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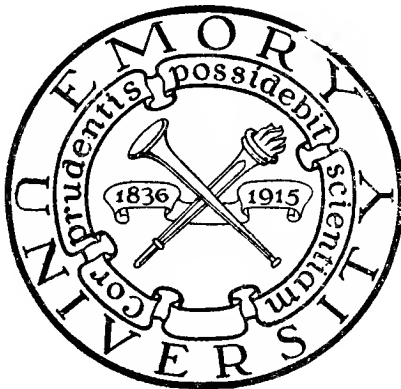
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ROBERT-HOUDIN,

AMBASSADOR, AUTHOR, AND CONJUROR.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

Fourth Edition.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE,



IN my humble capacity of translator of Robert-Houdin's life, I may be permitted to make one or two remarks, and answer in anticipation the objections which I feel confident will be raised.

In the first place, I am perfectly well aware that this English copy of Houdin's book will strike many of my readers as even more Gallicised than the original; but I beg to assure them I have produced this impression from malice prepense. It would have been a very easy task for me to have made the book thoroughly English; but I feel, had I done so, it would have been as flat as yesterday's champagne. The great merit of the book, to my mind, is the intense belief M. Houdin has in his mission, and though no Englishman would write of himself in such a satisfied tone, I am firmly convinced that the arch-conjuror is actuated by the same feelings which induced Vatel to fall on his sword because the fish did not arrive in time. Death before disgrace! is apparently Houdin's motto. Granting this indulgence for his "brave 'ords," I thought it much better to present him to my readers as a

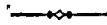
real Frenchman, and not to endeavour to array him in an English garb, in which he would have been a nondescript.

Exception may be taken, also, to the attributes I have ascribed to him on my title-page. But a slight consideration will prove the justice of my choice. That he is an author, almost a novelist, the Torrini episode will sufficiently prove; he was an ambassador most decidedly, if success be any criterion of diplomacy; while his claim to the rank of conjuror will be granted by every one who saw him—and who did not?

Most refreshing, too, is the way in which he writes of England and the English; and in his sincerity he almost equals his countryman, who said, "I always speak the truth, and I must allow I have seen an Englishman who had not red hair." When we remember how many artistes, after making a fortune among us, have repaid us by insulting perfidious Albion, I feel sure that my readers will give his "Reminiscences" a hearty welcome, and not think the worse of him because he does homage to the prevalent failing of the true-blooded Frenchman. I dare say, after all, that many Englishmen are equally convinced of their own supreme talent, though they do not express that opinion so naïvely as does Robert-Houdin.

LASCELLES WRAXALL.

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THE OVERTURE.



Saint Gervais, near Blois,
September, 1858.

EIGHT o'clock has just struck: my wife and children are by my side. I have spent one of those pleasant days which tranquillity, work, and study, can alone secure. With no regret for the past, with no fear for the future, I am—I am not afraid to say it—as happy as man can be.

And yet, at each vibration of this mysterious hour, my pulse starts, my temples throb, and I can scarce breathe, so much do I feel the want of air and motion. I can reply to no questions, so thoroughly am I lost in a strange and delirious reverie.

Shall I confess to you, reader? And why not? for this electrical effect is not of a nature to be easily understood by you.

The reason for my emotion being extreme at this moment is, that, during my professional career, eight o'clock was the moment when I must appear before the public. Then, with my eye eagerly fixed on the hole in the curtain, I surveyed with intense pleasure the crowd that flocked in to see me. Then, as now, my heart beat, for I was proud and happy of such success.

At times, too, a doubt, a feeling of uneasiness, would be

mingled with my pleasure. "Heavens!" I would say to myself, in terror, "am I so sure of myself as to deserve such anxiety to see me?"

But, soon reassured by the past, I waited with greater calmness the signal for the curtain to draw up. I then walked on the stage: I was near the foot-lights, before my judges—but no, I err—before my kind spectators, whose applause I was in hopes to gain.

Do you now understand, reader, all the reminiscences this hour evokes in me, and the solemn feeling that continually occurs to me when the clock strikes?

These emotions and souvenirs are not at all painful to me: on the contrary, I summon them up with pleasure. At times I even mentally transport myself to my stage, in order to prolong them. There, as before, I ring the bell, the curtain rises, I see my audience again, and, under the charm of this sweet illusion, I delight in telling them the most interesting episodes of my professional life. I tell them how a man learns his real vocation, how the struggle with difficulties of every nature begins, how, in fact—

But why should I not convert this fiction into a reality? Could I not, each evening when the clock strikes eight, continue my performances under another form? My public shall be the reader, and my stage a book.

This idea pleases me: I accept it with joy, and immediately give way to the sweet illusion. Already I fancy myself in the presence of spectators whose kindness encourages me. I imagine they are waiting for me—they are listening eagerly.

Without further hesitation I begin.

MEMOIRS

OF

ROBERT-HOUDIN.

CHAPTER I.

My Birth and Parentage—My Home—The Lessons of Colonel Bernard—Paternal Ambition—My first Mechanical Attempts—Had I but a Rat!—A Prisoner's Industry—The Abbé Larivière—My Word of Honour—Farewell to my darling Tools.

IN conformity with the traditional custom which expects every man who writes his Memoirs—or, not to use too strong language, his confessions—to display his patent of gentility, I commence by stating to my readers, with a certain degree of pride, that I was born at Blois, the birth-place of Louis XII., surnamed the “Father of his People,” and of Denis Papin, the illustrious inventor of the steam-engine.

So much for my native town. As for my family, it would only appear natural, regard being had to the art to which I devoted my life, that I should display in my family tree the name of Robert *le Diable*, or of some mediæval sorcerer; but, being the very slave of truth, I will content myself with stating that my father was a watch-maker.

Though he did not rise to the elevation of the Berthonds and the Brégmets, my father was reputed to be very skilful in his profession. In fact, I am only displaying our hereditary modesty when I say that my father's talents were confined to a single art; for, in truth, Nature had adapted him for various branches of mechanics, and the activity of

his mind led him to try them all with equal ardour. An excellent engraver, a jeweller of the greatest taste, he at the same time could carve the arm or leg for some fractured statue, restore the enamel on any time-worn porcelain, or even repair musical snuff-boxes, which were very fashionable in those days. The skill he evinced in these varied arts at length procured him a most numerous body of customers; but, unfortunately, he was wont to make any repairs not strictly connected with his own business for the mere pleasure.

In this house, which I may almost term artistic, and in the midst of tools and implements in which I was destined to take so lively an interest, I was born and educated. I possess an excellent memory, still, though my reminiscences date back a long way, I cannot remember the day of my birth. I have learned since, however, that it was the 6th of December, 1805. I am inclined to believe that I came into the world with a file or a hammer in my hand, for, from my earliest youth, these implements were my toys and delight: I learned how to use them as other children learn to walk and talk. I need not say that my excellent mother had frequently to wipe away the young mechanic's tears when the hammer, badly directed, struck my fingers. As for my father, he laughed at these slight accidents, and said, jokingly, that it was a capital way of driving my profession into me, and that, as I was a wonderful lad, I could not but become an extraordinary workman. I do not pretend that I ever realized the paternal predictions, but it is certain that I have always felt an irresistible inclination for mechanism.

How often, in my infantile dreams, did a benevolent fairy open before me the door of a mysterious El Dorado, where tools of every description were piled up. The delight which these dreams produced on me were the same as any other child feels when his fancy summons up before him a fantastic country where the houses are made of chocolate, the stones of sugar-candy, and the men of gingerbread. It is difficult to understand this fever for tools; the mechanic, the artist, adores them, and would ruin himself to obtain them. Tools, in fact, are to him

what a MS is to the archæologist, a coin to the antiquary, or a pack of cards to a gambler: in a word, they are the implements by which a ruling passion is fed.

By the time I was eight years of age I had furnished proofs of my ability, partly through the kindness of an excellent neighbour, and partly through a dangerous illness, when my forced idleness gave me leisure to exercise my natural dexterity. This neighbour, M. Bernard, was a colonel on half-pay. Having been a prisoner for many years, he had learned how to make an infinity of toys, which he taught me as an amusement, and I profited so well by his lessons, that in a very short time I could equal my master. I fancy I can still see and hear this old soldier, when, passing his hand over his heavy gray moustache, he exclaimed with energetic satisfaction, "Why, the young scamp can do anything he likes." This compliment flattered my childish vanity, and I redoubled my efforts to deserve it.

With my illness my pleasures ended: I was sent to school, and from that time I had few opportunities for indulging in my favourite tasks. Still, on my holidays, I used to return to my father's workshop with delight, and yet I must have been a great torment to that excellent parent. Owing to my want of skill, I now and then broke some tool, and although I might try to conceal it, the blame was generally laid on me, and, as a punishment, I was forbidden to enter the workshop. But it was of no use attempting to keep me from my hobby; the prohibition had to be continually renewed. Hence it was thought advisable to attack the evil at the root, and I must be sent away from home.

Although my father liked his trade, experience had taught him that a watchmaker rarely makes a fortune in a country town: in his paternal ambition he, therefore, dreamed a more brilliant destiny for me, and he formed the determination of giving me a liberal education, for which I shall always feel grateful to him. He sent me to college at Orleans. I was then eleven years of age.

Let who will sing the praises of school life; for my own part, I can safely state, that, though I was not averse

to study, the happiest day I spent in our monastic seminary was that on which I left it for good. However, once entered, I accepted my lot with resignation, and became in a short time a perfect schoolboy. In my play hours my time was well employed, for I spent the greater portion of it in making pieces of mechanism. Thus I made snares, gins, and mouse-traps; their excellent arrangement, and perhaps the dainty bait as well, producing me a great number of prisoners.

I had built for them a charming open cage, in which I had fixed up a miniature gymnastic machinery. My prisoners, while taking their ease, set in motion a variety of machines, which caused a most agreeable surprise. One of my inventions more especially attracted the admiration of my comrades; it was a method of raising water by means of a pump made almost entirely of quills. A mouse, harnessed like a horse, was intended to set this Lilliputian machine in motion by the muscular strength of its legs; but, unfortunately, my docile animal, though perfectly willing, could not overcome the resistance of the cog-wheels, and I was forced, to my great regret, to lend it a hand.

"Ah! if I only had a rat!" I said to myself, in my disappointment, "how famously it would work!" A rat! But how to get one? That appeared to me an insurmountable difficulty: but, after all, it was not so. One day, having been caught in the act of breaking bounds by a monitor, I was awarded twelve hours' imprisonment. This punishment, which I suffered for the first time, produced a violent effect on me: but in the midst of the sorrowful reflections inspired by the solitude, an idea dissipated my melancholy thoughts by offering a famous suggestion.

I knew that at nightfall the rats used to come from an adjacent church into the cell where I was confined, to regale on the bread-crumbs left by prisoners. It was a capital opportunity to obtain one of the animals I required; and as I would not let it slip, I straightway set about inventing a rat-trap. My only materials were a pitcher holding water, and, consequently, my ideas were confined

exclusively to this. I, therefore, made the following arrangement.

I began by emptying my pitcher; then, after putting in a piece of bread, I laid it down so that the orifice was on a level with the ground. My object was to attract the victim by this dainty into the trap. A brick which I dug up would serve to close the opening, but as it was impossible for me in the darkness to notice the exact moment for cutting off the prisoner's retreat, I laid near the bread a piece of paper, which would rustle as the rat passed over it.

As soon as night set in, I crouched close to my pitcher, and, holding the brick in my hand, I awaited with feverish anxiety the arrival of my guests. The pleasure I anticipated from the capture must have been excessive to overcome my timidity when I heard the first leaps of my savage visitors. I confess that the antics they performed round my legs occasioned me great nervousness, for I knew not how far the voracity of these intrepid rodents might extend; still, I kept my ground, not making the slightest movement, through fear of compromising the success of my scheme, and was prepared to offer the assailants a vigorous resistance in case of an attack.

More than an hour passed in vain expectation, and I was beginning to despair of the success of my trap, when I fancied I heard the slight sound I hoped for as a signal. I laid the brick on the mouth of the pitcher directly, and raised it up: the shrill cries inside convinced me of my success, and I began a pæan of triumph, both to celebrate my victory and to frighten away my prisoner's comrades. The porter, when he came to release me, helped me to master my rat, by fastening a piece of twine to one of his hind legs, and burdened with my precious booty, I proceeded to the dormitory, where masters and pupils had been asleep for a long time. I was glad enough to sleep too; but a difficulty presented itself—how should I bestow my prisoner?

At length a bright idea occurred to me, fully worthy of a schoolboy: it was to thrust the rat headforemost into one of my shoes. After fastening the twine to the leg of my

bed, I pushed the shoe into one of my stockings, and placed the whole in the leg of my trousers. This being accomplished, I believed I could go to bed without the slightest cause for apprehension. The next morning, at five exactly, the inspector took a turn through the dormitory to arouse the sleepers.

“Dress yourself directly,” he said, in that amiable voice peculiar to gentlemen who have risen too soon.

I proceeded to obey, but I was fated to dire disgrace: the rat I had packed away so carefully, not finding its quarters airy enough, had thought proper to gnaw through my shoe, my stocking, and my trouser, and was taking the air through this improvised window. Fortunately, it had not cut through the retaining string, so the rest was a trifle.

But the inspector did not regard matters in the same light as I did. The capture of a rat and the injury to my clothes were considered further aggravations of my previous offence, and he sent in a lengthy report to the head master. I was obliged to appear before the latter dressed in the clothes that bore the proof of my offence, and, by an unlucky coincidence, shoe, stocking, and trouser were all injured on the same leg. The Abbé Larivière (our head master) managed the college with truly paternal care; ever just, and prone by nature to forgiveness, he was adored by his pupils, and to be out of favour with him was regarded as the severest punishment.

“Well, Robert,” he said to me, looking kindly over the spectacles which bridged the end of his nose, “I understand you have been guilty of grave faults. Come, tell me the whole truth.”

I possessed at that time a quality which, I trust, I have not lost since, and that is extreme frankness. I gave the abbé a full account of my misdeeds, and my sincerity gained me pardon. The head master, after a vain attempt to repress it, burst into a loud fit of laughter on hearing the catastrophe of my adventures. Still, he ended his gentle lecture in the following words:—

“I will not scold you any more, Robert. I believe in your repentance: twelve hours’ confinement are sufficient

punishment, and I grant you your release. I will do more : though you are very young, I will treat you as a man—of honour, though—you understand me? You will pledge me your word not only that you will not commit your old faults again, but, as your passion for mechanics makes you often neglect your lessons, you must promise to give up your tools, and devote yourself henceforth to study.”

“Oh yes, sir, I give you my word,” I exclaimed, moved to tears by such unexpected indulgence ; “and I can assure you you will never repent having put faith in my promise.”

I made up my mind to keep my pledge, although I was fully aware of all the difficulties, which were so many stumbling-blocks in that path of virtue I wished to follow. Much trouble I had, too, at first, in withstanding the jests and sarcasms of the idler of my comrades, who, in order to hide their own bad conduct, strove to make all weak characters their accomplices. Still, I broke with them all. Sharpest pang of all, though, was the sacrifice I made in burning my vessels—that is, in putting aside my cages and their contents ; I even forgot my tools, and thus, free from all external distraction, I devoted myself entirely to my Greek and Latin studies.

The praise I received from the Abbé Larivière, who prided himself in having noticed in me the stuff for an excellent scholar, rewarded me for this sublime effort, and I may say I became, thenceforth, one of the most studious and attentive lads in the college. At times, I certainly regretted my tools and my darling machinery ; but, recollecting my promise to the head master, I held firm against all temptation. All I allowed myself was to set down by stealth on paper a few ideas that occurred to me, though I did not know whether I should ever have a chance to put them in practice.

At length the moment arrived for my leaving college ; my studies were completed—I was eighteen years of age.

CHAPTER II.

A Country Idler—Dr. Carlosbach, Conjuror and Professor of Mystification—The Sand-bag and the Stirrup Trick—I turn Lawyer's Clerk, and the Minutes appear to me very long—A small Automaton—A respectful Protest—I mount a Step in the Office—A Machine of Porter's Power—The Acrobatic Canaries—Monsieur Roger's Remonstrances—My Father decides that I shall follow my Bent.

IN the story I have just narrated, only simple events were noticeable—hardly worthy, perhaps, of a man who has often passed for a sorcerer; but grant me a few pages' patience, reader, as an introduction to my artistic life, and what you seek in my book will be displayed before your eager gaze. You will know how a magician is produced, and you will learn that the tree whence my magic staff was cut was only that of persevering labour, often bedewed by the sweat of my brow: soon, too, when you come to witness my labours and my anxious hours of expectation, you will be able to appreciate the cost of a reputation in my mysterious art.

On leaving college, I at first enjoyed all the liberty I had been deprived of for so many years. The power of going right or left, of speaking or remaining silent, as I listed, of getting up sooner or later, according to my fancy, was an earthly paradise for a collegian. I enjoyed this ineffable pleasure to the fullest extent: thus, in the morning—although habit made me wake at five—when the clock announced that once so dreaded hour, I burst into a loud laugh, and offered ferocious challenges to any number of invisible superintendents; then, satisfied by this slight retrospective vengeance, I went to sleep again till breakfast. After that meal I went out to indulge in a pleasant lounge about the streets; and I preferred walking in the public promenades, for thus I had better chances of finding something to attract my attention. In a word, not an event happened which I did not know, and I was the real amateur "penny-a-liner" of my native town.

Many of these incidents afforded very slight interest. One day, however, I witnessed a scene which produced a lasting effect upon me. One after-dinner, while walking along the side of the Loire, engaged with the thoughts suggested by the falling autumn leaves, I was aroused from my reverie by the sound of a trumpet, evidently blown by a practised performer. It may be easily supposed that I was not the last to obey this startling summons, and a few other idlers also formed a circle round the performer.

He was a tall fellow, with a quick eye, a sunburnt face, long and crispy hair, and he stemmed his fist in his side, while he held his head impudently high. His costume, though rather "loud," was still cleanly, and announced a man who probably had "some hay in his boots," to use a favourite phrase of gentlemen in the same profession. He wore a maroon-coloured frock-coat, trimmed with large silver frogs, while round his neck was a black silk cravat, the two ends being passed through a jewelled ring, which a millionaire would not have disdained—had it not unfortunately been paste. He wore no waistcoat, but his shirt was remarkably white, and on it glistened a heavy mosaic chain, with a collection of appendages, whose metallic sound loudly announced his every movement.

I had ample time to make these observations; for, as the audience collected but slowly, the stranger continued his trumpet overture for a quarter of an hour. At length, when an average crowd had assembled, the trumpet made way for the human voice. The artist laid the instrument on the ground, and walked round majestically to form a ring; then stopping, he passed his hand through his hair, and began his address. Being little used to this charlatanism in the streets, I regarded the man with confiding admiration, and determined not to lose a word of his address.

"Gentlemen," he commenced, in a firm and sonorous voice, "pray hear me. I am not what I seem to be; I may say more, I am what I do *not* seem to be. Yes, gentlemen, yes—confess it—you take me for one of those scurvy beggars who want to draw a few halfpence from your generosity. Well, you may undeceive yourselves. Though you see me on this spot to-day, I tell you that I have only come

here for the relief of suffering humanity in general, then for your welfare in particular, as well as for your amusement."

Here the orator, whose accent plainly showed that he hailed from the banks of the Garonne, passed his hand once more through his hair, raised his head, sucked his lips, and, assuming an air of majestic dignity, continued:—

"I will tell you presently who I am, and you will be able to estimate me at my true value: in the mean while, allow me to offer you a slight specimen of my skill."

The artist, having then formed the circle afresh, placed before him a small table, on which he arranged three tin goblets, so well polished that they might have been taken for silver; after which he fastened round his waist a red cotton velvet bag, into which he thrust his hands for some minutes—doubtlessly to prepare the tricks he intended to display—and the performance commenced.

During a long series of tricks, the nutmegs, at first invisible, appeared at the finger-ends of the conjuror; then they passed through the cups, under the table, into a spectator's pockets, and finally emerged, to the general delight, from the nose of a young looker-on. The latter took the matter quite seriously, and half killed himself with sneezing, to see whether a few more spice balls might not be left in his brain. The address with which these tricks were done, and the apparent simplicity of the operator in the execution of these ingenious artifices, produced the most perfect illusion—at least, as far as I was concerned.

It was the first time I had ever witnessed such a sight: I was stupefied, astounded! The man who could perform such marvels at his will seemed to me a superhuman being; hence I saw him put aside his cups with considerable regret. The audience seemed equally charmed; the artist perceived it, and took advantage of it, by making a sign that he had a few more words to say. Then, resting his hand on the table, he proceeded:—

"Ladies and gentlemen! I was very pleased to notice the kind attention you devoted to my tricks, and I thank you for it" (here the conjuror bowed to the ground); "and, as I am anxious to prove that you have not to deal with an

ungrateful person, I will attempt to repay in full the satisfaction you have made me feel. Deign to listen to me for a moment.

“I promised to tell you what I am: I will now satisfy you.” (Sudden change of countenance, and evidence of great self-esteem.) “You behold in me the celebrated Dr. Carlosbach: the composition of my name reveals to you my Anglo-Francisco-Germanic origin. To praise myself would be like painting the lily; I will, therefore, content myself with saying that I possess an enormous talent, and that my astounding reputation can only be equalled by my modesty. Elected, by acclamation, member of the most illustrious learned societies through the whole world, I incline before their judgment, which proclaims the superiority of my skill in the grand art of curing the human race.”

This address, as strange as it was emphatic, was delivered with imperturbable assurance: still I fancied I noticed a twitching of the lips, that revealed the grand doctor's ill-restrained desire to laugh. For all that, I listened attentively to his discourse.

“But, gentlemen,” he added, “I have said sufficient of myself; it is time to speak of my works. Learn, then, that I am the inventor of the Vermifuge Balsam, whose sovereign efficaciousness is indisputable. Yes, gentlemen, the worm, that enemy of the human race—the worm, the destroyer of everything existing—the worm, that obstinate preyer on the living and the dead, is at length conquered by my science; a drop, an atom of this precious liquor is sufficient to expel this fearful parasite for ever.

“And, gentlemen, such is the virtue of my marvellous balsam, that it not only delivers man from this frightful calamity during life, but his body has nothing to fear after death. Taking my balsam is a mode of embalming one's body prior to death; man is thus rendered immortal. Ah! gentlemen, were you but acquainted with all the virtues of my sublime discovery, you would rush upon me and tear it from me; but, as that would be illegal, I check myself in time.”

The orator, in fact, stopped, and dried his brow with one

hand, while with the other he motioned to the crowd that he had not yet ended his discourse. A great number of the audience were already striving to approach the learned doctor: Carlosbach, however, did not appear to notice it, and, reassuming his dramatic posture, he continued as follows:—

“But, you will ask me, what can be the price of such a treasure? can we be rich enough to purchase it? The moment has now arrived, gentlemen, to make you understand the full extent of my disinterestedness. This balsam, in the discovery of which I have worn away my days—this balsam, which sovereigns have purchased at the price of their crown—this balsam, in short, which is beyond all price—well, I make you a present of it!”

At these unexpected words, the crowd, panting with emotion, lifted up its eager arms, and implored the generosity of the doctor. But, what shameful deception! Carlosbach—the celebrated Doctor Carlosbach—this benefactor of humanity, suddenly altered his tone, and burst into an homeric shout of laughter. The arms fell down spontaneously; the audience looked vacantly in each other’s faces. At length one laughed. The contagion spread, and soon everybody was following the conjuror’s example. He was the first to stop, and demanded silence:—

“Gentlemen!” he then said, in a perfectly respectful tone, “do not be angry with me for the little trick I have played you; I wished thus to put you on your guard against those charlatans who daily deceive you, just as I have done, myself. I am no doctor, but simply a conjuror, professor of mystification, and author of a book, in which you will find, in addition to the discourse I have just delivered, the description of a great number of conjuring tricks. Would you like to learn the art of amusing yourself in society? For sixpence you may satisfy your curiosity.”

The conjuror produced from a box an enormous packet of books; then, going round the crowd, he soon disposed of his wares, thanks to the interest his talent had excited. The exhibition was over, and I returned home with my head full of a world of unknown sensations.

It will be readily supposed that I purchased one of these precious volumes. I hastened to examine it; but the false doctor continued his system of mystification in it, and, despite all my good-will, I could not understand one of the tricks he pretended to explain. However, I had the famous speech I have just quoted as some sort of consolation.

I made up my mind to lay the book aside and think no more of it; but the marvels it announced returned to my mind every moment. "O Carlosbach!" I said, in my modest ambition, "if I possessed your talent, how happy I should feel!" and, filled with this idea, I decided on taking lessons of the learned professor. Unfortunately, this determination was arrived at too late. When I proceeded to his lodgings, I learned that the conjuror had resorted to his own tricks, and had left his inn the previous evening, forgetting to pay the princely score he had run up. The innkeeper gave me the account of this last mystification on the part of the professor.

Carlosbach had arrived at his house with two trunks of unequal size and very heavy; on the larger of them was painted "Conjuring Apparatus," on the other, "Clothing." The conjuror, who stated that he had received various invitations to perform at the adjacent châteaux, had set off the evening before to fulfil one of these engagements. He had only taken with him one of his trunks, that containing the apparatus; and it was supposed he had left the other in his room as a security for the bill he had run up. The next day the host, surprised at finding his lodger still absent, thought it advisable to place his traps in some safe place. He, therefore, went into his bedroom; but the two trunks had disappeared, and in their place was an enormous bag filled with sand, on which was written:

THE MYSTIFYING BAG.

THE STIRRUP TRICK.*

I continued for some time longer to enjoy the contemplative life I had been pursuing; but at last satiety assailed me, and I was quite surprised one day at finding myself

* This evidently means the same as our *duch-and-durras*. The stirrup trick is the last "pull" on human credulity.

wearied of this life of idleness. My father, like a man who could read the human heart, had awaited this moment to talk seriously with me; he therefore took me aside one morning, and said, without further preface, in a kindly voice:—

“My good boy, you have now quitted college with a sound education, and I have allowed you to enjoy fully the liberty to which you seemed to aspire. But you must see this is not sufficient for a livelihood; you must now enter on the world resolutely, and apply your parts to the profession you wish to embrace. That profession it is now time to choose; you have doubtlessly some inelination, some bias, and you should let me know it; speak, then, and you will find me inclined to second your views.”

Although my father had frequently expressed his fears lest I should follow his trade, I thought, after these remarks, that he had changed his mind, and I joyfully said—

“Of course I have an inelination, and you cannot be ignorant of it, for it is of very old standing. You know I never wished to be other than——”

My father guessed my thoughts, and would not allow me to finish.

“I see,” he objected, “that you did not understand me, and I must explain my meaning more clearly. My desire is for you to choose a profession more lucrative than my own. Consider, it would be unreasonable to bury the ten years’ schooling for which I made such heavy sacrifices in my shop; remember, too, that after thirty-five years’ hard work, I have been hardly able to save sufficient provision for my old age. Then, pray change your resolution, and give up your mania for making a ‘parcel of filings.’”

My father in this merely followed the idea of many parents, who can only see the disagreeable side of their own trade. To this prejudice, I must allow, he added the praiseworthy ambition of the head of a family desirous that his son should rise a step higher on the social ladder than himself.

As I was utterly ignorant of all other professions or trades save that of a mechanician, I was unable to appreciate them, or consequently select one; hence I remained

dumb. In vain did my father try to draw an answer from me by explaining the advantages I should derive from being a surgeon or chemist, a barrister or a solicitor. I could only repeat that I placed implicit confidence in his wisdom and experience. This self-denial and passive obedience appeared to touch him; I noticed it, and, wishing to make a final attack on his determination, I said to him—

“Before making up my mind to any decided choice of profession, allow me to offer one observation. Are you sure that it is your trade which is impossible of extension, or is it owing to the smallness of the town in which you have carried it on? Let me follow my own bent, I beseech you, and when I have become a good workman by your instruction, I will go to Paris and make a fortune there; I feel quite convinced I can do so.”

Fearing lest he might give way, my father tried to cut the conversation short by evading a reply to my objection.

“As you leave it to me,” he said, “I advise you to become a solicitor; with your natural parts, aided by application and good conduct, I am certain you will make your way famously.”

Two days later I was installed in one of the best offices at Blois, and, owing to my caligraphy, I was employed as a copying clerk, and in engrossing from morning till night, though rarely understanding what I was writing. My readers can readily guess that this mechanical work could not long satisfy the turn of my mind: pens, ink, and paper were most unsuitable articles to carry out the inventive ideas which continually occurred to me. Fortunately, at that period, steel pens were unknown; hence I had a resource in making my pens, to which I devoted the best part of my time. This simple fact will suffice to give an idea of the deep spleen which weighed upon me like a coating of lead, and I should have certainly fallen ill had I not found more attractive employment.

Among the mechanical curiosities intrusted to my father for repair, I had noticed a snuff-box, on the top of which a small piece of mechanism attracted my entire attention. The top of the box represented a landscape. On pressing

a spring, a hare made its appearance, and went towards a tuft of grass, which it began to crop; soon after, a sportsman, accompanied by a pointer, emerged from a thicket. The miniature Nimrod stopped at the sight of the game, shouldered his gun, and fired; a noise indicative of the explosion of a fire-arm was heard, and the hare, apparently wounded, disappeared in the thicket, pursued by the dog.

This pretty piece of mechanism excited my desires in an eminent degree, but I could not hope to possess it, as the owner, in addition to the value he attached to it, had no reason to dispose of it, and, besides, my pecuniary means were insufficient. As I could not make the article my own, I determined at least to keep it in remembrance, and drew a careful plan of it without my father's knowledge. This only more inflamed my desires, and I began to ask myself whether I could not make an exact copy of it.

Seeing no extreme difficulty in this, I rose at daybreak each morning, and, going down to my father's workshop, I worked till the hour when he used to begin work. Then I rearranged the tools exactly as I had found them, locked up my work carefully, and proceeded to my office. The joy I experienced in finding my mechanism act was only equalled by the pleasure I felt in presenting it to my father, as an indirect and respectful protest against the determination he had formed as to my choice of a trade. I had some difficulty in persuading him that I had not been assisted by any one in my work; but when at last I removed his doubts, he could not refrain from complimenting me.

"It is a pity," he said, thoughtfully, "that you cannot profit by your turn for mechanism; but," he added, suddenly, as if seeking to dispel an idea that troubled him, "you had better take no pride in your skill, for it may injure your prospects."

For more than a year I performed the duties of amateur—that is, unpaid—clerk; and I was then offered a situation by a country solicitor as second clerk, with a small salary. I accepted this unexpected promotion very readily; but, once installed in my new duties, I found that my employer had deceived me as to their range. The situation I occupied was that of office boy, having to run on errands, for

the first and only clerk could more than attend to the business. I certainly earned some money; it was the first I had gained by my own labour, and this consideration gilded the pill, which was rather bitter to my pride. Besides, M. Roger (such was my new master's name) was certainly the best fellow in the world. His manner, full of kindness and sympathy, had attracted me the first time I saw him, and I may add that his behaviour towards me was most agreeable during the time I remained in his office.

This gentleman, the personification of probity, possessed the confidence of the Duc d'Avaray, whose estate he managed, and being full of zeal for his noble client's business, he devoted more attention to it than to his office. At Avaray legal business was very scarce, and we had hardly enough to fill up our time. For my own part, I had many leisure hours, which my kind master enabled me to employ by placing his library at my service. I had the good fortune to find in it Linnæus's Treatise on Botany, and I learned the rudiments of that science.

The study of botany required time, and I could only devote to it the hours prior to the office opening. Unfortunately, I had become a tremendous sleeper—I hardly know how—and I could not manage to get up before eight o'clock. I resolved to conquer this obstinate somnolency, and I invented a waking apparatus, which, from its originality, deserves honourable mention here.

The room I occupied formed a portion of the Château d'Avaray, and was situated over an archway, closed by a heavy gate. Having noticed that the porter opened this gate, which led into the gardens, every morning, the idea occurred to me of profiting by this circumstance to institute an energetic alarm. This is how I managed it. When I went to bed, I fastened to one of my legs the end of a cord, which, passing through my half-opened window, was attached to the upper part of the iron gate. When the porter pushed the gate open, he dragged me, when least expecting it, to the middle of my bedroom. Thus violently roused from sleep, I tried to hold on by the bedclothes; but the more I resisted, the more did the pitiless porter

push on his side, and I at length woke up to hear him always abusing the hinges, which he determined to oil before the day was out. Then, I unloosed my leg, and, with my Linnæus in my hand, I went to interrogate Nature on her admirable secrets, the study of which caused me to spend many pleasant hours.

As much to please my father as to scrupulously fulfil my duties in my new office, I had promised to pay no more attention to mechanical inventions—for I feared their irresistible attraction—and I had religiously kept my word. There was, then, every reason to believe that I should pass through all my grades creditably, and some day, in my turn, become Maître Robert, solicitor, in some country town. But Providence, in his decrees, had traced out a very different route for me, and my stern resolutions were routed by a temptation too powerful for my courage. In our office there was, strangely enough, a magnificent aviary filled with canaries, whose song and plumage were intended to dispel the impatience of a client forced by some accident to wait. This cage being considered a portion of the office furniture, I was bound, as errand-boy, to keep it in a proper state of cleanliness, and provide the food of the denizens. This was the branch of my duties I performed with the greatest zeal: in fact, I bestowed so much care on the comfort and amusement of the birds, that they soon absorbed nearly all my time.

I began by setting up in this cage a number of mechanical tricks I had invented at college under similar circumstances. I gradually added fresh ones, and ended by making the cage a work of art and curiosity, affording considerable attraction to our visitors. At one spot was a perch, near which the sugar and the seed-glass displayed their attractions; but no sooner had the innocent canary placed its foot on the fatal perch, than a circular cage encompassed it, and it was kept a prisoner until another bird, perching on an adjoining piece of wood, set loose a spring, which delivered the captive. At another place were baths and pumps; further on was a small trough, so arranged, that the nearer the bird seemed to draw to it the further off it really was. Lastly, each denizen of the cage was obliged

to earn its food by drawing forward with its beak small pasteboard carts.

The pleasure I felt in carrying out these small schemes soon made me forget I was in a lawyer's office for any other purpose than to be at the beck and call of canaries. The chief clerk drew my attention to it, and added some just remonstrances; but I had always a protest ready, and continued making daily improvements in the aviary. At length, matters reached such a point, that the supreme authority, that is to say, my master in person, felt it his duty to interfere.

"Robert," he said to me, assuming an earnest tone, which he rarely employed towards his clerks, "when you came into my office you were aware it was to devote yourself exclusively to business, and not to satisfy your own thirst for pleasure: warnings have been given you to return to your duty, and you have paid no attention to them; I am, therefore, obliged to tell you that you must either decide on giving up your mechanical fancies, or I must send you home to your father."

And the worthy Monsieur Roger stopped, as if to draw breath after the reproaches he had given me, I am sure much against his will. After a moment's silence he reassumed his paternal tone, and said to me:—

"And now, my friend, will you let me give you a piece of advice? I have studied you, and feel convinced you will never be more than a very ordinary clerk, and, consequently, a still more ordinary notary, while you might become an excellent mechanician. It would be, then, wiser for you to give up a profession in which you have such slight prospect of success, and follow that for which you evince such remarkable aptitude."

The kindly tone M. Roger assumed induced me to open my heart to him. I told him of my father's determination to keep me from his own trade, and described to him all the vexation I had felt from it.

"Your father fancied he was acting for the best," he replied to me, "by putting you in a profession more lucrative than his own: he thought he should only have a simple boyish fancy to overcome, but I am persuaded it is

an irresistible vocation, against which you should no longer struggle. I will see your parents to-morrow, and I have no doubt I shall induce them to change their opinion about your future prospects in life."

Since I quitted my father's house he had sold his business, and had retired to a small property he had near Blois. My master went to see him as he had promised me: a long conversation ensued, and after numerous objections on both sides, the lawyer's eloquence vanquished my father's scruples, and he at length yielded.

"Well," he said, "as he absolutely desires it, let him follow my trade. And, as I cannot instruct him myself, my nephew, who is a pupil of mine, will act towards my son as I did towards him."

This news overwhelmed me with joy: it seemed as if I were entering on a new life, and the fortnight I had yet to spend at Avaray seemed to me terribly long. At length I set out for Blois, and the day after my arrival found me seated before a vice, file in hand, and receiving my first lesson in watchmaking from my relative.

CHAPTER III.

My Cousin Robert—The most important Event in my Life—How a Man becomes a Sorcerer—My first Sleight-of-Hand Feat—An utter Failure—Practising the Eye and the Hand—Curious Experiment in Prestidigitation—Monsieur Noriet—An Action more ingenious than delicate—I am poisoned—Influence of Delirium.

BEFORE speaking of my labours in the watchmaker's shop, I must introduce my readers to my new master. And, in the first place, to set myself right, I will say that my cousin Robert, as I used to call him, has been, since my first connection with him, one of my best and dearest friends. It would be difficult, in fact, to imagine a more happy character, a heart more affectionate and devoted.

With a rare intelligence, my cousin combined other equally valuable qualities. He possessed a graceful address, which, without flattery, I may say is peculiar to our

family, and he was justly considered the first watchmaker in Blois, a town which has long excelled in the horologic art.

My cousin began by teaching me how to "make filings," as my father called it; but I required no apprenticeship to learn the use of tools, and hence the outset was not so painful as it is usually to novices. From the beginning of my apprenticeship I was enabled to undertake small jobs, which gained me my master's praise. Yet I would not have it supposed I was a model pupil, for I had still rife in me that spirit of investigation which drew down upon me several reprimands from my cousin, and I could not endure to confine my imagination to the ideas of another person. I was continually inventing or improving.

My whole life through, this passion—or, if you will, mania—has held sway over me. I never could fix my thoughts on any task without trying to introduce some improvement, or strike out a novel idea. But this temperament—eventually so favourable—was at this period very prejudicial to my progress. Before following my own inspirations and yielding to my fancies, I ought to have learned the secrets of my art, and, in fact, dispelled all ideas which were only adapted to make me diverge from the true principles of clockmaking.

Such was the sense of the paternal observations made now and then by my cousin, and I was obliged to recognize their justice. Then I would go to work again with redoubled zeal, though groaning inwardly at the bonds that fettered my genius. In order to aid my progress and afford me relaxation, my master recommended me to study some treatises on mechanics in general, and on clockmaking in particular. As this suited my tastes exactly, I gladly assented, and I was devoting myself passionately to this attractive study, when a circumstance, apparently most simple, suddenly decided my future life, by revealing to me a vocation whose mysterious resources must open a vast field for my inventive and fanciful ideas.

One evening I went into a bookseller's shop to buy Berthoud's "Treatise on Clockmaking," which I knew he had. The tradesman being engaged at the moment on matters

more important, took down two volumes from the shelves, and handed them to me without ceremony. On returning home, I sat down to peruse my treatise conscientiously, but judge of my surprise when I read on the back of one of the volumes "SCIENTIFIC AMUSEMENTS." Astonished at finding such a title on a professional work, I opened it impatiently, and, on running through the table of contents, my surprise was doubled on reading these strange phrases:

The way of performing tricks with the cards—How to guess a person's thoughts—To cut off a pigeon's head: to restore it to life, &c., &c.

The bookseller had made a mistake. In his haste, he had given me two volumes of the Encyclopædia instead of Berthoud. Fascinated, however, by the announcement of such marvels, I devoured the mysterious pages, and the further my reading advanced, the more I saw laid bare before me the secrets of an art for which I was unconsciously predestined.

I fear I shall be accused of exaggeration, or at least not be understood by many of my readers, when I say that this discovery caused me the greatest joy I had ever experienced. At this moment, a secret presentiment warned me that success, perhaps glory, would one day accrue to me in the apparent realization of the marvellous and impossible, and fortunately these presentiments did not err.

The resemblance between two books, and the hurry of a bookseller, were the commonplace causes of the most important event in my life.

It may be urged that different circumstances might have suggested this profession to me at a later date. It is probable; but then I should have had no time for it. Would any workman, artisan, or tradesman give up a certainty, however slight it might be, to yield to a passion which would be surely regarded as a mania? Hence my irresistible penchant for the mysterious could only be followed at this precise period of my life.

How often since have I blessed this providential error, without which I should have probably vegetated as a country watchmaker! My life would have been spent in

gentle monotony ; I should have been spared many sufferings, emotions, and shocks : but, on the other hand, what lively sensations, what profound delight would have been sacrificed !

