

## ‘The Engraver’

It was on a dark and stormy night, in the winter of the year 1784, that a female, miserably clad, and bearing something which resembled a bundle of linen in her arm, walked rapidly along the Rue Saint Jacques in the metropolis of France. The rain fell in torrents; and scarcely a soul was seen on the streets, so late was the hour, and so tempestuous was the weather. Even the patrol neglected a portion of its usual rounds, in order to return the more quickly to the guard-house, – the *mouchard*, or police-spy, repaired to his own home, convinced that he would have no employment abroad on such a night as that, – the *chiffonner*, or rag-picker, did not venture out in the midst of the pitiless storm, – and the *gendarme* remained in his own snug retreat, smoking his pipe, and felicitating himself that he was not out at the moment. Still the female, to whom allusion has been made, pursued her way, regardless of the storm, and unmindful of the heavy rains, which had already wetted her to the skin.

The woman stopped at the gate of a large and gloomy-looking building at the extremity of the Rue Saint Jacques. She ascended the steps, and approached a singular projection of woodwork which was fitted into one of the folding doors of the entrance. This machine, which resembled an immense drum set in the gate in an upright position in such a manner that one section was in the open air and the other inside the gates, revolved upon a perpendicular axis, and, when turned round by the female above mentioned, presented a large aperture to her view, beneath the glare of the flickering lamp over the portal. The machine was hollow; and into the opening thus disclosed the female hastily thrust the bundle which she held in her arms. She then pulled the bell at the gate – moved the box in such a manner that the aperture was turned inwards once more, – and having cast one long and lingering look towards the singular machine, she made a precipitate retreat from the spot.

The porter, who answered the loud peal of the bell at the hospital (for such was the building in question) found a beautiful male child in the turning box. The infant was about eight or nine months old; its clothes were of the most wretched description, although particularly clean; and on its breast was placed a piece of paper, on which these words were written in a small and neat hand, – ‘JAMES HERBERT: born of English parents, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, 1784.’

The foundling was immediately entrusted to the care of a nurse, who treated it with every kindness. Good clothes were provided for the child – wholesome food was allotted to him – and in a short time he was one of the most healthy inmates of that vast asylum. Years passed away, and no one returned to claim the foundling: but every six months a small sum of money was remitted to the governor of the establishment for the use of James Herbert; and that functionary, in compliance with the regulations of the institution, amassed the remittances in order to provide for the foundling as soon as he should have reached an age when his future lot might become a subject of consideration

James Herbert was, however, a boy of moody and melancholy disposition. The moment he obtained a consciousness of his real position in life, and knew upon what terms he was residing in a vast hospital, with hundreds of companions in the same predicament, he entertained so evil an impression of this world and its denizens that, young as he was, he wished to die. The governor treated him kindly, occasionally sent for him to his house, and permitted him to play with his own children; and James manifested a deep gratitude in return for this condescension.

When he reached the age of sixteen, the governor sent for him, and questioned him relative to the particular business or calling to which he was desirous of being apprenticed.

‘I have no less a sum than ten thousand francs in my possession, which is to be laid out for your advantage,’ said the governor. ‘Some unknown hand has from time to time conveyed money to me through the medium of the turning box; and the whole amount has been carefully hoarded by me according to the rules of the establishment. This sum will be used in a way that will essentially aid you in learning a business or trade that may ensure you a livelihood.’

‘My parents then have not altogether deserted me!’ exclaimed the poor boy, cheered by the consolatory word of the governor; then, after a moment’s pause, he added, ‘Sir, my principal occupation during the last four years has been, as you know, devoted to the workshop of the engraver who teaches the boys of the second ward. I should like to be apprenticed to an engraver.’

‘Be it so,’ said the governor; and in a few days James Herbert was an inmate of the house of an eminent copper-plate engraver in the Rue Saint Honoré.

For some time James was most assiduous in his application to his new pursuit; and his master, whose name was Legrand, had every reason to be satisfied with the young apprentice. But, at the expiration of a year, the blue eyes of Celestine, the engraver’s daughter, had made so deep an impression upon the heart of the youth, that he sat for hours meditating upon her charms, instead of achieving the task which had been set him. He was too bashful to tell his love to the object of it; but she, innocent though she were, soon discovered, with that quickness of perception which in these matters is so peculiar to woman, that she was far from indifferent to the apprentice. Love, it is said, begets love; and certainly in this case the adage was fulfilled; for Celestine soon entertained a strong predilection for James Herbert; and, without venturing to confess the real state of their feelings to each other, they often exchanged glances which unwittingly told the fond tale of affection.

Celestine was a beautiful girl, and was about two or three months older than Herbert. She was tall and well-formed; her eyes were of a deep, melting hue; and her hair was auburn – that auburn which takes a thousand fantastic shades beneath the rays of the sun. Her lips were red and pouting, and her teeth beneath seemed like the chaste pearls of the East set in the handle of the yatagan;<sup>[1]</sup> her smile was happiness – her glance delight. Her complexion was so clear that her

skin appeared to be transparent; and on her cheeks the white and vermilion were so exquisitely blended together that it seemed as if the roses of York and Lancaster were there struggling for superiority. There were a few freckles on her forehead; but even they were beautiful, and only bore the more ample testimony to the delicacy of the young girl's complexion.

Legrand, the father of Celestine, had long been a widower; and as he was invariably absorbed in the labours of his art, he had no one to espouse or control her movements. She had no mother's care – no tender parent's advice to teach her how to act: she had not a female acquaintance whom she considered worthy of her confidence; and she therefore obeyed the impulse of her own heart, by loving without even reflecting whether it were prudent or not to cherish such an attachment.

