

LUST AND LOVE.

We left the sweet back of the sluggish Nile. Where flows of traffic block the gulf...

THE RAMONET DUEL.

The manner of giving, says the poet, is of more importance than the gift. I think, however, that when the thing received is a blow on the face the distinction is not likely to be appreciated by the recipients.

Glousseux opened the discussion, saying sternly, "It seems to me, gentlemen, that my friend Ramonet cannot be expected to take a blow without demanding satisfaction."

"Or he might bring a suit for damages," said Monpate more mildly.

"Yes, of course," cried Ramonet and Peignot, both evidently preferring the last named measure.

"I shall speak of that later," said Glousseux—and a sigh of relief escaped the parties most concerned—"but we must first," he added, "ascertain whether M. Peignot is willing to apologize to my friend Ramonet."

"I should accept," said the injured man timidly, but Peignot, thinking he alluded to twenty-five francs damages, exclaimed "Never!"

"Very well," said Glousseux briskly. "That being the case we must now decide whether the assault constituted a slap or a blow, as there is a great difference between the two."

Peignot thought the difference might consist of a hundred francs in the way of damages, so he hastened to declare that it was merely a slap, while Ramonet remarked, "All I know about it is that I saw stars."

"It is the law in affairs of honor," said Glousseux, "that a slap calls for a personal meeting, while a blow is merely the act of a boor and may be referred to the police for penalty."

Ramonet and Peignot on hearing this exclaimed simultaneously that it was a blow, but Glousseux begged them not to speak hastily and then added:

"A blow with the fist produces a dull, solid thud, whereas a slap is sharp and resounding. Now I will leave it to Monpate to say whether it sounded like puf or like clack!"

The gentleman appealed to replied that truth compelled him to say that he had heard clack!

"Besides that," said Glousseux triumphantly, "it is evident from the red mark on my friend's left cheek that it was a slap he received. We have now, gentlemen, nothing more to do but to arrange the details of the meeting. Monpate, you and I are willing to act as seconds, are we not?"

Here Ramonet, evidently enlightened by the stars he had seen, opened his lips to suggest a compromise, but Monpate interrupted him.

"Will you take us, or do you prefer to seek others? No? Very well, we accept the honor you offer us."

"And a grave responsibility it is," added Glousseux, "the lives of two fellow creatures are concerned."

The seconds conversed in whispers for a few minutes, and then Glousseux remarked:

"Ramonet, you have the choice of arms, and I counsel you to select swords."

"Do you appreciate serious consequences?" asked the doctor in surprise. "Are the combats very fiery?"

"Your man has not arrived!" "The hour fixed for the arrival of the principals approached."

Glousseux paced up and down impatiently and Monpate smoked a cigar in sullen silence. Ten minutes passed, fifteen, twenty-five, and yet the combatants did not come.

"Your man has not arrived!" "Nor yours," retorted the other. "He has been detained, that is all. Be quite sure he will explain satisfactorily."

"It is hardly probable that both should meet with a delay," muttered Glousseux. "Very true, but why not M. Peignot?"

"Certainly, you shall have it—when ever you wish." "I wish it now!"

The next instant they had thrown off their coats, seized the swords and begun to fight. Just then Ramonet and Peignot appeared on the scene. They were walking arm in arm and conversing cheerfully, and when they caught sight of the combatants they exclaimed in surprise: "Stop! Stop!"

At the same moment Dr. Rousseau arrived, breathless but radiant. "It will be delicious," he began, and then added in dismay: "so they have begun it without waiting for me!"

"Stop them!" cried Ramonet and Peignot, and the combatants, hearing them, left off brandishing the swords.

"Ah, here is the man you suspected of cowardice," cried Glousseux, and Ramonet exclaimed, "Absurd," with an air of great dignity.

"Here is he whose honor you assailed," said Monpate. "He was speaking in jest," observed Peignot calmly.

The two seconds looked at each other for a minute and burst into a peal of laughter. "What is the use of our fighting with each other in defence of these two cowards?" cried Glousseux.

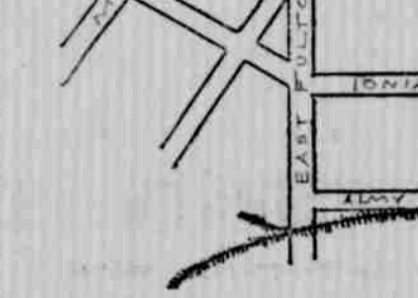
"Permit me," began Peignot, but Monpate interrupted him with: "I will permit you to do nothing except pay for the dinner."



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