I was eagerly devouring every line of the magic book which described the astounding tricks ; my head was a-glow, and I at times gave way to thoughts which plunged me in ecstasy. Still the hours slipped away, and while my mind was indulging in fanciful dreams, I did not notice that my candle had burned down in the socket. How can I describe my disappointment when it suddenly went out ? It was the last candle I possessed ; hence I was forced to quit the sublime realms of magic all for want of a halfpenny taper. At this instant I would have given my whole fortune, were it only for a street lamp.

I was not exactly in the dark ; a dim ray entered my window from a neighbouring lamp ; but, though I made every effort to read by it, I could not decipher a single word, and was obliged to retire to bed willy-nilly.

In vain I tried to sleep ; the febrile excitement produced by the book prevented either sleep or rest. I went continually over the passages which had most struck me, and the interest they inspired only the more excited me. Finding it impossible to remain in bed, I repeatedly returned to the window, and while casting envious glances on the lamp, I had made up my mind to go down into the street, and read by its light, when another idea occurred to me. In my impatience to realize it I did not wait to dress, but, confining my attire to what was strictly necessary, if I may so call a pair of slippers and my drawers, I took my hat in one hand, a pair of pincers in the other, and went down into the street.

Once there, I proceeded straight to the lamp ; for I must confess, that in my anxiety to profit at once by the sleight-of-hand tricks I had been studying, I intended to conjure away the oil-lamp provided by the authorities for the safety of the town. The part the hat and pincers were to play in the operation were simple enough : the latter would wrench open the little box containing the end of the cord by which the lamp was raised, and the former would act as a dark

lantern, and hide the rays of light which might betray my theft.*

All prospered famously; and I was about to retire in triumph, when a miserable incident threatened to rob me of the profits of my trick. At the moment of my success a baker's man overthrew my plans by emerging from the door of his shop. I concealed myself in a doorway, and, while striving to hide the light, I waited perfectly motionless till the unlucky baker retired. But judge of my grief and terror when I saw him lean against the door and calmly smoke his pipe!

My position was growing intolerable; the cold and the fear of detection made my teeth chatter, and, to increase my despair, I soon felt the lining of my hat catch fire. There was no time for hesitation: I crushed my failure of a lantern in my hands, and thus put out the fire; but it was a dreadful sacrifice. My poor hat, the one I wore on Sundays, was smoked, stained with oil, and shapeless. And while I was enduring all these torments, my tyrant continued to smoke with an air of calmness and comfort which drove me nearly mad.

It was quite plain I could not stay here till daylight; but how to escape from this critical situation? To ask the baker to keep my secret would be running a risk; while, to return home straight would betray me, for I must pass in front of him, and he would be sure to recognize me. The only chance left was to go down a side street and make a *détour* to reach the house. This I decided on, even at the risk of any one meeting me in my bathing attire. Without delay I took hat and lamp under my arm, for I was forced to remove the proofs of my crime, and I started off like an arrow. In my trouble, I fancied the baker was after me. I even thought I heard his footfall behind me, and in my anxiety to escape I doubled my speed; first I turned to the right, then to the left, and went through such a number of streets, that it took me a

* It will be remembered that in those days French towns were lighted by a lamp suspended in the centre of the highway from a cord attached to two poles.

quarter of an hour to regain my room, in a state of perfect collapse, yet glad to have escaped so cheaply.

It is a painful confession for a man destined eventually to fill a certain part in the annals of conjuring to make, that my trial-piece turned out so lamentably. In fact, to use a theatrical phrase, it was an utter *fiasco*.

Still, I was not at all discouraged; the next day I regained all my equanimity on finding my precious treatise on "White Magic" before me, and I began studying the interesting secrets it contained with great ardour.

Within a week I knew them all by heart.

From theory I resolved to proceed to practice; but, just as was the case with Carlosbach's book, I suddenly met with an obstacle. The author, I will grant, was more conscientious than the Bordelais mystifier: he gave a very plain explanation of his tricks; still, he committed the error of supposing his readers possessed of the necessary skill to perform them. Now, I was entirely deficient in this skill, and though most desirous of acquiring it, I found nothing in the book to indicate the means. I was in the position of a man who attempts to copy a picture without possessing the slightest notion of drawing and painting.

In the absence of a professor to instruct me, I was compelled to create the principles of the science I wished to study. In the first place, I recognized the fundamental principle of sleight of hand, that the organs performing the principal part are the sight and touch. I saw that, in order to attain any degree of perfection, the professor must develop these organs to their fullest extent—for, in his exhibitions, he must be able to see everything that takes place around him at half a glance, and execute his deceptions with unflinching dexterity.

I had been often struck by the ease with which pianists can read and perform at sight the most difficult pieces. I saw that, by practice, it would be possible to create a certainty of perception and facility of touch, rendering it easy for the artist to attend to several things simultaneously, while his hands were busy employed with some

complicated task. This faculty I wished to acquire and apply to sleight of hand; still, as music could not afford me the necessary elements, I had recourse to the juggler's art, in which I hoped to meet with an analogous result.

It is well known that the trick with the balls wonderfully improves the touch, but does it not improve the vision at the same time? In fact, when a juggler throws into the air four balls crossing each other in various directions, he requires an extraordinary power of sight to follow the direction his hands have given to each of the balls. At this period a corn-cutter resided at Blois, who possessed the double talent of juggling and extracting corns with a skill worthy of the lightness of his hands. Still, with both these qualities, he was not rich, and being aware of that fact, I hoped to obtain lessons from him at a price suited to my modest finances. In fact, for ten francs he agreed to initiate me in the juggling art.

I practised with so much zeal, and progressed so rapidly, that in less than a month I had nothing more to learn; at least, I knew as much as my master, with the exception of corn-cutting, the monopoly in which I left him. I was able to juggle with four balls at once. But this did not satisfy my ambition; so I placed a book before me, and, while the balls were in the air, I accustomed myself to read without any hesitation.

This will probably seem to my readers very extraordinary; but I shall surprise them still more when I say that I have just amused myself by repeating this curious experiment. Though thirty years have elapsed since the time of which I am writing, and though I scarcely once touched my balls during that period, I can still manage to read with ease while keeping three balls up.

The practice of this trick gave my fingers a remarkable degree of delicacy and certainty, while my eye was at the same time acquiring a promptitude of perception that was quite marvellous. Presently I shall have to speak of the service this rendered me in my experiment of second sight. After having thus made my hands supple and docile, I went on straight to sleight of hand, and I more especially devoted myself to the manipulation of cards and palmistry.

This operation requires a great deal of practice; for, while the hand is held apparently open, balls, corks, lumps of sugar, coins, &c., must be held unseen, the fingers remaining perfectly free and limber.

Owing to the little time at my disposal, the difficulties connected with these new experiments would have been insurmountable, had I not found a mode of practising without neglecting my business. It was the fashion in those days to wear coats with large pockets on the hips, called *à la propriétaire*, so whenever my hands were not otherwise engaged, they slipped naturally into my pockets, and set to work with cards, coins, or one of the objects I have mentioned. It will be easily understood how much time I gained by this. Thus, for instance, when out on errands my hands could be at work on both sides; at dinner, I often ate my soup with one hand while I was learning to *sauter la coupe* with the other—in short, the slightest moment of relaxation was devoted to my favourite pursuit. As no one suspected that my *paletôt* was in some degree a study, this manner of keeping my hands in my pockets began to be regarded as a bad habit I had acquired; but after a few jests on the subject I was left in peace.

Though my passion for sleight of hand was so intense, I had, however, sufficient command over myself not to displease my master, who never noticed that my thoughts were away from my work, and constantly praised me for my regularity and application.

At length my apprenticeship was over, and my cousin one fine day stated I was a journeyman, and able to earn wages. I heard this with double pleasure, for I found in it not only greater liberty, but also a chance of improving my finances. Nor was I long ere I profited by my advancement; a situation was offered me by a watchmaker at Tours, and I proceeded to that town at once.

My new master was that M. Noriet who afterwards gained some distinction as a sculptor. His imagination, already full of his future works, disdained the ordinary labour of watch-repairing, and he gladly left to his workmen what he called, ironically, the “shoeblack” part of

the trade. It was for this purpose I joined him, and I received, in addition to board and lodging, 35 fr. a month. Little enough, I grant; but it was an enormous sum in my eyes, for, since leaving the lawyer's at Avaray, my income had been reduced to a *minimum*.

When I say I earned 35 fr., it is merely to mention a round sum; in reality I never received it net. Madame Noriet, in her quality of an excellent manager, was perfectly conversant with all matters relative to discount and exchanges; and thus she had found a way of lessening my wages in a manner as ingenious as it was improper. She used to pay me in crowns of six francs, and as at that time six-franc pieces were only worth 5 fr. 80 c., the lady gained 24 sous every month, which I carried to my "profit and loss" account.

Although my time was fully occupied here, I managed to continue my pocket practice; and I daily noticed with joy the progress I was making. I had learned how to make any object I held in my hand disappear with the greatest ease; and as for the practice of card tricks, they were only child's play to me, and I could produce some delightful illusions.

I confess to feeling a degree of pride in my humble power of amusing my friends, and I neglected no occasion of displaying it. On Sunday, for instance, after the invariable game of *loto*, which was played in this patriarchal family, I gave a small performance of sleight of hand, which enlivened the melancholy victims of this most monotonous of all games. I was honoured with the name of an "agreeable droll," and this compliment delighted me.

My regular habits, my perseverance, and perhaps a certain degree of gaiety I possessed at the time, had gained me the friendship and sympathy of both my master and mistress. At last I became an indispensable member of the family, and shared in all their amusements. Among these were frequent excursions in the country. On one of these, on the 25th of July, 1828 (I shall never forget that memorable date, as it was all but registered on my tombstone), we went to a fair at an adjacent village.

Before leaving Tours, we had promised to be home to dinner at five; but, finding ourselves much amused, we did not keep military time, nor found our way home till eight.

After enduring the scolding of the cook, whose dinner had got cold, we sat down and ate like people whose appetite has been whetted by a long walk in the open air, and eight or ten hours' fasting.

Whatever Jeannette might say, everything she sent up was found excellent, except a certain ragout, which everybody declared detestable, and hardly touched. I, however, devoured my share of the dish, without troubling myself the least in the world about its quality. In spite of the jests aroused by my avidity, I asked for a second relay, and would certainly have eaten the whole dish, had not my mistress, with due regard for my health, prevented it.

This precaution saved my life. In fact, dinner was hardly over and the game of loto begun, than I felt most uncomfortable. I went to my room, where atrocious pains seized upon me, and a doctor was sent for. After a careful investigation, the doctor discovered that a powerful layer of verdigris had formed in the stewpan in which the ragout had been cooked, and said I was poisoned.

The consequences of this poisoning were most terrible to me: for some time my life was despaired of, but eventually the sufferings seemed to be modified by the gentle care bestowed on me, and I was granted some slight relief. Strangely enough, it was not till this second phase of my illness, when the doctor declared me out of danger, that I was haunted by a certainty of speedy death, to which was joined an immoderate desire to end my days in the bosom of my family. This idea—a species of monomania—incessantly assailed me, and I soon had no other thought than that of escaping to Blois. As I could not hope to obtain the doctor's permission to set out, when his most urgent advice was to take care of myself, I determined to take leave.

At six o'clock one morning, taking advantage of a moment when I was left to myself, I hastily dressed, went down stairs, and found a stage-coach just starting for

Blois. I entered the rotonde, in which I happened to be the only passenger, and the coach, lightly laden as it was, soon set off at full gallop.

The journey was a horrible martyrdom to me. I was devoured by a burning fever, and my head seemed to be burst asunder by every jolt of the vehicle. In my frenzy I tried to escape my agony, and yet it was continually increasing. Unable to endure longer, I opened the door of the compartment, and leaped, at an imminent risk of my life, on to the high road, where I fell in a state of insensibility.

I cannot say what happened to me after my fainting-fit; I can only remember long days of vague and painful existence, that appeared of eternal duration: I was in a raging fever; my dreams were frightful, and I suffered from the most dreadful hallucinations. One of them was incessantly recurring—it seemed as if my head opened like a snuff-box; a doctor, with turned-up cuffs, and armed with an enormous pair of iron pincers, drew from my brain roasted chestnuts, which immediately burst like bombs, and scattered myriads of scintillations before my eyes.

This phantasmagoria gradually faded away, and the illness at length succumbed; but my reason was so shaken that it did not avail me. I was reduced to a mechanical existence. If I noticed anything, it seemed veiled in a thick mist, and I could not perform any process of reasoning. It is true that all I did notice only served to increase the confusion of my ideas. I felt as if being shaken in a carriage, and yet I was in a capital bed, and the room was exquisitely clean. How could I help fancying I was still dreaming?

At length, a spark of intelligence was aroused in me, and the first startling impression was produced by the sight of a man standing at my bedside. His features were quite strange to me. Stooping over, he affectionately urged me to swallow a draught. I obeyed; and he then begged me to keep silent, and remain as calm as I possibly could.

Unfortunately, my present state of weakness rendered it

but too easy to follow this prescription. Still, I tried to guess who this man could be, and consulted my memory. It was quite useless: I could remember nothing since the moment when, yielding to frenzy, I had thrown myself out of the diligence.

CHAPTER IV.

I return to Life—A strange Doctor—Torrini and Antonio: a Conjuror and a Fanatic for Music—A Murderer's Confession—A perambulating House—The fair at Angers—A portable Theatre—I witness for the first Time a Conjuring Performance—The blind Man's Game at Piquet—A dangerous Rival—Signor Castelli eats a Man alive.

I AM by no means a fatalist; and yet I cannot refrain from remarking here that many events in human life seem to encourage the views of fatalists.

Suppose, dear reader, that, on leaving Blois to proceed to Tours, destiny had opened before me one of the fairest pages of my life, I should certainly have been delighted at such a glorious future, but in my heart I should have been inclined to doubt its realization. In fact, I set out as a simple workman, with the intention of making a tour of France. This journey would have occupied much time, as I intended to remain a year or two in every city I visited, and France is large! Then, when I considered myself skilful enough, I would return home and set up as a watch-maker.

But fate decided otherwise, and I must be drawn back to my real "groove" when I tried to escape from it. The means employed were a poisoning, which turned me mad, and hurled me lifeless on the high road. But I was going to recall my reminiscences after my *fortunate* catastrophe, and I will take up the story from the point where I left off.

What had happened since my fainting fit; where was I; why did this man treat me so kindly? I longed for a solution of these problems, and I should certainly have cross-questioned my host, had it not been for the earnest advice

he had just given me. As thought, however, was not forbidden, I tried to form a satisfactory conclusion from surrounding objects.

The room I was in might be three yards long by two broad. The walls were made of polished oak; on either side was a small window with muslin curtains; while four walnut chairs, shelves serving as tables, and my excellent bed, composed the furniture of this moving room, which bore a close resemblance to the cabin of a steamboat.

There must also be two other compartments, for, to my left, I saw my doctor frequently disappear behind two red damask curtains, where I heard him moving about, while to my right I heard, through a thin partition, a voice encouraging the horses. This circumstance made me conclude I was in a carriage, and that the latter voice belonged to the driver.

I already knew that hero's name, as I had often heard the person I presumed to be his master use it. It was Antonio: and he was, at any rate, a splendid musician, for he was continually singing pieces from Italian operas, which he broke off to swear harmlessly at his steeds. As for the master, he was a man of about fifty, above the average height, and his face, though sad and serious, displayed a degree of kindness which prepossessed me. His long black hair fell on his shoulders in natural curls, and he was dressed in a blouse and trousers of unbleached cloth, with a yellow silk pocket-handkerchief as cravat. But nothing in all this served to tell me what he was, and my surprise was increased by finding him constantly at my side, and nursing me like the fondest of mothers.

A day had elapsed since his recommendation to keep silent; I had gained a little strength, and fancied myself strong enough to talk; I was, therefore, going to begin, when my host, guessing my intention, prevented me.

"I can imagine," he said, "your impatience to know where you are and whom with; nor will I conceal from you that I am equally curious to learn the circumstances that led to our meeting. Still, in regard for your health, the responsibility of which I have assumed, I must ask you to be patient for one night more; to-morrow, I believe,

we shall be able to talk as long as you like, without any risk."

As I had no serious objection to raise, and as I had been wont for some time to obey all my strange doctor ordered, I yielded. The certainty of soon holding the key to the enigma secured me a peaceful sleep, whose good effects I noticed on waking. Hence, when the doctor came to feel my pulse, he was surprised at the progress I had made in a few hours, and, without awaiting my questions, he said, as if replying to the mute inquiry my eyes made:—

"Yes, I will satisfy your just curiosity: I owe you an explanation, and you shall not wait any longer. My name is Torrini, and I am a conjuror by profession. You are in my house—that is, in the carriage I usually employ as my domicile. You will be surprised, I dare say, to learn that the bedroom you now occupy can be lengthened into a theatre, and in that room behind the red curtains is the stage on which my apparatus is arranged."

At the word "conjuror" I could not repress a start of satisfaction, which my sorcerer probably did not notice, ignorant as he was that he had before him one of the most fervent adepts of his profession.

"As for yourself," he went on, "I need not ask you any questions: your name, trade, as well as the cause of your illness are known to be, for I consulted your *livret*, and some letters I found on you, in my desire to benefit you. I must now tell you, though, all that has happened since you lost consciousness. After giving some representations at Orleans, I was proceeding to Angers, where the fair will shortly begin, when, at some distance from Amboise, I found you lying insensible, with your face to the ground. Fortunately for you, I was then taking my morning walk by the horses' side, and this circumstance saved you being run over. By Antonio's help I carried you to my bed, and my knowledge of medicine restored you to life. But, my poor fellow! the fever caused you to make the most terrible outbreaks; you threatened me continually, and I had the greatest difficulty in mastering you. At Tours I would have gladly stopped to call in a doctor, for your situation was critical, and I had not practised for many years:—but

my hours were counted: I must arrive in time at Angers, where I wish to choose a good spot for my exhibition, and I had a strange fancy I should save your life, which has proved true."

Not knowing how to thank this excellent Torrini, I offered him my hand, which he pressed firmly; but—must I confess it—I was checked in the effusion of my gratitude by a thought which I deeply regretted later.

"To what motive," I asked myself, "can I attribute this sudden affection?" This feeling, however sincere it might be, must have some cause, and in my ingratitude I sought whether my benefactor did not conceal some interested design behind his apparent generosity. Torrini, as if he had guessed my thoughts, continued, in a kindly tone:—

"You expect a fuller explanation? Well, however painful it may be to me, I will give it. It is this—

"You are surprised that a mountebank, a man belonging to a class not generally erring on the side of sensibility, should have evinced such compassion for your sufferings, but your surprise will cease, my boy, on learning that this compassion is produced by the sweet illusion of paternal love."

Here Torrini stopped an instant, tried to recover himself, and then proceeded:—

"I had a son, a beloved son; he was my hope, my life, my happiness; but a dread fatality robbed me of him: he died, and, terrible to say, he was assassinated, and his murderer stands before you!"

At this unexpected confession I could not repress a start of horror; the cold drops beaded on my face.

"Yes, yes, his murderer!" Torrini went on, his voice growing gradually firmer: "and yet the law could not punish me; it left me life. In vain I accused myself before my judges; they treated me as a maniac, and my crime was regarded as accidental homicide. But what do I care, after all, for their judgment? Whether through carelessness, or imprudence as they say, my poor Giovanni is not the less lost to me, and I shall reproach myself with his death my life long."

Torrini's voice was drowned by his sobs. He remained for some time with his hands before his eyes; then, making an effort, he continued, in a calmer tone:—

“To spare you emotions that might prove dangerous in your present state, I will abridge the narrative of the misfortunes to which this event was only a terrible prelude. What I have said will suffice to explain the natural cause of my sympathy towards you. When I first saw you, I was struck by the likeness you bore in age and height to my unhappy boy. I even fancied I could trace a certain resemblance in your face, and, yielding to this illusion, I decided on keeping you near me, and nursing you as if you were my own child. You can now form an idea of the agony I endured during the week when I was compelled to despair of your restoration to life. But Providence, taking pity on us both, has saved you. You are now quite convalescent, and in a few days, I trust, will be perfectly recovered. Such, my boy, is the secret of the affection I displayed towards you.”

Deeply moved by the father's misfortunes, and touched by the tender care he had bestowed on me, I could only express my gratitude in half-broken phrases, for I was almost stifled by emotion. Torrini, also feeling the necessity of shortening this painful interview, went out, promising to return soon.

No sooner was I alone than a thousand thoughts crossed my mind. This mysterious and tragical event, the thought of which seemed to overthrow Torrini's reason; this crime of which he accused himself so persistently; this verdict whose justice he disputed, perplexed me in the highest degree, and gave me a great desire to obtain more complete details about this domestic drama. Then I asked myself how a man possessing so agreeable a countenance, who did not lack either judgment or talent, and who joined to a solid education a readiness of conversation and distinguished manners, could have thus sunk to the lowest stage of his profession?

While absorbed in these thoughts, the vehicle stopped: we had arrived at Angers. Torrini left us, in order to obtain the mayor's leave to perform; and so soon as he had

succeeded, he prepared to occupy the spot allotted to him. As I have already stated, the room I occupied was to be transformed into a theatre; hence I was carried to an adjacent inn, and placed in a capital arm-chair close to an open window. The weather was glorious; the sun's beneficent rays seemed to impart fresh life to me, and I began to lose that egotistic indifference which a lengthened illness usually produces.

I could see Antonio and his master, with their sleeves tucked up, working at the theatre. In a few hours our residence was completely transformed; the moving house had become a charming room. The arrangement of this singular vehicle is so stamped on my memory, that I can still supply an exact description of it, and I will fill up the details I have already given of it.

The bed on which I had lain was drawn up through a trap in the ceiling, where it occupied a very small space. If clothes or linen were required, an adjoining trap was opened, and, by means of a ring, a chest of drawers was produced as if by magic. A similar process revealed a small chimney, which, by a peculiar arrangement, expelled the smoke below the hearth. Lastly, the larder, cooking-range, and other accessories of the household were ready to hand, and could be easily restored to their respective places. This strange furniture occupied all the space between the wheels, so that the room, though amply furnished, was not crowded.

But I was most surprised to see the vehicle, which was scarcely six yards long, suddenly grow twice that length. This was most ingeniously contrived: the body was double, and could be pulled out like a telescope. This prolongation, supported by trestles, was quite as secure as the rest of the edifice. The partition, dividing the rooms off, had been removed, so that they now formed but a single apartment. The public entered on this side, and a staircase led to the door, before which an elegant marquee formed a vestibule, where the tickets were issued. Lastly, a scaffolding was erected over the front, which represented a stuccoed house.

The sight of this machine excited my imagination, and I

built castles in the air which I was never to inhabit. I, too, would have a similar vehicle, though rather smaller, as my exhibition would be different.

Here I must make room for a parenthesis, to supply an explanation I think necessary. I have spoken so much of sleight of hand, that it might be supposed I had quite given up all thoughts about mechanism. On the contrary, I still passionately loved that science; but I had mollified its application, since the love of the marvellous had inflamed my imagination. I proposed to call to my aid automata, which I would eventually build; then I would traverse the whole of Europe, perhaps the world, gaining an ample amount of honour, pleasure, and profit.

While engaged with these pleasant dreams I regained my health and strength, and hoped that Torrini would soon allow me to be present at one of his performances. In fact, he soon offered me an agreeable surprise, for, one evening, he led me to his theatre, and installed me on the first row of seats, grandly denominated "the stalls." Judging by my own enthusiasm, I expected the theatre would be thronged so soon as the doors opened, but, to my great surprise and regret, the room was not more than half full.

The hour fixed for commencing at length arrived; the bell rang thrice, the curtains were drawn back, and an exquisite little stage was visible. The most striking thing was the entire absence of all that apparatus by which many performers compensate for their lack of skill, while, by a graceful innovation, a few candles, artistically arranged, were substituted for that dazzling glare which, at the period of which I write, was the indispensable ornament of all performances of "amusing science."

Torrini appeared, walked towards the public with great ease of manner, made a deep bow, then demanded the indulgence of the spectators, and ended by paying a compliment to the ladies. This slight address, though uttered in a cold and melancholy tone, received a few encouraging bravos from the audience.

The performance commenced in the most perfect silence; everybody seemed inclined to devote all attention to it. I

could hardly breathe, in my desire not to lose a single word or gesture.

I will not describe the several tricks I saw; they all possessed extraordinary interest for me; but Torrini appeared to excel in card tricks. He possessed two most precious qualities in the exercise of this art: these were extreme skill, and an incredible boldness of execution. To these he added a most aristocratic way of touching the cards; his white and carefully-tended hands seemed hardly to rest on them, and his tricks were so artistically performed that the audience involuntarily bestowed a sympathizing confidence upon him. Sure of the effect he would produce, he performed the most difficult "passes" with a coolness no one could expect him to possess; and this produced the most successful results. To close the performances, Torrini requested the audience to choose some one to play a game of piquet with him, and a gentleman immediately stepped on the stage.

"Pardon me, sir," said Torrini, "but it is indispensable, for the success of the experiment, that I should know your name and profession."

"Nothing easier, sir. My name is Joseph Lenoir, at your service; and my profession is that of dancing-master."

Any other than Torrini would have made some jest on the name and profession of this rival of Vestris; but he did nothing of the sort. He had only asked this question to gain time, for he never indulged in any mystification; so he merely added:—

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness; and now we know who we are, we can place confidence in each other. You have come to play a game of piquet with me; but do you understand the game thoroughly?"

"I flatter myself I do, sir."

"Ah! ah!" Torrini said, with a laugh. "Pray do not flatter yourself till we have played our game. Still, not to lower your self-esteem, I will allow you to be an excellent player; but that will not prevent you losing the game, although the chances are all in your favour. Listen to me carefully; the trick I am going to perform, and

which is called the "blind man's game of piquet," requires that I should be blinded, so have the goodness to bandage my eyes carefully."

M. Lenoir, who, I may mention, wore spectacles, was very distrustful, hence he took extraordinary precautions to accomplish his task. First, he covered the patient's eyes with tow, over which he fastened three thick bandages; and, as if this fourfold covering were not enough to blind his opponent, he fastened an enormous shawl round his head. I know not how Torrini kept from suffocation beneath these heavy bandages; for my part, the perspiration ran down my face at seeing him so muffled up. Not knowing all the resources this skilful performer had at command, I was rather fearful as to the result of the experiment, and my alarm reached its climax when I heard him address his opponent as follows:—

"Monsieur Lenoir, have the kindness to sit down opposite me at this table. I have still a small service to ask you before we begin our game. You have quite deprived me of my sight, but that is not enough. You have now to bind my hands, so that I may be quite incapable."

M. Lenoir raised his spectacles, and looked at Torrini as if stupefied; but the latter, quietly placing his arms on the table, and crossing his thumbs, said, "Now, sir, fasten them securely."

The dancing-master took the piece of whipcord and performed his task as conscientiously as he had done the first part.

"Am I now blinded, and deprived of the uso of my hands?" Torrini asked his vis-à-vis.

"I am certain of it," Joseph Lenoir replied.

"Well, then, to begin our game. But tell me first in what suit you would like to be repiqued?"

"In clubs."

"Very good; now deal the cards by twos or threes, as you please. When they are dealt out, I will leave you to select the hand you think will enable you best to prevent a repique."

All the time these explanations and preparations lasted the audience remained motionless and silent, not knowing

whether a mystification or a real trick were intended. Now, on seeing the dancing-master shuffle the cards, there could be no further doubt; hence all rose to command a view of the stage, and a great number of spectators even surrounded the table. I had also drawn near, and, to my great delight, secured a front place.

Profound silence in the room.

"The cards are shuffled, please to cut!" the dancing-master said, in an ironical tone, as if secure of victory.

"Willingly," Torrini replied. And though hampered in his movements, he soon satisfied his opponent.

The cards having been dealt, M. Lenoir decided on keeping those before him.

"Very good!" said Torrini. "You wished, I think, to be repiqued in clubs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now follow my play. I throw out the sevens of spades, hearts, and diamonds, and my two eights; the cards I take in give me a quint in clubs, fourteen in queens, and fourteen in kings, with which I repique you. Pray count and verify, sir."

Torrini spoke the truth. Hearty shouts of applause greeted his success, while jokes were cut at the expense of the poor dancing-master, who hurried from the stage in a state of pitiable confusion.

The performance over, I expressed to Torrini the pleasure his tricks caused me, and paid him some sincere compliments on the skill he had evinced during the whole evening, and specially in his last trick.

"These compliments are the more flattering," he replied, with a smile, "as I know now they are paid me, if not by a fellow-artist, at least by an amateur, who, I am certain, already possesses some degree of skill in the profession."

I know not which of us, Torrini or myself, was the more charmed by the compliments we exchanged; at any rate, I felt most sensibly the favourable opinion he had formed of my talents. One thing, however, perplexed me: I had never said a word to Torrini about my sleight-of-hand fancies: how could he have found them out?

He read my thoughts, and added :—

“You are surprised at my detecting your secret? and you would like to know how I did so? I am happy to tell you. My room is small; hence it is easy for me, when on the stage, to look at every face, and judge the various impressions I produce on the spectators. I observed you particularly, and while watching the direction of your eyes, I could judge what was passing in your mind. Thus, when I indulged in some amusing paradox, to draw public attention away from the side where the trick was to be performed, you alone escaped the snare, and kept your eyes fixed on the right spot. As for my piquet trick, though I could not observe you while I was performing it, I have reasons to be assured that you did not know it.”

“You have guessed perfectly right, my dear magician, and I cannot deny that in my leisure hours I have amused myself with some of these tricks, for which I always felt great inclination.”

“Inclination! Allow me to say that is not the proper word in your case, my dear lad; yours is a true passion. I base my opinion on the following observations. This evening, from the moment of the curtain rising, your searching eye, your agitated face and half-parted lips, denoted the state of excitement you were in. You looked like a gourmet just sitting down to a well-covered board, or a miser gloating over his treasure. Do you think that with these signs I need be a sorcerer to discover the sway conjuring exercises over your mind?”

I was about to reply, when Torrini drew out his watch, and said to me, “Come, young gentleman, it is growing late; it is high time for a convalescent to seek his rest. We will continue our conversation at a better time.”

With these words my doctor led me to my room, and, after counting my pulse, which appeared to satisfy him, retired. In spite of the pleasure I felt in talking, I was not ill pleased to find myself alone, for I had a thousand souvenirs to evoke. I wished to summon up again the experiments that had struck me most; but it was all in vain. One thought mastered all the rest, and produced a strange

sinking in my heart. I tried, without success, to explain the motives why the public neglected Torrini's interesting performances.

This motive Antonio explained to me afterwards, and it is too curious to be passed by in silence. Besides, I have here an opportunity to introduce my readers to a very remarkable specimen of the great family of mountebanks.

I have said that we reached Angers at fair time; and among the numerous providers of amusement who solicited the presence and money of the Angevins, was another conjuror, known as Castelli.

He was no more an Italian than was Torrini. I shall presently give Torrini's real name, and the reasons that caused him to change it for the one we know him by; as for the other conjuror, he was a Norman by birth, and only assumed the name of Castelli in conformity with the custom of most conjurors of the day, who thought an Italian name more attractive.

Castelli was far from possessing Torrini's marvellous address, and his performances offered no special interest as far as sleight of hand was concerned; but he thought with Figaro that "skill was better than learning," and he proved it by his repeated successes. In truth, this man was the incarnation of charlatanism, and he spared nothing to pique public curiosity. Each day some new prodigy was announced on his enormous posters. It was in reality only a deception, very often a mystification for the audience; but his treasury was always filled to repletion—hence, the trick was good. If the public felt wroth at being duped, Castelli knew the art of escaping from the dilemma, and drawing the laughers on his side; he boldly made some jest in bad Italian, at which the pit could not help laughing, and was thus disarmed.

Besides, it must be remembered that at this period conjuring was not so respectable as it is now: people went to an exhibition of that sort to laugh at the conjuror's victims, even if themselves exposed to his attacks. My readers ought to have seen the mystifier *par excellence*, the celebrated physico-ventriloquist of the age, Comto, to form an idea of

the cool way in which the public was then treated. This performer, though so graceful and gallant towards ladies, was merciless to men. According to his notions, the cavaliers (as they were then called) were predestined to supply amusement for the fair sex.—But I must not poach on the biography of the “natural philosopher to the king,” which will hereafter find a place in my volumes.

The same day on which I had witnessed Torrini’s performance, Castelli’s bills contained an astounding statement, well adapted, I grant, to tempt public curiosity. The professor pledged himself to eat a man alive, and if he did not succeed to the satisfaction of his audience, he would hand over all the receipts to the mayor for distribution among the poor. This seductive appeal had drawn the whole town; crowds collected round the show, and persons who arrived too late were glad to pay double entrance money. But the new trick played by the conjuror was quite worthy of all that had preceded it.

Castelli, after performing several tricks of second-rate interest, at length arrived at the one which caused even the calmest spectator to throb with impatience.

“Gentlemen,” he then said, addressing the audience, “we will now proceed to the last trick. I promised to eat a man alive for my supper, and I will keep my word. Will the courageous spectator who wishes to serve as a repast to me” (Castelli pronounced this word with the expression of a perfect cannibal) “take the trouble to mount on the stage?”

Two victims immediately presented themselves. By accident they offered a perfect contrast, and Castelli, who understood the art of producing an effect, skilfully profited by it. He placed them side by side, with their faces turned to the audience, then after surveying one of them, a tall, bilious-looking fellow, from head to foot, he said to him, with affected politeness—

“I do not wish to insult you, sir, but I am sorry to tell you that, as regards my food, I am quite of M. lo Curé’s opinion—you understand me?”

The tall thin man appeared for a moment as if trying to guess a riddle, and ended by scratching his ear,—a gesture

which, among all nations, civilized or barbarous, signifies, "I do not understand."

"I will explain, then," Castelli continued. "You know that M. le Curé does not like bones; at least, so they say at forfeits, and I assure you I share the curé's antipathy in this respect. You can retire, then; I will not detain you." And Castelli began bowing to his visitor, who hastened back to his seat.

"Now, then, for us two," the conjuror said, turning to the one who remained. He was a tall, chubby fellow, with rosy cheeks, who seemed purposely made for the repast of an epicurean cannibal.

"Well, my stout friend, so you consent to be eaten alive?"

"Yes, sir, I am quite willing, and came here for that purpose."

"Ah! ah! that is capital!" (Here Castelli licked his lips like a gourmet, whose mouth waters at the sight of a dainty dish.) "As I have a powerful appetite, we will begin directly."

At this moment a gigantic cruet-stand was brought in. The stout youth regarded it with surprise, as if trying to discover the use of this strange utensil.

"Don't mind it, pray!" said Castelli. "I am very fond of hot dishes, so allow me to pepper and salt you in my usual fashion."

And he began covering the unhappy man with a white powder, which, adhering to his hair, face, and clothes, soon gave him an extraordinary appearance. The stout youth, who at the beginning had tried to rival the conjuror's gaiety, did not laugh now, and seemed earnestly to desire the end of the jest.

"Now, then!" Castelli added, rolling his eyes about ferociously, "kneel down, and hold your hands over your head. Very good, my friend: it really looks as if you had never followed any other trade than being eaten alive. Now, then, say your prayers, and I will begin. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir," the stout lad muttered, turning quite yellow with emotion, "I am ready."

Castelli then took the end of the patient's thumb in his mouth, and bit it so hard, that the latter, as if working by a spring, jumped up, shouting energetically.

"Confound it, sir, take care; you hurt me!"

"What! I hurt you?" Castelli said, with perfect calmness. "What will you say, then, when I reach your head? It was really absurd of you to cry out like a baby at the first monthful. Come, be reasonable: let me go on. I am frightfully hungry, and long for my supper."

And Castelli, thrusting him by the shoulders, tried to make him take his first position. But the young man resisted with all his strength, as he cried, in a voice palsied with fear, "I won't have it: I tell you I won't have it. You hurt me too much!" At length, by a supreme effort, he escaped from his tormentor's hands. During this time the audience, foreseeing the result of this amusing scene, had been shouting with laughter, and Castelli found some difficulty in gaining a hearing.

"Gentlemen!" he said, assuming a tone of the deepest disappointment, "you see me both surprised and vexed at the flight of that gentleman, who had not the courage to allow himself to be eaten. Now, I expect some one to take his place; for, far from shunning the performance of my promise, I feel so comfortable, that I pledge myself, after eating the first spectator who offers, to eat the second, and so on. Indeed, to prove myself worthy your applause, I promise to eat the whole roomful."

This jest was greeted by another hearty laugh, but the farce was played out. No one came forward to be eaten, and the crowd went home to digest the trick played on them all.

If such manœuvres could succeed, few spectators were left for Torrini. As he desired to maintain a certain dignity, he never announced tricks he did not perform, and, even if trying to render the titles attractive, he always adhered to the strictest truth.

CHAPTER V.

Antonio's Confessions—How to gain Public Applause—The Count de —, Mountebank—I repair an Automaton—A Mechanician's Shop on Wheels—Nomadic Life—Happy Existence—Torrini's Lessons—His Opinions about Sleight of Hand—A fashionable Greek, Victim of his own Swindling—The Conjuror Comus—A Duel at Piquet—Torrini proclaimed Conqueror—Revelations—New Catastrophe—Poor Torrini!

THE day after the performances, Antonio came as usual to inquire after my health. I have already said this young man possessed a charming character: ever gay, ever singing, his fund of good humour was inexhaustible, and frequently produced a degree of gaiety in our house, which otherwise would have been very gloomy. On opening my door, he stopped the operatic air he had been humming from the bottom of the stairs.

"Well, my little signor," he said, in French, picturesquely intermingled with Italian, "how is the health this morning?"

"Famous, Antonio—famous, thank you!"

"Oh yes! famous, Antonio, famous!" and the Italian sought to repeat the intonation of my voice. "I believe you, my dear patient; but that will not prevent you taking this draught the doctor, my master, has sent you."

"I am willing; but, indeed, this medicine is becoming unnecessary, for now I feel that I shall soon be restored to health, and then I shall only have to thank you and your master for your attention to me, and pay him the expenses caused by my illness."

"What are you talking about?" Antonio said. "Do you think of leaving us? Oh, I hope not."

"You are right, Antonio; I am not thinking of it to-day, but I must consider of it as soon as I am in a condition to leave. You must see, my friend, that in spite of all the pain our separation will cause me, I must make up my

mind to it before long, for I am anxious to return to Blois, and reassure my family, who must feel most uncomfortable about me."

"Your family cannot be uncomfortable, as, in order to calm your father, you wrote to him that your illness, having had no dangerous results, you had proceeded to Angers to look for work."

"It is true, but—"

"But, but," Antonio interrupted me, "you have no good reason to offer. I repeat, you cannot quit us. Besides," he added, lowering his voice, "if I told you something, I am sure you would be of my opinion."

Antonio stopped, appeared to struggle for a moment against the desire he felt to confide in me, then making up his mind, said, resolutely, "Ah, bah! as it is necessary, I cannot hesitate. You were talking just now about paying my master. Do you know that he is, I fancy, in your debt?"

"I do not understand you."

"Well, listen to me, my dear friend," Antonio said, with a mysterious air; "I will explain myself. You are not ignorant that our poor Torrini is afflicted by a very grave malady that touches him here (and Antonio laid his hand on his forehead); now, since you have been with us, and he fancies he can trace some resemblance to his son, my master is gradually losing his sorrow, and even indulges in gaiety now and then. Yesterday, for instance, during his performance, you saw him make his audience laugh twice or thrice, which has not occurred for a long time.

"Ah, my dear sir," Antonio continued, growing more and more communicative, "if you had seen him before that fatal event, when he performed in the first theatres of Italy. What enthusiasm! what spirit! Who could have foretold at that period that Count de"—here Antonio checked himself—"that the celebrated Torrini would ever be reduced to play in a barn as the rival of the lowest mountebanks—he, the inimitable sorcerer, the honoured artist, everywhere known as the handsome, elegant Torrini! However, it was only just; for he eclipsed the richest professors by his luxury and distinguished manners, and never did a performer

more fully deserve legitimate applause for his talent and address.