Another year passed away; and during that period the lovers had sighed in secret, and had only exchanged tender glances with each other. At length an accident produced an avowal of his attachment on the part of Herbert; and Celestine unhesitatingly unfolded her own sentiments in return. The young couple were then supremely happy; and Herbert now applied himself with all his former assiduity to his labours. He meditated upon his successful love as he sat at work in a parlour behind the shop; and he found that the more earnestly he toiled, the more rapidly glided away the time, and the shorter was the interval that separated him from the society of her whom he adored. His naturally melancholy disposition received a tinge of joy and tranquil happiness which his soul had never before experienced; and without reflecting upon the possibilities of the future, he contented himself with the enjoyments of the present. The society of Celestine was in his idea an Elysium, which could admit of no rival.

Another year passed away; and James Herbert was now of nineteen years of age. He was a tall, intelligent youth, with dark black eyes, long curling hair, an agreeable though somewhat melancholy cast of countenance, and a pleasing manner. He had lately attained such proficiency in the art to which he had devoted himself that some of the finest plates which bore the name of Legrand upon their margin emanated from his hand; and the old engraver himself declared that he possessed a treasure in his talented apprentice.

One day a gentleman entered the shop and desired to speak to James Herbert. 'I have heard so much of your skill,' said the stranger to the youth, 'that I am determined to put it to the test. If your achievements confirm public rumour, you will find no mean patron in me.'

The gentleman then produced a design for the back of a banker's cheque – a complicated and difficult plan, to prevent the probability of imitation by forgery; and this he desired the youth to engrave within a certain time. Legrand hastened to answer an affirmative in the name of his pupil; and the gentleman took his departure.

The time agreed upon passed away, and the stranger returned. The plate had been finished only the day before; and it was immediately handed to him who had ordered it. He seemed delighted with the fidelity and delicacy of its execution; and paid the price demanded without a moment's

hesitation. He then left another plate to be engraved, and said that, as it was a particularly difficult one, he should not call for it until the expiration of three months from that period.

This second task was a hard and difficult one; and Herbert's health seemed to suffer from the severity of his application to it. The three months passed away, and on the day before that on which the stranger was expected to call for the plate, a considerable portion of the engraving yet remained to be accomplished. Old Legrand himself relieved his pupil at the task on that day; but when night came there was still work for two or three hours. James considered that his honour and reputation were at stake – he knew how excellent a patron he would lose, were he not to fulfil the labour – and he resolved to sit up and finish the plate. Celestine intimated her intention of keeping him company in his vigil; and her father, who was wearied with his own exertions, retired to rest.

The youth seated himself at the table, and commenced his labours. Celestine took a chair near him, and watched her lover with the utmost attention and interest. Few words were exchanged between them; but every now and then James raised his eyes from his work, and his glances encountered those of the affectionate and beautiful girl. Then a kiss hastily snatched, or the pressure of her delicate hand, gave him fresh courage to continue his labours.

The clock struck one, as he laid aside his instrument, pushed the plate from before him, and exclaimed 'It is finished !'

'I congratulate you, dearest James,' said Celestine, and of her own accord she playfully imprinted a kiss upon his brow, as he leant back in his chair in a position the best calculated to alleviate the fatigues he had experienced by his long stopping posture.

Herbert caught the young girl in his arms, and embraced her fondly. He drew her gradually upon his knees, and played with the long and shining locks which fell profusely upon her white neck, the full beauties of which were only partially concealed by a low gown. They were alone – at that mysterious and dangerous hour, – and they dreaded not interruption. They were absorbed in the contemplation of their own affection, for they loved so truly and so well ! and every moment their kisses became more frequent and more burning. Oh ! far too dangerous hour for the honour of a tender maiden, – far too resistless a temptation for a youth of the age of Herbert ! They were culpable, – and the honour of Celestine was sacrificed to their mutual passion.

O Love ! how dangerous art thou, that thou requires such holocausts as the chastity of woman !  
O Love ! thou art not then a religion; – thou hast neither revelations, laws, nor prophets ! Thou hast not sprung up in the hearts of men simultaneously with science and liberty ! Thou art always placed beneath the control of a blind destiny; and man has not as yet discovered within him a power, or a virtue, or a will, which might enable him to wrestle successfully against thy force !  
For ever art thou destined, O Love ! to fall overwhelmed by the flames which you yourself

create; and for ever is mankind doomed, by its pride or its selfishness, to change into poison the purest and most heavenly balm which has been accorded the denizens of earth.

On the following morning the stranger called for his plate, and appeared better pleased with it than he even had been with the former one. He added a thousand francs to the sum demanded by Legrand: and then presented another pattern to Herbert, with an intimation that he should call that day three months for it. The design was most elaborate in all its details, and had evidently been planned by a most ingenious draughtsman. Herbert gladly understood the task; and the stranger departed.

Celestine now appeared to enter upon a new existence. She no longer experienced that calm contentment which had previously characterised her love: her mind was now in a perpetual state of excitement; and she was haunted by a thousand fears, in the same way as she indulged at other periods in as many delusive hopes. On his part, James manifested increased affection towards her; but neither even thought of the propriety of soliciting the consent of Legrand to their union. Love is made up of absurdities, contradictions, idiosyncrasies, and extremes; and this timidity, neglect, or thoughtlessness on the part of the lovers was in perfect keeping with the usual conduct of the votaries of the blind deity.

Time wore away; and at length Celestine felt convinced that her amour with the young apprentice would soon be proclaimed to the world. She was in a way to become a mother; and she knew not whether to sorrow or rejoice at this conviction. She communicated the truth to her lover; and now for the first time it occurred to James that the situation of his mistress demanded the prompt solemnization of their nuptials. Without a moment's hesitation, he sought an explanation with her father. He avowed his love, and implored the old man to consent to his union with Celestine. Legrand was rich, and might have boldly aspired to a more elevated connexion for his daughter; but he was a good and a kind man, in the first place; and in the second, he remembered that James possessed those talents which would ensure a large fortune. He accordingly replied as follows:

‘My dear James, I accord you the hand of my daughter with the most unfeigned delight. You have secured a patron in the stranger who has set you so many difficult tasks, and who will doubtless prove the means of building your reputation upon a solid basis. In three months he will call for the new plate; and if you proceed with it, as you have begun, it will be a master-piece of engraving. The day of your nuptials shall be the one on which the stranger comes to fetch his plate; and probably he may be induced to honour the bridal festivities with his presence.’

