

# THE EVENING NEWS.

Wednesday. JUNE 21, 1871.

THE THREE FRIENDS OF VAUX VILAINNE.

An Episode of the Late War.

By F. M. F. SKENE.

[CONTINUED.]

"It is true that he means to make you his heir."

"So he hints, and he is rich. Ah! delightfully rich. He is a horse dealer, you know, and he gets guineas without number from the Miltons Anglais, who come to Paris for their amusement. I shall have horses to ride whenever I please, that is the glorious part of it. I can take them out for exercise, and I shall take good care they have enough of that, 'promise you,' and Jules looked at his friends with a roguish smile.

"It is a pleasant prospect, I must say," replied Martel. "Well! the cure had surely no need to talk to us of the trials and miseries of life—unless you have reason to anticipate them, Evariste," he added, turning to the third young man, who had not yet spoken.

Evariste was small and very delicate, made the sister of his companions, and had very refined features and soft hazel eyes, which were shaded with a certain pensiveness that hardly amounted to melancholy; as he turned to Martel a peculiarly sweet smile lit up his face.

"No," he answered, "I have no fears, nor any special plans formed for life; but I have day dreams," he added, in a low voice.

"Ah! we have them, then," exclaimed Jules. "You are a most poetical, Evariste, mon ami, and perhaps you mean to go about the country like a troubadour, winning the hearts of all the fair ladies with your sweet songs."

Evariste shook his head smiling, but did not answer.

"Come, tell us what your ambition is," said Martel; "I am sure you have some great scheme."

"You will mock yourselves of me if I do tell you," said Evariste, while a faint tinge of color spread itself over his face.

"No! no!" they both exclaimed; "why should we?"

"You know you are far more learned than either of us," said Jules; "we never studied as you did in the old days when the ones labored so hard to hammer a little knowledge into our brains. I dare say you have flowers far over our heads in your dreams. Come, speak of them."

"Well," said Evariste, somewhat reluctantly, "I only want to do something for my fellow-creatures before I leave the world. I do not want to live just to amuse myself, and then die to be forgotten. I should like to follow the example of the heroes of old who died for their country; or, better still, of the martyrs who died for Christ." And his face became flushed with a glow of enthusiasm.

"There is that an idea which would have come to me," said Jules. "I prefer to live."

"Well, I should not object to die a glorious death," said Martel, "but I must first live a long, happy life with Vevette, mon amie. It would be pleasant enough to know that one's name would be honored by posterity; but let me take my pleasure out of existence first."

"But, Martel," said Evariste, "it is not in old age, for the most part, that we make our fortunes. Life has come to an end by that time, you know."

"Sacred old age! death!" exclaimed Jules; "why, Evariste, you are worse than the cure, with your gloomy ideas; but happily they are only ideas after all. With all these fine sentiments, men and I think I know pretty well what will be your fate—you will be a bon pere de famille like your father before you. Do you think I did not observe Leonie Michelot's many beauty glances along the way all through Brodation this evening? And she loves her Evariste. You need not deny it."

"I do not wish to deny it," he answered quietly. "I do love her better than my life. Still I think I could give up my life, with her, if I were chosen by Heaven to be a hero or a martyr."

"But you are not so chosen, which does not seem likely in these commonplace times, you will marry Leonie and rock the baby's cradle in due course, will you not?" said Jules, looking at him laughingly.

"I dare say I shall," he answered, with a bright smile, "and be thankful enough that I was allowed to be happy in life, instead of glorious in death."

"So we are all three provided for, in spite of the cure," said Martel; "et pas mal, I must say;" and after a little more conversation on indifferent subjects, the three friends separated, and walked home to their respective homes.

A few days—during which the birds still sang among the sunlit trees, and the grapes ripened on the vines, and the inhabitants of Vaux Vilaine went to and fro in happy security, and talked of the prospects of the harvest as the most important subject in the world—and then the pastoral quiet of even that most peaceful home was awfully broken by the stunning thunders of the grape war news, which all knew to be the truth—the despatched roll of shrouds upon thousands of the bravest hearts in France.

Was there a spot in all that fair and pleasant country, however secluded and remote, to which the dreadful tidings failed to bring anguish and terror, even before a shot had been fired or a single life sacrificed? Surely not one; and Vaux Vilaine was no exception.

Jules, Martel, and Evariste had each a brother in the army, but they themselves, for various "familial" reasons, had as yet been held exempt greatly to their indignation and annoyance—for even the special ties which bound Martel and Evariste to the homes that held Vevette and Leonie did not prevent them feeling, quite as strongly as Jules did, the burning desire to throw their young lives into the balance and help to turn the scale in favor of their beautiful and unfortunate France, in whose ultimate welfare they had a personal and direct interest, but which did not cause them to believe, in the face of the general reverse.

Still, though there was lamentation and disquiet in Vaux Vilaine, and many a significant notice on the church door asking the faithful, of their charity, to pray for the soul of some brave soldier lying in his last cold sleep on the blood-drenched soil of Wœvre or Wéverne, yet the ordinary life of the villagers went on much as of course, and continued the same, notwithstanding their accustomed employment; the harvest and vintage were gathered in with only a little additional toil, because the numbers of the men who remained to accomplish that pleasant task were so much fewer than they had ever been before. And the domestic events in the various families proceeded as they had ever done; children were christened; young maidens given in marriage, and old men occasionally buried whose last sigh had been for their wives; and fair France, so sorely wounded in the gigantic conflict, still lived and reigned.

To be continued.

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