“However, I must confess,” Antonio added, carried away by his confessions, “that this applause was sometimes my handiwork. Doubtlessly the public appreciates talent with intelligence, but it often requires to be guided in the outburst of its admiration. I took charge of this duty, and without saying a word to my master, I prepared him several ovations which extended and prolonged his success. How many times bouquets thrown at the right moment, excited the applause of the entire audience! how many times murmurs of approval, skilfully introduced, aroused the enthusiasm of the theatre! What successes, my dear fellow—what successes we had, though, in those days! I cannot give you a better idea of them than by saying that, at times, my master could hardly manage to spend all the money his representations produced.”

“It is a pity that your master,” I said to Antonio, “did not place less trust in the future, and save a portion of that fortune which he would gladly have to-day.”

“We have often made that reflection,” he replied, “but it only increased our regret. And how could we suppose then that Fortune would turn her back on us so suddenly? Besides, my master thought luxury necessary to acquire that prestige which he liked to possess, and considered justly that his prodigality added to the popularity his talent had procured him.”

This confidential talk would probably have lasted longer had not Torrini called Antonio, who suddenly quitted me.

One incident struck me in this conversation: it was when Antonio recalled his master's name. This remark only increased my desire to know Torrini's history. But I had no time to lose, as the last performance was announced for the following day, and as I was resolved to return home.

I therefore armed myself with courage to overcome the repugnance which, according to Antonio, his master felt about speaking of the past, and after we had breakfasted together, I broke the ice, in the hope I should lead him to tell me all I so much wanted to know.

“You are going to Angoulême to-morrow,” I said to him, “and I regret I cannot accompany you: we must separate, however much it may cost me, after the service you have rendered me, and the care you have devoted to me.”

I then begged him to let my family know the expenses my illness had entailed, and I ended by assuring him of my deep gratitude. I expected to hear Torrini oppose my departure: but it was not so.

“However much you may press me,” he replied, with the greatest calmness, “I will take nothing from you. How can I ask payment for what has caused me so much happiness? Never talk about that. You wish to leave me,” he added, with that affectionate smile peculiar to him, “and I say you will not leave me.”

I was going to reply.

“I say you will not leave me,” he repeated, quickly, “because you have no reason to do so, and because, presently, you will have a thousand to remain some time longer with me. In the first place, you require great care to recover your health, and root out the remains of an illness which might otherwise return. Besides, I will add, I was awaiting your convalescence to ask a service from you which you cannot refuse; I want you to repair an automaton I bought from a Dutch mechanician, of the name of Opre, and I am sure you will do it admirably.”

To these excellent reasons, Torrini, who doubtlessly feared some hesitation on my part, joined the most attractive promises.

“To lighten your labours,” he said, “we will have long talks about conjuring. I will explain to you the game of piquet, that delighted you so much, and after, when that subject is exhausted, I will tell you the most important events of my life. You will learn from my story what a man is capable of suffering short of death, and the lessons you may draw from a life now almost ended may serve perchance, to guide you in a career which has hardly yet commenced. Lastly,” he said, offering me his hand, “your presence, I trust, will help to dispel those gloomy thoughts which have robbed me so long of my energy.”

I could make no reply to these touching solicitations; hence I yielded to Torrini's wishes. The same day he gave me the automaton I was to repair. It was a small harlequin, supposed to leap out of the box in which it was confined, perform some evolutions, and return to prison at the word of command; but it was in such a bad condition, that I had almost to make a new one. For this purpose I arranged a small workshop in the carriage, and, two days later, I began my first automatic labours, while proceeding along the road to Angoulême.

Never shall I forget the charm of that journey. My health was perfectly restored, and with it my gaiety and the full exercise of my moral faculties. Our enormous vehicle, drawn by two horses, could not proceed very rapidly: hence we only covered nine or ten leagues a day, and even then we had to start very early. Still, in spite of our slow locomotion, never did time appear to me to pass so quickly or more agreeably. Was it not the realization of all my dreams? What more could I desire? Installed in a small, clean room, before a window through which the smiling panorama of Poitou and the Angoumois was unrolled before me, I found myself amidst my beloved tools, working at the construction of an automaton in which I saw the first-born of a numerous progeny: it was impossible for me to imagine anything to surpass this.

On starting, I attacked my work with such impetuosity, that Torrini, still anxious for my health, insisted that I should take some rest after every meal. The same day, on leaving the dinner-table, he handed me a pack of cards, and told me to display my skill.

Though frightened by such a clear-sighted spectator, by a judge whose skill had so astonished me, I collected my courage, and began by one of those effects to which I had given the name of "flourishes." It was a brilliant prelude, merely intended to dazzle the eyes while showing the extreme agility of the fingers. Torrini regarded me with indifference, and I fancied I saw a smile playing round his lips. I was, I confess, rather disappointed; but he hastened to console me.

"I really admire your address," he said, "but I put

little faith in those flourishes, as you call them. I find them brilliant, but useless. Besides, I am curious to know if you use them at the beginning or end of your card tricks."

"It appears to me logical enough," I replied, "to place them at the beginning, as they are only intended to dazzle the spectators."

"Well, my boy," he went on, "we differ on that point. I think that they ought not to be placed either at the beginning or end of any card tricks. For this reason: after such a brilliant exhibition, the spectator will only see in your tricks the result of dexterity, while, by affecting a good deal of simplicity, you will prevent your audience trying to account for them. Thus you produce a supernatural effect, and pass for a real sorcerer."

I quite agreed in this reasoning, the more so as at the beginning of my experiments I had always considered nature and simplicity the bases of the art of producing illusions, and I had laid down the maxim (only applicable to conjuring) that "you must first gain the confidence of the person you wish to cheat." Hence, I had not been consistent with my principles, and humbly confessed it.

It is certainly a singular occupation for a man to whom frankness is natural, to be continually engaged in concealing his thoughts, and seeking the best way of making dupes. But may it not also be urged that dissimulation and falsehood become qualities or defects according to the purpose they are employed for?

Does not the merchant, for instance, regard them as precious qualities to heighten the value of his wares?

Does the science of diplomaey consist in stating everything with frankness and simplicity?

Lastly, is not fashion, or the usages of decent society, an admirable mixture of dissimulation and deceptions?

As for the art I cultivated, what would it be without falsehood?

Encouraged by Torrini, I regained my assurance. I continued practising all my tricks, and showed him several new inventions of my own. My master paid me some compliments, to which he added sensible advice.

“I recommend you,” he said, “to moderate your vivacity. Instead of displaying so much petulance in your movements, affect, on the contrary, extreme calmness, and thus you will avoid those clumsy gesticulations by which conjurers generally fancy they distract the attention of their spectators, when they only succeed in wearying them.”

My professor then, adding example to precept, took the cards from my hands, and showed me in the same passes I had performed the finesses of dissimulation allied to sleight of hand. I looked on with sincere admiration: probably flattered by the impression he had produced on me, Torrini said:—

“As we are now on the subject of card tricks, I will explain to you my game of piquet; but, in the first place, you must see the box I employ in its performance.”

And he handed me a small box, which I turned over a score times without detecting its use.

“You will seek in vain,” he said to me; “a few words would put you on the right track; but I prefer, although the remembrances it summons up are very painful, to tell you how this box fell into my hands, and for what purpose it was originally invented.

“About twenty years ago I was living at Florence, where I practised as a physician. I was not a conjuror in those days (he added, with a profound sigh), and would to Heaven I had never become so!

“Among the young men of my own age, I was particularly intimate with a German of the name of Zilbermann. Like myself, he was a doctor, and equally like myself without practice. We passed the greater part of our leisure hours together: in other words, we were almost inseparable. Our tastes were much the same, save on one point, where we differed essentially. Zilbermann was passionately fond of gambling, while I felt no attraction for play. My antipathy for cards must indeed have been excessive to prevent me yielding to the force of contagion; for my friend won large sums, enabling him to live like a great gentleman, while I, though most economical, could not

help incurring debts. However this may be, Zilbermann and I lived on terms of fraternal intimacy. His purse was at my service, but I used it discreetly, as I knew not when I should be able to return what I borrowed. His delicacy and generosity towards me led me to believe he was frank and loyal with all the world ; but I was deceived.

“ One day, when I had only left him a few hours before, one of his servants came hastily to summon me, stating that his master had been dangerously wounded, and begged to see me at once. I ran off directly, and found my unhappy friend lying on his couch, with a face of deadly pallor. Overcoming my grief, I proceeded to offer him succour. Zilbermann stopped me, motioned me to sit down, dismissed his attendants, and, after being assured we were alone, begged me to listen to him. His voice, weakened by the pain he was suffering, scarcely reached my ear, and I was forced to stoop down over him.

“ ‘ My dear Edmond,’ he said to me, ‘ a man accused me of cheating. I challenged him—we fought with pistols—and his bullet is lodged in my chest.’

“ And when I urged Zilbermann to let me attend to him, he added :—

“ ‘ It is useless, my friend. I feel I am wounded to death. I have hardly time to make a confession, for which I claim all your indulgent friendship. Learn, then,’ he added, offering me a hand damp with death, ‘ I was not unjustly insulted. I am ashamed to confess that, for a long time, I have lived at the expense of my dupes. Aided by a fatal skill, and still more by an instrument I invented, I daily cheated at play.’

“ ‘ How — you, Zilbermann ?’ I said, withdrawing my hand sharply.

“ ‘ Ycs, I!’ the dying man replied, seeming by a glance to supplicate my mercy.

“ ‘ Edmond!’ he added, collecting all his remaining strength, ‘ in the name of our old friendship do not abandon me! For the honour of my family, let not this proof of my infamy be found here. I implore you to remove this instrument.’ And he showed me a small box attached to his arm.

“ I unfastened it, and like yourself, my boy, looked at it, without understanding its use. Revived by a thought of his culpable passion, Zilbermann added, with the most lively admiration,

“ ‘ And yet, see how ingenious it was. This box can be attached to the arm without perceptibly increasing its size. Ready packed cards are put in it beforehand; when you are going to cut, you put your hand quietly over the cards on the table, so as to cover them completely; then you press this spring by resting your arm gently on the table. The prepared cards come out, while a pair of pincers seizes the other pack and draws it up into the box. To-day, for the first time, the instrument failed me—the pincers left a card on the table. My adversary——’

“ Zilbermann could not complete the phrase; he had drawn his last gasp.

“ Zilbermann’s confessions and death had overpowered me, and I hastened from his room. On returning home, I began to reflect on what had happened, and, imagining that my known intimacy with the deceased would forbid my stay at Florence. I determined on proceeding to Naples. I took with me the unlucky box, though not foreseeing the use I should eventually make of it; and for a long time I forgot its existence. However, when I turned my attention to conjuring, I thought about my piquet trick, and the fortunate use I made of the box gained me one of my most remarkable triumphs as professor of sleight of hand.”

At this recollection Torrini’s eyes sparkled with unusual brilliancy, and prepared me for an interesting anecdote. He then proceeded as follows:—

“ A conjuror, named Comus, had invented a trick at piquet, which he performed, I must allow, with extraordinary dexterity. The praise he acquired in consequence rendered him very boastful; and thus he never failed to announce on his bills that he alone could perform this incomparable trick, thus challenging all the sleight-of-hand professors known. I had some degree of reputation in those days, and Comus’s assertion stung me. Knowing his way of doing the trick, and my own to be far

superior, I resolved to pick up the glove he threw to all his rivals.

“I therefore went to Geneva, where he happened to be, and offered him a share performance, in which a jury should decide on our relative merits. Comus gladly accepted, and on the day fixed an immense number of spectators assembled. Being my senior, my opponent commenced. But in order that you, my dear Robert, may also act as jury, I will first explain to you how he performed his trick.

“Taking a new pack of cards, he undid the cover, had them shuffled, and then taking them in his hand, he managed to get them, as if by accident, either face to face or back to back. This disarrangement gave him time to manipulate the cards, while appearing to be merely putting them in order; thus, when he had finished, I could easily see that he had made an almost imperceptible crease on certain cards, which must give him a suit of eight cards, a king, and fourteen in aces.

“This done, Comus handed the cards to his adversary, begging him to shuffle them again; and during this time he had his eyes bandaged. This was a useless precaution, let me observe *en passant*; for whatever care may be taken to deprive a person of sight in this way, the projection of the nose always leaves a vacuum sufficient to see clearly.

“When the other player had finished, Comus again took up the cards as if to shuffle them; but you can easily understand that he only arranged them so that the cards he had marked must fall to him in the deal. The *saute de coupe*, as you are aware, neutralizes the effect of cutting; hence Comus was certain of success. In fact, matters ended so on this occasion, and hearty applause greeted my rival's victory.

“I have reason to believe that a great number of these bravos emanated from his friends and accomplices; for when I came forward in my turn to perform my trick, a murmur of dissatisfaction greeted my appearance on the stage. The ill-will of the spectators was so manifest that it would have intimidated me, had I not then been quite

steered against all applause or dissatisfaction on the part of the public.

“The audience were far from suspecting the surprise I had prepared for them; for, instead of asking any one to come from the house as my playman, I requested Comus himself to play with me. At this request I saw the people begin to look at each other; but what were the exclamations when, after asking my rival to bandage my eyes and tie my hands, I not only declined to touch the cards, but left him at liberty, after stating in what suit he would be repiqued, to deal the cards by twos or threes, and choose the hand he preferred!

“I had a pack ready prepared in my box, and I was sure of my instrument—need I say that I gained the game?

“Owing to my secret arrangements, my mode of acting was so simple, that it was impossible to find out how I did it, while Comus’s preliminary manipulations led to the supposition that his dexterity gained the game. I was declared victor unanimously. Shouts greeted this decision; and even Comus’s own friends, deserting my rival, came to offer me a pretty gold pin, surmounted by a cup, the symbol of my profession. This pin, as one of the audience told me, had been ordered by poor Comus, who felt certain of winning it back.

“I may (Torrini added) fairly boast of this victory; for, though Zilbermann left me the box, he had not taught me the game of piquet, which I invented myself. Was not this trick, I ask you, far superior to Comus’s, which, it is true, deceived the multitude, but the poorest sleight-of-hand performer could easily detect?”

Torrini was extremely proud of his inventive skill; but this, I believe, was his sole defect, and he made up for it by his readiness to praise other persons. His story ended, I complimented him most sincerely, not only on his invention, but on the victory he had gained over Comus.

Travelling in this way, and stopping at times to perform in towns where we might hope to clear a profit, we passed through Limoges, and found ourselves on the road leading from that town to Clermont. Torrini proposed to give

some performances in the chief town of the Puy-de-Dôme, after which he intended returning straight to Italy, whose gentle climate and quaint ovations he regretted.

I had made up my mind to part from him there. We had been travelling together about two months; this was about the time I had fixed for the repair of the automaton, and my work was almost concluded. On the other hand, I had a right to ask my dismissal, with no fear of being considered ungrateful. Torrini's health had become as good as we might ever expect, and I had given up to him all the time I could reasonably spare.

Still I did not like to speak about our separation; for the professor, delighted with my progress and skill, could not conceive I could have any other wish but to travel with him, and eventually become his successor. This position would certainly have suited me in many respects; for, as I have said, my vocation was irrevocably fixed. But, whether new instincts were kindled in me, or that the intimacy I lived in with Torrini had opened my eyes to the unpleasantness of such a mode of life, I aimed at something higher than being his successor.

I had therefore made up my mind to leave him; but painful circumstances deferred the moment of separation.

We had just arrived at Aubusson, a town celebrated for its numerous carpet factories. Torrini and his servant were on the box of the carriage: I was at work. We were going down a hill, and Antonio was pulling at the rope which dragged our wheels, when, suddenly, I heard something break, and the carriage started off at full speed. The slightest obstacles produced a tremendous shock, and every moment I expected the carriage to go over.

Trembling, and hardly able to breathe, I clung to my bench as a plank of safety, and, with my eyes closed, awaited the death that appeared inevitable. For a moment we were on the point of escaping the catastrophe. Our powerful horses, skilfully guided by Antonio, had kept up bravely during this rapid descent, and we had passed the first houses in Aubusson, when, as misfortune willed it, an enormous hay-cart emerged from a side street, and barred our passage. The driver did not see the danger till it was too

late to avoid it. The accident was inevitable, the collision frightful.

I was momentarily stunned by the pain, but as soon as I recovered I stepped out of the carriage to look after my comrades. I found Antonio, covered with harmless contusions, supporting Torrini, whose arm was dislocated, and leg broken. Our two horses lay dead in the road: as for the carriage, only the body remained intact; all the rest was knocked to atoms.

A doctor, hurriedly sent for, reached an adjoining inn to which we had been directed almost as soon as ourselves. And here I could not refrain from admiring Torrini's magnanimity, when he insisted on our being looked to first; and, in spite of our entreaties, we could not alter his determination. Antonio and myself were soon all right again, but this was not the case with Torrini: he was obliged to undergo all the operations and different phases of a broken leg.

Although he treated the accident so coolly, it might produce terrible consequences for him: the repair of the carriage, the physician, our forced stay at an inn, would cost him very dear. Could he continue his performances—replace his horses? This idea caused Antonio and myself cruel anxiety: Torrini alone did not despair of the future.

"No matter," he said, with entire confidence in himself; "once I have recovered, all will go on well. Why ought a courageous and healthy man to fear aught? Help yourself, and Heaven will help you! our good La Fontaine wrote, Well, we will all, then, help ourselves, and no doubt we shall escape from this dilemma."

In order to give my company to this excellent man, and distract his thoughts, I put up my bench by his bedside, and, while working, continued the conversations which had been so unfortunately interrupted.

The day at length arrived when I gave the last touch to the automaton, and made it perform before Torrini, who appeared delighted with it. Had our patient been less unfortunate, I should have now quitted him; but could I leave the man who had saved my life in this way? Besides, another thought had occurred to me. Although Torrini

told us nothing of his pecuniary position, Antonio and I fancied he was greatly embarrassed. Was it not my duty to try and relieve him, were it in my power? I imparted to Antonio a scheme he approved, though begging me to defer it a little longer, till we found whether our suppositions were correct.

Still the days were very long by my patient's side, for my mechanical job was finished, and sleight of hand was a subject of conversation long exhausted. One day, when Torrini and I were seeking some topic to talk about, I remembered his promise to tell me his life-history, and reminded him of it.

At this request Torrini sighed. "Ah!" he said, "if I could suppress many sad incidents in my story, I should delight to read you a few pleasant pages from an artist's life. However it may be," he added, "I have contracted a debt with you which I must pay.

"Do not expect me to give you a journal of my life; that would be tedious both to you and myself. I will only quote some interesting episodes, and describe to you some tricks you possibly have not heard of. This will be the most amusing portion of my story," Torrini added, with a smile, "for whatever may be your present resolutions about following my art, I need not be a Nostradamus to predict that you will devote yourself to it some day, and gain immense success. What you are about to hear, my friend, will show you that it is not every man who can say, with the popular proverb, 'Spring, I will not drink thy water!'"

CHAPTER VI.

Torrini relates his Life—Treachery of Chevalier Pinetti—A Conjuror through Malice—A Race between two Magicians—Death of Pinetti—Exhibits before Pius VII.—The Cardinal's Chronometer—Twelve Hundred Francs spent on a Trick—Antonio and Antonia—The most bitter of Mystifications—Constantinople.

My name is Edmond de Grisy, and that of Torrini belongs to Antonio, my brother-in-law. That worthy young man, whom you wrongfully took for my servant, has been good enough to follow me in my evil fortune, and help me in my

performances. You must have seen, though, by the way I treat him, that while leaving to him the toil better suited for his age than mine, I regard him as my equal, and consider him my best friend—at least, I should have called him so before knowing you—but now, one of my best friends.

My father, the Count de Grisy, resided on his property in Languedoc, the sole resource left him of a once large fortune, which circumstances had sadly diminished. Devoted to Louis XVI., and one of his most faithful servants, on the day of danger he offered his body as a rampart for his sovereign, and was killed at the storming of the Tuileries on the 18th August.

I was at that time in Paris, and, profiting by the disorders in the capital, I was enabled to pass the barriers, and reach our small family domain. There I dug up a hundred louis my father had concealed for any unforeseen accident; to this money I added some jewels left by my mother, and with these modest resources proceeded to Florence.

The value of my entire property was 5000 francs. On the interest of this sum I could not live; hence I was obliged to seek some profession to support me. I soon formed my decision: taking advantage of the excellent education I had received, I devoted myself to the study of medicine. Four years later I took my degree as doctor; I was then twenty-seven.

I established myself at Florence, where I hoped to form a connection. Unfortunately for me, in this town, with its gentle climate and reinvigorating sun, the number of physicians was greater than that of the patients, and my new profession was a perfect sinecure.

I have already told you how Zilbermann's death compelled me to quit the capital of Tuscany, and I established myself at Naples. More fortunate than at Florence, immediately on my arrival I was called in to a patient whose illness had defied the skill of the first Italian physicians. He was a young man, of very high family: his recovery gained me great renown, and I soon took my place among the best Neapolitan physicians. This success, and the fashion I gained by it, opened to me the doors of all the

salons, and my name, aided by the manners of a gentleman brought up at the court of Louis XVI., rendered me indispensable at all soirées and festivals.

What a happy and calm existence I might still be enjoying had not destiny, jealous of my happiness, destroyed my future prospects of felicity by hurling me into the vivid and ardent emotions of an artistic life!

The carnival of 1796 had just commenced. At that time one man was the popular idol of the Italians; nothing was spoken of but the marvels achieved by Chevalier Pinetti. This celebrated conjuror came to Naples, and the whole city attended his interesting performances. As I was madly attached to this sort of spectacle, I spent every evening at the theatre, trying to guess the chevalier's tricks, and, unfortunately for myself, I discovered the key to many of them.

But I did not stop here; I also wished to perform them before a few friends: success stimulated me, and made me desirous of increasing my répertoire. At length I could perform all Pinetti's tricks. The chevalier was eclipsed; nothing was spoken of but my skill and address; and every one besought a performance from me. But I did not accede to all these requests, for I was chary in displaying my talent, hoping thus to increase its value.

My privileged spectators were only the more enthusiastic, and asserted that I equalled Pinetti, if I did not surpass him.

The public is so happy, my dear lad (Torrini said, with a look of melancholy regret), when it can oppose some rising talent to any artist in renown. It seems as if this sovereign dispenser of fashion and favour takes a malicious pleasure in reminding the man it adores that every reputation is fragile, and that the idol of to-day may be shattered to-morrow.

My vanity forbade my thinking of this. I believed in the sincerity of the praise bestowed on me; and I, the earnest student, the clever doctor, was proud of my futile success.

Pinetti, far from seeming jealous of my triumph, evinced a desire to form my acquaintance, and even came to call

upon me. He might have been about forty-six years of age at this time, but his elegant toilet made him appear much younger. There was something distinguished in his face, though the features were commonplace and irregular, and his manners were excellent. Still, by an inexplicable want of judgment, he used, when performing, to wear a brilliant general's uniform, on which numerous decorations glistened.

This peculiarity, which bordered too much on the charlatan, ought to have enlightened me as to the man's moral value; but my passion for conjuring rendered me blind. We met like old friends, and our intimacy was almost instantaneous. Pinetti was most affable, talked about his secrets unreservedly, and even offered to take me to the theatre and show me his stage arrangements. I accepted the offer with the greatest readiness, and we entered his richly-ornamented carriage.

From that moment the chevalier treated me with the utmost familiarity. In any other this would have wounded my pride, or at least aroused my suspicion, and I should have been on my guard. On the contrary, I was enchanted with Pinetti, for, by his unbounded luxury, he had gained such consideration, that the noblest young gentlemen in the city were proud of his friendship. Why, then, should I be more haughty than they? In a few days we had become almost inseparable friends, only parting at the time of our mutual performances.

One evening, after one of my private exhibitions, I proceeded to sup as usual with Pinetti, my head still aglow with the compliments I had received. I found him alone. On seeing me enter, the chevalier ran up to me, embraced me affectionately, and asked how my performance had gone off. I did not hide my success from him.

"Ah! my friend," he said, "that does not surprise me; you are incomparable: indeed, I should not be paying you a forced compliment if I said you might challenge the most skilful among us."

And during the whole supper, despite my efforts to stop him, he would only speak of my skill and address. Though I tried to decline his compliments, the chevalier seemed so

sincere, that I ended by accepting them. In fact, I was so convinced of their truth, that I began to pay myself some compliments; for how could I believe it was all a trick to make a fool of me? When Pinetti saw I had arrived at this stage, and that the champagne had turned my head, he said:

“Do you know, my dear count, that you could offer the Neapolitans a surprise to-morrow, worth its weight in gold for the poor?”

“How?” I asked.

“Suppose, my dear friend, you take my place in a performance I am going to give on behalf of the poor. We will put your name in the bills instead of mine, and it will be regarded as a noble and honourable understanding between two artists. One representation the less will not injure my reputation, while it will cover you with glory; I shall thus have the double satisfaction of helping the unfortunate, and displaying my best friend’s talent to advantage.”

This proposal so startled me, that I rose from table, as if fearing to hear more. But Pinetti was gifted with such persuasive eloquence, and he seemed to promise himself so much pleasure from my future triumph, that at length I ended by yielding all he asked.

“That is right,” Pinetti said to me; “dismiss such want of confidence in yourself, which could be hardly pardoned in a schoolboy. Now, matters settled so far, we have no time to lose. Let us draw up the bill: choose among my tricks those you prefer, and, as for the preparations, trust to me: I will take care all is in order.”

The greater number of Pinetti’s tricks were performed by the help of accomplices, who brought to the theatre various objects of which the conjuror had doubles. This singularly facilitated the pretended marvels, and I had no doubt of success.

We soon drew up the bill, at the top of which I wrote my name with great emotion; then came a list of the tricks I proposed to do. Just as we finished this, the usual guests entered the room, offering excuses more or less specious to explain their delay. Still, their tardy appearance aroused no suspicion in my mind; for Pinetti’s

was open all hours of the night, and his door was **only** closed from daybreak till two P.M., the time he devoted to sleep and dress.

As soon as the new arriviers heard of my resolution, they noisily congratulated me, and promised to support me by their hearty applause. Not that I wanted it, they added, for my performance would create an extraordinary enthusiasm. Pinetti gave one of his servants the bill, telling him to order the printer to have it posted all over the city before daybreak.

An impulse made me stretch out my hand to take back the paper, but Pinetti checked me with a laugh.

"Come, my dear friend," he said, "do not try to fly an assured triumph, and to-morrow at this hour we shall all be toasting your success."

All the visitors joined in chorus, and they drank in anticipation of my approaching triumph. A few glasses of champagne dispelled my hesitation and scruples.

I returned home very late, and went to bed without thinking of what had occurred. At two the next afternoon I was still asleep, when I was aroused by Pinetti's voice:—

"Get up, Edmond!" he shouted through the door. "Up, man! we have no time to lose: the great day has arrived. Open the door: I have a thousand things to say to you."

I hastened to open.

"Ah! my dear count," he said, "allow me to congratulate you on your good fortune. Your name is in every mouth: the whole theatre is taken; the last tickets are being positively fought for; the king and the royal family will do you the honour of being present; we have just been informed of the fact."

At these words the whole affair flashed across my mind: a cold perspiration stood on my forehead: the terror that assails every novice rendered me dizzy. In my confusion I sat down on the foot of my bed.

"Do not reckon on me, chevalier," I said, with firmness. "Whatever may happen, I will not perform."

"What! you will not perform?" my perfidious friend

said, affecting the most perfect tranquillity; "but, my good fellow, you cannot be thinking of what you are saying. There is no possibility of drawing back: the bills are put up, and it is your duty to keep the engagement you have made. Besides, you should remember this performance is for the poor, who have already begun to bless you, and you cannot abandon them, while a refusal would be an insult to the king. Come, come," he added, "summon up your courage, my dear friend. Meet me at the theatre at four: we will have a rehearsal, which I consider useless, but it may restore your pluck. Till then, good-bye!"

So soon as I was left to myself, I remained for nearly an hour absorbed in thought, trying in vain to elude the performance. An insurmountable barrier ever prevented escape: the king, the poor, the entire city—all, in short, rendered it an imperious duty to keep my rash promise. At length I began to think there was no serious difficulty about the performance, for a great number of the tricks, as I have already said, being performed by the help of friends, these took the chief labour on themselves. Encouraged by this idea, I gradually regained my courage, and at four o'clock joined Pinetti at the theatre with a degree of assurance that surprised even him.

As the performance did not begin till eight, I had ample time to make my preparations, and I employed it so well, that, when the moment arrived to appear on the stage, my foolish fears were completely dissipated, and I presented myself before the public with sufficient coolness for a novice.

The theatre was crowded. The king and his family, seated in a stage box, appeared to regard me with sympathizing glances; for his majesty was probably aware of my being a French émigré.

I boldly commenced my performance with a trick which must eminently excite the imagination of the spectators. I had to borrow a ring, place it in a pistol, and fire through a window opening from the stage into the sea that bathed the theatre walls. This done, I would open a box, previously examined, closed, and sealed by the audience, and

in it would be found an enormous fish bearing the ring in its mouth.

Full of confidence in the success of the trick, I proceeded towards the pit to borrow a ring. Of twenty offered me I selected one belonging to an accomplice of Pinetti's, and begged him to place it with his own hands in the barrel of the pistol I handed to him. Pinetti had told me that his friend would use for this purpose a copper ring, which would be sacrificed, and that I should return him a gold one in its place.

The spectator obeyed me. I then opened the window and fired the pistol. Like the soldier on the battle-field, the smell of powder excited me; I felt full of fun and gaiety, and ventured on a few jests, which pleased the audience. Taking advantage of the general hilarity, I seized my magic wand, and traced my cabalistic circles round the box. At length I broke the seals, and triumphantly produced the fish, which I carried to the owner of the ring, that he might take it out of the fish's mouth.

If the accomplice play his part well, he must evince the greatest stupefaction; and, indeed, the gentleman, on receiving the ring began looking around him, and his face grew very long. Proud of my success, I went back on the stage, and bowed in reply to the applause I received. Ah, my dear Robert! this triumph lasted but a short time, and became to me the prelude of a terrible mystification.

I was proceeding to another trick, when I saw my spectator gesticulating to his neighbours, and then turning to me as if wishing to address me. I fancied he was going on with the farce to dispel any suspicion of collusion; still I thought he went too far. What was my surprise, then, when the man rose and said:—

“Excuse me, sir, but it seems as if your trick is not over, since you have given me a copper ring set with paste instead of my diamond solitaire.”

As a mistake seemed to me impossible, I turned on my heel, and commenced my preparations for the next trick.

“Sir,” my obstinate spectator again took the word, “will you have the goodness to reply to my question? If

the end of your trick be a jest, I acknowledge it as such, and you can return me my ring presently. If it be not so, I cannot accept the horrible substitute you have handed me."

Every one was silent: none knew the meaning of this protest, though many fancied it was an ordinary mystification, which would end in still greater glory for the performer. The claimant, the public, and myself found ourselves in the same state of uncertainty; it was an enigma which I alone could solve—and I did not know the word.

Hoping, however, to escape from a position as critical as it was ridiculous, I walked up to my pitiless creditor, and, on looking at the ring I had given him, I was startled at finding it was really coarsely gilt copper. "Could the spectator to whom I applied have been no accomplice?" I thought. "Could Pinetti desire to betray me?" This supposition appeared to me so hateful that I rejected it, preferring to attribute the fatal mistake to chance. But what should I do or say? My head was all on fire.

In my despair, I was about to offer the public some explanation of this untoward accident, when an inspiration temporarily relieved me from my embarrassment.

"Do you still believe, sir," I said to the plaintiff, after assuming an extreme degree of calmness, "that your ring has been changed into copper while passing through my hands?"

"Yes, sir; and, besides, the one you have returned me does not in the slightest degree resemble mine in shape."

"Very good, sir," I continued, boldly; "that is the real marvel of the trick; that ring will insensibly assume its old form on your finger, and by to-morrow morning you will see it is the one you lent me. That is what we term in the language of the cabala the 'imperceptible transformation.'"

This reply gained me time. I intended to see the claimant when the performance was over, pay him the price of the ring, whatever it might be, and beg him to keep my secret. After this happy escape I took up a pack of cards and continued my performance, and as the accomplices had nothing to do in this trick, I felt sure of success.

Approaching the royal box, I begged his majesty to do me the honour of drawing a card. He did so very affably; but, to my horror, the king had no sooner looked at the card he had drawn, than he threw it angrily on the stage, with marks of most profound dissatisfaction.

The blow dealt me this time was too direct for me to attempt parrying it or turning it aside. But I was anxious to know the meaning of such a humiliating affront, so I picked up the card. Imagine, my dear boy, the full extent of my despair when I read a coarse insult to his majesty, written in a hand I could not mistake. I attempted to stammer some excuse, but by a gesture the king disdainfully commanded silence.

Oh, I cannot describe to you all that then passed in my mind, for a dizziness attacked my brain, and I felt as if I were going mad.

I had, at length, obtained a proof of Pinetti's perfidy. He had determined on covering me with disgrace and ridicule, and I had fallen into the infamous snare he had so treacherously laid for me. This idea restored my wild energy: I was seized by a ferocious desire for revenge, and I rushed to the side scene, where my enemy should be stationed. I meant to seize him by the collar, drag him on the stage like a malefactor, and force him to demand pardon.

But the juggler was no longer there. I ran in every direction like a maniac, but wherever I might turn, cries, hisses, and shouts pursued me, and distracted my brain. At length, bowed down by the weight of such intense emotions, I fainted.

For a week I remained in a raging fever, incessantly yelling for revenge on Pinetti. And I did not know all then.

I learned afterwards that this unworthy man, this false friend, had emerged from his hiding-place on my fainting. He had gone on the stage at the request of some of his accomplices, and continued the performance, to the great satisfaction of the entire audience.

Thus, then, all this friendship—all these protestations of devotion—were only a farce—a very juggling trick.

Pinetti had never felt the slightest affection for me ; his flattery was only meant to draw me into the trap he had laid for my vanity, and he wished to destroy, by a public humiliation, a rival who annoyed him.

He was perfectly successful in this respect, for from that day my most intimate friends, fearing, probably, that the ridicule I endured might be reflected on them, suddenly turned their backs on me. This desertion affected me deeply, but I had too much pride to beg the renewal of such passing friendship, and I resolved on quitting Naples immediately. Besides, I was planning a scheme of vengeance, for which solitude was necessary.

Pinetti, like the coward he was, had fled after the atrocious insult he had offered me. To have challenged him would be doing him too much honour, so I vowed to fight him with his own weapons, and humiliate the shameful traitor in my turn.

This was the plan I drew up :—

I determined to devote myself ardently to sleight of hand, and study thoroughly an art of which I as yet knew only the first principles. Then, when quite confident in myself—when I had added many new tricks to Pinetti's repertoire—I would pursue my enemy, enter every town before him, and continually crush him by my superiority.

Full of this idea, I sold everything I possessed, and took refuge in the country, where, completely retired from the world, I prepared my plans for vengeance. I cannot describe to you, my friend, what patience I devoted and how I toiled during the six months my voluntary retreat lasted ; but I was more than compensated for it, as my success was complete. I gained a degree of skill to which I had never dared to pretend : Pinetti was no longer my master, and I became his rival.

Not satisfied with these results, I intended also to eclipse him by the richness of my stage. I therefore ordered apparatus of unknown brilliancy in those days, spending in this every farthing I possessed. With what delight did I regard these glittering instruments, each of which seemed to me a weapon capable of inflicting mortal wounds on my

adversary's vanity! How proudly my heart beat at the thought of the contest I would commence with him!

Henceforth, it would be a duel of skill between Pinetti and myself, but a mortal duel; one of us must remain on the ground, and I had reason to hope that I should be the victor in the struggle.

Before commencing my tour I made some inquiries about my rival, and learned that, after traversing Southern Italy, he had just left Lucca, *en route* for Bologna. I learned, too, that, on leaving that city, he intended to visit Modena, Parma, and Piacenza.

Without loss of time I set out for Modena, in order to precede him there, and thus prevent him performing. Enormous bills announced the representations of "THE COUNT DE GRISY, THE FRENCH ARTIST," and my programme was most attractive, for it contained all Pinetti's tricks. The papers had puffed the latter so extravagantly for some time past, that I felt sure my performance would be gladly witnessed.

In fact, my room was taken by storm, as eagerly as on my disastrous performance at Naples; but this time the result was very different. The improvements I had introduced in my rival's tricks, and the great skill I displayed in performing them, gained me a unanimous verdict.

From this time my success was insured, and the following performances raised my name above that of all the most fashionable magicians of the day. According to the plan I had laid down, I left Modena when I heard of Pinetti's approach, and went to Parma. My rival, full of faith in his merits, and not believing in my success, took the theatre I had just left. But he began to be bitterly undeceived; the whole city was satiated with the style of amusement he announced; no one responded to his appeal, and, for the first time, the success to which he was accustomed slipped from his grasp.

Chevalier Pinetti, who had so long held undivided sway, was not the man to yield to a person he called a novice. He had guessed my plans, and, far from awaiting the attack, he acted on the offensive, and came to Parma, where he opened a room exactly opposite mine. But this town

was lost to him like the last : he had the misery of seeing my theatre continually filled, while his was quite deserted.

I must tell you, too, my friend, that all the money I netted only covered my luxurious outlay. What did I care for gold and silver? I only dreamed of revenge, and to satisfy that feeling I squandered my money. I wished, above all, to pale that star which had formerly eclipsed me. I displayed regal pomp in my performances; the theatre and its approaches were literally covered with tapestry and flowers, while the house and the stage, glistening with light, presented to the dazzled eyes of the audience numerous escutcheons, bearing compliments to the ladies, who were thus quite gained over to the side of the gallant Count de Grisly.

In this way I crushed Pinetti, although he did all in his power to offer me a vigorous resistance. But what could his tinsel and old-fashioned ornaments avail against what I may fairly term my elegance and distinguished manners?

Piacenza, Cremona, Mantua, Vicenza, Padua, and Venice, were witnesses of our desperate struggle, and, despite his rage and despair, the arrogant Pinetti was obliged to endure my superiority, if he did not recognize it. Abandoned by even his most zealous admirers, he determined to quit the field, and proceeded towards Russia. Some slight success partly consoled his late defeats, but, as if Fortune were determined on making him repay the favours she had so long lavished on him, a tedious and painful illness exhausted his strength as well as his slight savings. Reduced to a state of abject misery, he died at the village of Bartitchoff, in Volhynia, at the house of a nobleman who sheltered him from compassion.

Pinetti once gone, my revenge was satiated, and, being master of the battle-field, I might have abandoned a profession ill fitted for my birth. But my medical connection was broken up, and, on the other hand, I yielded to a motive which you will appreciate some day : when a man has once tasted the intoxication produced by the applause of the public, it is very difficult to renounce it ; with my will or against it, I must continue my profession as conjuror

I therefore determined on profiting by the reputation I had gained, and proceeded to Rome, as a brilliant termination to my Italian representations. Pinetti had never dared to enter that city, less through distrust of himself than through fear of the Inquisition, of which he could only speak with terror. The chevalier was extremely prudent whenever he was personally concerned; he feared being treated like a sorcerer, and ending his days in an *auto-da-fé*. More than once he had bid me take warning by the unhappy Cagliostro, who was condemned to death, and only owed to the clemency of the Pope the commutation of the penalty into perpetual imprisonment.

Confiding in the intelligence of Pius VII., and, besides, having no pretensions to the necromancy Pinetti affected, nor to the charlatanism of Cagliostro, I proceeded to the capital of the Christian world, where my performances created a great sensation. His Holiness himself, on hearing of me, did me the signal honour of requesting a performance, at which I was advised all the dignitaries of the Church would form my audience.

You can fancy, my lad, with what eagerness I acquiesced in his wish, and what care I devoted to my preparations. After selecting all my best tricks, I ransacked my brain to invent one worthy of my illustrious spectators. But I had no need to search long, for chance, that most ingenious of inventors came to my aid.

On the day prior to the performance I was in the shop of one of the first watchmakers of Rome, when a servant came in to ask if his eminence the Cardinal de ——'s watch were repaired.

"It will not be ready till this evening," the watchmaker replied; "and I will do myself the honour of carrying it to your master myself."

When the servant had retired, the tradesman said to me:

"This is a handsome and capital watch. The cardinal to whom it belongs values it at more than 10,000 fr.; for, as he ordered it himself of the celebrated Bréguet, he fancies it must be unique of its kind. Strangely enough, though, only two days ago, a young scamp belonging to

this city offered me a precisely similar watch, made by the same artist, for 1000 fr."