James would have remonstrated against this delay, but the old man cut him short with a word which showed the inflexibility of his determination; and the youth hastened to communicate to the anxious Celestine the result of his interview with her father. The poor girl was overjoyed at the success of her lover's measure; and she consoled him with an assurance of being enabled to conceal her situation until the period which should unite them for ever.

The eventful day arrived: and grand were the preparations made by the old engraver to celebrate his daughter's nuptials in a befitting manner. Numbers of relations and friends were invited to the entertainment which was to be given in the evening: the most costly attire had been purchased for the bride, whose situation was not suspected, and who looked more lovely than ever: and M. Legrand for once consented to abandon his labour, and devote himself to amusement. James Herbert was in rapture; the plate had been terminated a few days previously, and executed in a style far superior to that which characterized the former tasks entrusted to him by the stranger, whose arrival he anxiously awaited. True to his time, at half past nine precisely, that individual entered the shop. He asked if the plate were finished, and appeared well pleased when it was presented to him in its perfect state.

'What is the price ?' said he; for he was a man of very few words.

'Five thousand francs,' returned Legrand, who did not hesitate to place a high value upon the performance of his pupil.

The stranger made no answer; but placed six notes, each for a thousand francs, upon the counter. He then took up the plate, and was preparing to depart without giving any further instructions, when James addressed him thus, in a timid tone of voice:

'Sir, you have been a great benefactor to me, and I am under deep obligations to you. Will you make me still more your debtor, by honouring my nuptials with the master's daughter by your presence ? They are to be celebrated this day.'

The stranger reflected for a moment, and a sudden idea seemed to flit across his brain, for he smiled at the conceit. He then turned towards the youth, and said, 'I accept your invitation with pleasure – but on one condition.'

'I do not hesitate to promise in advance to fulfil it, whatever it may be,' cried James.

'The condition is, that after the celebration of the nuptials in the church and at the town hall, and before the entertainment takes place, you will accord me one hour of your company alone. I wish to present you to a friend or two whose acquaintance will tend to your benefit.'

'Agreed !' ejaculated Herbert: and the stranger was at once introduced to the drawing-room, where the guests who were to be at the ceremony had already met. 'By what name shall I have the pleasure of presenting my benefactor ?'

'Oh ! what name ?' said the stranger, as if somewhat startled or annoyed by the question: 'Why – say Monsieur de Vergennes.' And James introduced the stranger by the name of de Vergennes.

The carriages, which had been ordered, were now announced; and the cavalcade proceeded to the mayoralty of the second *arrondissement*. When the civil ceremony was accomplished, the

procession hastened to the Church and the Assumption, where the union of the happy couple was blessed by the priest at the altar of the Christian's God. The bride and bridegroom with their friends then returned to the engraver's house, and de Vergennes hastened to remind Herbert of his promise. It was now two o'clock in the afternoon, and there was an interval of nearly three hours before dinner-time. James promised his lovely wife to return as speedily as possible, and then accompanied the stranger to the place whither the latter conducted him.

Hour after hour passed away, and still neither Herbert nor de Vergennes made their appearance. Five o'clock proclaimed the moment when the wedding banquet was to be served up; and the principal person at that festal scene was absent. Celestine became alarmed; and the old engraver knew not how to console her. The clouds of night drew a dark veil over this hemisphere, and still James returned not. The guests at length sate down to the repast at eight o'clock, in compliance with the entreaties of Legrand; but the meal was a dull and gloomy one. Nine – ten – eleven – twelve o'clock struck, and the bridegroom was still absent. The guests took their departure; and Celestine was conveyed in a state bordering on despair to that which was to have been her nuptial couch, but which seemed to her a widowed one !

On the following morning Legrand proceeded to the office of the Commissary of Police of the quarter, and related the singular disappearance of his son-in-law. The magistrates questioned him minutely relative to the circumstances of that disappearance; and Legrand stated all that occurred relative to the stranger.

'Did this M. de Vergennes, as he calls himself,' said the Commissary, 'carry away the new plate with him, or did he leave it behind ?'

'He took it away with him,' was the answer.

'And this is the third which you have engraved for him, or rather which your son-in-law engraved ?' proceeded the commissary.

'The third,' returned the old man.

'Should you recognise the others if you were to see them ?' demanded the magistrate.

Legrand replied in the affirmative.

'Is this one ?' asked the Commissary, opening a drawer in his desk, and taking a copper-plate from it.

Legrand examined it for a moment with feelings of the utmost astonishment, and then exclaimed, 'Yes, it is the first plate which was engraved for M. de Vergennes ! I could select it form amongst a thousand.'

‘And is this another ?’ proceeded the commissary, as he took a second plate from the drawer and handed it to M. Legrand.

‘It is,’ answered the old engraver. ‘Perhaps you have the third also ? I see that my name has been beaten out of the plates.’

The Commissary shook his head to imply that he had not the third plate, and then appeared to reflect profoundly for some minutes. Suddenly raising his head, he cross-questioned the old engraver severely, relative to the habits and character of Herbert, the circumstances under which the several plates were engraven for M. de Vergennes, and the amount of remuneration paid for them. Legrand replied to all these questions with the assurance of a man who is telling the truth; and again the Commissary seemed to mediate upon a difficult subject for several minutes.

