly, 'it is a great deal; it is to pay dear for a very little thing. It matters not, I accept your ten years. I will take them; recollect your promise, and I will keep mine.'

'I will not portray to you my surprise at hearing him speak thus. I believed that years had impaired his reason; I shrugged my shoulders, and I quit, a few days after, this castle, to make a journey to Paris—'

There I found myself cast into the society of men of learning. Their examples encouraged me, and I published several works, the success of which I will not relate to you here. All Paris was eager to applaud them; the journals re-echoed my praises; the new name which I had taken became celebrated, and yesterday, young man, you admired it.'

Here a new gesture of surprise interrupted the story.

'You are not, then, the Duke de C—?' I exclaimed.

'No,' he answered coldly.

And I said to myself: 'A celebrated man of learning—is it Marmontel? Is it d'Alembert? Is it Voltaire?'

My unknown interlocutor sighed; a smile of regret and contempt ran lightly over his lips, and he resumed his story:

'The literary reputation which I had coveted, was soon insufficient for a soul as jealous and greedy as mine. I aspired to more noble success, and I said to Yago, who had accompanied me to Paris and would not leave me: 'There is no real glory, no true fame, except that acquired in the career of arms. What is a man of learning,—a poet? Nothing. Talk to me of a great captain, of a general, of an army: this is the destiny which I covet, and for a great military reputation, I would give ten of the remaining years of my life.'

'I accept them,' responded Yago; 'I will take them; they belong to me; don't forget.'

At this part of the story, the unknown man again paused; and seeing a species of trouble and hesitation depicted in all my features, he continued:

'I have told you truly, young man; you can not believe it; it seems to you a dream, a chimera!—and to myself also. And yet the rank which I have obtained was not an illusion; the soldiers whom I have led to battle, the redoubts taken, the standards conquered, the victories with which France has resounded—all this was my work, all this glory belonged to me.'

While he was walking with hasty strides, and spoke thus with warmth and enthusiasm, surprise had chilled all my senses, and I said to myself: 'Who, then, is this man? Is it Coigny? Is it Richelieu? Is it Marshal de Saxe?'

From this state of exaltation my unknown interlocutor had relapsed into despondency, and approaching me he said, with a sombre look:

'Yago spoke the truth; and when later, disgusted with this vain smoke of military glory, I aspired to that which is alone real and positive in this world; when at the price of five or six years of existence, I desired gold and riches, he granted them to me. Yes, young man, yes, I have seen fortune second and surpass all my wishes; lands, forests, castles—'. This morning all these were in my power; and if you doubt me, if you doubt Yago—wait—wait—he will come—and you shall go and see yourself, with your own eyes, that that which confounds your reason and mine, is unhappily too real.'

The unknown man then approached the chimney, looked at the clock, made a ges-

ture of affright, and said to me in a low voice:

'This morning at the break of day, I felt myself so despondent and feeble, that I could scarcely rise. I rang for my *valet de chambre*. Yago appeared.

'What is this I feel,' said I to him. 'Master, nothing but that which is very natural. The hour is approaching, the moment is at hand.'

'What? said I to him? 'Do you not guess it? Heaven has destined you sixty years as the term of your life: you had lived thirty of them when I commenced to serve you.'

'Yago, said I to him with terror, do you speak seriously?'

'Yes, master, in five years you have spent twenty-five years of your existence in glory! You have given them to me, they belong to me; and those days of which you have been deprived, shall be added to mine.'

'What! is this the price of your services?'

'Others have paid dearer. Witness Fabert, whom I also protected.'

'Be silent, be silent, said I to him. It is not possible; it is not possible.'

'Very well! But prepare yourself, for there remains to you but one half hour to live.'

'You are making sport of me, you are deceiving me.'

'By no means: calculate yourself. You have actually lived thirty-five years, and twenty-five years you have lost! Total, sixty. This is your number; to each one his own.'

'He wished to go out, and I felt my strength diminishing; I felt my life escaping from me.'

'Yago, Yago, give me a few hours, a few hours more.'

'No, no,' answered he; 'that would be to take them from my number, and I know better than you the price of life. There is no treasure which can pay for two hours of existence.'