While the watchmaker was talking to me, I had already formed a plan.

"Do you think," I said to him, "that this person is still inclined to dispose of his watch?"

"Certainly," the watchmaker replied. "This young prodigal, who has spent all his fortune, is now reduced to sell his family jewels: hence the 1000 fr. will be welcome."

"Is he to be found?"

"Nothing easier: in a gambling-house he never quits."

"Well, then, sir, I am anxious to purchase the watch, but it must be to-day. Have the kindness, then, to buy it for me. After that, you will engrave on it his eminence's arms, so that the two watches may be perfectly similar, and on your discretion the profit you make by the transaction will depend."

The watchmaker knew me, and probably suspected the use I intended to make of the watch; but he was assured of my discretion, as the honour of my success would depend on it. Hence he said:

"I only require a quarter of an hour to go to the gambling-house, and I am confident your offer will be accepted."

The quarter of an hour had not elapsed ere my negotiator returned with the chronometer in his hand.

"Here it is!" he said with an air of triumph. "My man received me like an envoy from Providence, and gave me the watch without even counting the money. To-night all will be ready."

In fact, that same evening the watchmaker brought me the two chronometers, and handed me one. On comparing them, it was impossible to detect the slightest difference.

It cost me dear, but I was now certain of performing a trick which must produce a decided effect.

The next day I proceeded to the Pontiff's palace, and at six o'clock, upon a signal given by the Holy Father, I stepped on the stage. I had never appeared before such an imposing assembly. Pius VII., seated in a large arm-

chair on a dais, occupied the foreground: near him were seated the cardinals, and behind them were the different prelates and dignitaries of the Church.

The Pope's face breathed benevolence, and it was fortunate for me, for the sight of this smiling and gentle face dissipated an unpleasant idea which had been strangely troubling me for some moments.

"Suppose this performance," I said to myself, "were merely a feigned examination to make me confess my connection with the infernal powers? May not my words be taken down, and perhaps Cagliostro's perpetual imprisonment be reserved as the punishment for my innocent experiments?"

My reason soon dismissed such an absurdity—it was not probable the Pope would lend himself to such an unworthy snare. Although my fears were completely removed by this simple reasoning, my opening address displayed my feelings in some degree, for it seemed more like a justification than the prelude to a performance.

"Holy Father!" I said, bowing respectfully, "I am about to show you some experiments to which the name of 'White Magic' has been most unjustly given. This title was invented by charlatans to impress the multitude, but it only signifies a collection of clever deceptions intended to amuse the imagination by ingenious artifices."

Satisfied by the favourable impression my address produced, I gaily commenced my performance. I could not describe to you, my dear lad, all the pleasure I felt on this evening; and the spectators seemed to take such lively interest in all they saw, that I felt myself in unusual spirits. The Pope himself was delighted.

"But, Monsieur le Comte," he continually said, with charming simplicity, "how can you do that? I shall be quite ill with merely trying to guess your secrets."

After the "blind man's game of piquet," which literally astounded the audience, I performed the trick of the "burnt writing," to which I owe an autograph I set a great store by. This is how the trick is done:—

A person writes a sentence or two: he is then requested to burn the paper, which must be afterwards found intact

in a sealed envelope. I begged his Holiness to write a sentence: he consented, and wrote as follows:—

“ I have much pleasure in stating that M. le Comte de Grisy is an amiable sorcerer.”

The paper was burned, and nothing could depict the Pope's astonishment on finding it in the centre of a large number of sealed envelopes. I received his permission to keep this autograph.

To end my performance, and set the crown on my exploits, I now proceeded to the trick I had invented for the occasion.

Here I had several difficulties to contend with; the greatest was certainly to induce Cardinal de ——— to lend me his watch, and that without asking him directly for it, and, to succeed, I must have recourse to a ruse. At my request several watches were offered me, but I returned them with the excuse, more or less true, that, as they had no peculiarity of shape, it would be difficult to prove the identity of the one I chose.

“ If any gentleman among you,” I added, “ has a watch of rather large size (this was the peculiarity of the cardinal's), and would kindly lend it to me, I should prefer it, as better suited for the experiment. I need not say I will take the greatest care of it; I only wish to prove its superiority, if it really possess it, or, on the other hand, to marvellously improve it.”

All eyes were naturally turned on the cardinal, who, it was known, set great value on the exaggerated size of his chronometer. He asserted, with some show of reason perhaps, that the works acted more freely in a large case. However, he hesitated to lend me his beloved watch, till Pius VII. said to him,

“ Cardinal, I fancy your watch will suit exactly; oblige me by handing it to M. de Grisy.”

His eminence assented, though not without numberless precautions; and when I had the chronometer in my hands, I drew the attention of the Pope and the cardinals to it, while pretending to admire the works and handsome chasing.

“ Is your watch a repeater?” I then said to the cardinal.

“No, sir, it is a chronometer, and watches of that degree of accuracy are not usually encumbered with unnecessary machinery.”

“Indeed! a chronometer; then it must be English?” I said with apparent simplicity.

“What, sir!” the cardinal replied, as if stung by my remark, “do you think chronometers are only made in England? On the contrary, the best specimens have always been made in France. What English maker can be compared with Pierre Leroy, Ferdinand Berthoud, or Bréguet above all, who made that chronometer for me?”

The Pope began to smile at the cardinal's energy.

“Well, then, we will select this chronometer,” I said, putting a stop to the conversation I had purposely started. “I have, then, gentlemen, to prove to you its solidity and excellent qualities. Now for the first trial.”

And I let the watch fall on the ground. A cry of terror rose on all sides, while the cardinal, pale and trembling, bounded from his seat, saying, with ill-suppressed wrath,

“You are playing a very sorry jest, sir.”

“Monseigneur,” I said, with the greatest calmness, “you have no occasion to be frightened; I merely wish to prove to these gentlemen the perfection of your watch. I beg you not to be alarmed; it will escape scathless from all the trials I subject it to.”

With these words I stamped on the case, which broke, flattened, and soon presented but a shapeless mass. At first, I really fancied the cardinal was going into a fit; he could scarcely restrain his passion; but the Pope then turned to him:

“Come, cardinal, have you no confidence in our sorcerer? For my part, I laugh like a child at it, being convinced there has been some clever substitution.”

“Will your Holiness permit me to remark,” I said, respectfully, “that there has been no substitution? I appeal to his eminence, who will recognize his own watch.”

And I offered the cardinal the shapeless relics of his watch. He examined them anxiously, and finding his arms engraved inside the case, said, with a deep sigh,

“Yes, that is certainly my watch. But,” he added, dryly, “I know not how you will escape, sir: at any rate, you should have played this unjustifiable trick on some object that might be replaced, for *my* chronometer is unique!”

“Well, your excellency, I am enchanted at that circumstance, for it must enhance the credit of my experiment. Now, with your permission, I will proceed.”

“Good gracious me, sir, you did not consult me before destroying the watch. Do what you please, it is no concern of mine.”

The identity of the cardinal’s watch thus proved, I wished to pass into the Pope’s pocket the one I had bought the previous evening. But I could not dream of this so long as his Holiness remained seated. Hence, I sought some pretext to make him rise, and soon found one.

A brass mortar, with an enormous pestle, was now brought in. I placed it on the table, threw in the fragments of the chronometer, and began pounding furiously. Suddenly, a slight detonation was heard, and a vivid light came from the vessel, which cast a ruddy hue over the spectators, and produced a magical appearance. All this while, bending over the mortar, I pretended to see something that filled me with the liveliest astonishment.

Through respect for the Pope, no one ventured to rise, but the Pontiff, yielding to his curiosity, approached the table, followed by a portion of the audience. They might look and look: nothing was to be seen but flame.

“I know not whether I must attribute it to the dazed state of my brain,” said his Holiness, passing his hand over his eyes, “but I can distinguish nothing.”

I, too, had much the same idea, but far from confessing it, I begged the Pope to come round the table and choose a more favourable spot. During this time I slipped my reserve watch into the Pope’s pocket. The experiment was certain, and the cardinal’s watch had by this time been reduced to a small ingot, which I held up to the spectators.

“Now,” I said, “I will restore this ingot to its original

shape, and the transformation shall be performed during its passage to the pocket of a person who cannot be suspected of complicity."

"Aha!" the Pope said, in a jocular tone, "that is becoming a little too strong. But what would you do, my good sorcerer, if I asked you to choose my pocket?"

"Your Holiness need only order for me to obey."

"Well, Monsieur le Comte, let it be so."

"Your Holiness shall be immediately satisfied."

I then took the ingot in my fingers, showed it to the company, and it disappeared on my uttering the word "Pass!"

The Pope, with manifestations of utter incredulity, thrust his hand into his pocket. I soon saw him blush with confusion, and draw out the watch, which he handed to the cardinal as if afraid of burning his fingers.

At first it was supposed to be a mystification, as no one could believe in such an immediate repair; but when my audience were assured that I had fulfilled my promise, I received the applause so successful a trick deserved.

The next day the Pope sent me a rich diamond snuff-box, while thanking me for all the pleasure I had occasioned him.

This performance created a great sensation at Rome, and every one flocked to see my marvels. Perhaps they hoped to witness the famous trick of the "Broken Watch," which I had performed at the Vatican. But though I was then very extravagant, I was not so mad as to spend 1200 francs a night in the performance of a trick which could never again be done under such favourable auspices.

An operatic company was attached to the theatre while I performed, but their performances were suspended during my stay in Rome. The manager employed this leisure time to rehearse a fresh piece to be performed on my departure, and this gave me a daily opportunity to mix with the actors. I had formed a peculiar friendship with one of the youngest of them, a charming lad of eighteen, with a tenor voice, whose elegant and regular features formed a singular contrast to his employment. His feminine face, with his small waist and timid demeanour, quite injured the effect

when he played the part of a lover; he looked like a boarding school miss in man's clothes. Yet, I discovered afterwards that this effeminate person contained a bold and manly heart, for Antonio (such was the tenor's name) had been engaged in several affairs of honour, in which he had done his manly devoir.

At this part of Torrini's story I interrupted him, for the name of Antonio struck me.

"What!" I said, "can it be that——?"

"Certainly; the same person! Your astonishment is justifiable, but it will cease when I tell you that more than twenty years have elapsed since the time I speak of. At that period, Antonio did not wear a heavy black beard, and his face had not yet been embrowned by the open air and the fatigues of our laborious and nomadic life."

Antonio's mother was also engaged at the theatre; she performed in the ballets, and her name was Lauretta Torrini. Though close upon forty, she had retained all her pristine charms. She must have been very beautiful in her time, but the greatest scandalmongers could not reproach her with the least levity. She was the widow of a government clerk, and had brought up her family by her own labour.

Antonio was not her only child; she had borne a daughter with him. These twins, as frequently happens, had such a striking resemblance, that only their dress distinguished them; and they had been christened Antonio and Antonia. The lad received a musical education at the theatre, but Antonia was always sedulously kept from the stage. After a careful education, her mother had placed her in a milliner's shop, till she could set up for herself.

I have dwelled so long on this family because, as you can guess, it soon became my own. My friendship for Antonio was not quite disinterested, for I owed to it an introduction to his sister. Antonia was lovely and virtuous: I asked her hand, and was accepted. Our mar-

riage was to take place as soon as my engagement had terminated, and it was arranged that Lauretta and Antonio should share our fortunes.

I have already said that Antonio appeared effeminate; but although large black eyes, fringed with long eyelashes, and exquisitely pencilled eyebrows, a Grecian nose, and fresh and ruddy lips, were almost wasted on Antonio, still these advantages admirably suited my betrothed. Such a treasure could not long remain concealed: Antonia was noticed, and all the rich young nobles fluttered round her. But she loved me, and had no difficulty in resisting the numerous and brilliant offers made her.

While waiting the wished-for day, Antonia and I formed plans for our future happiness. She would enjoy a travelling life, and as she longed for a sea voyage, I promised to take her to Constantinople. I wished to perform before Selim III., who was considered an enlightened prince, and hospitably treated the artists he assembled at his court. All, then, seemed to smile on my plans, when one morning, while dreaming of these pleasant prospects, Antonio suddenly entered my room.

“My dear Edmond,” he said, “I defy you to guess where I have been, and what has happened to me since last evening. I must tell you, then, as prelude to my story, that, dragged, in spite of myself, into a drama, which threatened to become very sanguinary, I turned it into a farce, the details of which are worth hearing. You shall judge.

I was at the theatre yesterday, when a carpenter, a worthy man in many respects, but who spends three parts of his time in public-houses, came up and begged to tell me a secret.

“Monsieur Antonio,” he said, “if you wish to prevent a great evil, you have no time to lose. I have just been drinking with some of my comrades, and a man, whose acquaintance we had formed over the bottle, told us we could gain a large sum easily. The proposal was so agreeable that we accepted it unanimously, on condition of

knowing what was wanted of us. We were told, and this is what we promised to do:—

“This evening, when your sister leaves her shop, we are to surround her, as if quarrelling, and drown her cries by our shouts. The Marquis d’A——’s people will manage the rest. Now do you understand?”

I only understood too well, and, scarcely thanking the carpenter, I rushed off at full speed. Fortunately my brains did not fail me. I was in front of a gunsmith’s: I went in, bought a pair of pistols, and then hastened home.

“Mother,” I said, as I went in, “I have made a bet that I should be taken for Antonia by putting on her clothes. Dress me, then, quickly, and tell my sister I beg her to leave the shop half an hour later than usual.”

My mother did as I asked, and when I was dressed I so perfectly resembled Antonia that she kissed me, and burst into a hearty laugh at my pleasant idea.

Nine o’clock had just struck: it was the hour appointed for the abduction. I hastened away, doing my best to imitate my sister’s walk and manner. My heart beat violently when I saw this band of robbers and servants approach me, and I instinctively put my hands on my fire-arms; but I soon reassumed the timid demeanour of a young girl, and walked onwards.

The affair was executed just as I had been told: I was carried off with all proper respect, in spite of my feigned resistance, and placed in a carriage with the blinds down. The horses started off at a gallop.

There was a man by my side whom I recognized in the gloom: it was certainly the Marquis d’A——. I had to endure his warm excuses, and then his passionate assurances, which sent the blood to my cheeks, and I was several times on the point of betraying myself, but my vengeance was so exquisite and near that I suppressed my anger. My purpose was, so soon as I found myself alone with him, to challenge him to mortal combat.

Half an hour had scarce elapsed when we reached the end of our journey. The marquis begged me to descend, and politely offered me his hand to lead me into a small

isolated villa. We entered a brilliantly-lighted room, where some young gentlemen and ladies were awaiting us. My abductor, radiant with victory, introduced me to his friends and their companions, and received their felicitations.

I lowered my eyes for fear my passion might be noticed, for I knew that this humiliating triumph had been reserved for my sister, who would certainly have died of shame. Five minutes later a servant opened the folding-doors, and announced that supper was served.

“To table, friends,” the marquis exclaimed—“to table, and let each take the place he likes best!” And he offered me his arm.

We seated ourselves round a sumptuous repast, the marquis waiting on me, for he had dismissed all the attendants. For some time I refused to touch anything; but you know, my dear Edmond, Nature has claims which cannot be neglected. I was fearfully hungry, and my appetite was sharpened by the scent of the dainty dishes. In spite of my anger, I was forced to give up my plans of abstinence, and yielded to temptation.

I could not eat without drinking, and there was no water on the table. The other ladies had no objection to wine, so I followed their example. Still I was very moderate, and, to play my part properly, I affected great reserve and extreme timidity.

The marquis was delighted to see me behaving thus. He addressed some compliments to me, but noticing they were disagreeable, he did not press me, feeling assured that he could take his revenge at a more suitable season.

We had reached the dessert; the whole of the company were in a charming humour. May I confess to you, my dear Edmond, that the sight of these merry comrades and coquettish dames produced the same effect on my senses as the dishes had done on my appetite, and insensibly dispelled my gloomy ideas? I had no strength left to continue the dramatic character I had undertaken, and I sought a more satisfactory conclusion. I soon made up my mind.

Three toasts had been drunk in succession: “Wine!”

“Play!” “Love!” The ladies had joined in emptying their glasses, while I remained calm and silent. The marquis begged me in vain to join in the general gaiety. Suddenly I rose, glass in hand, and assuming the free-and-easy manner of a soldier—

“Per Bacco!” I shouted, in a barytone voice, giving the marquis a hearty slap on the shoulder. “Drink, my friends, to the lovely eyes of these ladies!” Then I drained my glass at a draught, and trolled out a lively ditty.

I cannot describe the marquis’s feelings; all I know is, he turned to stone under my hand. His friends regarded me in stupor, taking me, doubtlessly, for a maniac, while the women laughed convulsively at my strange outbreak.

“Well, gentlemen,” I continued, “why are you surprised? Do you not recognize Antonio Torrini, the tenor, all alive and well, and prepared to accept anybody’s challenge with the pistol or the glass, he doesn’t care which.” At the same time I laid my pistols on the table.

At these words, the marquis at length awoke from the torpor into which the evanishment of his sweet dreams had plunged him, and he raised his hand to strike me in the face. But his eyes no sooner met mine, than, yielding to the influence of an illusion which he abandoned with such pain, he fell back on his chair.

“No!” he said, “I cannot strike a woman.”

“Oh, as for that, M. le Marquis,” I said, as I left the table, “I only ask ten minutes to appear before you in my proper attire.” I then went into an adjoining room, where I doffed gown, petticoats, and finery: I had kept on all my own clothes under my feminine masquerade, with the exception of my coat. That article of clothing not being indispensable to receive a blow, and as I was in fighting costume, I returned to the dining-room.

During my absence the scene had changed. I seemed to have “missed my cue,” as they say in the theatre when an actor does not arrive in time to reply. All the guests regarded me with smiles, and one coming up, said:

“Monsieur Antonio, my friend’s seconds and yours,

appointed *ex officio* during your absence, are agreed that you have taken ample satisfaction, and have no occasion to fight. Do you approve of our decision?"

I offered my hand to the marquis, who took it with very ill grace, for he evidently could not stomach the bitter trick I had played him. This *dénouement* satisfied my vengeance, and I withdrew. But, before leaving, each of us pledged our honour to discretion, in which the ladies joined.

After thanking Antonio for his devotion to me, and complimenting him on his quickness, I added:—

"These gentlemen acted very gallantly in confiding a secret to the ladies; but I, who flatter myself I can read the human heart, say with François I.,

Souvent femme varie,
Bien fol est qui s'y fie.

For this reason the marriage shall take place the day after to-morrow, and in three days we will start for Constantinople."

Antonio loved his sister as much as myself, and he was right (Torrini added), for she was the most perfect woman earth ever saw. She was an angel!

The Count de Grisy was so excited by these reminiscences, that he raised his arms to heaven, where he seemed to seek the woman he had so deeply loved. But he fell back on his pillow again, exhausted by the agony the disarrangement of his bandages produced. He was forced to break off his narrative till the next day.

CHAPTER VII.

Continuation of Torrini's History—The Grand Turk orders a Performance—A marvellous Trick—A Page cut in two—Pitying Protest of the Harem—Agreeable Surprise—Return to France—Torrini's Son killed—Madness—Decay—My first Performance—An annoying Accident—I return Home.

THE next day, Torrini continued his narrative, without awaiting any request from me:

On arriving at Constantinople, we enjoyed for some time a delicious rest, whose charm was heightened by all the intoxication of the honeymoon. At the end of the month, however, I thought our mutual happiness ought not to prevent me trying to realize the plan I had formed of performing in the presence of Selim III.; but, before asking this favour, I thought of giving some performances in the town. However great my reputation might be in Italy, it was hardly probable that my name had crossed the Mediterranean: hence I had a new reputation to achieve.

I had a theatre erected, in which my success continued: crowds came to see me, and the highest personages were my constant visitors. I may be permitted to boast of this success, my lad, for the Turks, naturally indolent and phlegmatic, when utterly astounded by the sight I offered them, reminded me, by their enthusiasm, of my excitable Italian spectators.

The grand vizir himself came to one of my performances. He spoke about it to his sovereign, and excited his curiosity to such a degree, that I received an invitation, or rather a command, to court. I proceeded in all haste to the palace, where the apartment was shown me in which the performance would take place. A body of workmen was placed at my orders, and I was allowed all latitude for my theatrical arrangements. Only one stipulation was made: the stage must be exactly in front of a gilded lattice, behind which I was told, the Sultan's wives would be seated.

Within two days my theatre was erected and completely decorated. It represented a garden, filled with natural flowers, whose lively colours and fragrant scent delighted both sight and smell. At the rear, and in the midst of dense foliage, a fountain fell back, in thousands of drops, into a crystal basin, sparkling like diamonds in the brilliant light, while, at the same time, the falling water deliciously cooled the air. Lastly, to my right and left, hedges of flowers served as side scenes and laboratory, while the buffet, loaded with my brilliant apparatus, was erected in the centre of this Garden of Armida.

When all was ready, the Sultan and his numerous suite

took the places assigned to them, according to their court precedence. The Sultan reclined on a sofa, with the grand vizir by his side, while an interpreter, keeping respectfully in the rear, translated my remarks to him. When the curtain rose, a shower of rose-leaves fell on the stage, and formed an odoriferous and deliciously soft carpet. I then appeared, dressed in a rich Louis XV. costume.

I will spare you the account of my tricks, with the exception of one, which, like the "broken watch," was the inspiration of the moment. I must add, that my spectators had been already considerably startled when I performed it.

Addressing Selim in the grave and solemn tone proper to a magician, I said :

"Noble Sultan, I am about to proceed from simple tricks of skill to the sublime science of magic : but, in order that my incantations may succeed, I must address myself directly to your august highness. Will you be pleased to lend me this ornament which I require?"

And I pointed to a splendid necklace of pearls which adorned his neck. The Sultan handed it to me, and I placed it in the hands of Antonio, who was helping me, in a page's costume.

"It is well known," I continued, "that magicians possess unlimited powers, for they hold in subjection familiar spirits, who blindly obey their masters' orders. Let these spirits, then, prepare to obey me, for I am about to summon them."

Here I majestically traced a circle round me with my wand, and pronounced, in a low voice, certain magic spells. Then I turned to my page, to take the collar from him, but it had disappeared. In vain I asked Antonio for it : his only reply was a hoarse and sarcastic laugh, as if he were possessed by one of the spirits I had summoned.

"Mighty prince," I then said to the Sultan, "believe me when I say that, far from sharing in this audacious theft, I am forced to confess myself the victim of a plot I did not at all foresee. But your highness may be reassured : we possess means of forcing our subordinates to return to

their duty. These means are as powerful as they are terrible, and I will offer you an example."

At my summons two slaves brought in a long and narrow chest, and a trestle for sawing wood. Antonio seemed to be terribly alarmed, but I coldly ordered the slaves to seize him, place him in the chest, the cover of which was immediately nailed down, and lay it across the trestle. Then, taking up a saw, I prepared to cut the chest asunder, when piercing cries were heard from behind the gilt lattice—the Sultan's wives were protesting against my barbarity. I stopped a moment to give them time to recover; but so soon as I set to work again, new protestations, in which I distinguished threats, compelled me to suspend my operations.

Not knowing if I might be allowed to address the gilt lattice, I determined to reassure these sympathizing ladies indirectly.

"Gentlemen," I said to my numerous audience, "have no fears, I beg, for the culprit; instead of feeling any pain, I assure you he will experience the most delightful sensations."

It was evident that my statement was believed, for silence was restored, and I could continue my experiment. The chest was at length divided into two parts; I raised them so that each represented a pedestal; I then placed them side by side, and covered them with an enormous wicker cone, over which I threw a large black cloth, on which cabalistic signs were embroidered in silver. This duly performed, I recommenced my little farce of magic circles and bombastic words; when suddenly the deep silence was interrupted by two voices performing an exquisite duet beneath the black cloth.

During this time Bengal lights were kindled all around as if by enchantment. At length the fires and the voices having gradually died away, a noise was heard, the cone and the cloth were upset, and—All the spectators uttered a cry of surprise and admiration: for two pages, exactly alike appeared on the pedestals, holding a silver salver, on which lay the collar of pearls. My two Antonios walked up to the Sultan, and respectfully offered him his rich ornament.

The whole audience had risen as if to give more effect to the applause bestowed on me; the Sultan himself thanked me in his own language, which I did not understand, but I fancied I read in his face an expression of deep satisfaction. The next day an officer of the palace came to compliment me on behalf of his master, and offered me the collar which had been so cleverly juggled away the previous evening.*

The trick of the *two pages*, as I called it, was one of the best I ever performed, and yet it was probably one of the most simple. Of course you understand, my dear boy, that Antonio disposed of the collar while I distracted public attention by my incantations. You also understand that, while he was being nailed up in the chest, he escaped through an opening corresponding with a trap in the stage; hence I had only to cut through planks. Lastly, by the aid of the cone and the cloth, Antonio and his sister, dressed precisely alike, came up through the trap and took their places on the pedestals. The *mise en scène*, and the coolness of the performers, did the rest.

This trick created great excitement in the city; the story, passing from mouth to mouth, soon attained the proportions of a miracle, and contributed much to the success of my remaining performances.

I might have realized a large fortune by making a tour through the Turkish provinces, but I was mortally tired of the peaceful life I was leading, and I felt the need of changing my ground and seeking fresh excitement. Besides, I began to feel a degree of nostalgia, and as my wife begged me to return to Italy, or some other Christian country, as she did not wish our first-born to come into the world among Pagans, we set out for France.

It was my intention to proceed to Paris, but on arriving at Marseilles, I read in the papers the advertisements of a conjuror of the name of Olivier. His programme contained the whole of Pinetti's tricks, which was almost my own. Which of the two was the plagiarist? I have reason

* Selim's was evidently a model court. If the present Sultan were to offer a conjuror a pearl necklace, the chances are it would reach him in the shape of Venice beads.—L. W.

to believe it was Olivier. At any rate, having no desire to engage in a new passage of arms, I evacuated the town.

It is impossible for me, my friend, to describe to you my itinerary during sixteen years; suffice it to say, I traversed the whole of Europe, stopping, of preference, in the chief towns. For a long time my reputation remained at its zenith, but suddenly, like Pinetti, I was destined to experience the inconstancy of Fortune.

One fine day I found my star beginning to pale; the public did not flock so eagerly to my performances, I no longer heard the bravos that used to greet my appearance on the stage, and the spectators appeared to me indifferent. How was this? What could be the cause of this capricious change? My *répertoire* was still the same: it was my Italian one, of which I was so proud, and for which I had made such sacrifices; I had introduced no change; the tricks I submitted to the public were the same which had been so warmly accepted. I felt, too, that I had lost none of my vigour, skill, or spirit.

Precisely because I had made no change, the public had begun to grow indifferent; as an author has observed, very justly, "the artist who does not rise, descends;" and this was peculiarly applicable to my position: while civilization had been progressing, I remained stationary—hence, I was going down.

When this truth struck me, I made a complete reform in my programme. The card tricks, no longer possessing the charm of novelty, as the meanest jugglers could do them, were nearly all suppressed, and I substituted other experiments.

The public like, and run after, touching scenes: I invented one, which, in this respect, would certainly satisfy them, and draw them back to me. But why did Heaven allow me to succeed? why did my brain conceive this fatal idea? (Torrini exclaimed, raising his hands to heaven, and his eyes filling with tears.) Had it not been so, I should still have my son, and should not have lost my Antonia!

It was some time before Torrini could continue his nar-

rative, for these terrible reminiscences caused him mental torture. At length, after holding his hand over his eyes for some time, as if trying to concentrate himself in his grief, he continued :—

About two years ago I was at Strasburg; I was performing at the theatre, and every one was anxious to see my touching scene, which I had named "The Son of William Tell." My son Giovanni played the part of Walter, the son of the Swiss hero, but, instead of placing the apple on his head, he held it between his teeth. On a given signal, a spectator, armed with a pistol, fired at Giovanni, and the ball lodged in the heart of the fruit.

Owing to the success of this trick, my money-box was soon filled again. This restored my confidence in the future, and, far from profiting by the lessons of adversity, I reassumed my luxurious habits, as I fancied I had again pinioned Fortune, and she could not slip from me.

This illusion was fearfully dispelled.

"The Son of William Tell," of which I had made a separate act, usually terminated the performance. We were about to execute it for the thirtieth time, and I had ordered the curtain to be dropped in order to have the stage arranged as the public square of Altorf, but all at once, my son, who had just put on the traditional Helvetic costume, came to me, complaining of a sudden indisposition, and begging me to hurry on the performance. I had just seized the bell-rope to warn the carpenters to raise the curtain, when my son fell down in a fainting fit.

Without caring for the impatience of the public, we paid all attention to my poor Giovanni, and I bore him to a window. The fresh air soon restored him—still, there was a mortal pallor on his face, which would prevent his appearance in public. I was myself assailed by a strange presentiment, which urged me to stop the performance, and I resolved to announce it to the public.

The curtain was drawn up, and, with features contracted by anxiety, I walked to the footlights, Giovanni even paler than myself, and scarce able to stand, being at my side. I briefly explained the accident that had happened, rendering

it impossible to perform the final experiment, and offered to return the entrance money to any who might feel dissatisfied. But at these words, which might excite great confusion and grave abuses, my courageous son, making a supreme effort, stated that he felt better, and able to perform his share in the trick, which, after all, was passive, and not at all fatiguing.

The public received this intimation with lively applause, and I, the insensate and barbarous father, taking no heed of the warning Heaven had sent me, had the cruelty, the madness, to accept this generous act of devotion. Only one word was needed to prevent ruin, dishonour, and death, yet that word died away on my lips! Listening solely to the noisy applause of the audience, I allowed the performance to commence.

I have already stated the nature of the trick that attracted the whole town; it consisted in substituting one ball for another. A chemist had taught me how to make a metallic composition bearing an extraordinary resemblance to lead. I had made balls of it, which, when placed by the side of the real ones, could not be detected. The only precaution necessary was not to press them too hard, as they were of a very friable nature: but for the same reason, when inserted in the pistol, they fell into an impalpable powder, and did not go further than the wad.

Till now I had never dreamed of any danger in the performance of this trick, and, indeed, I had taken all possible precautions. The false bullets were contained in a small box, of which I alone had the key, and I only opened it at the moment of action. That evening I had been peculiarly careful; then how can I explain the frightful error? I can only accuse fatality. So much is certain—a leaden bullet had been mixed with the others in the box, and was inserted in the pistol.

Conceive all the horror of such an action! Imagine a father, with a smile on his lips, giving the signal which will deprive his son of life—it is frightful, is it not?

The pistol was fired, and the spectator, with cruel adroitness, had aimed so truly that the bullet crashed through

my son's forehead. He fell forward with his face to the ground, rolled over once or twice, and——

For a moment I remained motionless, still smiling at the audience, and incapable of believing in such a misfortune. In a second, a thousand thoughts crossed my brain. Could it be an illusion, a surprise I had prepared, and which I had momentarily forgotten? or was it the return of my son's attack?

Paralyzed by doubt and horror, my feet clung to the stage; but the blood welling profusely from the wound violently recalled me to the terrible reality. At last I understood all, and, mad with agony, I cast myself on my son's lifeless corpse.

I know not what took place afterwards, or what became of me. When I recovered the use of my senses, I found myself in prison, with two men before me, a physician and a magistrate. The latter, sympathizing with me, was kind enough to perform his painful mission with all possible regard for my feelings; but I could scarce understand the questions he addressed to me; I knew not what to reply, and I contented myself with shedding tears.

I was fully committed, and brought up at the next assizes. I assure you I took my place in the dock with indescribable delight, hoping I should only leave it to receive the just punishment of the crime I had committed. I was resigned to die; I even wished it, and I determined to do all in my power to get rid of a life which was odious to me. Hence, I offered no defence; but the court requested a barrister to undertake my cause, and he defended me with great skill. I was found guilty of "Homicide through imprudence," and sentenced to six months' imprisonment, which I passed in an infirmary. Here I saw Antonio again for the first time, who brought me terrible news: my dear Antonia, unable to endure such complicated misery, had died of a broken heart.

This new blow affected me so much that I was nearly dead. I spent the greater period of my imprisonment in a state of weakness akin to death; but at length my vigorous constitution overcame all these shocks, and I regained my

health. I had quite recovered when the doors of my prison were opened.

Grief and remorse accompanied me wherever I went, and cast me into a state of apathy from which nothing could arouse me. For three months I behaved like a madman, running about the country, and only eating just enough to keep me from perishing of hunger. I went forth at day-break, and did not return till night. I could not possibly have said what I did during these lengthened excursions, but I probably walked about with no other object than to change place.

Such an existence could not last long: poverty, and her mournful handmaids, soon preyed upon me. My wife's illness, my imprisonment, and our expenses during these three months of listlessness had swallowed up, not only my money, but also all my apparatus. Antonio explained our situation to me, and begged me to recommence my performances.

I could not leave this good brother, this excellent friend, in such a critical position; I therefore acceded to his entreaties, on condition that I should change my name to Torrini, and never perform in any theatre. Antonio offered to arrange everything to my wish. By selling the valuable presents I had received on various occasions, and which he had managed to secrete from the officers, he paid my debts, and had the carriage built in which we suffered this painful accident.

From Strasburg we proceeded to Basle. My first performances were stamped with the deepest sorrow, but I gradually substituted skill and care for my gaiety and good spirits, and the public accepted the change. After visiting the principal towns in Switzerland, we returned to France, and it was thus I found you, my dear boy, on the road between Tours and Blois.

I saw by Torrini's last sentences, and the manner in which he tried to shorten his narrative, that he not only required rest, but also to recover from the painful emotions these melancholy reminiscences had evoked. A few words, too, Torrini had dropped confirmed my notion that he was in a

pecuniary dilemma ; hence, I left him under the pretence of letting him sleep, and begged Antonio take a walk with me. I wanted to remind him it was time to carry out the plan we had formed, which consisted in giving a few performances at Aubusson, without dropping a word of it to our dear master. Antonio was of my opinion ; but when it came to deciding which of us should perform, he positively asserted he knew no more of the conjuring art than he had been obliged to learn—he could slip a card, a handkerchief, or a coin into a person's pocket, if required, but nothing more. I learned later that Antonio, though not very skilful, knew more than he pretended.

We decided that I should represent the sorecerer ; and I must have been animated with a great desire to help Torrini, and pay him in part the debt of gratitude I owed, ere I consented to mount a stage so suddenly. For, although I had shown my friends some of my tricks, the performance had always been gratuitous ; now I had to do with spectators who paid for their seats, and this caused me considerable apprehension.

Still, my resolution once formed, I proceeded with Antonio to the mayor's, in order to obtain his permission to perform. This magistrate was an excellent man ; aware of the accident that had happened to us, and that he had it in his power to do a good deed, he offered us the gratuitous use of a concert room. More than this, to give us a chance of forming some acquaintances who might be of use to us, he begged us to come to his house the next Sunday evening. We accepted this offer gratefully, and had reason to congratulate ourselves on it. The mayor's guests, pleased with certain tricks I showed them, faithfully kept their promise of attending my first performance, and not one was missing.

My heart panted audibly when the curtain rose, and I was obliged to whisper to myself that the spectators, aware of the object of my performance, would be inclined to look over much. Some cheering applause restored my confidence, and I got through my first tricks very decently. This success heightened my assurance, and at length I acquired a degree of coolness I did not think myself capable of.

It is true, I was perfectly *au fait* in my tricks, through having seen Torrini perform them so often. The principal ones were the Trowel, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Bird Dead and Alive, and the Omelette in the Hat. I concluded with the Blind Man's Game of Piquet, which I had carefully studied; I was fortunate enough to succeed, and was warmly applauded.

An accident that happened during the performance singularly lessened the joy I felt in my triumph. I had borrowed a hat to make an omelette in. Those who have seen this trick are aware that it is chiefly intended to produce a laugh, and that the object borrowed runs no risk. I had got through the first part excellently, consisting in breaking the eggs, beating them, throwing in the salt and pepper, and pouring it all into the hat. After this, I had to feign the frying of the omelette; I placed a candle on the ground, then, holding the hat sufficiently high above it to escape the flame, I began turning it gently round, while making some of the stereotyped jokes adapted to the trick. The public laughed so heartily and loudly that I could scarce hear myself speak, but I could not suspect the cause of their hilarity. Unfortunately, I detected it only too soon. A strong scent of burning made me turn my eyes on the candle: it had gone out. I then looked at the hat: the crown was quite burned and stained. I had kept on turning the hat round unsuspectingly, until I at length put it on the top of the candle and covered it with grease.

Quite dazed by this sight, I stopped, not knowing how to escape. Fortunately for me, my alarm, though so truthful, was regarded as a well-played farce: it was supposed this was only a heightened effect, and this confidence in my skill was an additional torture, for my supernatural power could not repair a hat. My only chance was to gain time; so I continued the trick, with a tolerably easy air, and produced to the public a splendidly cooked omelette, which I had enough courage left to season with a few jokes.

Still, that quarter of an hour of which Rabelais speaks had arrived. I must restore the hat, and publicly confess myself a clumsy blockhead. I had resigned myself to this, and was going to do so with all the dignity I could muster,

when I heard Antonio call me from the side. His voice restored my courage, for I felt assured he had prepared some way for my escape. I went up to him, and found him standing with a hat in his hand.

“Look here,” he said, exchanging it for the one I held, “it’s yours; but no matter, keep a good face: rub it as if you were removing the stains, and, on handing it to the owner, ask him, gently, to read what is at the bottom.”

I did as he told me; and the owner of the burnt hat, after receiving mine, was going to betray me, when I pointed to the note fastened in the crown. It ran as follows:—

“An act of carelessness caused me to commit a fault, which I will repair. To-morrow I will do myself the honour of asking your hatter’s address: in the mean while, be kind enough to act as my accomplice.”

My request was granted, for my secret was honestly kept, and my professional honour saved. The success of this performance induced me to give several others: the receipts were excellent, and we realized a very fair sum. Immense was our joy when we carried our treasure triumphantly to Torrini. That worthy man, after listening to all the details of our plot, was half inclined to sell us for our secrecy, but he could not find heart to do so. He thanked us most heartily, and we began to set matters straight again, as our master was now convalescent, and could attend to his own business. Torrini paid all his creditors in full, purchased two horses, and, having nothing further to do at Aubusson, he determined on starting.

The moment of our separation had arrived, and my old friend had been arming himself for it during several days. The parting was painful to us all; a father quitting his son, without hope of ever seeing him again, could not have displayed more violent grief than did Torrini when pressing me in his arms for the last time. I, too, felt inconsolable at the loss of two friends with whom I would so gladly have passed my life.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Prodigal Son—Mademoiselle Houdin—I go to Paris—My Marriage—Comte—Studies of the Public—A skilful Manager—Rose-coloured Tickets—A musky Style—The King of Hearts—Ventriloquism—The Mystifiers mystified—Father Roujol—Jules de Rovère—Origin of the word *prestidigitateur*.

How my heart beat when I returned to my native town! I felt as if I had been absent an age, and yet it was only six months. The tears stood in my eyes as I embraced father and mother: I was stifled with emotion. I have since made long journeys in foreign countries; I have always returned to my family safely, but never, I can declare, have I been so profoundly affected as on this occasion. Perhaps it is the same with this impression as with so many others, habit at last renders it flat.

I found my father very quiet on my account, for I had employed a trick to ease his mind. A watchmaker of my acquaintance had sent him my letters, as if from Angers, and he had also forwarded me the replies. Still, I must furnish some reason for my return, and I hesitated about describing my stay with Torrini. At length, however, urged by that desire, common to all travellers, of narrating their travelling impressions, I gave an account of my adventures, even to their minutest details.

My mother, frightened, and thinking I was still brain-struck, did not await the end of my narrative to send for a physician, who reassured her by stating, what my face indeed confirmed, that I was in a state of perfect health.

It may be thought, perhaps, that I have dwelt too long on the events that followed my poisoning; but I was compelled to do so, for the experience I acquired from Torrini, his history, and our conversations, had a considerable influence on my future life. Before that period my inclination for conjuring was very vague: from that time it gained a complete mastery over me.

Still, I was bound to wrestle against this feeling with all

my energy, for it was not presumable that my father, who had unwillingly yielded to my passion for watchmaking, would be so weak as to let me try a novel and most singular profession. I could, certainly, take advantage of my being of age, and my own master; but, besides my unwillingness to grieve my father, I reflected, too, that as my fortune was very small, I ought not to risk it without his consent. These reasons induced me to defer, if not renounce, my plans.