‘In what money did de Vergennes settle for the last two plates ?’ suddenly demanded the magistrate.

‘In notes of the bank of France,’ was the reply.

‘Have you those notes with you, or have you disposed of them ?’

‘I paid them into my banker’s hands shortly after I received them.’

‘You may now withdraw, M. Legrand. In a day or two I may probably be enabled to give you some information of your son-in-law. The ends of justice require that I should hold no further conversation with you at present.’

The engraver retired, his mind a prey to the most tormenting curiosity and surprise. He however imparted hopes to the mind of Celestine, and endeavoured to persuade the afflicted young woman that her husband would soon be restored to her.

Several days passed away – and James Herbert returned not to his anxious wife. Legrand called every morning at the office of the Commissary of Police; but all the answer he could obtain to his inquiries was – ‘I have as yet nothing, either favourable or unfavourable, to report to you.’ Celestine’s soul became a prey to the deepest, the most acute, despair; her position would soon be apparent in spite of all her precautions to conceal it; and she had not her husband with her to soothe her in the moment of anticipated disgrace ! One morning when her father returned with the usual reply from the office of the magistrate, he seemed to survey his daughter as she reclined upon the sofa with peculiar attention. She started – and the old man, into whose mind a suspicion had stolen, banished it with the idea that it was an illusion. He then withdrew to his shop to seek relief from his afflictions in the labour of his craft.

But Celestine had noticed the peculiarity of countenance with which her sire had regarded her; and she dreaded the wrath of her father in case of discovery. She could not brook the idea that

detection had already taken place, or was near at hand: she possessed a soul incapable of enduring the scorn of the world; and, roused to despair, she hastily put on her bonnet and shawl and left the house. She proceeded at a rapid pace towards the Champs Elysées, passed along the banks of the river, and at length reached that part of the Seine where the path to Auteuil branches off the main road which runs along the margin of that river. She had made up her mind to terminate her days in those tranquil and placid waters, – she felt that excess of grief had driven her almost mad, – and she determined to destroy at once all chance of ever raving in an asylum for the insane. She hastened to the bank, – she glanced towards the still and deep waters with a shudder; she then remembered her forlorn situation – and, hesitating no longer, she sprung into the Seine. There was a splash – then the ripples chased each other rapidly to the bank – a form rose to the surface of the water – a piercing shriek echoed over the bosom of the river – a ghastly countenance, with wild and affrighted eyes, appeared for a moment upon the surface, and then all was over ! The waters speedily became still and tranquil once again; and the woes of the lifeless Celestine were all buried in the depths of the river.

On the following morning the corpse was caught in the nets at Saint Cloud; and was there despatched to the morgue in Paris. It was there exposed for a few hours, until it was recognized and claimed by a distracted old man, who called loudly upon his God to give him back the daughter whom he had lost ! That unhappy old man was the engraver of the Rue Saint Honoré.

In the meantime, what had really become of James Herbert ? According to his promise he accompanied M. de Vergennes to a house in the island of the city, and there he was introduced to two or three individuals, all of gentlemanly appearance, well dressed, and more or less polished in their manners. They were seated in an apartment which was decently furnished, and which commanded a view of the Palace of Justice from its three windows. The back looked towards the cathedral of Nôtre Dame, the two giant towers of which venerable Gothic building were seen from the casements of the attic.

‘I have procured the new plate as promised,’ said M. de Vergennes, addressing himself to his friends, as he entered the room, ‘and have brought the young engraver himself to be introduced to you.’

The gentlemen thus addressed all surveyed Herbert with the greatest attention and interest; and one of them, as soon as his scrutiny had terminated, exclaimed, ‘What if we were to execute that scheme which Maurice proposed some time ago ?’

‘That is the precise motive for which I have brought him hither,’ returned de Vergennes, glancing towards Herbert.

‘Tell him the truth at once, then,’ said he who had spoken before. ‘The police already know the best part.’

‘Sit down, my dear boy,’ said de Vergennes, assuming a sudden familiarity of manner which contrasted strangely with the cold and polite style he had up to that period adopted in respect to the young engraver; ‘sit down and I will first let you into the secret of my plans and views. You must know that you have fabricated for us the designs of the notes of three as excellent foreign bank notes as one would wish to have to deal with. By the aid of the first, we cleared about sixty thousand francs, and ninety thousand by the second. The one I obtained from you this morning will produce us double the latter amount.’

‘Or treble you may say,’ exclaimed one of the gentlemen, whose name appeared to be Maurice; ‘that is, if the thing is properly managed. The police may keep the others.’

‘Well – that does not regard him,’ ejaculated M. de Vergennes pettishly, alluding to Herbert, who sat stupefied upon his chair; for his mind was now filled with strange suspicions, the truth of which he did not however choose to admit to himself.

‘All he has to do, is to obey our direction,’ added de Vergennes, ‘and his rewards shall be liberal.’

Herbert made no answer; and de Vergennes proceeded to unfold his wishes.

‘This is the object we have in view,’ he said, after a moment’s pause. ‘You must engrave for us two plates of notes of the Bank of France, – one for thousand franc notes, the other for notes of five hundred francs. You shall not be allowed to stir from this house until you have completed the task; and when the labour is accomplished, we will give you fifty thousand francs for your reward, upon your taking a solemn oath not to divulge the nature of the business which kept you here.’

‘Never – never !’ cried Herbert, on whose mind the whole truth now flashed, unimpeded in its course by a single doubt: ‘would you involve me in the crime of forgery – of forgery of the notes of the Bank of France, the punishment of which is *death* !’

‘Then you must stay here till you do as we desire you,’ very coolly observed M. de Vergennes. ‘You were married this morning – you must know whether you prefer returning to your lovely bride or remaining prisoner in this house.’