'I could scarcely speak; my eyes were veiled, and a deathly coldness chilled my veins.'

'Well, said I to him, making an effort: take these possessions, for which I have sacrificed everything. Four hours more, and I renounce my gold, my riches, this opulence which I have so much desired.'

'Be it so. You have been a good master, and I wish to do some good for you. I consent.'

'I felt my strength reanimated, and I exclaimed: 'Four hours! it is so little a thing! Yago! Yago! four hours more, and I renounce my literary glory, all my works, to him who has placed me so high in the esteem of the world.'

'Four hours for this!' exclaimed the negro with disdain. 'It is a great deal; it matters not, I will not refuse you your last favor.'

'No, not the last, said I to him. Yago! Yago! I beseech you, give me until this evening, the twelve hours, the whole day, and let my exploits, my victories, my military fame, let all be effaced forever from the memory of men, and let nothing of them longer remain on the earth. This day, Yago! this entire day, and I shall be exceedingly content.'

'You abuse my goodness,' said he, 'and are making a dupe's bargain. It matters nothing, I give you until the setting of the sun. After that ask nothing more. This evening, then! I will come and take you.'

'He departed,' continued the unknown man with despair, 'and this day is the last which remains to me! Then approaching the glass door which was open, and which looked out upon the park, he cried out, 'I shall no more behold this beautiful sky, this green turf, those sparkling waters; I shall no more breathe the fragrant air of spring! Foolish that I was! Those possessions which God has given to all, those possessions to which I was insensible, and the pleasure of which I only now can comprehend, I could have enjoyed for twenty-five years! And I have consumed my days, I have sacrificed them for a vain chimera, for a sterile glory which has not rendered me happy and has died before me. Here, here,' said he, showing me some peasants who were crossing the park and were going to work sowing, 'what would I not give now to share their labors and their misery! But I have no longer

any thing to give, nor any thing to hope for here below, nothing—not even misfortune.'

At that moment a ray of the sun, a sun of the month of May—illuminated his pale and bewildered features; he seized me by the arm with a kind of delirium, and said: 'See, see! how beautiful is the sun! and I must quit all this! Ah! that at least I could see it once more! How completely I relish this day, so pure and beautiful—which for me has no to-morrow!'

He rushed into the park; and, at the turning of a walk, he disappeared, before I could get hold of him again. Indeed I had not the strength to do it; I had fallen back upon the sofa, stunned and prostrated with what I had just seen and heard. I arose, I walked to convince myself that I was awake, that I was not under the influence of a dream. At this moment a door of the *boudoir* was opened, and a servant said to me:

'Here is my master, the Duke de C—.'

A man of sixty years and of marked physiognomy advanced, and extending to me his hand, asked my pardon for having kept me so long in waiting.

'I was not at the castle,' said he, 'I have just come from the city, where I have been to consult for the health of my younger brother, the Count de C—.'

'Is his life in danger?' said I.

'No, Monsieur, thanks to heaven,' answered the Duke; 'but in his youth ideas of ambition and glory had worked upon his imagination, and a very severe disease which he had lately, and of which he thought he would die, has left in his mind a species of delirium and alienation, which continually persuade him that he has but one day more to live. This is his madness.'

Everything was explained to me!

'Now,' continued the Duke, 'let us come to yourself, young man, and let us see what we can do for your advancement. We will set out at the end of this month for Versailles. I must present you there.'

'I know your kind disposition towards me, Monsieur le Duc, and I thank you for it.'

'What! have you renounced the court, and the advantages you may expect from it?'

'Yes, Monsieur.'

'But think then that you will there make a rapid way, and that with a little assiduity and patience, you can in ten years hence—'

'Ten years lost!' I exclaimed.

'Well,' he replied with astonishment, 'is this paying too dear for glory, fortune, and honors? Come, young man, we will set out for Versailles.'

'No, Monsieur le Duc, I will set out again for Bretagne, and I pray you again to accept my thanks and those of my family.'

'This is madness,' exclaimed the Duke. And I, thinking upon what I had just seen and heard, said to myself, 'It is good sense!'