Besides, my success at Aubusson had not altered my decided opinion about conjuring, that a man who wishes to be thought capable of performing incomprehensible things should have attained an age which leaves it to be supposed that his superiority is the result of lengthened study. The public may permit a man of forty to deceive them, but they will not bear it from a young man.

After a few days devoted to killing the fatted calf, I entered the shop of a Blois watchmaker, who set me to work cleaning and brushing. As I have already said, this mechanical and wearisome task reduces the journeyman watchmaker to the level of an automaton. Each day was spent in the same monotonous round, here a spring to repair, there a pin to replace (for cylinder watches were rare at that period), a chain to refasten; lastly, after a cursory examination of the works, a turn of the brush to make all bright again. Still I am far from wishing to run down the trade of a repairing watchmaker, and I can always honour the skill employed in repairing a watch by doing as little as possible.

Sometimes, it may be remarked, a watch comes back from the mender's in as bad a state as when it went. It is true, but with whom is the fault? In my belief, with the public. In the country, more especially, it is impossible to perform repairs conscientiously, for the public bargain about their watch or clock as they would do in buying vegetables. The consequence is, the watchmaker is forced to compound with his conscience, and the customer loses his money.

One thing is certain: I did not like the trade, and I was growing atrociously idle. But if I were cold and indolent

as regarded watch repairing, I felt a devouring need for activity in some other department. To satisfy this, I gave myself up entirely to an amusement which delighted me—I became an amateur actor.

No one, I fancy, can blame me for this; for, among those who read my confessions, I am sure there is hardly one who has not performed in some shape. From the boy who recites a speech at the school distribution of prizes, up to the old gentleman who often accepts the part of "heavy father" at one of those agreeable parties arranged on long winter evenings, not one but enjoys the sweet satisfaction of being applauded. I, too, had this weakness; and, urged on by my travelling recollections, I wished to appear once more before the public, who had already treated me so kindly.

Some young friends joined me in forming a light comedy company, and I had the pleasure of performing all Perlet's parts in the most fashionable pieces of the day. Our performance was gratis; hence, I need not say we had crowded audiences. Of course, too, we were all wonderful actors—at least, people told us so—and our gratified self-love found no cause for refusing their praise.

Unfortunately for our brilliant success, rivalry and wounded feelings, as so frequently happens, produced discord among us, and at last only the hairdresser and candle-snuffer were left of our goodly company. These two faithful followers, finding themselves thus abandoned, held a council, and, after mature deliberation, decided that they would accept each other's resignation, as they could not perform alone. In order to explain the heroic persistency of these two artistes, I may as well state they were the only persons paid for their services.

My father regretted to see me leave work for pleasure, and, in order to bring me back to healthy ideas, he formed a plan which must have the double advantage of improving my conduct, and tying me down to his side: in short, he meant to establish me in business, and make me marry.

I do not know—or, rather, I will not say—why I declined the latter proposal, under the pretext that I felt no inclination for marriage. As for my beginning business,

I easily made my father understand that I was too young even to dream of it. But I had hardly intimated my refusal, when a very simple circumstance entirely changed my views, and made me forget all my oaths of fidelity to a certain party.

The success my acting had met with procured me admission to certain salons, where I often spent an agreeable evening; for acting went on here, too, in the shape of charades.

One evening, we were requested, as usual, to enliven the visitors by one of our proverbs. I do not remember the word proposed; I only know I was chosen to fill the part of a bachelor gourmet. I sat down to table, and while indulging in a meal like those usually served up at a theatre, I improvised a warm defence of celibacy. This apology was all the more easy to me, as I needed only to repeat the fine arguments I had employed to my father about his double proposition. Now, it happened that, among the persons listening to this description of the blessings of celibacy, was a young lady of seventeen, who inclined a serious ear to my arguments against marriage. It was the first time I had met her; so I could not ascribe any other reason for her fixed attention than her desire to detect the word.

A man is always delighted to find an attentive listener, more especially when it is a pretty young girl: hence, I thought it my bounden duty to make some polite remarks to her during the course of the evening. A conversation ensued, and became so interesting, that we had a great deal still to say to each other when the hour came for separation, and I believe the regret at parting was not felt by myself alone.

This simple event was, however, the cause of my marriage with Mademoiselle Houdin, and this marriage took me to Paris. The reader will now understand why my name is Robert-Houdin; but I have also to add that this double name, which I at first assumed to distinguish me from my numerous homonymes, eventually became my patronymic, by a decision of the council of state. I may be pardoned for remarking that this favour, always so

difficult to obtain, was granted me in consideration of the popularity my long and laborious toil had gained me while using that name.

My father-in-law, M. Houdin, a celebrated watchmaker, was a native of Blois, and had gone to Paris, as a better field for his talents. He was now engaged in the wholesale clock trade, while making, with his own hands, astronomical clocks, chronometers, and regulators. It was agreed that we should live together, and that I should help him in his business.

M. Houdin was quite as fond as myself of everything appertaining to mechanism, and was thoroughly versed in the subject. Hence, we had long and interesting conversations on the topic, and at the end of one of these I confided to him my scheme of setting up a room for the display of mechanical toys and sleight-of-hand tricks. M. Houdin understood me, adopted my plans, and urged me to carry on my studies in the path I had chosen. Proud of the approbation of a man with whose extreme prudence I was acquainted, I gave myself up seriously during my leisure hours, to my favourite exercises, and began by contriving some instruments for my future cabinet.

My first care, on arriving at Paris, was to attend a performance of Comte's, who had long lorded it in his theatre at the Gallery Choiseul. This celebrated professor was now resting on his laurels, and only performed once a week. The other evenings were devoted to the performances of his young actors, who were perfect prodigies.

Many of my readers will remember his bills, with their singular announcement of the principal parts performed by M. ARTHUR, aged 5; MADemoiselle APELINA, aged 4½; MADemoiselle VICTORINE, aged 7; little VICTOR, aged 6. These baby actors attracted the whole of Paris.

Comte might have left the stage entirely, and contented himself with being manager and day-nurse to these children of Thalia, for he possessed a very comfortable fortune: but he made it a point to appear at least once a week, from a double motive: his performances, owing to their rarity, always exercised a beneficial effect on the receipts: and, on the other hand, by continuing to act he prevented

other professors of conjuring setting up in opposition to him

Comte's tricks were all drawn from the same repertory I knew by heart; hence they had no great interest for me; still I derived some profit from attending his performances, for I was enabled to study the audience.

I listened attentively to all said around me, and often heard very judicious remarks. These being generally made by persons not apparently gifted with great penetration, led me to the conclusion that the conjuror ought to distrust plain mother wit; and I worked out the problem to my own satisfaction: "that it is easier to dupe a clever man than an ignorant one."

This seems to be a paradox; but I will explain it.

The ordinary man only sees in conjuring tricks a challenge offered to his intelligence, and hence representations of sleight of hand become to him a combat in which he determines on conquering. Ever on his guard against the honeyed words by means of which the illusion is produced, he hears nothing, and shuts himself up in this inflexible reasoning:

"The conjuror," he says, "holds in his hand an object, which he pretends he makes disappear. Well, whatever he may say to distract my attention, my eyes shall not leave his hand, and the trick cannot be done without my finding out how he manages it."

It follows that the conjuror, whose artifices are principally directed to the mind, must double his address to delude this obstinate resistance.

The clever man, on the contrary, when he visits a conjuring performance, only goes to enjoy the illusions, and, far from offering the performer the slightest obstacle, he is the first to aid him. The more he is deceived the more he is pleased, for that is what he paid for. He knows, too, that these amusing deceptions cannot injure his reputation as an intelligent man, and hence he yields to the professor's arguments, follows them through all their developments, and allows himself to be easily put off the right scent.

. Is not my problem proved?

Comte was also an object of interesting study to me, both as manager and as artist. As manager, Comte could have challenged the most skilful to a comparison, and he was a famous hand at bringing grist to his mill. The little schemes a manager employs to attract the public and increase his receipts are tolerably well known; but Comte, for a long time, did not require to have recourse to them, as his room was always crowded. At length the day arrived when the benches allowed some elbow room; then he invented his "family tickets," his "medals," his "reserved boxes for the prize-holders at schools and colleges," &c. &c.

The family tickets gave admission to four persons at half price. Though all Paris was inundated with them, every one into whose hands one of these tickets came believed himself specially favoured by Comte, and none failed to respond to his appeal. What the manager lost in quality he amply regained in quantity.

But Comte did not stop here; he also wished that his *rose-coloured tickets* (the name he gave his family tickets) should bring him a small pecuniary profit, as compensation for reduced prices. He therefore offered each person who presented one of these tickets a copper medal, on which his name was engraved, and asked in exchange the sum of one penny. Suppose the ticket-holder declined, he was not admitted, and when matters came to that pass, people always paid.

It may be said that a penny was a trifle; but with this trifle Comte paid for his lights; at least he said so, and he may be believed.

During the holidays the pink tickets disappeared, and made room for those reserved for the school prize boys, which were far more productive than the others, for what parents could deny their sons the acceptance of M. Comte's invitation, when they could promise themselves the extreme pleasure of seeing their beloved boys in a box exclusively occupied by *crowned heads*? The parents, consequently, accompanied their children, and for a gratis ticket the manager netted six or seven fold the value of his graceful liberality.

I could mention many other ways Comte augmented his receipts by, but I will only allude to one more.

If you arrived a little late, and the length of the *queue* made you fear the places would be all taken, you had only to enter a small café adjoining the theatre, and opening into the Rue Ventadour. You paid a trifle more for your cup of coffee or your glass of liqueur, but you were quite sure that before the public were admitted the waiter would open a secret door, allowing you to reach the paying-place in comfort, and choose your seat. In fact, Comte's café was a true box-office, except that the spectator received something in return for the sum usually charged for reserving seats.

As artist, Comte possessed the double talent of ventriloquism and sleight of hand. His tricks were performed skilfully and with a good share of dash, while his performances generally pleased, for the ladies were treated most gallantly. My readers may judge for themselves from the following trick, which I believe was his own invention, and which always pleased me when I saw it.

This experiment was called "The Birth of the Flowers," and it began with a short address in the shape of agreeable pleasantry.

"Ladies," the professor said, "I propose on the present occasion to make twelve of you disappear from the pit, twenty from the first circle, and seventy-two from the second."

After the burst of laughter this pleasantry always produced, Comte added: "Reassure yourselves, gentlemen; in order not to deprive you of the most graceful ornament of this room, I will not perform this experiment till the end of the evening." This compliment, spoken very modestly, was always excellently received.

Comte proceeded to perform the trick in this way:

After sowing seeds in some earth contained in a small cup, he spread over this earth some burning liquid, and covered it with a bell, which, as he said, was intended to concentrate the heat and stimulate vegetation. In fact, a few seconds later, a bouquet of varied flowers appeared in the cup. Comte distributed them among the ladies who

graced the boxes, and during this distribution contrived to "plant" the following graceful remarks: "Madam, I keep a pansy (*pensée*) for you.—It will be my care, gentlemen, that you find no cares (*soucis*) here.—Mademoiselle, here is a rose which you have forced to blush with jealousy."

Before long the little bouquet was exhausted, but suddenly the conjuror's hands were liberally filled with flowers. Then, with an air of triumph, he exclaimed, displaying the flowers which had come as if by enchantment:

"I promised to metamorphose all these ladies: could I choose a form more graceful and pleasing? In metamorphosing you all into roses, I am only offering a copy for the original. Tell me, gentlemen, have I not succeeded?"

These gallant words were always greeted by a salvo of applause.

On another occasion, Comte, while offering a rose and a pansy to a lady, said: "I find you here, madam, exactly depicted. The rose represents your freshness and beauty; the pansy your wit and talent."

He also said, in allusion to the ace of hearts, which he had "passed" on one of the most beautiful women in the room: "Will you be kind enough, madam, to lay your hand on your heart? You have only one heart, I presume? Pardon my indiscreet question; but it was necessary; for, though you have only one heart, you might possess them all."

Comte was equally gallant towards sovereigns.

At the end of a performance he gave at the Tuileries, before Louis XVIII., he invited his majesty to select a card from the pack. It may be that chance led the king to draw his majesty of hearts! it may be, though, that the conjuror's address produced this result. During this time, a servant placed on an isolated table a vase filled with flowers.

Comte next took a pistol loaded with powder, in which he inserted the king of hearts as a wad; then, turning to his august spectator, he begged him to fix his eye on the vase, as the card would appear just over it. The pistol was

fired, and the bust of Louis XVIII. appeared among the flowers.

The king, not knowing how to explain this unexpected result, asked Comte the meaning of this strange apparition, adding, in a slightly sarcastic tone,

“I fancy, sir, that your trick has not ended as you stated.”

“I beg your majesty’s pardon,” Comte replied, assuming the manner of a courtier; “I have quite kept my promise. I pledged myself that the king of hearts should appear on that vase, and I appeal to all Frenchmen whether that bust does not represent the king of all hearts?”

It may be easily supposed that this trick was heartily applauded by the audience. In fact, the *Royal Journal* of the 20th December, 1814, thus describes the end of the performance:—

“The whole audience exclaimed, in reply to M. Comte, ‘We recognize him—it is he—the king of all hearts! the beloved of the French—of the whole universe—Louis XVIII., the august grandson of Henri Quatre!’

“The king, much affected by these warm acclamations, complimented M. Comte on his skill.

“‘It would be a pity,’ he said to him, ‘to order such a talented sorcerer to be burnt alive. You have caused us too much pleasure for us to cause you pain. Live many years for yourself in the first place, and then for us.’”

But though Comte was so amiable to ladies, he was pitiless to gentlemen. It would be a long story were I to describe all the spiteful allusions and mystifications to which his masculine spectators were exposed. For instance, there was his ace of hearts’ trick, which he ended by producing aces from every part of his victim’s body, who knew not what saint to implore in order to stop this avalanche of cards. Then, again, there was the bald-headed gentleman who had politely lent his hat, and received a volley of compliments of the following nature:—

“This article must belong to you,” said Comte, drawing a wig from the hat. “Aha, sir! it appears you are a family man. Here are socks—then a bib—a chemise—a charming little frock,” and, as the public laughed heartily, “on my

faith, a goody-two-shoes!" he added, producing a pair of shoes. "Nothing is wanting for the dress—not even the stays and their laces. I suppose, sir, you thought you could stay my tongue when you placed that article in your hat."

Ventriloquism added a great charm to Comte's performances, as it gave rise to numerous little scenes that produced a striking effect. This faculty too often suggested to him curious mystifications, the best of them (if such a thing can ever be good) being reserved for his travels, when they served as a puff of his performances, and helped to attract crowds.

At Tours, for instance, he induced the people to break in four doors, in order to rescue an unhappy man supposed to be dying of hunger. At Nevers he renewed the miracle of Balaam's ass, by causing a donkey that was weary of its master's weight to lift up its voice in complaint. One night, too, he caused a profound consternation in a diligence, for a dozen brigands were heard at the doors shouting, "Money, or your life!" The terrified passengers hastened to hand their purses and watches to Comte, who offered to treat with the robbers, and they retired apparently satisfied with their spoil. The passengers were glad to have escaped so cheaply, and the next morning, to their still greater satisfaction, the ventriloquist returned them the tribute they had paid to their fears, and explained to them the talent by which they had been duped.

Another time, at Mâcon fair, he saw a countrywoman driving a pig before her, which could hardly move, so laden was it with fat.

"What's the price of your pig, my good woman?"

"A hundred francs, my good-looking gentleman, at your service, if you wish to buy."

"Of course I wish to buy; but it is a great deal too much: I can offer you ten crowns."

"I want one hundred francs, no more and no less: take it or leave it."

"Stay," Comte said, approaching the animal: "I am sure your pig is more reasonable than you. Tell me, on your conscience, my fine fellow, are you worth one hundred francs?"

“ You are a long way out,” the pig replied, in a hoarse and hollow voice ; “ I’m not worth one hundred pence. I am meazled, and my mistress is trying to take you in.”

The crowd that had assembled round the woman and pig fell back in terror, fancying them both bewitched, while Comte returned to his hotel, where the story was told him with sundry additions, and he learned that some courageous persons had gone up to the woman, begged her to be exorcised, and thus drive the unclean spirit out of the pig.

Still, Comte did not always escape so easily ; and he almost paid dearly for a trick he played on some peasants at Fribourg, in Switzerland. These fanatics took him for a real sorcerer, and attacked him with sticks ; and they were even going to throw him into a lime-kiln, had not Comte escaped by causing a terrible voice to issue from the kiln, which routed them.

I will end my account of these amusing adventures with a little anecdote, in which Comte and myself were in turn mystifier and mystified.

The celebrated ventriloquist paid me a visit at the Palais Royal, and I accompanied him to the foot of the stairs on his departure. Comte walked down before me, still talking, so that the pockets of his coat were at my mercy. The opportunity was too good to neglect the chance of playing a trick on my talented *confrère*, so I filched his handkerchief and a handsome gold snuff-box : and I took care to turn the pocket inside out, as a proof that my performance had been properly executed.

I was laughing at the comic result my trick must have when I returned Comte his property ; but it was “ diamond cut diamond :” for, while I was thus violating the laws of hospitality, Comte was scheming against me. I had scarce concealed the handkerchief and box, when I heard a strange voice on the first floor landing.

“ Monsieur Robert-Houdin, will you be kind enough to step up to the box-office : I wish to speak to you.”

My readers will guess that the ventriloquist had played me a trick ; indeed, on reaching the office, I only found the clerk, who could not understand what I was talking about. I perceived, too late, that I was victimised, and I heard

Comte celebrating his victory by shouts of laughter. For a moment, I confess I felt vexed at having been taken in, but I soon regained my equanimity on thinking I might have the best of it yet. So I went down stairs very calmly.

"What did that person want?" Comte asked, with ill-repressed delight.

"Can't you guess?"

"I?—no."

"It was a penitent thief, who begged me to return you the articles he had filched from you. Here they are, my master!"

"I prefer it to end so!" Comte said, returning his pocket to its place. "We are now quits, and I hope we shall always be good friends."

From all the preceding remarks it may be concluded that the fundamental principles of Comte's performances were mystifying gentlemen (sovereigns excepted), complimenting ladies, and jesting with everybody. Comte was right in employing these means, as he generally gained his object; for he delighted and raised a laugh. At this period French manners justified such behaviour, and the professor, by flattering the taste and instincts of the public, was sure to please.

There has been a great change since, and puns are no longer held in such esteem: banished from good society, they have sought refuge in studios, where the pupils too often make an immoderate use of them, and though they may be permitted now and then among intimate friends, they are not proper in a performance of sleight of hand. The reason is very simple: not only do puns raise a belief that the artist fancies himself a wit, which may be injurious to him; but, if he succeed in raising a laugh, it weakens the interest felt in his experiments.

It is a recognized fact that, in those performances where imagination plays the chief part, "astonishment is a hundred-fold better than a silly laugh;" for, though the mind may remember what has delighted it, laughter leaves no trace on the memory.

Symbolical or complimentary language is also completely out of fashion, at least the age does not err in excess of gal-

lantry, and "musky" compliments would be badly received in public. I have always thought, too, that ladies visit a performance like mine in order to refresh their minds, and not to be put in evidence themselves. They possibly prefer to remain simple lookers-on rather than expose themselves to florid compliments.

As for mystification, a more powerful pen than mine must undertake its apology.

In saying this, I have no wish to cast censure on Comte. I am writing at this moment in accordance with the spirit of my age; Comte acted in accordance with his: we both succeeded, though differing in our treatment, and this only proves that "all styles are good except that which is wearisome."

These performances of Comte's, however, inflamed my imagination; I only dreamed of theatres, conjuring, mechanism, automata, &c.; I was impatient to take my place among the adepts of magic, and make myself a name in the marvellous art. The time I required in forming a determination seemed to me so much stolen from my future success. My success! I did not know what trials I should undergo ere I merited it. I had no suspicion of the toil, the care, and trouble which I should have to pay for it.

Still, I resolved on continuing my studies of automata and instruments suited to produce magical illusions. Though I had seen many of them while with Torrini, I had many more to learn, for the stock of conjuring tricks in those days was enormous. Fortunately I found an opportunity of materially abridging my studies.

I had noticed, while passing along the Rue Richelieu, a modest little shop, in front of which conjuring apparatus was exposed for sale. This was a piece of good luck, so I bought some of the things, and while paying repeated visits to the master of the shop, under pretext of asking information, I got into his good graces, and he grew to look on me as a friend.

Father Roujol (such was his name) was perfectly acquainted with his trade, and he held the confidence of every conjuror of note; hence, he could give me much valuable information, so I became more polite than ever,

and the worthy man soon initiated me into all his mysteries. But my repeated visits to the shop had another object as well, for I wished to meet some of the masters of the art who could increase my knowledge.

Unfortunately, my old friend's shop was not so visited as before. The revolution of 1830 had turned persons' ideas to more serious matters than "physical amusements," and the greater number of conjurors had wandered into strange countries. Old Roujol's good times had, therefore, passed away, which rendered him very gloomy.

"Things are not as they used to be," he would say, "and it might really be fancied the jugglers had juggled themselves away, for I don't see a single one. Will the time ever return," he added, when the Due de M—— did not disdain to visit my humble shop, and remain here for hours talking to me and my numerous visitors? Ah, that was a time! when all the first conjurors and amateurs formed a brilliant club here; for each of these masters, desirous of proving his superiority over the others, showed his best tricks and his utmost skill."

I felt the old gentleman's regret equally with himself, for I should have revelled in such society, as I would have walked any time twenty leagues for the sake of talking with a professor. Still, I had the luck to form here the acquaintance of Jules de Rovère, the first to employ a title now generally given to fashionable conjurors. Being of noble birth, he desired a title in accordance with it; but, as he had rejected with disdain the vulgar name of *escamoteur*, and as, too, that of *physicien* was frequently used by his rivals, he was compelled to create a title for himself.

One day the pompous title of "PRESTIDIGITATEUR" was visible on an enormous poster, which also condensed to supply the derivation of this breath-stopping word, *presto digiti* (activity of the fingers). Then came the details of the performance, intermingled with Latin quotations, which must attract the attention of the public by evidencing the learning of the conjuror—I beg pardon, prestidigitator.

This word, as well as *prestidigitation*, due to the same author, were soon seized upon by Jules de Rovère's rivals, who liked a good mouthful too. The Academy itself fol-

lowed this example by sanctioning the formation of the word, and thus handing it down to posterity. I am bound to add though, that this word, originally so pompous, is no longer a distinction, for, as the most humble jugglers were at liberty to appreciate it, it follows that conjuring and prestidigitation have become synonymous. The conjuror who requires a title should seek it in his own merit, and recognize the sound truth, that "it is better for a man to honour his profession than to be honoured by it." For my own part, I never made any distinction between the two names, and shall employ them indiscriminately, until some new Jules de Rovère arrive to enrich the Dictionary of the French Academy.

CHAPTER IX.

Celebrated Automata—A Brazen Fly—The Artificial Man—Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas d'Aquinas—Vaucanson—His Duck—His Flute-Player—Curious Details—The Automaton Chess-Player—Interesting Episode—Catherine II. and M. de Kempelen—I repair the Componium—Unexpected Success.

OWING to my persevering researches I had nothing left to learn in conjuring; but, in order to carry out my scheme, I had to study the principles of a science on which I greatly depended for the success of my future performances. I allude to the science, or rather art, of making automata.

While occupied with this idea I made active investigations; I applied to the public libraries and their keepers, whom my tenacious importunity drove into despair. But all the information I collected only brought me descriptions of mechanical toys, far less ingenious than certain playthings of the present day, or absurd statements of chefs-d'œuvre published in the dark ages. My readers may judge from the following:—

I found, in a work bearing the title "Apologie pour les Grands Homines Accusés de Magie," that "Jean de Mont-royal presented to the Emperor Charles V. an iron fly, which made a solemn circuit round its inventor's head,

and then reposed from its fatigue on his arm." Such a fly is rather extraordinary, yet I have something better to tell my readers—still about a fly.

Gervais, Chancellor to the Emperor Otho III., in his book entitled "Otia Imperatoris," informs us that "the sage Virgilius, Bishop of Naples, made a brass fly, which he placed on one of the city gates, and that this mechanical fly, trained like a shepherd's dog, prevented any other fly entering Naples; so much so, that during eight years the meat exposed for sale in the market was never once tainted."

How much should we regret that this marvellous automaton has not survived to our day! How the butchers, and still more their customers, would thank the learned bishop! Pass we to another marvel:

Francis Pious relates that "Roger Bacon, aided by Thomas Bungay, his brother in religion, after having rendered their bodies equal and tempered by chemistry, employed the Speculum Amuchesi to construct a brazen head, which should tell them if there were any mode of enclosing the whole of England by a high wall. They forged at it for seven years without relaxation, but misfortune willed it that when the head spoke the two monks did not hear it, as they were engaged on something else."

I have asked myself a hundred times how the two intrepid blacksmiths knew the head had spoken, when they were not present to hear it. I never discovered any other solution than this; it was, doubtlessly, *because their bodies were equalized and tempered by chemistry.*

But here is a far more astounding marvel.

Tostat, in his "Commentaries sur l'Enode," states that "Albertus Magnus, Provincial of the Dominicans at Cologne, constituted a brass man, which he worked at continually for thirty years. This work was performed *under various constellations, and according to the laws of perspective.*"

When the sun was in the sign of the Zodiac, the eyes of this automaton melted metals on which the characters of the same sign were traced. This intelligent machine was equally gifted with motion and speech, and it revealed to

Albertus Magnus some of his most important secrets.* Unfortunately, St. Thomas Aquinas, Albertus's pupil, taking this statue for the handiwork of the devil, smashed it with a big stick.

As a finale to these fables, which are well fitted to figure among the marvels performed by Perrault's fairies, I will quote from page 252 of the "Journal des Savants" for 1677: "The artificial man of Reysolius, a statue so resembling the human form, that, with the exception of the operations of the soul, everything that takes place in the body may be witnessed."

What a pity the mechanician stopped so soon! for it would have cost him so little, while making so exquisite a resemblance to the fairest work of the Creator, to add to his automaton a soul moving by clockwork!

This quotation does much honour to the savants who accepted the responsibility of such a statement, and is a further proof how history is written.

It may be easily supposed these works furnished me no guide to the art I so much wished to study; and although I continued my inquiries, I only attained the unsatisfactory result that nothing serious had been written on the subject of automata.

"What!" I said to myself, "can it be possible that the marvellous science which raised Vaucanson's name so high—the science whose ingenious combinations can animate inert matter, and impart to it a species of existence—is the only one without its archives?"

When about to give up the subject in despair, I stumbled on a memoir of the inventor of the "Automaton Duck." This memoir, bearing date 1738, is addressed by the author to the members of the Academy of Sciences. In it will be found a learned description of his flute-player, as well as a report of the Academy, which I here transcribe.

Extract from the Registers of the Royal Academy of Sciences for April 30, 1738:—

"The Academy, after hearing M. de Vaucanson's memoir

* "Les Secrets du Grand Albert," a work crammed with absurdities, and falsely attributed to Albertus Magnus.

read, containing a description of a wooden statue, copied from Coysvoix's marble fawn, which plays twelve different airs on a German flute with a precision deserving of public attention, was of opinion that this machine was extremely ingenious; that the inventor had employed novel and simple means both to give the fingers the necessary motion and to modify the wind entering the flute, by augmenting or diminishing its velocity, according to the various tones; by varying the arrangement of the lips, and setting a valve in motion to perform the functions of the tongue; lastly, by artificially imitating all that a man is obliged to do; and that, in addition, M. de Vaucanson's memoir possessed all the clearness and perception such matter is capable of, proving the intelligence of the author, and his great knowledge of the different branches of mechanism. In confirmation of which I have signed the present certificate.

“ FONTENELLE,

“ Perpetual Secretary, Royal Academy of Sciences.

“ Paris, May 3, 1738.”

After this report comes a letter of Vaucanson's, addressed to the Abbé D. F., in which he informs him of his intention of presenting to the public on Easter Monday—

1. A player of the German flute.
2. A player of the tambourine.
3. An artificial duck.

“ In this duck,” the celebrated automatist writes, “ will be noticed the mechanism of the viscera, intended to perform the functions of eating, drinking, and digesting. The action of all the parts is exactly imitated. The bird puts out its head to take up the seed, swallows it, digests it, and evacuates it by the ordinary channels.

“ All thoughtful persons will understand the difficulty of making my automaton perform so many different movements, as when it stands on its legs, and moves its head to the right and left. They will also see that this animal drinks, dabbles with its bill, quacks like a living duck, and, in short, is precisely similar in every respect.”

I was the more surprised at the contents of the memoir, as it was the first trustworthy information I had gained about automata. The description of the flute-player gave me a high opinion of the inventor's talent; but I much regretted finding so short an account of the mechanical combinations of the duck.

For a time I contented myself with admiring and believing in the great master's work, but in 1844, Vaucanson's duck was exhibited in a room at the Palais Royal.* Of course I was one of the first to visit it, and was much struck by its skilful and learned formation. Some time after, one of the wings having been injured, the duck was sent me to repair, and I was initiated into the famous mystery of digestion. To my great surprise, I found that the illustrious master had not disdained to have recourse to a trick which a conjuror would have been proud of. The digestion, so pompously announced in the memoir, was only a mystification—a real *canard*, in fact. Decidedly, Vaucanson was not only my master in mechanism, but I must bow before his genius for juggling.

The trick was as simple as it was interesting. A vase, containing seed steeped in water, was placed before the bird. The motion of the bill in dabbling crushed the food, and facilitated its introduction into a pipe placed beneath the lower bill. The water and seed thus swallowed fell into a box placed under the bird's stomach, which was emptied every three or four days. The other part of the operation was thus effected: Bread-crumbs, coloured green, was expelled by a forcing-pump, and carefully caught on a silver salver as the result of artificial digestion. This was handed round to be admired, while the ingenious trickster laughed in his sleeve at the credulity of the public. But, before leaving this subject, I must give a short biographical notice of this illustrious man.

Jacques de Vaucanson was born at Grenoble on the 24th February, 1709, of a noble family, and his taste for me-

* After Vaucanson's death, his works were dispersed and lost, with the exception of the duck, which, after remaining for a long time in a garret at Berlin, saw light again in 1840, and was purchased by a M. George Tiets, who spent four years in repairing it.

chanism was developed at an early age. In 1730, the flute-player at the Tuileries suggested to him the idea of constructing on this model an automaton which should really play the flute, and he spent four years in perfecting it. The story runs that Vaucanson's valet was the only person acquainted with his secret, and at the first notes produced by the flute-player, the faithful servant fell at his master's feet, as if he were more than mortal, and they embraced with tears of joy.

The duck and tambourine-player soon followed, and were chiefly intended to speculate on public curiosity. Though noble by birth, Vaucanson exhibited his automata at the fair of Saint Germain and at Paris, where his receipts were enormous. He is also said to have invented a loom on which a donkey worked cloth; this he made in revenge upon the silk-weavers of Lyons, who had stoned him because he attempted to simplify the ordinary loom. We also owe to Vaucanson a chain that still bears his name, and a machine to make meshes of equal size.

It is also said he invented for the performance of Mar-montel's *Cleopatra* an asp which fastened itself with a hiss on the bosom of the actress who played the principal character. On the first performance of the tragedy, a jester, more struck by the hissing of the automaton than by the beauty of the tragedy, exclaimed "I am of the asp's opinion!"

This illustrious mechanic retained all his activity to the last moment of his life. While dangerously ill, he devoted himself to his machine for making his endless chain.

"Do not lose a minute," he said to his workmen; "I fear I may not live long enough to explain my idea thoroughly."

Eight days later, on the 21st of November, 1782, he died, at the age of seventy-three; but before leaving this world, he had the consolation of seeing his machine at work.

One piece of good luck never arrives without another; thus, in 1844, I also saw at the house of a mechanic of the name of Cronier, at Belleville, the famous *Chess-player*, who defeated the whole chess world. I never saw it at

work, but since then I have received some information about the automaton of a certain degree of interest, and I trust my readers will feel the same surprise as I did when I heard it.

My story commences in Russia; the first division of Poland in 1792 had produced a certain fermentation, the effects of which were felt some years later. In 1796, a revolt broke out in a half-Russian, half-Polish regiment stationed at Riga, at the head of the rebels being an officer of the name of Worou-sky, a man of great talent and energy. He was of short stature, but well built; and he exercised such influence, that the troops sent to suppress the revolt were beaten back with considerable loss. However, reinforcements came from St. Petersburg, and the insurgents were defeated in a pitched battle. A great number perished, and the rest took to flight across the marshes, where the soldiers pursued them, with orders to grant no quarter.

In this rout Worou-sky had both thighs shattered by a cannon-ball, and fell on the battle-field; however, he escaped from the general massacre by throwing himself into a ditch behind a hedge. At nightfall, Worou-sky dragged himself along with great difficulty to the adjacent house of a physician of the name of Osloff, whose benevolence was well known, and the doctor, moved by his sufferings, attended upon, and promised to conceal him. His wound was serious, but the doctor felt confident of curing him, until gangrene set in, and his life could only be saved at the cost of half his body. The amputation was successful, and Worou-sky saved.

During this time, M. de Kempelen, a celebrated Viennese mechanician, came to Russia to pay a visit to M. Osloff, with whom he had been long acquainted. He was travelling about to learn foreign languages, the study of which he afterwards displayed in his splendid work on the "Mechanism of Words," published at Vienna in 1791. M. de Kempelen stopped a short time in every country the language of which he desired to learn, and his aptitude was so great that he acquired it very speedily.

This visit was the more agreeable to the doctor, as for

some time he had been alarmed as to the consequences of the noble action he had performed; he feared being compromised if it were found out, and his embarrassment was extreme, for, living alone with an old housekeeper, he had no one to consult or to help him. Hence, he told M. de Kempelen his secret, and begged his aid. Though at first startled by sharing such a secret—for he knew that a reward was offered for the insurgent chief, and that the act of humanity he was about to help in might send him to Siberia—still, M. de Kempelen, on seeing Worousky's mutilated body, felt moved with compassion, and began contriving some plan to secure his escape.

Dr. Osloff was a passionate lover of chess, and had played numerous games with his patient during his tardy convalescence; but Worousky was so strong at the game that the doctor was always defeated. Then Kempelen joined the doctor in trying to defeat the skilful player, but it was of no use; Worousky was always the conqueror. His superiority gave M. de Kempelen the idea of the famous Automaton Chess-player. In an instant his plan was formed, and he set to work immediately. The most remarkable circumstance is, that this wonderful chef-d'œuvre, which astonished the whole world, was invented and finished within three months.

M. de Kempelen was anxious his host should make the first essay of his automaton; so, he invited him to play a game on the 10th of October, 1796. The automaton represented a Turk of the natural size, wearing the national costume, and seated behind a box of the shape of a chest of drawers. In the middle of the top of the box was a chess-board.

Prior to commencing the game, the artist opened several doors in the chest, and M. Osloff could see inside a large number of wheels, pulleys, cylinders, springs, &c., occupying the larger part. At the same time, he opened a long drawer, from which he produced the chessmen and a cushion, on which the Turk was to rest his arm. This examination ended, the robe of the automaton was raised, and the interior of the body could also be inspected.

The doors being then closed, M. de Kempelen wound up

one of the wheels with a key he inserted in a hole in the chest; after which, the Turk, with a gentle nod of salutation, placed his hand on one of the pieces, raised it, deposited it on another square, and laid his arm on the cushion before him. The inventor had stated that, as the automaton could not speak, it would signify check to the king by three nods, and to the queen by two.

The doctor moved in his turn, and waited patiently till his adversary, whose movements had all the dignity of the Sultan he represented, had moved. The game, though slow at first, soon grew animated, and the doctor found he had to deal with a tremendous opponent; for, in spite of all his efforts to defeat the figure, his game was growing quite desperate. It is true, though, that for some minutes past, the doctor's attention had appeared to be distracted, and one idea seemed to occupy him. But while hesitating whether he should impart his thoughts to his friend, the figure gave three nods. The game was over.

"By Jove!" the loser said, with a tinge of vexation, which the sight of the inventor's smiling face soon dispelled, "if I were not certain Worosky is at this moment in bed, I should believe I had been playing with him. His head alone is capable of inventing such a checkmate. And besides," the doctor said, looking fixedly at M. de Kempelen, "can you tell me why your automaton plays with the left hand, just like Worosky?"*

The mechanician began laughing, and not wishing to prolong this mystification, the prelude to so many others, he confessed to his friend that he had really been playing with Worosky.

"But where the deuce have you put him, then?" the doctor said, looking round to try and discover his opponent.

The inventor laughed heartily.

"Well! do you not recognize me?" the Turk exclaimed, holding out his left hand to the doctor in reconciliation, while Kempelen raised the robe, and displayed the poor cripple stowed away in the body of the automaton.

* The automaton chess-player always used the left hand—a defect falsely attributed to the carelessness of the constructor.

M. Osloff could no longer keep his countenance, and he joined the others in their laughter. But he was the first to stop, for he wanted an explanation.

“But how do you manage to render Worousky invisible?”

M. de Kempelen then explained how he concealed the living automaton before it entered the Turk’s body.

“See here!” he said, opening the chest, “these wheels, pulleys, and cranks occupying a portion of the chest, are only a deception. The frames that support them are hung on hinges, and can be turned back to leave space for the player while you were examining the body of the automaton.

“When this inspection was ended, and as soon as the robe was allowed to fall, Worousky entered the Turk’s body we have just examined, and, while I was showing you the box and the machinery, he was taking his time to pass his arms and hands into those of the figure. You can understand that, owing to the size of the neck, which is hidden by the broad and enormous collar, he can easily pass his head into this mask, and see the chess-board. I must add, that when I pretend to wind up the machine, it is only to drown the sound of Worousky’s movements.”

“Very good, then,” the doctor replied, to show he perfectly understood the plan; “while I was examining the chest, my confounded Worousky was in the Turk’s body, and when the robe was lifted, he had passed into the chest. I frankly allow,” M. Osloff added, “that I was done by this ingenious arrangement; but I console myself with the idea that cleverer persons than I will be deceived.”

The three friends were the more delighted by the result of this private rehearsal, as this instrument furnished an excellent means of escape for the poor prisoner, and at the same time assured him a livelihood. The same evening the road by which the frontier should be reached was agreed on, as well as the precautions to be taken during the journey. It was also arranged that, in order to arouse no suspicions, performances should be given in all the towns they passed through, beginning with Toul, Kalouga, Smolensk, &c.

A month later, Worousky, now entirely recovered, gave

a first specimen of his marvellous skill to a numerous audience at Toula. I possess a copy of the original bill, which was given me by M. Hessler, nephew of Dr. Osloff, who also supplied me with all these details. Worousky won every game he played at Toula, and the papers were full of praises of the automaton. Assured of success by the brilliancy of their debut, M. de Kempelen and his companion proceeded towards the frontier.

It was necessary that Worousky should be concealed from sight somewhere even when travelling; hence he was literally packed up. The enormous chest in which the automaton was conveyed only travelled very slowly, apparently through fear of breaking the machinery, but in reality to protect the skilful chess-player who was shut up in it, while air-holes were made in the side of this singular post chaise to enable Worousky to breathe.

The poor cripple endured all this inconvenience calmly, in the hope of soon being out of reach of the Muscovite police, and arriving safe and sound at the end of this painful journey. The fatigue, it must be granted, was considerably alleviated by the enormous receipts they netted by the exhibition.

Our travellers had arrived at Vitebsk, on the road to the Prussian frontier, when one morning Kempelen rushed into the room where Worousky was concealed.

“A frightful misfortune hangs over us,” the mechanician said, in a terrible state of alarm, and showing a letter dated St. Petersburg. “Heaven knows how we shall escape it! The Empress Catherine, having heard through the papers of the automaton’s wonderful talent, desires to play a game with it, and requests me to bring it straight to the imperial palace. We must hit on some plan to evade this dangerous honour.”

To Kempelen’s extreme surprise, Worousky heard this great news very calmly, and even seemed to be pleased at it.

“Refuse such a visit!—by no means: the wishes of the Czarina are orders which cannot be infringed without peril; we must, therefore, obey her as quickly as possible. Your zeal will have the double effect of gaining her favour,

and removing any suspicions that might arise about your automaton. Besides," the bold soldier added, with a degree of pride, "I confess I should like to find myself face to face with the great Catherine, and show her that the head on which she set the price of a few roubles is, under certain circumstances, as good as her own."