James Herbert now comprehended the full extent of the danger to which he was exposed; and he hastened to reply as follows: –

‘If you will permit me to return home, I will perform all that you require, without reward.’

‘Impossible !’ cried de Vergennes.

‘Did I not engrave the former plates which you ordered of me ?’ demanded Herbert, indignantly.

‘Yes – but you did not exactly understand what they were,’ was the immediate answer.

‘You will at least suffer me to communicate with my wife?’ persisted the almost heartbroken youth.

‘No – we shall forbid anything that may compromise our safety,’ returned de Vergennes.

‘You may read the letter,’ cried Herbert.

‘No – no – a thousand times *no*!’ ejaculated de Vergennes, impatiently. ‘You *must* say that you are destined somewhere by force, or are staying at a place when you write your letter; and in either case enquiries would ensue. Decide, – will you accept our offer; or will you remain a close prisoner in a cellar under the house, and below the bosom of the Seine itself?’

‘I accept!’ cried Herbert, after few moments’ consideration: ‘should the eye of justice penetrate all this infamy, sooner or later, my safety would not be compromised because I act from compulsion, and under the influence of intimidation.’

‘You accept our offer,’ said de Vergennes, a ray of joy lighting up his countenance: ‘that is sufficient for us! Keep your reflections to yourself!’

‘Let me commence my labours at once,’ said James, ‘I shall toil day and night until I have completed them.’

De Vergennes conducted the young man into an adjoining room, where there were all the materials and implements which were required for an engraver. There was also a bed on an alcove; and it was evident at first glance, that the chamber had been fitted up with the idea of being used as a sleeping apartment, as well as a sitting one. It instantly struck Herbert that he had not been the first occupant of that room for a similar purpose; and he shuddered when he reflected upon the perils of his position against such a set of desperate characters. De Vergennes contented himself by pointing to the table on which the implements were lying, and then left the room.

Herbert did not allow his reflections sufficient time to sadden him with the gloominess of their nature, but instantly commenced his work. He dared not think upon the dreadful nature of the suspense endured by his adored Celestine – the thought was maddening, especially as he knew that she would not long be able to conceal her situation from the eyes of strangers; and in order to dispel that thought, he resolved to toil with an ardour which, by the very dint of his physical powers, should blunt the feelings of his moral ones.

Day after day did he remain seated at his task – rising early and retiring late to rest – wasting but a short time to partake of the succulent repasts which were provided for him by those for whom he was labouring – and grudging every instant which he bestowed on his couch or his table. But

his work proceeded rapidly – and well; the execution of the plates was as perfect as if he had been engaged in good work. While the unfortunate James Herbert was thus toiling in one room of that spacious dwelling, a paper-maker, who had been carried away from his friends in a similar manner, was occupied in the apartment precisely over his head, in the fabrication of an imitation of that material which is used to receive the impressions of the plate engraved for the Governor and company of the Bank of France ! All the ramifications of the plan adopted by de Vergennes and his companions were as systematic and complete as those of a dishonest Ministry, which is determined to retain office at any sacrifice.

At the expiration of a week Herbert informed de Vergennes, who visited his apartment two or three times every day, that the first plate – viz., that for bank notes of a thousand francs each, was completed. de Vergennes received it with an enthusiastic manifestation of delight; and, from the moment all possible attentions and kindnesses, short of liberty, were lavished upon the successful engraver. The choicest luxuries of the season were daily served up at his table; and the manners of de Vergennes became almost fawning through excess of condescension.

Herbert was however compelled to rest for several days before he commenced the second plate. The severity of his toils in the execution of the first had materially impaired his health, and when he resumed his task he was not able to proceed as rapidly as before. He had been three weeks in that state of captivity when he completed the second and last portion of his work; and the termination of it was hailed by him as the signal for the recovery of his liberty.

‘You will not find us ungrateful,’ said de Vergennes, as he received the plate from the hands of the youthful engraver, whose countenance was ashy pale, whose eyes were heavy and languid, and whose strength was exhausted. ‘But good God’ he added with an apparent tone of deep interest, ‘you are ill ! You are fainting !’ and as he uttered these words he hastened to fetch a glass of wine from the adjoining apartment.

Herbert drank it off – for he felt a deep need of it; but no sooner had he imbibed the contents of the glass when he fell from his chair in a deep lethargy. De Vergennes dragged him toward the bed, threw him upon it, and then left the apartment. When Herbert awoke from the stupor into which the liquor had thrown him, he was enveloped in total darkness.

As soon as he had collected his scattered ideas into one focus he comprehended the full extent of the treachery of de Vergennes. Rising from the bed on which he had found himself lying, he groped about for the means of striking a light, and in a short time succeeded in his object. The first thing that struck him was a letter lying upon the table. He took it up, and perceived that it was addressed to himself. Having torn it open, he found that it contained a large sum in banknotes – but not a written word of either explanation or thanks.

Obedying a mechanical impulse, James Herbert thrust the notes into his pocket, and hastened to leave the house in which he had been so strangely employed and treated. No opposition was

offered to his *exit*, by either bolt or human being, – the dwelling appeared to be entirely deserted, – and he was glad when he found himself once more in the open street.

Having stood for a few minutes to breathe the fresh air of heaven, and to gaze up towards the star-studded sky, the uniform surface of which only seemed to be broken by the gigantic towers of Nôtre Dame, which rose like two Babels in the air, –Herbert hastened in the direction of the Pont Neuf, and thence towards the Rue Saint Honoré. He reached the well-known abode of M. Legrand – his master and father-in-law, – he rejoiced when he saw lights in the windows – and he buoyed himself up with the hope of clasping his beloved one in his arms in the course of a few minutes. He ascended the stair-case with a light step –rushed into the drawing-room – and stopped short only when he saw three or four strangers sitting round a table, at which one of them was writing.