The next day I was *en route*; and with what pleasure I again saw my magnificent castle of la Roche-Bernard, the old trees of my park, and the beautiful sun of Bretagne! I found again my tenants, my sisters, my mother and happiness!—which has not since abandoned me, for eight days after I married Henriette.

MAXIMS.—Wrongs are engraved on marble, benefits on sand. All things are artificial, for nature is the art of God. One cannot always be a hero, but one may always be a man. He declares himself guilty, who justifies himself before accusation. Some run headlong into danger, because they have no courage to wait for it. The injuries we do and those we suffer, are seldom weighed in the same balance. Praying will make us leave off sinning, and sinning make us leave off praying. There are no faults truly fatal but those which we neither acknowledge nor repair. There is no such injury as revenge, and no such revenge as the contempt of an injury. Wholesome sentiment is rain, which makes the field of daily life fresh and odorous. Love is a weapon that will conquer men, when all other weapons fail. If you would not have affliction visit you twice, listen at once to what it teaches.

Humorous.

RATHER AMUSING.—A correspondent of the N. Y. Spirit of the Times gives the following amusing yarn:

I heard a good story the other day, which I will give you. A distinguished member of the Legislature was addressing a Temperance Society and he got prosy, but showed no disposition to 'let up,' though the audience waxed thinner and thinner.

Finally the presiding officer got excited, and repairing to a friend of the speaker's, inquired how much longer he might be reasonably expected to speak. Whereupon the friend answered that he didn't exactly know—when he got on that branch of the subject, he generally spoke a couple of hours.

'That'll never do—I've got a few remarks to make myself,' said the president, 'how can I stave him off?'

'Well, I don't know. In the first place I would pinch his left leg; and then if he wouldn't stop, I'd stick a pin in it.'

The President returned to his seat, and his head was invisible for a moment.—Soon after, he returned to the brother who had recommended the pin style of treatment, and said:

'I pinched him, and he didn't take the least notice at all; I stuck a pin in his leg, he didn't seem to care a curse; I crooked it in, and he kept on spouting as hard as ever.'

'Very likely,' said the wag, 'that leg is cork.'

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE OF OURS (Billy Kemp) was a house, sign and ornamental painter—in fact, dabbled in an immensity of artistic pursuits. His genius not only extraordinary, but versatile, giving evidence of the latter in one particular instance. A grocery-keeper, desirous to make a splash in the outside embellishments of his store, engaged Billy to paint some signs. Among them was one on which were the words 'sperm oil,' and underneath the representation of a whale. Well, the sign was finished and brought home. The whale didn't suit the grocery-keeper—didn't exactly come up to his ideas of one of the monsters of the salty deep.

'Look here, Billy, what do you call this?' says he.

'Call that?—why I call that a whale, and a first rate imitation, too!' said Billy.

'Whale! Nonsense! It looks more like a hog.'

'A hog?'

'Yes, a regular hog.'

'Does it, though? Well, then, I'll make a hog of it! Old Porkey, the butcher, wants a hog painted, and I'll just take this 'ere feller here and put legs on him, and let him have it!'

And half an hour afterwards the whale had legs attached to it, and was sold for a perfect representation of a Porkey.

There's his genius as is genius.

A CRITIC.—A good judge of paintings was shown a picture executed by a very indifferent hand, but much commended, and asked his opinion of it.

'Why, truly,' said he, 'the painter is a very good one, and observes the Lord's commandments.'

'Why so?' asked one.

'Why, I think,' answered he, 'that he hath not made to himself 'the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth.'

AN INDIAN had gone to Albany one cold winter day, and got very drunk. On his way home, he became completely overcome, lay down and was frozen to death. His tribe was at that time much disposed to imitate the habits of white men, and accordingly held an inquest over the dead body. After a long pow-wow, they finally agreed to the verdict, that the deceased came to his death by mixing too much water in his whiskey, which had frozen in him and killed him!

A young lady who had not received so much attention from the beaux as her female associates, said to her lover, 'I told them I would wait until the chaff had blown off, and then I would pick up the wheat.'