"Madman that you are!" M. de Kempelen exclaimed, startled by the excitement of the impetuous insurgent. "Remember, that we may be discovered, and you will lose your life, while I shall be sent to Siberia."

"Impossible!" Worousky quietly replied; "your ingenious machine has already deceived so many skilful persons, that I am convinced we shall soon have one dupe more. Besides, what a glorious reminiscence, what an honour it will be to us, if we can say some day that the Empress Catherine II., the haughty Czarina, whom her courtiers proclaim the most intellectual person in her vast empire, was deceived by your genius, and conquered by me!"

Kempelen, though not sharing Worousky's enthusiasm, was obliged to yield. Hence, they set off without further argument; the journey was very long and fatiguing, but Kempelen did not quit his companion for a moment, and did all in his power to ameliorate his position. At length they reached their journey's end, but though they had travelled as fast as they could, Catherine, on receiving Kempelen, appeared rather angry.

"My roads must be very bad, sir, if you require fifteen days to travel from Vitebsk to St. Petersburg."

"Will your majesty," the crafty mechanic replied, "allow me to make a confession which will serve as my excuse?"

"Do so," Catherine replied, "provided it be not a confession of the incapacity of your marvellous machine."

"On the contrary, I would confess that, being aware of your majesty's skill at chess, I desired to offer you a worthy opponent. Hence, before starting, I made some additions which were indispensable for so important a game."

"Ah!" the empress said, with a smile, smoothed down

by this flattering explanation. "And you fancy these new arrangements will enable your automaton to beat me?"

"I should be much surprised were it otherwise."

"Well, we shall see, sir," the empress continued, nodding her head ironically. "But," she added, in the same tone, "when will you bring my terrible opponent before me?"

"Whenever your majesty may please."

"If that is the case, I am so impatient to measure my strength with the conqueror of the most skilful players in my country, that I will receive him this very evening in my library. Put up your machine there, and at eight o'clock I will join you. Be punctual!"

Kempelen took leave of Catherine, and hastened to make his preparations for the evening. Worosky was delighted at the prospect of amusing the empress; but, although Kempelen was resolved to risk the adventure, he wished to take all possible precautions, so that he might have a way of escape in case of danger. Hence, he had the automaton carried to the palace in the same chest in which it travelled.

When eight o'clock struck, the empress, accompanied by a numerous suite, entered the library, and took her place at the chess-board.

I have forgotten to say that Kempelen never allowed any one to pass behind the automaton, and would not consent to begin the game till all the spectators were in front of the board.

The court took their places behind the empress, unanimously predicting the defeat of the automaton. The chest and the Turk's body were then examined, and when all were perfectly convinced they contained nothing but the clockwork I have already mentioned, the game began. It proceeded for some time in perfect silence, but Catherine's frowning brow speedily revealed that the automaton was not very gallant towards her, and fully deserved the reputation it had gained. The skilful Mussulman captured a bishop and a knight, and the game was turning much to the disadvantage of the lady, when the Turk, suddenly

forgetting his dignified gravity, gave a violent blow on his cushion, and pushed back a piece his adversary had just moved.

Catherine II. had attempted to cheat; perhaps to try the skill of the automaton, or for some other reason. At any rate, the haughty empress, unwilling to confess her weakness, replaced the piece on the same square, and regarded the automaton with an air of imperious authority. The result was most unexpected—the Turk upset all the pieces with a blow of his hand, and immediately the clock-work, which had been heard during the whole game, stopped. It seemed as if the machinery had got out of repair. Pale and trembling, M. de Kempelen, recognizing in this Worowsky's impetuous temper, awaited the issue of this conflict between the insurgent and his sovereign.

“ Ah, ah! my good automaton! your manners are rather rough,” the empress said, good humouredly, not sorry to see a game she had small chance of winning end thus. “ Oh! you are a famous player, I grant; but you were afraid of losing the game, and so prudently upset the pieces. Well I am now quite convinced of your skill and your violent character.”

M. de Kempelen began to breathe again, and regaining courage, tried to remove the unfavourable impression which the little respect shown by the automaton must have produced. Hence he said, humbly,

“ Will your majesty allow me to offer an explanation of what has just happened?”

“ By no means, M. de Kempelen,” Catherine said, heartily—“ by no means; on the contrary, I find it most amusing, and your automaton pleases me so much that I wish to purchase it. I shall thus always have near me a player, somewhat quick perhaps, but yet able to hold his own. You can leave it here to-night, and come to me to-morrow morning to arrange the price.”

There is strong reason to believe that Catherine wished to commit an indiscretion when she evinced a desire that the figure should remain at the palace till the next morning. Fortunately, the skilful mechanician managed to baffle her feminine curiosity by carrying Worowsky off in

the big chest. The automaton remained in the library, but the player was no longer there.

The next day Catherine renewed her proposition to purchase the chess-player, but Kempelen made her understand that, as the figure could not perform without him, he could not possibly sell it. The empress allowed the justice of these arguments; and, while complimenting the mechanician on his invention, made him a handsome present.

Three months after, the automaton was in England, under the management of Mr. Anthon, to whom Kempelen had sold it. I know not if Worousky was still attached to it, but I fancy so, owing to the immense success the chess-player met with. Mr. Anthon visited the whole of Europe, always meeting with the same success; but, at his death, the celebrated automaton was purchased by Maelzel, who embarked with it for New York. It was then, probably, that Worousky took leave of his hospitable Turk, for the automaton was not nearly so successful in America. After exhibiting his mechanical trumpeter and chess-player for some time, Maelzel set out again for France, but died on the passage of an attack of indigestion. His heirs sold his apparatus, and thus Cronier obtained his precious relic.

My fortunate star again furnished me with an excellent occasion for continuing my studies. A Prussian of the name of Koppen exhibited at Paris, about the year 1829, an instrument known as the Componium. It was a perfect mechanical orchestra, playing operatic overtures with remarkable precision and effect, and it owed its name to the circumstance that, by means of truly marvellous arrangements, this instrument improvised charming variations without ever repeating itself. It was asserted to be as difficult to hear the same variation twice, as to find two similar quaternes drawn in succession at the lottery.

The componium was enormously successful, but at last public curiosity was exhausted, and it was withdrawn, after bringing in the owner one hundred thousand francs clear profit in a year. This amount, whether correct or not, was adroitly published, and some time after the instrument was put up for sale. A speculator of the name of

D—, seduced by the hope of obtaining equally large receipts in a foreign country, bought the instrument, and took it to England. Unfortunately for D—, at the moment when this goose with the golden eggs arrived in London, George IV. died; the court went into mourning, and no one visited the instrument. In order to avoid useless expense, D— thought it prudent to give up a scheme commenced under such evil auspices, and determined on returning to Paris. The componium was consequently taken to pieces, packed up, and carried to France.

D— hoped the instrument would enter duty free, but, on leaving France, he had omitted some formality indispensable before obtaining this favour. The Customs stopped it, and he was obliged to refer the case to the Minister of Trade. While awaiting his decision, the chests were deposited in damp ware-rooms, and it was not till the end of the year, and after numberless formalities and difficulties, that the instrument returned to Paris.

This will give an idea of the state of disorder, confusion, and damage in which the componium was left.

Discouraged by the ill success of his trip to England, D— resolved on selling his mechanical improviser, but, before doing so, he cast about for a mechanician who would undertake to put it in working order. I have forgotten to state that, on the sale of the componium, M. Koppen had handed over with it a very clever German workman, who was, as it were, the driver of this gigantic instrument. This person, finding he must sit with his hands before him during the interminable formalities of the French Customs, thought he could not do better than return home.

The repair of the componium was a tedious business—a work of perseverance and research—for, as its arrangement had always been kept secret, no one could supply the least information. D— himself, having no notion of mechanism, could not be of the slightest use, so the workman must only depend on his own ideas.

I heard the matter talked about, and, urged by a probably too flattering opinion of myself, or, rather, dazzled by the glory of executing such a splendid job, I offered to undertake the immense repairs.

I was laughed at: the confession is humiliating, but perfectly truthful. I must say, too, that it was justifiable, for I was only known at that time as a humble workman, and it was feared that, far from making the instrument act properly, I should cause still greater injury while trying to repair it. However, as D—— met with no better offer, and I offered to deposit a sum, to be forfeited in the event of my doing any injury, he eventually yielded to my wishes.

It will be allowed that I was a very conscientious workman; but, in reality, I acted for my own benefit, as this undertaking, by supplying me with an interesting object of study, would prove a perfect lesson in mechanism for me.

As soon as my offer was accepted, all the boxes in which the componium was packed were carried into a large room I used as a workshop, and emptied, pell-mell, into sheets, spread for the purpose on the ground.

When alone, and I saw this heap of rusty iron, these myriads of parts, whose meaning I did not understand, this orchestra of instruments of every size and shape, such as cornets, bugles, hautboys, flutes, clarionets, bassoons, organ pipes, big drum, triangle, cymbals, &c., all arranged in sizes, according to the chromatic scale, I was so frightened by the difficulty of my task, that I was quite annihilated for several hours.

To better understand my mad presumption, which only my passion for mechanics and my love of the marvellous can excuse, I must add that I never even saw the componium performing; hence, all was an unknown country for me. Add to this, that the greater portion of the works were covered with rust and verdigris.

Seated in the midst of this musical chaos, with my head resting in my hands, I asked myself a hundred times this simple question, "Where shall I begin?" and then my imagination was quite paralyzed. One morning, however, finding myself well disposed, and feeling the influence of the Hippocratic axiom, "Mens sana in corpore sano," I felt disgusted at my long sloth, and rushed headforemost at my immense task.

If my readers were only mechanics, how willingly

would I describe to them all my trials, attempts, and studies! With what pleasure I would explain the skilful and ingenious combinations that arose successively from this chaos! But, as I fancy I can see my readers turning over my pages to seek the end of a chapter that is growing too serious, I will check my inclination, and content myself with stating that, for a whole year, I proceeded from the known to the unknown, in solving this inextricable problem, and one day I had the happiness of seeing my labours crowned with complete success. The componium—a new phoenix—had risen from its ashes.

This unexpected success gained me the greatest praise, and D—— bade me name my own price; but I would not accept anything beyond my actual outlay, feeling amply repaid by such a glorious result. And yet, however high my reward might have been, it would not have repaid me what this task, which overtasked my strength, eventually cost me.

CHAPTER X.

An Inventor's Calculations—One Hundred Thousand Francs a Year by an Inkstand: Deception—My new Automata—The First Magician in France: Decadence—I meet Antonio—Bosco—The Trick with the Cups—An Execution—Resurrection of the Criminals—Mistake in a Head—The Canary rewarded.

My sleepless nights, my incessant toil, and, above all, the feverish agitations resulting from all the emotions of such an arduous undertaking, had undermined my health. A brain-fever attacked me, and though I recovered from it, it was only to pass five long years in listlessness and vacuity. My mind seemed quite gone: I felt no passion, no love, no interest, even in the arts I had so delighted in: conjuring and mechanism only existed for me in the shape of recollections.

But this illness, which had mastered the Faculty of Paris, could not resist the refreshing air of the country, where I retired for six months, and when I returned to

Paris, I was a new man. With what joy I saw again my beloved tools! With what ardour I resumed my work! for I had to regain not only the lost time, but also the enormous expenses incurred by my long illness.

My modest fortune was for the moment sensibly diminished, but on this point I was case-hardened; for would not my future performances fill up all these losses, and insure me a handsome fortune? Thus I discounted an uncertain future; but, after all, do not all inventors like to convert their schemes into ingots?

Perhaps, too, I unconsciously yielded to the influence of one of my friends, an extraordinary projector, whom mistakes and deceptions never hindered forming fresh schemes. Our manner of calculating the future had considerable affinity. But I must do him this justice: however high my estimate might be, he was far superior to me in that respect. Here is an instance to judge by.

One day this friend called upon me, and showing me an inkstand of his invention, which combined the double merit of being safe from upset, and of always keeping the ink at the same level, said,

“ At last, my lad, I have hit it; this invention will make a revolution in the writing world, and allow me to walk about like a gentleman, with a hundred thousand francs a year—at the very lowest, understand me. But you can judge for yourself, if you follow my calculations closely. You know, there are thirty-six millions of inhabitants in France?”

I nodded an affirmative.

“ Starting on this basis, I do not think I err if I assume that at least one-half can write, eh? or, say we take one-third, or, to be still more sure, the round sum of ten millions. Now, I hope I shall not be charged with exaggeration, if, out of these ten millions, I take one-tenth, or a million, as the number of those looking after what may be useful to them.”

And my friend stopped here, and looked at me as much as to say, “ Am I not reasonable in my estimates?”

“ We have, then, in France one million men capable of appreciating the benefits of my inkstand. Well, of this

number how many will you allow who during the first year hear of my inkstand, and consequently will purchase it?"

"Well," I replied, "I confess to a difficulty in giving you an exact answer."

"Good Heavens! who spoke about exactness? I only want an approximation, and that must be the lowest possible, that there may be no mistake."

"Well," I went on, continuing my friend's decimal calculations, "take a tenth."

"Now, mind, *you* said a tenth, or, in other words, one hundred thousand. But," the inventor continued, charmed at seeing me share his brilliant calculations, "do you know what the sale of these one hundred thousand inkstands will produce me in a year?"

"I can form no idea."

"I will then tell you. I have reserved myself one franc on each inkstand sold. This gives a profit, then——"

"Of one hundred thousand francs, of course."

"You see there is no difficulty in making the calculation. You must bear in mind, too, that the other nine hundred thousand writers we left on one side will end by appreciating my inkstand: they will also buy it. Then what will the nine millions we omitted do? And notice, too, that I am only speaking of France, which is a mere dot on the globe. When foreign countries know its merits, when the English and their colonies order it——(Oh, it would require a mathematician to reckon all this up!)"

My friend wiped his brow, which had grown quite damp during the heat of his address, and he ended by repeating, "Remember, we established our estimate on the lowest basis."

Unfortunately, that was the place where my friend's calculation broke down. His inkstand, being much too dear, was not purchased, and the inventor ended by adding this gold-mine to his many other deceptions.

I, too, I confess, based my calculations on the census, or, at least, on the approximative number of visitors to the capital, and even at the lowest figure I arrived at a most satisfactory result. But I do not regret having given way to these fancies, for though they occasioned me various

disappointments, they served to keep up some energy in my mind, and enabled me to wrestle against the numberless difficulties I encountered in making my automata. Besides, who has not, once in his life at least, indulged in the gilded calculations of my friend the inkstand inventor?

I have already repeatedly mentioned the automata I made, and it is high time to describe the nature of the articles intended to be used in my performances.

The first was a small pastrycook issuing from his shop-door at the word of command, and bringing, according to the spectator's request, patties and refreshments of every description. At the side of the shop assistant pastrycooks might be seen rolling paste and putting it in the oven.

Another specimen represented two clowns, Auriol and Debureau. The latter held out at arm's length a chair, on which his merry comrade performed acrobatic tricks, like his namesake at the Circus in the Champs Elysées. After these performances Auriol smoked a pipe, and ended by accompanying on the flageolet an air played by the orchestra.

The next was a mysterious orange-tree, on which flowers and fruit burst into life at the request of the ladies. As the finale, a handkerchief I borrowed was conveyed into an orange purposely left on the tree. This opened and displayed the handkerchief, which two butterflies took by the corners and unfolded before the spectators.

Lastly, I made a dial of transparent glass, which marked the hours at the will of the spectators, and struck the time on a crystal bell.

At the time I was most deeply engaged in these labours, I made a very agreeable rencontre. While walking along the Boulevards, full of thought, according to my usual habit, I heard some one calling me. On turning round, an elegantly-dressed man pressed my hand.

"Antonio!" I exclaimed, as I embraced him, "how glad I am to see you! but why are you here—what are you doing—and Torrini?"

Antonio interrupted me. "I will tell you all about it. Come to my apartments, where we shall be more at ease. I only live a few doors off."

In fact, within two minutes we stopped in the Rue de Lancry before a very handsome house.

“Go up,” Antonio said: “I live on the second floor.”

A servant opened the door. “Is your mistress at home?” Antonio asked.

“No, sir; but I was to tell you she would be in soon.”

After leading me into a pretty drawing-room, Antonio made me sit down by his side on a sofa.

“Now, my friend, let us talk, for we must have a great deal to tell each other.”

“Yes, let us talk; for I confess that my curiosity is strongly excited. I fancy at times I am dreaming.”

“I will bring you back to real life,” Antonio continued, “by telling you what has happened to me since we parted. Let us begin with poor Torrini.”

I made a movement of pained surprise.

“What do you say, Antonio? Can our friend——?”

“Yes, it is only too true. Death struck him at the moment we had every reason to hope a happier fate. On leaving you, Torrini intended to return as quickly as possible to Italy. The Count de Grisy was anxious to reassume his name, and revisit the scenes of past success, for he hoped there to become again the brilliant magician of yore. God decided otherwise. Just as we were about leaving Lyons, where he had been giving some successful performances, he was suddenly seized with typhus fever, which carried him off in a few days.

“I was his residuary legatee, and, after paying the last honours to a man to whom I had pledged my life, I began realizing my small fortune. I sold the horses and travelling carriage, and kept the apparatus, as I intended to use it. I had no profession, so I thought I could not do better than take up one, for which the road was clear before me, and I hoped that my name, to which my brother-in-law had given a certain celebrity in France, would assist me. It was very bold in me to try and fill the place of such a master, but I thought my impudence would answer as well as talent.

“Hence I called myself Signor Torrini, and, after the fashion of my rivals, I added the title of ‘first magician

of France.' Each of us is always the first and the most skillful in the country where he happens to be, unless he think proper to call himself the first in the whole world. Conjuring is a profession in which, as you know, no one errs through excess of modesty, and the custom of producing illusions facilitates this issue of bad money, which the public, it is true, appreciates and sets its real value on.

"So it behaved to me, for, despite my pompous announcements, I frankly confess it did not recognize the celebrity I claimed. On the contrary, my performances were so little attended, that my receipts were hardly sufficient for my existence. Still I went from town to town, giving my performances, and nourishing myself more often on hope than on reality. But the moment arrived when this unsubstantial food no longer sufficed me, and I was forced to stop. I had exhausted my resources: I had nothing left but my instruments. My clothes were reduced to the sheerest necessity, and threatened to desert me at any moment: thus hesitation was impossible. I decided on selling my instruments, and, provided with the small sum they produced me, I set out for Paris, the last refuge of those whose talent is neglected and position hopeless.

"In spite of my ill success, I had lost none of my stock of philosophy, and, though not very happy, I was full of hope in the future. Yes, my friend—yes, I had a presentiment at that time of the brilliant position fate reserved for me, and to which it led me, I may say, by the hand.

"Once arrived at Paris, I hired a modest room, and determined to live as sparingly as possible, in order to make my money hold out. You see that, in spite of my confidence in the future, I took some precautions, so as not to run the risk of dying of hunger; but you will allow I acted wrong in not trusting entirely to my lucky star.

"I had hardly been in Paris a week, when I met an old comrade, a Florentine, who used to perform as second basso in my old theatre. He, too, had been maltreated by Fortune, and, having come to Paris, he found himself reduced to accept a situation in the chorus of the Opera. When I had revealed my position to him, he told me a tenor situation was vacant in the chorus, and advised me to try

and get it: I accepted the offer with pleasure, though, of course, as merely transitional, for I felt a pang at my descent. Still, prudence suggested I had better guard against want.

"I have often noticed," Antonio continued, "that those events which inspire us with the greatest doubt turn out the most favourable, and mine was a case in point. As I had a good deal of spare time, I thought I would employ it in giving singing lessons. I therefore described myself as a singer at the Opera, while concealing the position I occupied there. Procuring my first pupil was as difficult as saving the first hundred pounds towards a fortune, and I had to wait a long time. At length I caught him; then others: and, gradually, I had enough pupils to enable me to leave the theatre.

"I must tell you this determination had another reason. I loved one of my lady pupils, and she returned my affection. Under such circumstances it was not prudent to remain a chorus-singer, which might have impeded my views. You naturally expect some romantic adventure; but nothing could be more simple than the event which crowned our loves—it was marriage.

"Madame Torrini, whom you will see presently, was the daughter of a retired laceman. Her father, a widower, with no other children, had no will but his daughter's, and he accepted my offers. He was the worthiest of men; but, unfortunately, we lost him two years ago. I retired from my professional duties on the fortune he left us, and I now live happily and calmly in a position which realizes my most brilliant dreams of old. This is another proof," my philosophic friend said, in conclusion, "that however precarious may be the position in which a man finds himself, he ought never to despair of luck turning."

My story was not so long as Antonio's, for, with the exception of my marriage, there was no event worthy narrating. I told him, however, of my long illness, and the work that had brought it on, and I had scarce ended when Madame Torrini entered the room. My friend's wife received me most kindly, saying:

"I have known you, sir, for a long time, as Antonio told

me your history, which caused me to feel the greatest interest, and my husband and myself often regretted we could not hear of you. Now, however, M. Robert," she added, "that we have found you, consider yourself an old friend of the family, and come to see us often."

I profited by this kind invitation, and more than once went to seek consolation and encouragement from these worthy friends.

Antonio still took an interest in conjuring, although it was a mere distraction by which he amused his friends. Still, not a conjuror announced his performances but he went to see him. One morning he entered my workshop in great haste.

"Look here," he said, offering me a paper, "as you run after all the celebrated conjurors, here is one that will astonish you. Read."

I took the paper eagerly, and read the following puff:—

"The famous Bosco, who can conjure away a house as easily as a nutmeg, is about to give his performances at Paris, in which some miraculous tricks will be executed."

"Well, what do you say to that?" Antonio asked me.

"A man must possess very great talent to undertake the responsibility of such praise. After all, I think the journalist is amusing himself at the expense of his readers, and that the famous Bosco only exists in his columns."

"You are quite wrong, my dear Robert: this conjuror is not an imaginary being, for not only have I read this puff in several papers, but I even saw Bosco last night at a café, giving some specimens of his skill, and announcing his first performance for next Tuesday."

"If it be so," I said to my friend, "I must ask you to spend the evening with M. Bosco, and I will come and call for you."

"Done," said Antonio; "mind and call for me on Tuesday at half-past seven, as the performance commences at eight."

At the appointed time we proceeded to the Rue Chantreine, where the performance was announced. At the money-taker's box we found ourselves face to face with a stout gentleman, dressed in a coat adorned with frogs and

trimmed with fur, making him look like a Russian prince on his travels. Antonio nudged me with his elbow, and said, in a whisper, "That's he!"

"Who's he?"

"Why, Bosco."

"All the worse," I said; "I am sorry for him."

"Explain yourself, for I do not understand the harm a Boyard's dress can do a man."

"My friend, I do not blame M. Bosco so much for his dress as for occupying his present place. I think an artiste cannot be too chary of his person off the stage; there is so much difference between the man whom an entire audience listens to and applauds, and the director who comes openly to watch his paltry interests, that the latter must injure the former."

During this conversation, my friend and myself had entered the room and taken our seats. According to the idea I had formed of a magician's laboratory, I expected to find myself before a curtain whose large folds, when withdrawn, would display before my dazzled eyes a brilliant stage ornamented with apparatus worthy of the celebrity announced; but my illusions on this subject soon faded away.

A curtain had been considered superfluous, and the stage was open. Before me was a long three-storied sideboard, entirely covered with black serge. This lugubrious buffet was adorned with a number of wax candles, among which glistened the apparatus. At the topmost point of this strange *étagère* was a death's-head, much surprised, I have no doubt, at finding itself at such a festival, and it quite produced the effect of a funeral service.

In front of the stage, and near the spectators, was a table covered by a brown cloth, reaching to the ground, on which five brass cups were symmetrically arranged. Finally, above this table hung a copper ball, which strangely excited my curiosity.*

For the life of me I could not imagine what this was

* Since this period Bosco has changed his stage decorations: his cloths have altered their colours, his candles are shorter, but the death's-head, the ball, the costume, and the tricks, have ever remained the same.

for, so I determined to wait till Bosco came to explain it. Antonio had entered into conversation with his neighbour, who spoke in the most enthusiastic manner of the performance we were about to witness. The silvery sound of a small bell put an end to my reverie and to my friend's conversation, and Bosco appeared on the stage.

The artiste had changed his costume: he had substituted for the Russian great-coat a little black velvet jacket, fastened round the waist by a leathern belt of the same colour. His sleeves were excessively short, and displayed a handsome arm. He wore loose black trousers, ornamented at the bottom with a ruche of lace, and a large white collar round his neck. This strange attire bore considerable resemblance to the classical costume of the Scapins in our plays.

After making a majestic bow to his audience, the celebrated conjuror walked silently and with measured steps up to the famous copper ball. After convincing himself it was solidly hung, he took up his wand, which he wiped with a white handkerchief, as if to remove any foreign influence; then, with imperturbable gravity, he struck the ball thrice with it, pronouncing, amid the most solemn silence, this imperious summons: *Spiriti mei infernali, obedite.*

I, like a simpleton, scarce breathed in my expectation of some miraculous result, but it was only an innocent pleasantry, a simple introduction to the performance with the cups. I was, I confess, rather disappointed, for, in my opinion, this performance was only suited for the public streets, and I did not expect any one would venture it on a Paris stage in 1838. I was justified in this view, as two persons, Mierre and Lesprit, might be daily seen going through this performance in the streets. Still, I must say that Bosco displayed great skill, and was heartily applauded by the public.

"Well," Antonio's neighbour said, victoriously, "was I not right?—is he not remarkably clever? But you'll see, that's nothing as yet."

Either Antonio was in a bad temper, or the performance did not please him, for he could not "plant" the admiration he had been quite prepared to bestow. In fact, he became most impatient when Bosco commenced the "pigeon trick."

Still, it must be allowed that the *mise en scène* and the execution were of a nature to irritate nerves even less sensitive than my friend's.

A servant placed on small tables on either side the stage two small blocks of black wood, on each of which a death's-head was painted. They were the blocks for the culprits. Bosco then came forward, holding a knife in one hand and a black pigeon in the other.

"Here is a pizon" (I forgot to state that Bosco spoke with a strong Italian accent) "zat has behaved badly. I am going to cut off his head; zall it be, ladies, wiz blood or wizout?" (This was one of his strong points.)

Some people laughed, but the ladies hesitated to reply to this strange question.

"Without blood," a spectator said. Bosco then placed the pigeon's head on the block, and cut it off, being careful to press the neck, and prevent the effusion of blood.

"You zee, ladies," the operator said, "zat ze pizon does not bleed, as you ordered."

"With blood," suppose another spectator said. Then Bosco loosened the artery, and let the blood run on a plate, which he handed round for inspection. The head, after being cut off, was placed upright on one of the blocks; and Bosco, taking advantage of a convulsive movement, which caused the beak to open, made this barbarous jest: "Come, mossiou, bow to zis amiable company—now once more. Ah, ah, zat is right."

The public listened, but no longer laughed.

The same operation was performed on a white pigeon without the slightest variation, after which Bosco placed the bodies in two false-bottomed boxes, being careful to put the black head with the white pigeon, and the white head with the black one. Then he repeated his conjurations over the boxes, and when he opened them, a black pigeon came out with a white head, and a white one with a black head. Each of the culprits, according to Bosco, had been restored to life, and assumed its comrade's head.

"Well, what do you think of that?" Antonio's neighbour asked him, as he clapped vociferously.

"To tell you the truth," my friend replied, "I must say

the trick is not very wonderful. Besides, I should like it better were it performed with less cruelty."

"Ah, you have delicate nerves, I see," the neighbour said; "perhaps you experience similar sensations when you see a fowl killed and put on the spit?"

"Allow me, sir, before answering you," my friend replied, sharply, "to ask if I have come here to see a kitchen performance?"

The discussion was growing warm, and was rather savage in its tone, when a third party terminated the dispute by the following jest:—

"Hang it, sir," he said to Antonio, "if you do not like cruelty, at any rate do not disgust other people with it."

Bosco now returned on the stage with a canary in his hand.

"Zentlemen," he said, "this is Piarot: he is very polite, and zall zalute you. Come, Piarot, do your duty." And he pinched the bird's claws with such force that the unfortunate tried to escape from this cruel clutch. Overcome by pain, it bent down over the juggler's hand, uttering cries of distress.

"Zat is good; I am zatisfied wiz you. You see, ladies, he not only zalute you, but he says 'Good night.' Continue, Piarot, you zall be rewarded."

The same torture made the bird bow twice more, and to *reward* it its master placed it in the hands of a lady, begging her to keep it. But during the passage the bird had ended its life, and reached the lady's hand dead. Bosco had strangled it.

"Oh, good Heavens, madam!" the conjuror exclaimed, "I believe you have killed my Piarot—you zall have squeezed him too moch. Piarot—Piarot!" he added, tossing the bird in the air, "Piarot, answer to me. Ah, madam, he is decidedly dead. What zall my wife say when she sees Bosco arrive wizout his Piarot: quite zurely I zall be beaten by Madame Bosco." (I must observe, here, that all I describe is literally true.)

The bird was interred in a large box, whence, after fresh conjurations, a living bird came out. This new victim was fated to suffer shorter agony. It was thrust *alive* into the

barrel of a large pistol, and Bosco, holding a sword in his hand, begged a spectator to fire at the point of the weapon he held out to him. The pistol was fired, and a third victim was seen spitted on the point of the sword.

Antonio rose. "Let us go," he said, "for I am turning sick."

I have seen Bosco several times since then, and each time I studied him carefully, not only to try and explain the cause of the great fashion he enjoyed, but also to be able to compare the various opinions expressed about this celebrated man. Here are some deductions drawn from my observations.

Bosco's performances generally please a large number, for the public suppose that, through some inexplicable address, the bird-murders are simply feigned, and, tranquil on this point, they indulge in all the pleasure caused by the talent of the conjurer and the originality of his accent.

Bosco has a quaint and full-sounding name, adapted to become popular, and no one knows better than he how to take advantage of it. Neglecting no opportunity for notoriety, he performs at any hour of the day, whatever may be the quality and number of the spectators. In a coach, at a table d'hôte, in cafés or shops, he never fails to give some specimen of his skill, by juggling a coin, a ring, and so on.

The witnesses of these little improvised performances consider themselves bound to return Bosco's politeness, by attending his public performance. They have formed the acquaintance of the celebrated conjuror, and are obliged to sustain the reputation of their new friend. Hence, they urge all their acquaintances to go also, puff off the performance, and thus the room is always full.

It must also be mentioned that numerous accomplices help Bosco's popularity materially. Each of them, it is known, is instructed to hand the magician a handkerchief, shawl, watch, &c., which he has in double. This allows him to pass them with an appearance of magic or skill, into a cabbage, a loaf, a box, or any other object. These accomplices, while aiding in the conjuror's experiments, have a great interest in securing their success: for their

self-love finds its profit in the success of the mystification. Besides, they have no objection to accept some of the applause as their due: hence, the magician has as many admirers as accomplices, and the influence a dozen intelligent prompters can exert in a room is well known.

Such were the influences which, joined to Bosco's talent, gained him a great renown for many years.

CHAPTER XI.

A Reverse of Fortune—Cookery and Clockwork—The Artist's Home—Invention of an Automaton—Voluntary Exile—A modest Villa—The Inconveniences of a Specialty—Two August Visitors—The Throat of a mechanical Nightingale—The Tiou and the Rrrrrrrrouit—Seven Thousand Francs earned by making Filings.

In the mean while I worked indefatigably at my automata, hoping that when these were completed, I should be able to establish myself permanently. But, in spite of my activity, I advanced very slowly towards the realization of my long-deferred hopes.

Only an inventor can know the value of a day's work on the gloomy road to success in combining automata. Numberless trials and deceptions of every nature foil at any moment the best-conceived plans, and seem to realize the pleasant story about reaching the end of a journey by making two steps forward and three backward.

I performed this wearisome progress during six months, and, at the end of that time, though I had several specimens far advanced, it was still impossible for me to fix the period when they would be quite finished. In order not to defer my appearance before the public, I therefore resolved to begin with my conjuring tricks and such automata as were ready. I had arranged with an architect, who was to help me in finding a suitable site for a theatre, but I had scarce taken my first steps, when an unforeseen catastrophe ruined both my father-in-law and myself.

This reverse of fortune threw me into a state of abject despondency, for I saw, to my terror, the realization of my

plans indefinitely postponed. I could no longer think of inventing machines, but must work, day by day, to support my large family. I had four children, all very young, and this was a heavy burden on a man who had never yet thought of his own interests.

The vulgar truth, "Time dissipates the severest griefs," is not the less true from being so often repeated; and it was the case with me. I was at first as wretched as man could well be; then my despair gradually died away, and made room for sorrow and resignation. At last, as it is not in my nature to keep up a melancholy character long, I ended by accepting the situation. Then the future, which had appeared so gloomy, assumed a different face, and, by a gradual process of reasoning, I began to indulge in reflections whose consoling philosophy restored my courage.

"Why should I despair?" I said to myself. "At my age, time itself is a fortune, and I have a considerable reserve fund of that. Besides, who knows whether Providence, by sending me this trial, has not wished to delay an undertaking that was not yet quite assured of success?"

In fact, what had I to offer the public that would overcome the indifference a new performer always inspires?—improved conjuring tricks? Those, I thought, would not prevent me failing, for I was unware at that period that, in order to please the public, an idea must be, if not novel, at least completely transformed, so that it cannot be recognized. Only in that way can an artiste escape a remark that always fills him with dread—"I have seen that before." My automata and mechanical curiosities would not have betrayed the hopes I built upon them, but I had too few, and the specimens I had in hand still required years of study and labour.

These wise reflections restored my courage, and, resigned to my new situation, I resolved to effect an utter reform in my budget. I had nothing more to look for than what I earned with my own hands, so I hired a modest lodging, at three hundred francs a year, in the Rue du Temple. It consisted of a room, a cabinet, and a stove in a cupboard, to which my proprietor gave the name of kitchen. I converted the largest room into our common

sleeping apartment, the cabinet served as my workshop, while the stove kitchen was used to prepare our modest meals.

My wife, though in delicate health, undertook the household department. Fortunately, this was not very laborious, as our meals were most modest; and as our rooms were limited in number, there was not much moving about required. The proximity of our mutual laboratories had also this double advantage, that, whenever my house-keeper was absent, I could watch the pot-au-feu or stir a ragoût without leaving my levers, wheels, and cogs.

These vulgar occupations for an artiste will make many a reader smile, but when a man cannot afford to keep a servant, and the quality of the dinner, consisting of a single dish, depends on the care devoted to it, it is better to pocket one's dignity and attend to the culinary department, at any rate, without feeling false shame. However, it appears that I performed my confidential mission admirably, for my exactitude gained me abundant praise. Still, I must confess that I had very slight talent for cooking, and this boasted exactitude was produced by my fear of incurring the reproaches of my head cook.

This humble existence was less painful to me than I had imagined. I had always been moderate, and the privation of succulent dishes affected me very little. My wife, surrounded by her children, to whom she devoted her utmost care, seemed equally happy, while hoping for better times to come.

I had resumed my first trade, that of repairing watches and clocks. Still, this was only to secure our hand-to-mouth existence, for all the while I was repairing I was meditating a piece of clockwork, the success of which restored some ease to our household. It was an alarm, which was thus arranged:—

You placed it by your side when you went to bed, and, at the hour desired, a peal aroused the sleeper, while, at the same time, a ready lighted candle came out from a small box. I was the prouder of this invention and its success, as it was the first of my ideas which produced me any profit.

This "alarm light," as I christened it, was so popular that, in order to satisfy the great demand for it, I was obliged to add a workshop to my rooms, and hire several workmen. Encouraged by such a favourable result, I turned my attention afresh to inventions, and gave a free scope to my imagination. I succeeded in making several more toys, among which was one which my readers will probably remember to have seen in the shop-windows. It was a glass dial, mounted on a column of the same material. This "mysterious clock" (as I called it), although entirely transparent, indicated the hour with the greatest exactness, and struck, without any apparent mechanism to make it move. I also constructed several automata, such as a conjuror playing with cups, a dancer on the tight-rope, singing birds, &c.

It may strike the reader that, with so many strings to my bow, and such amusing toys to make, my situation would be considerably improved, but it was not so. Each day, on the contrary, produced fresh trouble in my trade as well as in my household, and I even saw a financial crisis approaching which I found it impossible to prevent.

The cause of this result was very simple. While engaged with the mechanical toys I have just mentioned, I still worked at my theatrical automata, for which my passion had been again aroused by my present labours. Like the gambler, who throws his last farthing on the board, I invested all my earnings in my theatrical preparations, hoping these would soon repay me for my sacrifices with a hundred per cent. profit.

But it was fated that I should no sooner see the realization of my projects close at hand, than an unforeseen event should remove it again from my grasp. I had a sum of two thousand francs to pay at the end of the month: I had not a penny to meet it, and I had only three days left before the bill I had accepted became due.

Never did an embarrassment arrive more inopportune! I had just formed the plan of an automaton in which I had placed the greatest hopes. It was a "writing and drawing automaton," answering in writing or emblematic designs questions proposed by the spectators, and I intended

to employ this figure between the performances in my future theatre.

Once more was I obliged to check the flight of my imagination to absorb myself in the vulgar and difficult problem of meeting a bill when you have no money. I might, it is true, have saved myself all trouble by applying to my friends, but prudence and delicacy rendered it my duty to pay it from my own resources. Providence doubtlessly recognized the merit of my resolution, for he sent me a saving idea.

I had sold several mechanical toys to M. G——, a rich curiosity dealer, who had always treated me with marked kindness. I went to him, and gave him an exact description of my new automaton, and necessity must have rendered me eloquent, for M. G—— was so satisfied that he bought my automaton on the spot, which I bound myself to deliver to him within eighteen months. The price was arranged at five thousand francs, half of which M. G—— agreed to pay me in advance, reserving to himself the right, if I failed in my promise, of recouping himself by purchasing several of my automatic toys.

Imagine my joy when I returned home, holding in my hands the money to meet the bill! But the prospect of devoting myself for a long time to the manufacture of an article satisfying my mechanical taste, rendered me even happier.

Still, the princely way in which M. G—— had concluded the bargain produced some serious thoughts as to the promise I had made him. I now saw a thousand obstacles to prevent me keeping my word. I calculated that, even if I devoted every moment to my work, I should lose much time by causes I could not foresee or hinder. There were, first, friends, customers, and bores; then a family dinner, an evening party, that could not be declined, a visit that must be paid, and so on. These claims on politeness, which I must respect, would inevitably cause me to break my word: in vain I racked my brain in devising some scheme to gain time, or at least not to lose it; still, I could only succeed at the expense of my good temper. I there-

fore formed the resolution which my relations and friends declared to be madness, but from which they could not turn me, and that was to exile myself voluntarily until my task was completed.

Paris not appearing to me a secure place against annoyance, I chose the suburbs as my retreat, and one fine day, despite the prayers and supplications of my whole family, after intrusting my business to one of my workmen, whose talent and probity I was convinced of, I proceeded to Belleville, and installed myself in a little room in the Rue des Bois, which I hired for twelve months, at a hundred francs. The only furniture was a bed, a chest of drawers, a table, and a few chairs.

This act of madness, as my friends called it, or this heroic determination, as I called it, saved me from imminent ruin, and was my first step on the ladder of success. From this moment an obstinate will was aroused in me which enabled me to confront many obstacles and difficulties.

I am bound to confess that the first days of my retirement were painful, and I bitterly deplored the harsh necessity that thus isolated me from all I loved. The society of my wife and children had grown a necessity to me; a kiss from these dear beings restored my courage in hours of despondency, and now I was deprived of it. Surely I must have been supported by an enormous strength of will not to turn back at the prospect of this frightful vacuum.

Many times I furtively wiped away a tear, but then I closed my eyes, and straightway my automaton, and the various combinations that were to animate it, appeared before me like a consoling vision; I passed in review all the wheels I had created; I smiled upon them like so many children of my own; and when I emerged from this restorative dream I set to work again, filled with a courageous resignation.

It had been arranged that my wife and children should spend every Thursday evening with me, and I always dined at home on Sunday. These few hours devoted

to my family were the only amusements I allowed myself.