‘Who is this intruder ?’ cried the individual thus employed, as he laid aside his pen, and glanced angrily toward the young man.

‘It is I – James Herbert !’ he exclaimed. ‘But where is my wife – where is Celestine ?’

‘Celestine !’ ejaculated the former speaker: ‘what – is it possible that he can be ignorant –’

‘Ignorant of what ?’ cried Herbert, his heart misgiving him.

‘Ignorant of the fate of the unhappy girl whom you seduced – deceived with a hope as false as it was transitory –and then abandoned ?’

‘Speak –speak !’ exclaimed James, in a hoarse tone of voice; ‘what has become of Celestine ?’

‘She has destroyed herself,’ was the solemn reply; ‘and her father has this morning died of a broken heart !’

As these words issued from the lips of the stranger, a time-piece upon the mantle struck eleven; that was the first intimation of the exact hour of the night which James had received since his recovery from his long sleep, and his departure from the forger’s house.

‘Yes – your cruelty has killed her,’ repeated the spokesman of the little party seated at the table. ‘I am a notary – the partner of the one who usually transacts M. Legrand’s business – and I am here to make a list of his possessions. He leaves everything to charitable institutions, – and to you he bequeaths nothing—save his malediction !’

These words were uttered in a low tone of voice, – but had they bene proclaimed by a thunder-clap, Herbert would not have caught their meaning. He was suddenly stupefied by the announcement thus made to him; and he sank back into a sombre melancholy which was more terrible than the blackest despair.

He knew not how many hours he had remained in that situation when a voice suddenly broke in upon his reverie. The great dawn of morning was peeping through the crevices of the shutters.

‘The inventory is now complete; and as you are not a legatee, nor in any way connected with the will of the deceased, you must excuse me – but I have only one duty to perform – and –’

‘I comprehend you !’ interrupted Herbert, with a contemptuous smile, the feeling which prompted it for a moment rising above the bitterness of his grief, – ‘I cannot be permitted to remain in this house !’

He rose as he uttered these words, and cast a sorrowful look around him, and then slowly retired from the apartment. The clock of the palace of the Minister of Finance struck seven as he left the dwelling which had once been the abode of happiness and of love !

What could he do ? and whither could he go ? He had not a friend on the wide face of the earth; and he was penniless. No – a sudden reminiscence flashed across his mind; and he hastily felt in his pockets. He drew forth a bundle of bank notes, – his experienced eye in a moment convinced him that they had been printed from the first plate which he had engraved during the detention which had caused all his present miseries, – and he was about to cast from him the documents, to pass which was then Death. But he felt a species of attachment for them, because they were originated by his labour: he regarded them in the same light in which an artist surveys his picture – a sculptor his statue – a poet his ode – or a Pygmalion his Galatea. He counted them – they were fifty in number; and he thus found himself the possessor of that which would make him the master of as many thousand of francs for the mere trouble of walking into the shop of a money-lender. But still palpable on the bank notes was a circular design, the ground-work of which was black; and on this ground-work were white letters, conveying the terrible intimation that he who forged these documents should be punished by death !

As a man returns to this pocket the pistol with which he intended only a few moments before to end his days, when he has been interrupted in his dread design, so did James Herbert consign the fifty bank notes to *his* pocket once more. He then wandered about the streets of Paris until the coffee-houses were open – thinking of Celestine—and forgetting that he had those documents in his possession. Oh ! verily, temptations attach themselves to a man, with all the pertinacity of a disease – a deformity – or a remorse !

In the midst of the deepest grief, a man must at some time reflect upon his position. Herbert felt that all the tears in the world would not recall to life the being whom he had so fondly loved; and he began to perceive the necessity of taking a decided step relative to himself. He accordingly repaired to one of the most obscure quarters of Paris – for the poor districts of all great cities are termed obscure, because misery is not so loud in its tones as wealth and arrogance; – and there he hired lodging. He had no money to procure even a loaf of bread – and the old portress, who was to wait upon him, already required an advance of small coin for the purchase of domestic

necessities. Herbert was rendered desperate by his grief – and poverty is clad in horrors which are more terrible than those that invest the spectre which rises from the grave. He handed one of his bank notes to the old woman, and desired her to change it. She curtseyed and left the apartment to inform her husband downstairs and the half dozen gossips who dwelt in her way from her own house to the nearest money-changer's, that the new lodger counted his money by thousands of francs at a time.

When Herbert was once more alone, he threw himself upon the sofa which stood in the sitting-room of his new lodgings, and soon fell into a deep sleep. He has not closed his eyes for many hours, and he was exhausted, mentally and bodily. But the visions which visited him in his slumber were far from felicitous; and he saw frightful things in his sleep. The cold corpse of Celestine, clad in its winding-sheet, stood before him, and the sardonic countenance of de Vergennes seemed peering over its shoulder. Then came the ghastly form of the bereaved father – the old engraver – who stretched forth his lean and withered arms as if to involve a curse upon him who he supposed to have abandoned his daughter. Again, Herbert saw the gang of forgers hovering about him; and he awoke with a start and in a cold perspiration.

The clashing of a weapon in its scabbard fell upon his ears. He glanced hastily around him – and to his horror he found two gendarmes by his side. A middle-aged man, with a tri-coloured scarf around his waist, was seated at the table.

‘Sir, you are my prisoner !’ cried this individual, the moment Herbert's glance met his.

‘Your prisoner !’ ejaculated the young man. ‘And for what crime am I arrested ?’

The Commissary of Police (for such was the person with the tri-coloured sash) made no verbal reply; but intimated an answer by holding up a paper to the eyes of the young engraver. It was the forged banknote which he had sent to be changed !

‘O God !’ ejaculated Herbert, covering his face with his hands; ‘what will become of me ?’

He fell back on the sofa, and sobbed bitterly. The gendarmes proceeded to examine his person, and found upon him forty-nine other notes similar to the one which had caused his arrest. The commissary of Police drew up a *procès-verbal* of these particulars, and took down the statement of the old porteress. It appeared that the money-changer had originally suspected that the woman had not come honestly into the possession of the note, and had questioned her closely, – that she immediately repeated the tale she had told to the gossips in the neighbourhood, relative to the wealth of the lodger, – that the money-changer's suspicions were then directed towards an individual who sought so obscure a place of residence, when he possessed so large a sum of money, – and that an enquiry at the Bank of France, whither he compelled the old woman to accompany him, proclaimed the fact of the forgery of the note which had been tendered to him.

As soon as the *procès-verbal* was drawn up, James Herbert was conducted to the prison of La Force; and a statement of the case was forwarded to the imperial Procurator—for this event occurred in the times of that Emperor whose name is expressed by simply stating that he was the greatest man, both as a warrior and a statesman, that ever appeared in this world of ours. In the space of about six weeks, Herbert was put upon his trial at the Court of Assizes. The evidence was strong against him—the truth was his only defence; and that truth was told by his counsel in the most powerful language which God could possibly put into the mouth of man. Still it was proved that the accused had attempted to pass off one of his own forged notes; and criminal tribunals are not much accustomed to make allowances for the state of mind or the circumstances which conduct men to crime. The jury returned a verdict of *guilty*, with an unanimous recommendation to mercy. The appeal was not made in vain to Emperor Napoleon, and the sentence of death, which had been pronounced upon the culprit according to the terms of the law, was commuted by the imperial hero into one of perpetual confinement at the galleys.

The galleys for life—and to be marked on the shoulder with a red hot iron! Oh! this was most horrible; and yet Herbert considered himself happy when he was informed that his life was to be spared. He was, however, conducted in an open cart to the Place de Grève; and there, in the midst of a yelling multitude, the public executioner imprinted upon his shoulder the three letters G A L,<sup>[2]</sup> with an iron that hissed in his flesh, and with his blood! He was then removed to the prison of Bicêtre, to await the departure of the next chain of convicts to Toulon.

In the prison of Bicêtre Herbert saw more of the dark side of life than he had ever deemed it possible for man to behold. He was compelled to associate with wretches who gloried in their crimes—who spoke of an assassination as an actor speaks of a favourite character which he performs—who disguised their real meaning in a horrible slang called *argot*—who scoffed at all the institutions of religion—and whose good opinions of each other or of the denizens of the world without were decided by the enormity of turpitude to which it is possible to attain.

One dark and gloomy morning, the prisoners in that division of the immense goal where Herbert was confined were aroused at an earlier hour than usual; and it was announced to them that the fixing of the chains was to take place without delay. The convicts proceeded into the court-yard of the building, and there they found the *garde-chiourme*, or escort of the galley-slaves, already making their dreadful preparations. A long chain was stretched all across the court; and, at intervals of about two feet, an immense number of shorter chains, each probably a yard and a quarter in length, were laid across the long chain at right angles with it, or transversely; so that there was an equal proportion of the short chain on either side of the long one; and at the extremities of the short chains, on either side, there were iron collars, or rings. The convicts were summoned to their places, in a rank on each side of the long chain, according to the alphabetical order of their initials; and then the iron collars were fastened around their necks. But, to prevent the possibility of escape, the collars were riveted together, upon an anvil placed upon the backs of the galley-slaves, and with mighty hammers, the dint of which the smiths did not spare! The

spirit of the most daring was completely broken by this horrible process – a process which seems to degrade man beneath the level of those brutes which are shut up in menageries, but which are not chained together by the neck.

When the ceremony of fixing the chains was accomplished, the cavalcade moved out of the prison walls, escorted by the *garde-chiourme*, and by mounted gendarmes with loaded muskets. If any member of the chain ventured to talk too loudly, or otherwise to offend, heavy blows from the staff of the galley-sergeant, who commended the escort, soon reduced him to silence or to obedience; and when the right culprit was not immediately detected, the nearest man to the spot whence the noise emanated suffered the penalty in his place. The judges had not exaggerated when they informed the criminals, at their trials ‘that henceforth they would be dead as to law’: – those judges might have substituted the word *justice* for that of *law* !

Thus, those thirty or forty men moved on like one grand chain, of which each was only a link. They could only stop by a simultaneous movement; they all maintained the same pace, without the power of one man to proceed more rapidly or slowly than his companions. They were compelled to perform a certain distance every day, and were allowed nearly a month to accomplish the entire journey from Paris to Toulon. On the road they were fed upon black bread and pulse; the only luxury that was allowed them was pure water; – but then they were not permitted to revel in that indulgence, and stop at every brook. At night they slept on the straw of prisons in the towns at which they stopped; while their guards were provided with comfortable beds. It was horrible – most horrible !

On their arrival at the *bagne* – or the prison of Toulon, to which they were consigned – their collars were taken from their necks for the first time. The convicts were then taken into the bath-rooms, and permitted to indulge in ablutions, which were very necessary. They were swarming with vermin, collected from the straw in the gaols where they had slept on the road. When they were thus cleansed, they were linked together by twos; but now the connecting chains were fastened to the legs instead of to the necks. Red garments were distributed amongst them; and they were suffered to repose for a few days in their dormitories, previous to the commencement of their toils in the dock-yard, or on the fortifications.

Herbert’s companion – the man to whom he was attached by a chain, and from whom he was only separated by a chain, – the partner of his bed, of his toils, and of his rest, – the friend whom the chances of alphabetical distribution had provided for him, – the comrade who was a species of shadow ever following him, – a spectre constantly haunting him, – a night-mare which he could not shake off, – the eternal witness of all his motions and acts, – the being, in a word, who shared everything with him save his thoughts – and into them he nearly always penetrated at will, – this man was an old and practised thief, who was now upon his second visit to the galleys. One night he addressed his bed-fellow in the following manner: – ‘Herbert, do you intend to waste all your life in this infernal place ?’