At my wife's request, the portress of the house had agreed to prepare my meals: this excellent creature, an old *cordon bleu*, had left service to marry a mason of the name of Monsieur Auguste. This gentleman, judging by my modest existence in the house, thought me a poor devil who found some difficulty in keeping himself: hence, he assumed an air of generous protection, or kindly pity, towards me. As he was a worthy man at the bottom, I pardoned his ways, and only laughed at them.

My new cook had received special instructions to treat me famously, but, not wishing to increase my household expenses, I, on my side, made stipulations which were kept with the greatest secrecy. I arranged my meals after the following fashion: Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays I lived on an enormous dish, to which my chef gave the generic name of *fricot*, but that made no difference to me. On Friday and Saturday, for the sake of my health, I lived low; haricot beans, either white or red, satisfied my hunger, and with them a composite soup, often reminding me of the gastronomic tastes of an Auvergnat, and I dined as well, and perhaps better, than Brillat-Savarin himself.

This mode of life offered me two advantages: I spent little, and indigestion never troubled the clearness of my ideas. I required this, however, for it must not be supposed that mechanical difficulties were the only ones I had to contend against in making my automaton. My readers may judge, from the following incident, which also proves the truth of the proverb, "Willing is doing."

At the commencement of my labour I had ordered from a wood-carver the body, head, legs, and arms of my writer, and had applied to an artist, particularly recommended to me as most skilful, and I had tried to make him understand the importance I attached to my automaton having an intelligent face. My Phidias had replied that I might trust to him.

A month after my sculptor made his appearance: he carefully removed the wrapper, and showed me arms and legs splendidly carved, and ended by handing me the head,

with an air that seemed to signify, "What do you think of that?"

After what I had already seen I was prepared to admire a masterpiece, but imagine my stupor on observing that the head belonged to a saint! Quite astounded at this, I looked at my friend as if seeking an explanation, but he did not seem to understand me, and continued to point out all the beauties of his work. I had no good reason to refuse it, for, after its fashion, it was a very fine head; so I accepted it, though it could be of no use to me. At any rate, I wished to know the motive that induced my sculptor to select such a type, and, by dint of cross-examination, I learned that his special trade was carving saints, and he could not emerge from his usual "groove."

After this check, I applied to another artist, being careful to inquire of him previously whether he had been in the habit of carving heads of saints. In spite of my precautions, I only got from this artist a head bearing a strong family likeness to those Nuremberg dolls made to act as lay figures in studios.

I had not the courage to make a third trial; yet my writer required a head, and I regarded my chefs-d'œuvre in turn. Neither could by possibility suit me. A head with not the slightest expression spoiled my automaton, while a holy Jerome on the body of a writer dressed in the Louis XV. style would be a terrible anachronism.

"And yet the face I want is engraved here," I said striking my forehead. "What a pity I cannot carve it—suppose I were to try!"

It has always been my character to set about a scheme as soon as I had formed it, whatever the difficulties might be. Hence I took a piece of modelling wax, made it into a ball, in which I formed three holes, representing mouth and eyes, then sticking on a patch for a nose, I stopped to admire my handiwork.

Have you ever noticed a toy belonging to earliest youth, representing two blacksmiths at work on an anvil, which they are made to strike in turn by pulling two parallel rods! Well, those mechanical combinations, sold at one

penny, I believe are perfect marvels of art in comparison with my first essay in modelling.

Dissatisfied, disgusted, and almost angry, I threw my clumsy attempt aside, and thought of some other plan to escape my difficulty. But I have already said I am obstinate and persevering in all I undertake, and the greater the difficulty seems, the more I feel myself pledged to surmount it. The night passed in dreams which showed me my task satisfactorily accomplished, and the next morning I took heart, and went at it again. In fact, by passing a chisel over my ball—by taking away from one side and adding to the other—I succeeded in making eyes, mouth, and nose, which, if not regular, had at least the appearance of a human form.

The following days were spent in fresh studies and improvements, and each time I noticed some progress in my work. Still a moment arrived when I was terribly embarrassed. The face was regular, but that was not enough. I must give it some sort of character; but as I had no model, the task seemed beyond my strength.

The idea struck me of looking in the glass, and judging from my own face what features produce expression. Sitting down, then, as if writing, I studied my full face and profile, and tried to imitate what I saw. I was engaged at this task a long while, incessantly touching and retouching, until one fine day I found my work finished, and I stopped to look at it more attentively. Judge of my surprise on finding that I had unconsciously produced an exact likeness of myself. Far from being vexed at this unexpected result, I was pleased, for it was quite natural this child of my imagination should have my features. I was not sorry to place this family seal on a work to which I attached such importance.

I had been now living for more than a year at Belleville, and I saw with extreme pleasure the end of my task and of my exile drawing near. After many doubts as to the success of my enterprise, the solemn moment arrived when I should make the first trial of my writer. I had spent the whole day in giving the last touches to the automaton, which sat before me as if awaiting my orders, and prepared

to answer the questions I asked it. I had only to press the spring in order to enjoy the long-awaited result. My heart beat violently, and though I was alone, I trembled with emotion at the mere thought of this imposing trial.

I had just laid the first sheet of paper before my writer, and asked him this question :—

“ Who is the author of your being ?”

I pressed the spring, and the clockwork began acting. I dared hardly breathe through fear of disturbing the operations. The automaton bowed to me, and I could not refrain from smiling on it as on my own son. But when I saw the eyes fix an attentive glance on the paper—when the arms, a few seconds before numb and lifeless, began to move and trace my signature in a firm handwriting—the tears started to my eyes, and I fervently thanked Heaven for granting me such success. And it was not alone the satisfaction I experienced as inventor, but the certainty I had of being able to restore some degree of comfort to my family, that caused my deep feeling of gratitude.

After making my Sossia repeat my signature a thousand times, I gave it this next question : “ What o’clock is it ?”

The automaton, acting in obedience to a clock, wrote : “ It is two in the morning.”

This was a very timely warning. I profited by it, and went straight to bed. Against my expectations, I enjoyed a sleep I had not known for a long time.

There may be among those that read my book some who have also created some successful work. They will know that next to the happiness of enjoying one’s own invention, nothing is so flattering as to offer it to the notice of a third party. Molière and J. J. Rousseau consulted their servants, and, I must confess, it afforded me great pleasure the next morning to invite my portress and her husband to be present at the first performance of my writer.

As it was Sunday, and M. Auguste had no work to do, I found him at breakfast. He held a modest sardine with his thumb on a piece of bread, while in the other hand he had a knife, the handle of which was fastened to his waist by a lanyard. My invitation was graciously accepted, and they came to my room to witness the aristocratic perform-

ance of a nobleman of the age of Louis XV. The mason's wife chose this question: "What is the emblem of fidelity?" The automaton replied by drawing a pretty little grayhound lying on a cushion. Madame Auguste, quite delighted, begged me to make her a present of the drawing, while her husband, having by this time finished his breakfast, begged to see the work, for, as he said,

"I understand something about that sort of thing, for I have always to grease the vane on the church steeple, and have even taken it down twice. Ah! if I were to direct my attention to mechanics, I have no doubt I should be very successful."

Although of course he understood nothing of what he saw, the worthy mason carefully examined the mechanical arrangements; then, as if yielding to an impulsive frankness, he said in a kindly protecting tone,

"If I was not afraid of vexing you, I would make an observation."

"Pray do so, Monsieur Auguste, and be sure I shall treat it as it deserves."

"Well, in your place, I would have made the mechanism much more simple; for then those who do not understand that sort of thing would be able to do so more easily."

With some difficulty I maintained sufficient gravity to reply:

"Your observation is very just, Monsieur Auguste; I had not thought of that: but be assured I shall now profit by your suggestions, and speedily remove half the machinery; there will be quite sufficient left."

"Oh, certainly," the mason said, believing in the sincerity of my remarks, "there will be quite enough left then."

At this moment the garden-bell rang, and M. Auguste, ever attentive to his duties, ran to answer it, and as his wife also took her departure, I was enabled to laugh at my ease.

It is curious that an automaton which was visited by all Paris, and gained me such reputation—that the designer, which interested Louis Philippe and his family so greatly, should at the outset only receive the stupid criticism of a

porter. Well, a man is no more a prophet in his own house than in his own country.

It was more extraordinary, though, that I had eventually to make an alteration in the automaton for the following reasons: the public (I do not mean the educated portion) generally understand nothing of the mechanical effects by which automata are moved; but they are pleased to see them, and often only value them by the multiplicity of their parts. I had taken every care to render the mechanism of my writer as perfect as possible, and had set great store on making the clockwork noiseless. In doing this I wished to imitate nature, whose complicated instruments act almost imperceptibly.

Can it be credited that this very perfection, which I had worked so hard to attain, was unfavourable to my automaton? On its first exhibition, I frequently heard persons who only saw the outside, say:

“That writer is first-rate; but the mechanism is probably very simple. It often requires such a trifle to produce great results.”

The idea then struck me of rendering the clockwork a little less perfect, so that a whizzing sound should be heard, something like cotton spinning. Then the worthy public formed a very different estimate of my work, and the admiration increased in a ratio to the intensity of the noise. Such exclamations as these were continually heard: “How ingenious! What complicated machinery! What talent such combinations must require!”

In order to obtain this result, I had rendered my automaton less perfect; and I was wrong. In this I followed the example of certain actors who overdo their parts in order to produce a greater effect. They raise a laugh, but they infringe the rules of art, and are rarely ranked among first-rate artists. Eventually I got over my susceptibility, and my machine was restored to its first condition.

My writer thus finished, I could have ended my voluntary imprisonment if I pleased; but I wished to finish another automaton, for which a residence in the country would be requisite. Although this second automaton was very complicated, it did not so fully occupy my time as the

first. It was a nightingale, which a rich merchant of St. Petersburg had ordered, and I had agreed to produce a perfect imitation of the song and actions of this delightful wood minstrel.

This undertaking offered some serious difficulties; for though I had already made several birds, their singing was quite arbitrary, and I had only consulted my own taste in arranging it. The imitation of the nightingale's pipe was much more delicate, for I had to copy notes and sounds which were almost inimitable.

Fortunately, we were in the season when this skilful songster utters his delicious accents; hence, I could employ him as my teacher. I went constantly to the wood of Romainville, the skirt of which almost joined the street in which I lived, and laying myself on a soft bed of moss in the densest foliage, I challenged my master to give me lessons. (The nightingale sings both by night and day, and the slightest whistle, in tune or not, makes him strike up directly.)

I wanted to imprint on my memory the musical phrases with which the bird composes its melodies. The following are the most striking among them: *tiou-tiou-tiou, ut-ut-ut-ut, tchitchou, tchitchou, tchit-tchit, rrrrrrrrrrrrouit, &c.* I had to analyze these strange sounds, these numberless chirps, these impossible rrrrrrouits, and recompose them by a musical process. Now, here was the difficulty. I only knew so much of music as a natural taste had taught me, and my knowledge of harmony was hence a very feeble resource. I must add that, in order to imitate this flexibility of throat, and reproduce these harmonious modulations, I had a small copper tube, about the size and length of a quill, in which a steel piston moving very freely, produced the different sounds I required; this tube represented in some respects the nightingale's throat.

This instrument would have to work mechanically: clockwork set in motion the bellows, opened or closed a valve which produced the twittering, the modulation, and the sliding notes, while it guided the piston according to the different degrees of speed and depth I wanted to reach.

I had also to impart motion to the bird : it must move its beak in accordance with the sounds it produced, flap its wings, leap from branch to branch, &c. But this part of my task troubled me much less than the other, as it was purely mechanical.

I will not attempt to describe to the reader all the trials and investigations I had to make ; suffice it to say that, after repeated experiments, I created a system, half musical, half mechanical, which only required to be improved by fresh studies. Provided with this instrument, I hurried off to the wood of Romainville, where I scated myself under an oak, near which I had often heard a nightingale sing, which I thought was the "star" among the virtuosi. I wound up the clockwork, and it began playing in the midst of profound silence ; but the last notes had scarce died away ere a concert commenced from various parts of the wood, which I was almost inclined to regard as a general protest against my clumsy imitation.

This collective lesson did not suit my purpose, for I wished to compare and study, and could positively distinguish nothing. Fortunately for me, all the musicians ceased, as if by word of command, and one of them began a solo : it was doubtlessly the *premier sujet*, the Duprez of the company—possibly the nightingale I have just mentioned. This tenor indulged me with a succession of dulcet sounds and accents, which I followed with all the attention of an industrious pupil.

Thus I passed a portion of the night ; my professor was indefatigable, and, for my part, I was not weary of listening. At length we were obliged to part, for, in spite of the pleasure I felt, I began to grow chilly and sleepy. However, my lesson had done me so much good, that the next morning I began making important corrections in my mechanism. After five or six more visits to the wood, I attained the required result—the nightingale's song was perfectly imitated.

After eighteen months' stay at Belleville, I at length returned home to enjoy the company of my wife and children ; in my absence my business had prospered, and I,

by the manufacture of my two automata, had gained the enormous sum of seven thousand francs.

Seven thousand francs by making filings, as my father used to say. Unfortunately, that excellent man could not enjoy the beginning of my success—I had lost him a short time before the reverse of my fortune. With his love for mechanical inventions, how proud he would have been of my successes!

Having thus regained a certain degree of comfort, I was now able to enjoy some amusement, and visit my friends, among them Antonio, who could not blame me for deserting him so long. In our long conversations, my friend never ceased to encourage me to realize the projects he had suggested—I mean my theatrical schemes, of which he predicted the certain success.

While not neglecting my work, I had recommenced my conjuring exercises, and began to make the acquaintance of several conjurors. I also wished to see those ingenious personages who, not having a theatre to display their talents in, visit the cafés. Such men as these are obliged to employ an extraordinary degree of skill, for they have to deal with people who are set upon detecting them. I met several interesting specimens from whom I learned something; but a slight adventure soon told me I must be on my guard in the choice of my acquaintances.

A conjuror, whom I had formerly met at Roujol's, and to whom I had rendered a service, introduced me one day to a person of the name of D——. He was a young man of prepossessing appearance, and very elegantly dressed, while his manners evidenced the thorough gentleman.

“My friend tells me, sir,” he said, after the usual salutations, “that you are in search of a person possessing a certain degree of address. Although I have no wish to compliment myself, I may be able to show many things you do not know.”

“I accept your offer willingly,” I replied, “but I must tell you beforehand I am not a novice.”

This introduction took place in my study, and we sat down to a table on which refreshments were served. This was a trap by which I intended to make my visitor more

communicative. I then took up a pack of cards, and showed him my dexterity in *sauter la coupe*, and various other tricks.

I was watching D—— to observe the impression I produced on him, and after a few moments' careful following of my hands, he gave his comrade a gentle wink, of which I did not understand the meaning. I stopped for a moment, and not wishing to ask a direct explanation, I opened a bottle of Bordeaux, and filled his glass several times. This scheme was successful; the wine loosened his tongue, and he told me something that surprised me.

"I have a remark to make, M. Robert-Houdin," he said, emptying his glass, and holding it out to be filled again; "I thought I had come here to deal with what we call a 'pigeon;' I perceive it is quite otherwise, and as I do not wish to expose the tricks by which I earn my livelihood, I will content myself with the pleasure of having formed your acquaintance."

The technical terms seemed to me a startling contrast to my visitor's elegant manners, still, as I did not wish to give in yet, I said, in a tone of disappointment, "I hope, sir, you will recall your decision, and not leave me till you have shown me how you handle the cards. You can do this without prejudice, I think?"

To my great satisfaction he at length consented.

"Very well," he said, taking up a pack of cards; "but you will see our modes of 'working' do not agree."

It would be difficult for me to give a name to what he performed in my presence. It was not, properly speaking, sleight of hand; they were tricks and processes applied to cards, and were so unexpected, that they must deceive everybody. This manipulation was only an exhibition, however, of certain principles I learnt at a later date.

Like singers who begin by being urged, and who, when they have once started, cannot leave off, D——, animated both by the sincere praise I offered him, and the great number of glasses of Bordeaux he had swallowed, said to me, with that frankness common to drinkers, "And now, sir, I will give you another hint. I am not a professor of sleight of hand, but only perform a few tricks I show to

amateurs. These lessons, you can understand, would not suffice for my livelihood, and I will tell you, then," he added, emptying his glass again, and holding it out to be filled, as if he wished me to pay for his confidence, "I visit in the evening houses where I have managed to gain an introduction, and profit by some of the principles I have just shown you."

"I suppose you give a performance?" D—— smiled slightly, and repeated the wink he had once before given his comrade.

"Performances!" he replied. "Never! or, rather, I give them after my own fashion; I will explain that to you presently, but I will first amuse you by telling you how I manage to get a handsome prize for the lessons I give my amateurs; after that I will return to my *performances*."

"You can suppose, for reasons easy to understand, that I only give lessons to young men whose pockets I presume are well lined. On beginning my explanations I tell my pupil that I leave the price to him, and during the lesson I perform an interlude which must heighten his generosity."

"Drawing near my pigeon—pray pardon the word——"

"I have already done so."

"Ah, very good; I beg your pardon. I say, taking one of his buttons in my hand, 'Here is a mould piercing the cloth, and you might lose it.'

"At the same time I throw a Louis on the table; then I examine his buttons, one after the other, and pretend to draw a gold piece from each. As I only perform this trick as a harmless pleasantry, I pick up my gold with the greatest indifference. I even push my indifference so far as to leave one or two by mistake on the table, but only for a short time, of course."

"I continue my lesson, and, as I expected, my pupil pays but slight attention to it, being fully engaged with the reflections I have no skilfully suggested. Can he offer five francs to a man who appears to have his pocket full of gold? Of course not; the least he can do is to add one more piece to those I had displayed, and that always happens."

“Like a modern Bias, then, I carry all my fortune about me; I am sometimes tolerably rich, and then my pockets are well lined. Often enough, too, I am reduced to a dozen of these ‘yellow boys,’ but them I never touch, as they are the instruments by which I procure others. Many times I have gone without my dinner, though having this small fortune in my pocket, because I laid it down as a rule not to break into it.”

“The performances you give in society,” I said to my narrator, in order to bring him back to that point, “are of course more lucrative!”

“They are so, but prudence prevents me giving them so often as I should like.”

“I do not understand you.”

“I will explain my meaning. When I am in society, I am a young man of good family, and, like all young men, play. The only difference is, I have my own way of playing, which is not that of all the world, but it seems it is not bad, because it often renders chances favourable. You shall judge.”

Here my narrator stopped to refresh himself, then, as if doing the most legal or harmless thing in the world, he showed me several tricks, or rather acts of swindling, which he executed with so much grace, skill, and simplicity, that it would be impossible to detect him.

In order to understand the effect these culpable confessions produced upon me, my readers ought to know what it is to love a science of which you seek to solve the mysteries. Far from feeling repugnance or even disgust at this man with whom justice would have one day an account to settle, I admired, I was stunned! The finesse and perfection of his tricks made me forget their blameworthy application.

At length my Greek left me, and so soon as he was gone the remembrance of his confessions sent the blood to my cheeks. I was as ashamed of myself as if I had been his accomplice. I even reproached myself severely for the admiration I could not restrain, and the compliments it extorted from me. In some measure to compound with my conscience, I ordered my door to be closed against this

man ; but it was an unnecessary precaution—I never heard of him again.

Strangely enough, in consequence of my meeting with D——, and the revelations he had made me, I was enabled, at a later period, to render a service to society by unmasking a piece of swindling which the most skilful experts could not detect.

In 1849, M. B——, a magistrate belonging to the police-office of the Seine, begged me to examine and verify one hundred and fifty packs of cards, seized in the possession of a man whose antecedents were far from being as unblemished as his cards. The latter, indeed, were perfectly white, and this peculiarity had hitherto foiled the most minute investigation. It was impossible for the most practised eye to detect the least alteration or the slightest mark, and they all seemed very respectable packs of cards.

I consented to examine the cards, as I hoped to detect a manœuvre which must be clever as it was so carefully concealed. I could only do so after my performance was over, and so each night, before going to bed, I sat down with a bright lamp, and remained at my task till sleep or want of success routed me from my post.

Thus I spent nearly a fortnight, examining, both with my eyes and a strong magnifying glass, the form and imperceptible varieties in the cards composing the one hundred and fifty packs. I could detect nothing, and, weary of the job, I began to agree in the opinion of the previous experts.

“I am sure there is nothing the matter with these cards,” I said, one night, angrily, as I threw them across the table.

Suddenly I fancied I noticed a pale spot on the glistening back of these cards, and near one of the corners. I stepped forward, and it disappeared, but, strangely enough, it reappeared as I fell back.

“What a magnificent dodge!” I exclaimed in my enthusiasm. “I have it: that is a distinguishing mark.”

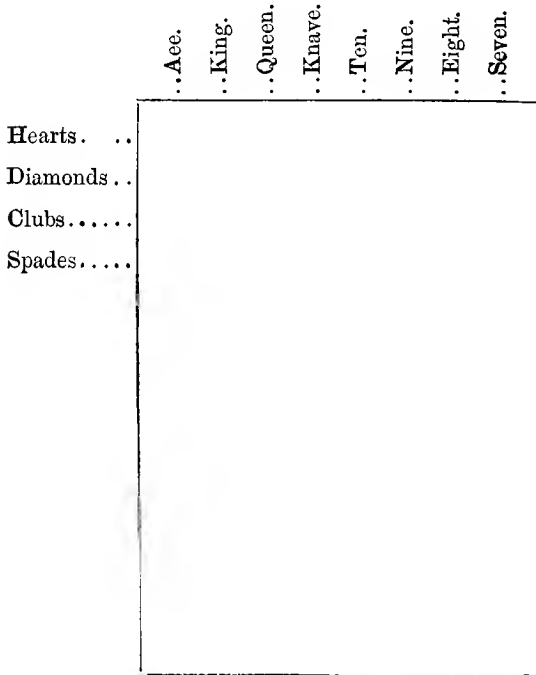
And following a certain principle which D—— had explained to me, I assured myself that all the cards possessed

a mark, which, according to its position, indicated the value and colour.

For the last quarter of an hour I have been burning with a desire to explain to my readers a most interesting process, but I am restrained by the fear that this ingenious swindling may facilitate false play. Still, it is an indubitable truth, that "to avoid a danger, it must be known." Hence if every player were initiated into the stratagems of the card-swindlers, the latter would find it impossible to employ them.

I am therefore inclined to make the communication I have stated, that a single mark placed in a certain part of a card is sufficient to make it known. To explain this, I must employ a diagram.

DIAGRAM 1.



Suppose a card divided into eight parts vertically, and four horizontally, as in diagram 1 ; the former will indicate the value of the cards, the latter the suit. The mark is placed at the point where the two lines intersect. Such is the process : practice does the rest.

As for the process employed in impressing the mysterious mark I have mentioned, I may be excused from stating it, as my object is to expose swindling, and not show the way to do it. Suffice it to say that, looked at closely, this point is lost in the white of the card ; but, at a distance, the light renders the card brilliant, while the mark alone remains dull.

At the first blush it will appear, perhaps, rather difficult to find out the division to which the isolated dot on the back of the card belongs. Still, by a little attention, it may be accurately detected by a practised eye. Thus, on my diagram, the dot indicates the Queen of Diamonds.

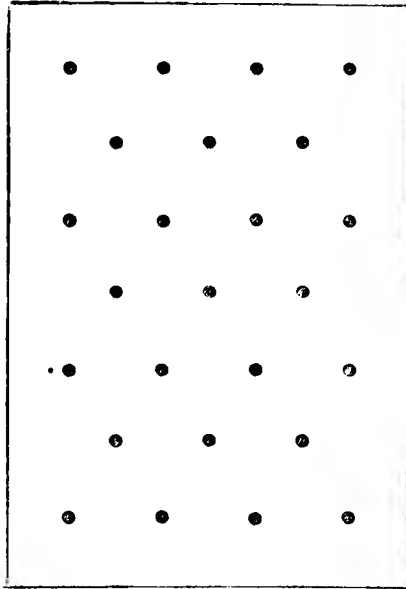
It must be remembered that a Greek using these cards, stakes, I will not say his honour, but his liberty, against fortune, and that he has carefully studied an art on which his livelihood depends.

After the explanation I have given, I can easily imagine my reader forming an heroic determination.

“Since these things take place,” he says to himself, “I will only play with chequered cards, and so I shall be safe.”

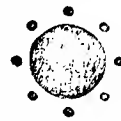
Unfortunately, chequered cards are better adapted for swindling purposes than the others, and to prove it, I must employ another diagram. Suppose the chequer to be formed of dots, or any other figures regularly arranged, as is usually the case with fancy-backed cards

DIAGRAM 2.



The first dot, starting from the left-hand top of the card, as in the previous diagram, will represent hearts; the second, downwards, diamonds; the third clubs; and the fourth spades. If, now, another small dot is placed by the side of one of these chequers, it will indicate the value of the card. This dot must be placed in one of the divisions marked in diagram 3. The topmost point indicates an ace; the next, to the right, a king; the third, a queen; the fourth, a knave; and so on. Of course, a single dot, as in diagram 2, when it is placed by the third point or colour, indicates the eight of clubs.

DIAGRAM 3.



There are many other arrangements, but they are more difficult to explain than to understand. Thus I have had chequered cards given me to inspect which had had no mark at all on them, but the pattern was more or less

altered by the way in which the cards were shaped, and this simple peculiarity indicated them all.

There are also the cards on the edge of which the Greek, when playing, makes a mark with his thumb-nail, which he can detect as they pass through his hands. If he is playing *écarté*, the kings are thus marked, and when these pass through his fingers, he can, by a familiar trick, leave them on the pack, and deal the next card. This substitution can be done so cleverly that it is impossible to detect it. I have also met persons of such practised sight that, after playing two or three games with a pack, they could recognize every card.

Returning to the prepared cards, it may be asked how it is possible to change the cards, for in all society where play goes on, the cards are only taken out of the paper just before beginning.

Well! this is simple enough. The Greek finds out at what shop these houses buy their cards: at the first he will make some small purchases, so that he may be regarded as a regular customer: then, on one fine day, he says that a friend has commissioned him to buy a dozen packets of packs. The next day these are brought back under the pretext that they are not of the colour required, and as the packets are still sealed, the tradesman, full of confidence, changes them for others.

But the Greek has spent the night in undoing the bands and sealing them up again by a process known to conjurors; the cards have been all marked and properly arranged, and as the tradesman has them now in his shop, the trick is accomplished. Before long they will reach the house where they are wanted.

All these swindling arts are very shocking, but there is another even more so in the shape of "imperceptible telegraphy." Without the slightest appearance of collusion, a Greek can tell his partner every card his opponent holds in his hand by a system similar to that of my "second sight."

I could describe many other tricks, but I will stop here. I believe I have said enough about card-sharppers and their swindling to induce a person never to sit down but with persons whose honour is unimpeachable.

CHAPTER XII.

The Inventive Genius of a Sugar-baker—Philippe the Magician—His Comic Adventures—Description of his Performance—Exposition of 1844—The King and Royal Family visit my Automata.

THE long looked-for change in my fortunes had at length arrived; my automata had gained me a certain degree of reputation, and I was making arrangements to commence my performances. Before describing these, I must devote a few pages, however, to some account of my immediate predecessor in the conjuring art, whose success in Paris at that period was most brilliant: I mean Philippe, the renowned magician, sorcerer, sleight-of-hand performer, and conjurer.

Philippe Talon was born at Alais, near Nîmes; after having carried on his sweet trade of confectioner for some time in Paris, his want of success compelled him to expatriate himself. London, that *pays de Cocagne*, the prospective El Dorado, was close at hand; so our tradesman proceeded thither, and soon set up again in trade in the capital of the United Kingdom. The French confectioner had fair chance of success, for in addition to the English liking for sweet-stuff, French confectionary has ever enjoyed a reputation in that country, only comparable with that which *real* English blacking has so long held in France. Still, despite these advantages, it seems that fresh difficulties arose; the fogs of the Thames, or, as some say, dangerous speculations, melted the fragile wares; the confitures suffered a decided discomfiture.

Talon packed up a second time, and went to Aberdeen, to ask shelter from the Scotch mountaineers, to whom he offered in exchange his seductive eates. Unfortunately, the Scotch of Aberdeen, differing greatly from the mountaineers in *La Dame Blanche*, wear neither silk stockings nor patent leather shoes, and consume very few jujubes and tarts. Thus, the new shop would soon have undergone

the fate of the other two, had not Talon's inventive genius found an issue from this precarious position.

The confectioner rightly thought that, in order to sell wares, they must be known; and in order for them to be known, they must be made known. Relying on this judicious reasoning, Talon soon compelled the Aberdonians to eat his sugar-plums, and, better still, to pay for them.

At this period, there was a company of actors at Aberdeen much in the same condition as Talon's "goodies;" they were neglected, and no one cared to try them. In vain had the manager prepared a pantomime full of tricks and blue-fire, the public remained deaf to his repeated appeals.

One fine day, Talon called on the Scotch impresario: "I have a proposal to make to you, sir," he said, without further preface, "which, if accepted, will fill your theatre, I am convinced."

"Pray explain yourself, sir," the manager said, nibbling at the bait, but putting little faith in a promise which he had good reasons for believing difficult of realization.

"It is simply," Talon continued, "to join to the attraction of your performance a lottery, for which I will pay all the cost. This shall be the arrangement: each spectator, on entering, must pay, in addition, the sum of sixpence, giving him a claim—

"1. To a paper of mixed sugar-plums.

"2. To a lottery-ticket, by which he may gain the first prize, of the value of five pounds."

Talon also promised a new performance, the secret of which he confided to the manager under the seal of discretion.

These proposals being accepted, the bargain was soon completed, and the intelligent Talon had not deceived himself. The public, attracted by the bonbons, the pantomime, and the promised surprise, filled the theatre.

The lottery was drawn; the prize made one person happy, and the other twelve or fifteen hundred spectators, provided with their papers of sugar-plums, consoled their disappointment by exchanging their "goodies." Under

such favourable circumstances the pantomime was found charming.

Still, this piece was drawing to its close, and the promised surprise had not yet come off, when suddenly the dancers in the ballet arranged themselves in a circle, a sharp cry was heard, and a magnificent Punch bounded on to the stage. It was Talon, disguised by two cotton humps and the traditional costume.

Our new artist performed Punch's eccentric dance with rare talent, and was heartily applauded. To thank the audience for their kind reception, the dancer tried to make a bow, but managed it so clumsily that he fell over on his side and could not rise again. The performers hastened to pick the wounded man up; he spoke in a faint voice, and complained of a broken rib. He earnestly asked for a box of Morrison's pills, and a servant hastened to bring him pills of an enormous size.

The public, who till then had pitied poor Punch's pain, and remained silent sympathizers, now began to scent a jest. First they smiled, and then they laughed when the patient, taking one of the pills, pretended to swallow it. Half a dozen having followed the same road, Punch found himself perfectly recovered, so, making a polite bow, he retired amidst shouts of laughter.

Philippe had given his first performance — the confectioner had exchanged the barley-sugar stick for the magician's wand.

This burlesque scene met with extraordinary success, and the receipts swelled day by day, until the confectioner had disposed of all his wares. Then he set off to give a specimen of his new talent in other towns.

I do not know whence the new magician acquired his art, but it is probable (historical gaps are always filled up with probabilities) that Talon had learned conjuring, as he had Punch's dance, to amuse his friends. One thing is certain, the performance he offered the worthy Aberdonians was not first rate, and it was not till he left that town that he made the great improvement to which he owed his future reputation.

Henceforth, laying aside his confitures and Punch's garb

and squeak, Philippe (the name the conjuror assumed traversed England, giving at first very modest performances. Then, his repertory becoming gradually increased by a certain number of tricks he picked up from conjurors of the day, he attacked the large towns, and proceeded to Glasgow, where he built a wooden theatre, in which to give his performances.

While the magic temple was building, Philippe noticed among the bricklayers' lads a young fellow who seemed to have remarkable intelligence, and he eventually engaged him to appear on the stage as assistant magician. Macalister (as his assistant was called) had a natural genius for tricks and models; he required no apprenticeship in this mysterious art, and, indeed, soon invented some tricks which attracted his master's attention.

From this moment, either by Macalister's help, or for some other reason, success attended Philippe everywhere, and he began acting in theatres. After a lengthened tour through England he crossed over to Dublin, where he acquired two new tricks, which were the foundation of his future reputation.

Three Chinese, who had come to France to perform some very startling tricks, attempted some performances at Paris, which, owing to their ill success, caused a quarrel among the Celestials. In France, as well as in China, "horses fight when there is no hay in the manger," and though our jugglers did not have recourse to such extremities, they separated. One of them proceeded to Dublin, where he taught Philippe the "gold-fish" trick, as well as the "rings." On learning the first of these tricks, Philippe was in great trouble about performing it, for he wanted a robe. He could not assume a Chinese costume, as his face had none of the distinguishing features of a mandarin, nor could he dream of a dressing-gown, for, however rich it might have been, the public would not have endured such a slight. Hence Philippe extricated himself from the difficulty by assuming the attire of a magician. It was a daring innovation, for, till that period, no conjuror had ventured to take on himself the responsibility of such a costume.

Once possessed of these two tricks, Philippe formed the project of returning to his ungrateful country; he therefore came to Paris in the summer of 1841, and performed at the Salle Montesquieu. The gold-fish and ring tricks, a brilliant costume, a magnificent pointed cap, and a comfortably arranged room, soon attracted large audiences, among whom was the manager of a Vienna theatre. Delighted with the performance, the latter on the spot offered the conjuror an engagement at half profits, which Philippe willingly accepted. As the Salle Montesquieu was used for public balls during the winter, this engagement also allowed him time to have a theatre constructed in readiness for his return to Paris.

The opening of the room Bonne-Nouvelle created a sensation in Paris when Philippe came back from his Austrian tour, and crowds went to see the gold-fish trick, which the performances in the Salle Montesquieu had made known.

My reader will have the kindness to accompany me to the *Palais des Prestiges* (as the new temple of magic was christened), and we will attend one of the magician's performances.

On reaching the end of the first floor passage in the Bonne-Nouvelle Bazaar, you passed through a doorway, and were quite surprised to find yourself in a room excellently adapted for this style of performance. There were stalls, pit, gallery, and boxes; the decorations were most elegant, and, above all, there was plenty of room to stretch your legs.

An orchestra, composed of six musicians of doubtful talent, executed a symphony to the accompaniment of the *melophone*, a species of accordion recently invented by a man of the name of Leclerc, who undertook the musical arrangements of the Palace.

The curtain rises.

To the great surprise of the spectators the stage is in perfect darkness.

A gentleman dressed in black emerges from a side door and walks towards us. It is Philippe: I recognize him by the Provençal twang of his accent. All the other specta-

tors take him for the manager, and fear they are about to hear some painful intelligence, as this gentleman holds a pistol in his hand.

Their uncertainty is, however, soon dispelled, for Philippe introduces himself. He states that he has been delayed in his preparations, but, in order to save time, he will light the innumerable candles on his stage by firing a pistol. Although a fire-arm is not required for the experiment, and is only intended to throw powder in the spectator's eyes, the candles are suddenly lighted at the sound of the detonation.

The audience applaud vociferously, and deservedly so, for this trick is remarkably striking. However much it may be applauded, the time it requires for preparation, and the mortal terror it occasions the performer, are beyond recompense.

In fact, like all experiments in which static electricity plays the chief part, this magical inflammation is not infallible. When this misfortune occurs, the position of the operator is the more embarrassing, as the phenomenon has been announced as the result of magic. Now, a magician must be omnipotent, or, if he be not so, he must avoid at all risks any failure which may lower his prestige in the eyes of the audience.

The stage once lighted, Philippe commenced his performance. The first part, composed of very average tricks, was relieved by the manœuvres of some curious automata. For instance :

The *Cossack*, which should have been called the *Grimacer*, so quaint were the contortions in which it indulged. This Cossack was also a very clever juggler, for it passed into its pocket with considerable skill various articles of jewellery its master had borrowed from the spectators.

The *magic peacock*, which uttered its unmelodious screech, expanded its gorgeous plumes, fed from its master's hand, &c.

And lastly, a *Harlequin*, like the one I repaired for Torrini.

After the first part of the performance, the curtain fell

to enable preparations to be made for a scene called in the bills "A festival at a Palace in Nankin." This was an attractive title for those who dealt in that description of cloth, but was only chosen to call to the spectator's memory the Chinese trick, which would end the performance.

When the curtain rose again the stage was entirely transformed. The tablecloths had been replaced by brocades glistening with gold and precious stones (at least they looked so at a distance); the candles, although so numerous before, had been multiplied, and gave the stage the appearance of a fiery furnace, the veritable abode of an ally of the Evil One.

The magician made his appearance in a costume which, in the public admiration, it must have exhausted the riches of Golconda to buy, and the *Festival of Nankin* commenced with the very clever trick derived from the Chinese.

Philippe took up several rings about eight inches in diameter, and intertwined them into chains and knots with the greatest possible ease. Then suddenly, when it seemed impossible for him to unravel his handiwork, he blew upon them, and the rings fell separately at his feet. This trick produced a charming illusion.

The one that succeeded it, and which I never saw performed by any one else, was quite equal to the preceding one in interest.

Macalister, the Scotch bricklayer (who on the stage was a negro of the name of Domingo), brought in on a table two sugar-loaves, still covered with that horrible paper which the honest grocer sells at the price of colonial wares. Philippe borrowed a dozen handkerchiefs (not from accomplices), and after placing them in a blunderbuss, he fired at one of the sugar-loaves chosen by the audience. He then broke it asunder with an axe, and all the handkerchiefs were found in it.

Next came *Fortunatus's hat*. Philippe, after producing from this hat, which he had borrowed from a spectator, an innumerable number of objects, at last pulled out enough feathers to make a bed. The most amusing part of this

trick consisted in the conjuror making a lad kneel down, who was completely buried in this avalanche of feathers.

Another striking trick was the one called "The Kitchen of Parafaragaramus." At Philippe's request two schoolboys came on the stage, whom he dressed, one as scullion, the other as professed cook. Thus metamorphosed, the two young *cordons bleus* underwent all sorts of pleasant-ries and mystifications. (This was a trick of Castell's school.)

The conjuror then proceeded to perform the trick: for this purpose he suspended from a tripod an enormous copper caldron full of water, and ordered the two lads to put in it dead pigeons, an assortment of vegetables, and plenty of seasoning. Then he lit some spirits of wine under the caldron, and pronounced some magical incantations. At his voice, the pigeons, returning to life, flew out of the caldron; while the water, vegetables, and seasoning had entirely disappeared.

Philippe usually ended the evening's performance with the famous Chinese trick, to which he had given the pompous name of "Neptune's Basins, or the Gold-Fish."

The magician, clothed in his brilliant costume, mounted on a sort of low table, which isolated him from the stage. After a few manœuvres to prove he had nothing about him, he threw a shawl at his feet, and, on lifting it up, he displayed a glass basin filled with water, in which gold-fish swam about. This was thrice repeated, with the same result; but, in his desire to improve on his brethren of the Celestial Empire, the French conjuror had added a variation to their trick, which gave an amusing termination to the performance. Throwing the shawl on the ground for the fourth time, several animals, such as rabbits, ducks, chickens, &c., emerged from it. This trick was performed, if not gracefully, at least in a way to excite the lively admiration of the spectators.

Generally, Philippe was very amusing in his entertainment. His experiments were performed with a good deal of conscientiousness, skill, and dash, and I have no hesitation in saying that the conjuror of the Bonne-Nouvelle Bazaar might then be considered one of the best of the day. Philippe

quitted Paris the following year, and has since performed entirely in foreign countries, or the provinces.

Philippe's success would not have failed to rekindle my desire to realize my theatrical schemes, had not, at this period, a misfortune hurled me into a state of profound wretchedness. I lost my wife.

Left with three young children, I was obliged to undertake their charge, although so unskilled in household cares. Thus, at the end of five years, robbed by some, deceived by others, I had almost lost all that my labour had produced me, and was going to ruin.

Forced by my intolerable position, I determined on reconstituting my home, and I married again. I shall have so many occasions of speaking of my new wife, that I shall refrain at present from praising her according to her deserts; besides, I am not sorry to abridge these domestic details, which, though personally important to me, only possess a very slight interest in my story.