‘What alternative awaits me ?’ demanded the young convict, in a tone rendered almost inaudible through despair.

‘If you saw a loop-hole through which you could creep into the open street, would you not avail yourself of the chance ?’ continued Hugo: for such was the name of the man.

‘Oh ! only show me the most distant chance of escape’, began Herbert, in an ecstasy of joy, at the ray of hope which the words of his companion imparted to his soul; ‘only convince me –’

‘Silence ! or we shall be overheard,’ said Hugo in a whisper. ‘You are a brave fellow, and shall share my good fortune. Tomorrow is the sixth of the month, is it not ?’

Herbert replied in the affirmative, and inquired the motive of the question.

‘To-morrow we work upon the port,’ was the answer, ‘and I have already arranged every thing with a friend outside. All *that* was planned and decided upon before I was every tried. What ! do you think that we ever forsake each other ? No – the thief outside sticks to the robber inside, like a friend to a friend; and I may rely upon the aid of *my* friend to-morrow evening with as much certainty as if the thing was already done. The man would give no farther explanation at that moment; and Herbert did not close his eyes once throughout that long and wearisome night – so extraordinary was the effect produced upon him by the whisperings of hope.

On the following morning the convicts, who had arrived at the *bagne* with Herbert, were order to proceed to the harbour as Hugo had anticipated. The *garde-chiourme*, with loaded muskets, escorted them; and when they reached the port, they were commanded to remove great masses of stone from one place to another, for the purpose of assisting the masons who were at work in the vicinity. The guards took seats at various intervals around the scene of these labours, and contented themselves with watching the proceedings of those who were entrusted to their charge. At mid-day the galley-slaves were supplied with food, and allowed an hour’s repose from their severe toils; but when that interval had passed, they were summoned to work once more.

Hour after hour slipped away; and to every inquiry of Herbert relative to the proposed escape, Hugo turned a deaf ear. It was then in the middle of winter; and at four o’clock it was nearly dark. Suddenly that hour was proclaimed by one of the churches of Toulon.

‘Can you swim ?’ demanded Hugo, abruptly turning towards his comrade, as they dragged a heavy stone between them.

Herbert replied in the affirmative.

‘Then your skill shall very soon be tested,’ exclaimed Hugo.

As he uttered these words, the two galley-slaves reached the edge of the port, which overlooks the water of the harbour. It was a wharf, and there was no parapet. At the spot which they had just reached, to deposit the stone that they had been dragging, there were no other galley-slaves at that same moment; the masons had retired from work, in consequence of the darkness of the hour; and the guards were at some distance. Hugo had well calculated the changes of the opportunity.

‘Now, then,’ said he to his companion, ‘if you’re a brave man, you will act with haste and with firmness. We must lower ourselves into the water !’

Herbert shuddered at the idea – but made no reply. He did not dare refuse to risk his life in order to escape from the living tomb to which he had been consigned. Hugo saw that his companion was willing to accompany him; and the first step towards freedom was immediately attempted.

In a moment they lowered themselves together into the water, by the aid of spars and beams which were affixed to the side of the wharf.

The guard heard the splash in the waves – and an alarm was immediately given.

‘Strike out boldly,’ said Hugo; ‘and escape is certain. I know the direction in which my friend’s boat is lying.’

Herbert turned his head, and saw lights dancing about on the wharf which he had just left; and in another instant a loud discharge of musketry fell upon his ears. The balls whistled past him and his companion, as they swam rapidly away from the port, side by side – retained at the same unvarying distance by the chain which held them together.

‘Courage—courage !’ ejaculated Hugo: ‘there is not much danger to be apprehended from those random shots !’

And as he spoke, there was a second discharge of musketry; but neither of the convicts was wounded.

‘Are we near the boat ?’ demanded Herbert, at the expiration of a few minutes; ‘my strength is beginning to fail me.’

‘A hundred yards more – and we are safe !’ returned Hugo.

‘There,’ he added after a moment’s pause – ‘there is the black streak upon the surface of the water right a-head.’

Herbert strained his eyes to pierce the gloom of the evening; and, to his joy, he distinguished the boat in the direction intimated.

A third discharge of musketry now menaced them; but again the bullets whistled harmlessly past.

‘You will not have time to load again, my brave boys,’ said Hugo; and, in another minute, he and his companion reached the boat.

Two sailors immediately assisted them into the bark; and their strength was speedily recruited by a draught of brandy. There was a fair breeze – the boat carried large lug-sails – the man at the helm was perfectly acquainted with the locality of the port, and all the sinuosities of the pool that leads into the sea. The boat sped rapidly over the waters – dashing away the white foam from her prow – and stooping to the wind as if she would at times capsize.

Ten minutes after the boat had received the two convicts, the loud din of the cannon on the port fell upon the ears of those on board.

‘Those are the signals of our escape,’ said Hugo; ‘the guards will be clever if they overtake us now !’

‘Thank God ! thank God !’ ejaculated Herbert, clasping his hands together with unfeigned devotion.

One of the sailors handed a file to each of the convicts, and in a short time they were divested of the chain which had linked them together. Clothes were then supplied them; and the chain and the garments which they cast off were all consigned to the deep in one bundle.

‘We are now really free,’ said Herbert. ‘But in what direction are we sailing ?’

‘Towards the coast of Spain,’ answered one of the sailors, ‘the cruizers are after us by this time; but we have not much to fear from their celerity.’

The species of prediction, conveyed by those words, was fulfilled; and the convicts were landed safely, in due time, upon the Spanish shore.

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[1] Dagger

[2] ‘Galerien’ - ‘galley-slave’