The Exhibition of 1844 was about to open, so I asked and obtained leave to exhibit some specimens of my skill. The site granted me, opposite the door of honour, was undoubtedly one of the best in the hall, and I erected a circular stand, on which I placed a specimen of all the mechanical pieces I had as yet made. Among these my Writer took the first place, which M. G—— had been kind enough to lend me for the occasion. I may say I enjoyed all the honour of the exhibition, for my productions were constantly surrounded by a crowd of spectators, who were all the more eager as the performance was gratis.

Louis Philippe paid daily visits to the Palace of Industry, and as my automata had been pointed out as deserving his attention, he evinced a wish to see them, and gave me twenty hours' notice of his visit. I thus had time enough to make all my arrangements. The king arrived, holding the Comte de Paris by the hand, and I stood on his left hand to explain my various articles. The Duchess of Orleans was by my side, and the other members of the royal family formed a circle round his majesty, while the crowd, kept back by the keepers of the palace and the police agents, left an open space round my exhibition.

The king was in a charming humour, and seemed to take a pleasure in all I showed him. He frequently asked me questions, and missed no occasion to show his excellent judgment. At the end of the *séance*, the party stopped before my Writer. This automaton, it must be borne in mind, wrote or drew according to the question asked. The king made the following inquiry: "How many inhabitants does Paris contain?" The Writer raised its left hand as if to indicate that it required a sheet of paper, on receiving which, it wrote very distinctly, "Paris contains 998,964 inhabitants."

The paper passed from the king's hand into those of the royal family, and all admired the beauty of the writing; but I saw that Louis Philippe had a critique to offer, for his smile proved that plainly enough. Hence I was not surprised when, pointing to the paper which had come back to him, he said:

"Monsieur Robert-Houdin, you did not, perhaps, recollect that this number will not agree with the new census, which is almost completed?"

Contrary to my expectations, I felt quite at ease with my illustrious visitors.

"Sire!" I replied, with sufficient assurance for a man not much accustomed to the society of crowned heads, "I hope at that period my automaton will be intelligent enough to make any necessary corrections."

The king appeared satisfied with this reply, and I took advantage of his good humour to mention that my Writer was also a poet, and explained that, if he would deign to offer it an unfinished quatrain, the automaton would fill up the rhyme in the fourth line. The king chose the following:—

Lorsque dans le malheur, accablé de souffrance,
Abandonné de tous, l'homme va succomber,
Quel est l'ange divin qui vient le consoler?
C'est

L'Espérance, the Writer added to the fourth line.

"That is really charming," the king said to me. "But, Monsieur Robert-Houdin," he added, in a confidential tone, "you must have given your writer instructions in the poetic art?"

“Yes, sire, as far as my weak powers permitted.”

“Then my compliment is merited more by the master than the pupil.”

I bowed to thank the king as much for his compliment as for the delicate manner in which it was conveyed.

“Now then, Monsieur Robert-Houdin,” Louis Philippe continued, “I see by the notice attached to this automaton that it is a draughtsman, in addition to its merits as a writer and poet. If it be so, come,” he said, addressing the Comte de Paris, “choose your own subject for a drawing.”

Thinking to cause the prince an agreeable surprise, I had recourse to palmistry to influence his decision, and he consequently selected a crown. The automaton began drawing the outline of this regal ornament with great skill, and every one followed its movements with interest, when, to my great disappointment, the point of the draughtsman’s pencil broke, and the crown could not be finished. I was going to recommence the experiment, when the king declined with thanks.

“As you have learned to draw,” he said to the Comte de Paris, “you can finish this for yourself.”

This performance, besides being the prelude of the kindly interest the Orleans family afterwards displayed towards me, probably exerted some influence on the decision of the jury, which granted me a silver medal.

CHAPTER XIII.

My proposed Reforms—I build a Theatre in the Palais Royal—Formalities—General Rehearsal—Singular effect of my Performance—The Largest and Smallest Theatre in Paris—Tribulation—My first Performance—Panic—Discouragement—A Fallible Prophet—Recovery—Success.

It may seem strange that I thus pass from my mechanical labours to my studies in sleight of hand; but if my readers will bear in mind that these two sciences were to unite in producing my success, it will easily be understood that I felt an equal degree of affection for them, and that after

mentioning one I must allude to the other. The Exhibition did not drive from my thoughts my theatrical projects.

The instruments intended for my future performances were on the point of completion, for I had never stopped working at them. I was hence enabled to commence operations as soon as an opportunity offered. In the mean time, I determined on the changes I intended to introduce into the usual routine of conjuring performances.

Remembering Torrini's principles, I intended to have an elegant and simple stage, unencumbered by all the paraphernalia of the ordinary conjuror, which looks more like a toyshop than a serious performance. I would have none of those enormous metal shades usually placed over objects that are to disappear, and whose secret duties cannot escape the notice of the simplest spectator. Apparatus of transparent or opaque glass, according to circumstances, would suffice for all my operations. In the performance of my tricks I also intended to abolish those double-bottomed boxes of which some conjurors made such an abuse, as well as all instruments designed to make up for the performer's want of skill. Real sleight of hand must not be the tinner's work but the artist's, and people do not visit the latter to see instruments perform.

Of course, after the abuse I have showered upon the use of accomplices, I quite did away with them. I have always regarded such trickery as unworthy a real artist, as it raises doubts as to his skill. Besides, having frequently acted as an accomplice, I remember the unfavourable impression this employment had left upon me as to the talent of my partner.

Jets of gas, covered by opaque globes, were to be substituted on my stage for the thousands of candles, whose brilliancy is only intended to dazzle the spectator, and thus injure the effect of the experiments.

Among the reforms I intended to introduce on the stage, the most important was the abolition of those long tablecloths reaching to the ground, beneath which an assistant is always suspected, and generally, with some show of reason. For these immense chests of deception I substituted consoles of gilt wood after the style of Louis XV

Of course, I abstained from any eccentric costume, and I

never thought of making any change in the attire civilized society has agreed to accept for evening dress, for I was always of opinion that bizarre accoutrements, far from giving the wearer any consideration, on the contrary, cast disflavour upon him.

I had also traced out for my performances a line of conduct from which I never diverged; that was to make no puns or play upon words, and never to permit myself to be guilty of a mystification, even were I sure of gaining the greatest success.

Finally, I wished to offer new experiments divested of all charlatanism, and possessing no other resources than those offered by skilful manipulation, and the influence of illusions.

This was, it will be seen, a complete regeneration in the art of conjuring; my only fear was whether the public would accept these important reforms and such elegant simplicity. It is true, Antonio, the usual confidant of my plans and thoughts, strongly encouraged me.

“Don’t be alarmed about your success,” he said; “you have precedents to prove the good taste of the public, and their willingness to accept reforms based on reason. Remember Talma appearing suddenly at the Théâtre-Français clothed in the simple antique toga, at a time when tragedies were performed in silk coats, powdered perukes, and red heels.”

I accepted the reasoning, though I did not recognize the justice of the comparison. In fact, Talma could impose his taste on the public by the authority of his talent and reputation, while I, who as yet held no brevet rank in the army of conjurers, trembled to see my innovations badly received.

We had now reached the month of December, 1844, and, having nothing further to detain me, I decided on striking the grand blow—that is to say, I went out one morning determined on finding a site for my theatre. I passed the whole day in attempting to find a spot combining advantage of situation, chance of receipts, and many other benefits. I stopped through preference at the best spots and before the handsomest houses, but found nothing that exactly suited me.

Wearied with searching, I singularly lowered my pretensions and wants. Here I found an enormous price asked for a room that only in part suited me; there, proprietors who would not, for any consideration, have performances in their houses; in short, obstacles and impossibilities on all sides.

Thus I ran about Paris for a fortnight, passing from the largest to the smallest houses in turn, and ended by convincing myself that fate was adverse to my plans. Antonio relieved me from my difficulty, for that worthy friend, who aided me in the search, came to tell me he had found a room in the Palais Royal which could be easily converted into a theatre. I went straight to 164 in the Galerie de Valois, where I found, in fact, all the conditions I had sought elsewhere combined.

The proprietor of this house had been dreaming for a long time in vain about a benevolent tenant, who, while paying an exorbitant price for his room, would come in without expecting any repairs to be done. I was, therefore, most welcome, when I not only agreed to pay the rent asked, but endured passively every sort of imposition. Indeed, I would have given much more, so afraid as I was lest this desirable house should slip from me.

When the bargain was concluded, I applied to an architect, who soon brought me the plan of a charming room, which I jumped at. A few days later he set to work, partitions were knocked down, the ground cleared, and the carpenters began erecting my theatre, which was to contain from 180 to 200 persons. Though small, this room was all I wanted for my style of performance; for supposing, according to my famous calculations, that it was constantly full, it would be an excellent affair for me.

Antonio, ever filled with zeal for my interests, paid constant visits to my workmen, and stimulated their activity; but one day my friend was struck by a sudden idea.

“By-the-way,” he said, “have you thought of asking permission from the Prefect of Police to construct your theatre?”

“Not yet,” I replied, quietly. “It cannot be refused

me, as this construction makes no change in the architectural arrangements of the house."

"That is possible," Antonio added, "but in your place I would take this step immediately, that no difficulty may occur when it is too late."

I followed his advice, and we went together to M. X——'s office, who then had the direction of theatrical affairs. After an hour waiting, we were introduced to the head of the office, who, being at the moment engaged in some interesting reading, did not seem even to notice our presence. In ten minutes, however, M. X—— laid down his book, opened and shut a few drawers, called his clerk, gave orders, lifted his spectacles, and made us a sign that he was ready to hear a sentence which I had already commenced twice or thrice without being able to end it. This impertinent coolness made my blood boil; still I said, as politely as my vexation would allow me,

"I have come, sir, to ask your permission to open a room for performances of magic and sleight of hand in the Palais Royal."

"Sir," the head of the office replied, very drily, "if you have chosen the Palais Royal for your performance, I can tell you you will not obtain permission."

"Why so, sir?" I said, in consternation.

"Because a ministerial decree forbids any new establishment being opened there."

"But pray consider, sir, that, not being aware of this decision, I have taken a room on a long lease, and my theatre is at this moment being built. The refusal of this permission will be my ruin. What can I do now?"

"That is not my business," the bureaucrat replied, disdainfully; "I am not a theatrical agent."

With these words M. X——, after the method employed by solicitors and physicians to announce that a consultation is over, rose, led us to the door, and, himself opening it, showed us clearly what we had to do. Antonio and myself, equally in despair, remained for more than an hour at the door of the Prefecture, vainly taxing our brains how to escape from this difficulty. With all our reasoning, we always arrived at the mournful conclusion that we could

do no less than stop the building, and compound with B—— to take the lease off my hands. It was my ruin, Antonio understood as well as I, and he could offer me no consolation.

“But, stay,” he said, suddenly, striking his forehead, “I have an idea. Tell me, during the late exhibition, did you not sell a ‘mysterious clock’ to M. Benjamin Delessert, a banker?”

“Well, suppose I did, what has that to do with——”

“What! do you not understand me? M. Delessert is brother of the Prefect of Police. Go and see him; he is said to be good-hearted: perhaps he will give you good advice, or even better than that. If he would speak to his brother on your behalf, we should be saved, for M. Gabriel Delessert is omnipotent in theatrical matters.”

I adopted Antonio’s advice with joy, and proceeded to carry it into effect. M. B. Delessert received me kindly, complimented me on the clock, with which he was quite satisfied, and made me inspect his magnificent picture-gallery, in which it was put up. Emboldened by this kind reception, I explained to him the embarrassment in which I was placed.

“Well, M. Robert-Houdin,” he said to me, “console yourself; we may possibly arrange this affair. I am going to give a large party next Wednesday evening, to which my brother has promised to come. Do me the pleasure to join us; you will give us a specimen of your talents, and when M. le Préfet has learned to appreciate you, I will speak to him of your matter.”

On Wednesday I proceeded to the house of my new protector, who had the kindness to present me to some of his guests, while confidentially praising my sleight-of-hand talents. My performance came off, and, judging by the applause I received, I may say it justified their anticipated compliments. A week had scarce elapsed when I received a summons to the office of the Prefect of Police. I went there with all speed, and M. Gabriel Delessert informed me that he had been able to induce the minister to revoke his decision. “Hence you can now go,” he

added, "and obtain your permission in M. X——'s office, where it has been sent for some formalities."

I was curious about my reception on this occasion, but M. X—— displayed such extreme politeness towards me, that it largely made up for the cavalier treatment he had offered me on the first occasion. Far from leaving me standing, he would willingly have offered me two chairs instead of one, and when I quitted his office, he overwhelmed me with all the attentions due to a man protected by a superior power. I was too happy to bear M. X—— any malice; hence we separated quite reconciled.

I will spare my readers the numberless tribulations which accompanied my unending building; mistakes in time and money are so usual in such matters, that I need not allude to them here. At length, all this was over, and with the liveliest pleasure I saw the last workman depart not to return again.

We had now reached the end of June, and I hoped to commence at the beginning of July. For this purpose I hastened my preparations, for each day was an enormous loss, as I was spending much and earning nothing.

I had already given some partial rehearsals, and I now decided on holding one to precede the general rehearsal, but, as I was not quite sure of the success of my experiments, I only invited half a dozen intimate friends, pledged to give me their opinion with the greatest severity. This performance was fixed for the 25th June, 1845, and on that day I made my preparations with as much care as if I were going to give my opening performance, for I had been suffering for nearly a month from a regular panic, which I could attribute to no other cause than my nervous and impressionable temperament.

I could not get a wink of sleep, my appetite had left me, and I thought of my performances with a species of dread. I, who had hitherto treated so lightly the performances I gave to my friends—I, who had obtained such success at Aubusson, trembled like a child.

The reason was, that hitherto I had performed before spectators ever smiling or ready to smile, and the success of my experiments made no difference to me. Now, I was

about to appear before a real audience, and I trembled at the thought of "the right they purchased at the door."

On the appointed evening, at eight precisely, my friends having duly arrived, the curtain rose, and I appeared on the stage. Half a dozen smiles greeted my appearance, which rekindled my courage and even gave me a species of coolness. The first of my experiments was performed very decently, and yet my address was very badly repeated. I recited it like a schoolboy who tries to remember his lesson, but the good favour of my spectators once acquired, I continued famously.

To explain what follows, I must mention that, during the whole day, heavy clouds had hung over Paris; and the evening, far from bringing any relief, wafted into the room puffs of heated air, which seemed to issue from a stove.

Well, I had scarcely reached the middle of the first part, when two of my spectators had yielded to the soporific influences of the weather and my "patter." I could excuse them, however, for my own eyelids were beginning to droop. Not being accustomed to sleep standing, however, I held my own.

But it is well known that nothing is so contagious as sleep, hence the epidemic made rapid progress. At the end of a few moments the last of the survivors let his head fall on his chest, and completed the sextett, whose snoring, continually *crescendo*, at length drowned my voice. My situation was disagreeable, and though I tried to arouse my audience by speaking in a louder key, I only succeeded in causing one or two eyelids to open, which, after a few insane winks, closed again.

At length the first part of the performance was over and the curtain fell, and with much pleasure I stretched myself in an arm-chair to enjoy a few minutes' rest! Five minutes would be enough, and I was asleep before I could repel the invader. My son, who helped me on the stage, had not waited so long; he had laid himself on the ground, and was sleeping like a top, while my wife, a busy, courageous woman, though struggling against the common foe, watched near me, and, in her tender care, did not disturb a sleep I required so much. Besides, she had

peeped through the hole in the curtain, and our spectators seemed so happy, that she had not the heart to disturb them. But insensibly her strength betrayed her courage, and unable to resist the temptation of a nap, she fell asleep too.

The pianist, who represented my orchestra, having seen the curtain fall, and hearing no movement on the stage, thought my performance was over, and determined on going. As the porter had orders to turn off the gas at the main when he saw my pianist go out, and was most anxious to be exact at the beginning of his engagement, he hastened to obey my orders, and plunged the room into utter darkness.

We had been enjoying this delightful sleep for about two hours, when I was aroused by a confused sound of voices and shouts. I rubbed my eyes and wondered where I was, but seeing nothing, I grew quite alarmed. "Can I possibly have gone blind?" I exclaimed; "I can see nothing?"

"Hang it, no more can we see anything!" said a voice, which I recognized as Antonio's. "For goodness' sake, give us a light!"

"Yes, yes, a light!" my five other spectators repeated in chorus.

We were soon on our feet; the curtain was raised, and then, having lighted some candles, we saw our five sleepers rubbing their eyes, and trying to find out where they were; while Antonio was growling away under the stalls, where he had fallen in his sleep.

All was then explained; we had a hearty laugh at the adventure, and separated with a promise of meeting again.

There were only four days to the 1st of July, and to any one acquainted with the preparations for a first performance, and, far more important still, for opening a theatre, this lapse of time will appear very short, for there is always so much to be done at the last moment. Thus the 1st of July arrived, and I was not prepared, and the opening did not take place till three days later.

On this day, by a strange coincidence, the Hippodrome and the "fantastic soirées" of Robert-Houdin, the largest and smallest stage in Paris, were opened to the public. The 3rd of July, 1845, saw two bills placarded on the walls of Paris; one enormous, belonging to the Hippodrome, while the other, of far more modest proportions, announced my performances. Still, as in the fable of the reed and the oak, the large theatre, in spite of the skill of the managers, has undergone many changes of fortune; while the smaller one has continually enjoyed the public favour.

I have sacredly kept a proof of my first bill, the form and colour of which has always remained the same since that date. I copy it word for word here, both to furnish an idea of its simplicity, and to display the programme of the experiments I then offered to the public:—

TO DAY, THURSDAY, JULY 3, 1845.

FIRST REPRESENTATION

OF

THE FANTASTIC SOIRÉES

OF

ROBERT-HOUDIN.

AUTOMATA, SLEIGHT-OF-HAND, MAGIC.

The Performance will be composed of entirely novel
Experiments invented by M. ROBERT-HOUDIN.

AMONG THEM BEING :

THE CABALISTIC CLOCK.

AURIOL AND DEBUREAU.

THE ORANGE-TREE.

THE MYSTERIOUS BOUQUET.

THE HANDKERCHIEF.

PIERROT IN THE EGG.

OBEDIENT CARDS.

THE MIRACULOUS FISH.

THE FASCINATING OWL.

THE PASTRYCOOK OF THE

PALAIS ROYAL.

TO COMMENCE AT EIGHT O'CLOCK.

Box-office open at Half-past Seven.

Price of places :—Gallery, 1 fr. 50 c. ; Area, 3 fr. ;
Stalls, 4 fr. ; Proscenium Boxes, 5 fr.

The day of my first representation at length arrived. To say how I spent it is impossible; all I remember is, that, at the end of a feverish and sleepless night, occasioned by the multiplicity of my tasks, I had to organize and foresee everything, for I was at once manager, machinist, author, and actor. What a terrible responsibility for a poor artist, whose life had hitherto been spent among his tools!

At seven in the evening, a thousand things had still to be done, but I was in a state of febrile excitement which doubled my strength and energy, and I got through them all.

Eight o'clock struck and echoed through my heart like the peal that summons the culprit to execution; never in my life did I experience such emotion and torture. Ah! if I could only draw back! Had it been possible to fly and abandon this position I had so long desired, with what happiness would I have returned to my peaceful avocations! And yet, why did I feel this mad terror? I know not, for three-fourths of the room were filled with persons on whose indulgence I could rely.

I made a final attack on my pusillanimity.

"Come!" I said to myself, "courage! I have my name, my future, my children's fortune at stake: courage!"

This thought restored me; I passed my hand several times over my agitated features, ordered the curtain to be raised, and without further reflection I walked boldly on the stage.

My friends, aware of my sufferings, received me with some encouraging applause; this kind reception restored my confidence, and, like a gentle dew, refreshed my mind and senses. I began.

To assert that I acquitted myself fairly would be a proof of vanity, and yet it would be excusable, for I received repeated signs of applause from my audience. But how to distinguish between the applause of the friendly and the paying public? I was glad to deceive myself, and my experiments gained by it.

The first part was over and the curtain fell. My wife came directly to embrace me, to encourage me, and thank me for my courageous efforts. I may now confess it: I believed that I had been alone severe to myself, and that it was possible all this applause was sterling coin. This belief did me an enormous good: and, why should I conceal it, tears of joy stood in my eyes, which I hastened to wipe away lest my feelings might prevent my preparations for the second part.

The curtain rose again, and I approached my audience with a smile on my lips. I judged of this change in my face by those of my spectators, for they began all at once to share my good humour.

How many times since have I tried this imitative faculty on the part of the public? If you are anxious, ill-disposed or vexed, or should your face bear the stamp of any annoying impression, your audience, straightway imitating the contraction of your features, begins to frown, grows serious, and ill-disposed to be favourable to you. If, however, you appear on the stage with a cheerful face, the most sombre brows un wrinkle, and every one seems to say to the artist: "How d'ye do, old fellow? your face pleases me, I only want an opportunity to applaud you." Such seemed to be the case with my public at this moment.

It was more easy for me to feel at my ease as I was beginning my favourite experiment, "the surprising pocket-handkerchief," a medley of clever deceptions. After borrowing a handkerchief, I produced from it a multitude of objects of every description, such as sugar-plums, feathers of every size up to a drum major's, fans, comic journals, and, as a *finale*, an enormous basket of flowers, which I distributed to the ladies. This trick was perfectly successful, but to tell the truth I had it at my fingers' ends.

The next performance was the "orange-tree," and I had every reason to calculate on this trick, for in my private rehearsals it was the one I always did best. I began with a few juggling tricks as introduction, which were perfectly successful, and I had every reason to believe I was getting through it capitably, when a sudden thought crossed my mind

and paralyzed me. I was assailed by a panic which must have been felt to be understood, and I will try to explain it by an illustration.

When you are learning to swim, the teacher begins by giving you this important piece of advice: "Have confidence, and all will be well." If you follow his advice, you easily keep yourself up on the water, and it seems perfectly natural; thus you learn to swim. But it often happens that a sudden thought crosses your mind like lightning: "Suppose my strength failed me!" From that time you hurry your movements, you redouble your speed, the water no longer sustains you, you flounder about, and, if a helping hand were not by, you would be lost.

Such was my situation on the stage; the thought had suddenly struck me: "Suppose I were to fail!" And immediately I began to talk quick, hurried on in my anxiety to finish, felt confused, and, like a tired swimmer, I floundered about without being able to emerge from the chaos of my ideas.

Oh! then I experienced a torture, an agony which I could not describe, but which might easily become mortal were it prolonged.

The real public were cold and silent, my friends were foolish enough to applaud, but the rest remained quiet. I scarcely dared to look round the room, and my experiment ended I know not how.

I proceeded to the next, but my nervous system had reached such a degree of irritation that I no longer knew what I said or did. I only felt that I was speaking with extraordinary volubility, so that the four last tricks of my performance were done in a few minutes.

The curtain fell very opportunely; my strength was exhausted; but a little longer and I should have had to crave the indulgence of my audience.

In my life I never passed so frightful a night as the one following my first performance. I had a fever, I am quite certain, but that was as nothing in comparison with my moral sufferings. I had no desire left or courage to appear on the stage. I wished to sell, give up, or give away, if

necessary, an establishment which taxed my strength too severely.

“No,” I said to myself, “I am not born for this life of emotion. I will quit the parching atmosphere of a theatre. I will, even at the expense of a brilliant fortune, return to my gentle and calm employment.”

The next morning, incapable of rising, and, indeed, firmly resolved to give up my representations, I had the bill taken down that announced my performance for that evening. I had made up my mind as to all the consequences of this resolution. Thus, the sacrifice accomplished, I found myself far more calm, and even yielded to the imperious claims of a sleep I had for a long time denied myself.

I have now arrived at a moment when I shall quit for ever the mournful and wearisome details of the numerous misfortunes that preceded my representations; but my readers will notice with some surprise to what a futile circumstance I owed my release from this state of discouragement, which I fancied would last for ever.

The repose I had taken during the day and the following night had refreshed my blood and my ideas. I regarded my situation under a very different aspect, and I had already made up my mind not to give up my theatre, when one of my friends—or, who called himself so—came to pay me a visit.

After expressing his regret at the unhappy result of my first performance, at which he had been present, he said:

“I called in to see you because I noticed your room was closed, and I had a wish to express my feelings to you on the subject. I must say, then, to speak frankly (I have noticed that this phrase is always followed by some bad compliment, which is meant to pass under the guise of friendly frankness), that you are perfectly right to quit a profession beyond your strength, and that you have acted wisely by anticipating with good grace a decision to which you would have been forced sooner or later. However,” he added, with a self-sufficient air, “I foretold it. I always thought you were committing an act of madness, and that

your theatre would no sooner be opened than you would be obliged to close it."

These cruel compliments, addressed under the cloak of apocryphal frankness, wounded me deeply. I could easily detect that this offerer of advice, sacrificing to his vanity the slight affection he felt for me, had only come to see me in order to parade his perspicacity and the justice of his provisions, of which he had never mentioned a syllable to me. Well, this infallible prophet, who foresaw events so truly, was far from suspecting the change he was producing in me. The more he talked, the more he confirmed me in the resolution of continuing my performances.

"Who told you my room was closed?" I said, in a tone that had nothing affectionate about it. "If I did not perform yesterday, it was because, worn out by the fatigue I have undergone for some time, I wished to rest for at least one day. Your foreboding will therefore be disappointed when I tell you that I shall perform this very evening. I hope, in my second representation, to take my revenge on the public; and this time they will judge me less severely than you have done. I am quite convinced of it."

The conversation having taken this turn, could not be continued much longer. My offerer of advice, dissatisfied at my reception of him, quitted me, and I have never seen him since. Yet, I bear him no malice; on the contrary, if he reads my Memoirs, I beg to offer him in this place my thanks for the happy revolution he produced in me by wounding my vanity to the quick.

Bills were immediately posted to announce my performance for that evening, and I made my preparations calmly, while thinking over those parts of my performance in which it would be advisable to introduce a change.

This second representation went on much better than I had hoped, and my audience appeared satisfied. Unfortunately, that audience was small, and my receipts, consequently, were the same. Still, I accepted it all philosophically, for the success I had obtained gave me confidence in the future.

However, I soon had real causes for consolation. The celebrities of the press came to my representations, and

described my performance in the most flattering terms. Some contributors to the comic papers also made very pleasant allusions to my performances and myself. Among others, the present editor of the *Charivari* wrote an article full of fun and dash about my performances, which he terminated with some lines, expressive of his decided opinion that I belonged to the family of Robert le Diable and Robert Macaire.

Finally, the *Illustration*, desirous of evincing its sympathy, engaged Eugène Forey to draw a sketch of my theatre. Such publicity soon attracted the attention of the first Parisian circles: people came to see my performances: they appointed to meet at my room, and from this moment commenced that reputation which has never left me since.

CHAPTER XIV.

New Studies—A Comic Journal—Invention of Second Sight—Curious Experiments—An enthusiastic Spectator—Danger of being a Sorcerer—A Philter or your Life—Way to get rid of Bores—An Electric Touch—I perform at the Vaudeville—Struggles with the Incredible—Interesting Details.

FONTENELLE says, somewhere or other, "There is no success, however merited, in which luck does not have a share;" and, although I was of the same opinion as the illustrious Academician, I determined by sheer toil to diminish as much as in me lay the share luck could claim in *my* success. In the first place, I redoubled my efforts to improve the execution of my tricks, and when I believed I had attained that result, I tried to correct a fault which, I felt, must injure my performance. This was speaking too rapidly; and my "patter," recited in a schoolboy tone, thus lost much of its effect. I was drawn in this false direction by my natural vivacity, and I had great trouble in correcting it; however, by resolutely attacking my enemy, I managed to conquer it.

This victory was doubly profitable to me: I performed with much less fatigue, and had the pleasure of noticing,

in the calmness of my audience, that I had realized the scenic truth, "the more slowly a story is told, the shorter it seems." In fact, if you pronounce slowly, the public, judging from your calmness that you take an interest in what you are saying, yield to your influence, and listen to you with sustained attention. If, on the contrary, your words reveal a desire to finish quickly, your auditors gradually submit to the influence of this restlessness, and they are as anxious as yourself to hear the end of your story.

I have said that people of the first rank came to my theatre, but I noticed, on the other hand, to my regret, that my pit was scantily filled. As I was ambitious to have my room thronged, I thought I could not effect this more easily than by making my theatre better known than I had hitherto done.

From time immemorial it has been the custom, at conjuring performances to distribute small presents to the audience, in order to "maintain their friendship." Toys were generally selected, which spectators of all ages contended for; and this often made Comte say at the moment of distribution, "Here are toys for great children and small." These presents had a very ephemeral existence, and as nothing indicated their origin, they could attract no attention to the giver. While, then, I was as liberal as my predecessors, I wished that my little presents should keep up for a longer period the remembrance of my name and experiments. Instead of dolls and other similar objects, I distributed to my spectators, under the form of presents produced by magic, illustrated comic journals, elegant fans, albums, and rebuses, all accompanied by bouquets and excellent bonbons. Each article bore, not only the inscription "Recollections of Robert-Houdin's fantastic soirées," but also details of my performances, according to the nature of the article. These were generally presented in the shape of verses. The thing that caused me the most trouble was my comic journal, the "Cagliostro," which I was forced to edit at the expense of my night's rest. The audience were amused by my jests, and the perusal of the paper between the acts gave me a little more time to make my preparations.

The experiment, however, to which I owed my reputation was one inspired by that fantastic god to whom Pascal attributes all the discoveries of this sublunary world: chance led me straight to the invention of *second sight*.

My two children were playing one day in the drawing-room at a game they had invented for their own amusement. The younger had bandaged his elder brother's eyes, and made him guess the objects he touched, and when the latter happened to guess right, they changed places. This simple game suggested to me the most complicated idea that ever crossed my mind.

Pursued by the notion, I ran and shut myself up in my workroom, and was fortunately in that happy state when the mind follows easily the combinations traced by fancy. I rested my head in my hands, and, in my excitement, laid down the first principles of second sight.

It would require a whole volume to describe the numberless combinations of this experiment; but this description, far too serious for these memoirs, will find a place in a special work, which will also contain the explanation of my theatrical tricks. Still, I cannot resist the desire of cursorily explaining some of the preliminary experiments to which I had recourse before I could make the trick perfect.

My readers will remember the experiment suggested to me formerly by the pianist's dexterity, and the strange faculty I succeeded in attaining: I could read while juggling with four balls. Thinking seriously of this, I fancied that this "perception by appreciation" might be susceptible of equal development, if I applied its principles to the memory and the mind.

I resolved, therefore, on making some experiments with my son Emile, and, in order to make my young assistant understand the nature of the exercise we were going to learn, I took a domino, the cinq-quer for instance, and laid it before him. Instead of letting him count the points of the two numbers, I requested the boy to tell me the total at once.

"Nine," he said.

Then I added another domino, the quater-tray.

“That makes sixteen,” he said, without any hesitation.

I stopped the first lesson here; the next day we succeeded in counting at a single glance four dominoes, the day after six, and thus we at length were enabled to give instantaneously the product of a dozen dominoes.

This result obtained, we applied ourselves to a far more difficult task, over which we spent a month. My son and I passed rapidly before a toy-shop, or any other displaying a variety of wares, and cast an attentive glance upon it. A few steps further on we drew paper and pencil from our pockets, and tried which could describe the greater number of objects seen in passing. I must own that my son reached a perfection far greater than mine, for he could often write down forty objects, while I could scarce reach thirty. Often feeling vexed at this defeat, I would return to the shop and verify his statement, but he rarely made a mistake.

My male readers will certainly understand the possibility of this, but they will recognize the difficulty. As for my lady readers, I am convinced beforehand they will not be of the same opinion, for they daily perform far more astounding feats. Thus, for instance, I can safely assert that a lady seeing another pass at full speed in a carriage, will have had time to analyze her toilette from her bonnet to her shoes, and be able to describe not only the fashion and quality of the stuffs, but also say if the lace be real, or only machine made. I have known ladies do this.

This natural, or acquired, faculty among ladies, but which my son and I had only gained by constant practice, was of great service in my performances, for while I was executing my tricks, I could see everything that passed around me, and thus prepare to foil any difficulties presented me. This exercise had given me, so to speak, the power of following two ideas simultaneously, and nothing is more favourable in conjuring than to be able to think at the same time both of what you are saying and of what you are doing. I eventually acquired such a knack in this, that I frequently invented new tricks while going through my performances. One day, even, I made a bet I would solve a problem in mechanics while taking my part

in conversation. We were talking of the pleasure of a country life, and I calculated during this time the quantity of wheels and pinions, as well as the necessary cogs, to produce certain revolutions required, without once failing in my reply.

This slight explanation will be sufficient to show what is the essential basis of second sight, and I will add that a secret and unnoticeable correspondence existed between my son and myself, by which I could announce to him the name, nature, and bulk of objects handed me by spectators.

As none understood my mode of action, they were tempted to believe in something extraordinary, and, indeed, my son Emile, then aged twelve, possessed all the essential qualities to produce this opinion, for his pale, intellectual, and ever thoughtful face represented the type of a boy gifted with some supernatural power.

Two months were incessantly employed in erecting the scaffolding of our tricks, and when we were quite confident of being able to contend against the difficulties of such an undertaking, we announced the first representation of second sight. On the 12th of February, 1846, I printed in the centre of my bill the following singular announcement:

“ In this performance M. Robert-Houdin’s son, who is gifted with a marvellous second sight, after his eyes have been covered with a thick bandage, will designate every object presented to him by the audience.”

I cannot say whether this announcement attracted any spectators, for my room was constantly crowded; still I may affirm, what may seem very extraordinary, that the experiment of second sight, which afterwards became so fashionable, produced no effect on the first performance. I am inclined to believe that the spectators fancied themselves the dupes of accomplices, but I was much annoyed by the result, as I had built on the surprise I should produce; still, having no reason to doubt its ultimate success, I was tempted to make a second trial, which turned out well.

The next evening I noticed in my room several persons

who had been present on the previous night, and I felt they had come a second time to assure themselves of the reality of the experiment. It seems they were convinced, for my success was complete, and amply compensated for my former disappointment.

I especially remember a mark of singular approval with which one of my pit audience favoured me. My son had named to him several objects he offered in succession; but not feeling satisfied, my incredulous friend, rising, as if to give more importance to the difficulty he was about to present, handed me an instrument peculiar to cloth merchants, and employed to count the number of threads. Acquiescing in his wish, I said to my boy, "What do I hold in my hand?"

"It is an instrument to judge the fineness of cloth, and called a thread counter."

"By Jove!" my spectator said, energetically, "it is marvellous. If I had paid ten francs to see it, I should not begrudge them."

From this moment my room was much too small, and was crowded every evening.

Still, success is not entirely rose-coloured, and I could easily narrate many disagreeable scenes produced by the reputation I had of being a sorcerer; but I will only mention one, which forms a résumé of all I pass over.

A young lady of elegant manners paid me a visit one day, and although her face was hidden by a thick veil, my practised eyes perfectly distinguished her features. She was very pretty.

My incognita would not consent to sit down till she was assured we were alone, and that I was the real Robert-Houdin. I also seated myself, and assuming the attitude of a man prepared to listen, I bent slightly to my visitor, as if awaiting her pleasure to explain to me the object of her mysterious visit. To my great surprise, the young lady, whose manner betrayed extreme emotion, maintained the most profound silence, and I began to find the visit very strange, and was on the point of forcing an explanation, at any hazard, when the fair unknown timidly ventured these words:—

“ Good Heavens ! sir, I know not how you will interpret my visit.”

Here she stopped, and let her eyes sink with a very embarrassed air ; then, making a violent effort, she continued :

“ What I have to ask of you, sir, is very difficult to explain.”

“ Speak, madam, I beg,” I said, politely, “ and I will try to guess what you cannot explain to me.”

And I began asking myself what this reserve meant.

“ In the first place,” the young lady said, in a low voice, and looking round her, “ I must tell you confidentially that I loved, my love was returned, and I—I am betrayed.”

At the last word the lady raised her head, overcame the timidity she felt, and said, in a firm and assured voice,

“ Yes, sir—yes, I am betrayed, and for that reason I have come to you.”

“ Really, madam,” I said, much surprised at this strange confession, “ I do not see how I can help you in such a matter.”

“ Oh, sir, I entreat you,” said my fair visitor, clasping her hands—“ I implore you not to abandon me !”

I had great difficulty in keeping my countenance, and yet I felt an extreme curiosity to know the history concealed behind this mystery.

“ Calm yourself, madam,” I remarked, in a tone of tender sympathy ; “ tell me what you would of me, and if it be in my power——”

“ If it be in your power !” the young lady said, quickly ; “ why, nothing is more easy, sir.”

“ Explain yourself, madam.”

“ Well, sir, I wish to be avenged.”

“ In what way ?”

“ How, you know better than I, sir ; must I teach you ? You have in your power means to——”

“ I, madam ?”

“ Yes, sir, you ! for you are a sorcerer, and cannot deny it.”

At this word sorcerer, I was much inclined to laugh ;

but I was restrained by the incognita's evident emotion. Still, wishing to put an end to a scene which was growing ridiculous, I said, in a politely ironical tone :

"Unfortunately, madam, you give me a title I never possessed."

"How, sir!" the young woman exclaimed, in a quick tone, "you will not allow you are——"

"A sorcerer, madam? Oh no, I will not."

"You will not?"

"No, a thousand times no, madam."

At these words my visitor rose hastily, muttered a few incoherent words, appeared suffering from terrible emotion, and then drawing near me with flaming eyes and passionate gestures, repeated :

"Ah, you will not! Very good; I now know what I have to do."

Stupefied by such an outbreak, I looked at her fixedly, and began to suspect the cause of her extraordinary conduct.

"There are two modes of acting," she said, with terrible volubility, "towards people who devote themselves to magic arts — entreaty and menaces. You would not yield to the first of these means, hence, I must employ the second. Stay," she added, "perhaps this will induce you to speak."

And, lifting up her cloak, she laid her hand on the hilt of a dagger passed through her girdle. At the same time she suddenly threw back her veil, and displayed features in which all the signs of rage and madness could be traced. No longer having a doubt as to the person I had to deal with, my first movement was to rise and stand on my guard; but this first feeling overcome, I repented the thought of a struggle with the unhappy woman, and determined on employing a method almost always successful with those deprived of reason. I pretended to accede to her wishes.

"If it be so, madam, I yield to your request. Tell me what you require."

"I have told you, sir; I wish for vengeance, and there is only one method to——"

Here there was a fresh interruption, and the young lady, calmed by my apparent submission, as well as embarrassed by the request she had to make of me, became again timid and confused.

“Well, madam?”

“Well, sir, I know not how to tell you—how to explain to you—but I fancy there are certain means—certain spells—which render it impossible—impossible for a man to be—unfaithful.”

“I now understand what you wish, madam. It is a certain magic practice employed in the middle ages. Nothing is easier, and I will satisfy you.”

Decided on playing the farce to the end, I took down the largest book I could find in my library, turned over the leaves, stopped at a page which I pretended to scan with profound attention, and then addressing the lady, who followed all my movements anxiously—

“Madam,” I said, confidentially, “the spell I am going to perform renders it necessary for me to know the name of the person; have the kindness, then, to tell it me.”

“Julian!” she said, in a faint voice.

With all the gravity of a real sorcerer, I solemnly thrust a pin through a lighted candle, and pronounced some cabalistic words. After which, blowing out the candle, and turning to the poor creature, I said:—

“Madam, it is done; your wish is accomplished.”

“Oh, thank you, sir,” she replied, with the expression of the profoundest gratitude; and at the same moment she laid a purse on the table and rushed away. I ordered my servant to follow her to her house, and obtain all the information he could about her, and I learned she had been a widow for a short time, and that the loss of an adored husband had disturbed her reason. The next day I visited her relatives, and, returning them the purse, I told them the scene the details of which the reader has just perused.

This scene, with some others that preceded and followed it, compelled me to take measures to guard myself against bores of every description. I could not dream, as formerly, of exiling myself in the country, but I employed a similar resource: this was to shut myself up in my work-

room, and organize around me a system of defence against those whom I called, in my ill-temper, thieves of time.

I daily received visits from persons who were utter strangers to me; some were worth knowing, but the majority, gaining an introduction under the most futile pretexts, only came to kill a portion of their leisure time with me. It was necessary to distinguish the tares from the wheat, and this is the arrangement I made:—

When one of these gentlemen rang at my door, an electric communication struck a bell in my workroom; I was thus warned and put on my guard. My servant opened the door, and, as is customary, inquired the visitor's name, while I, for my part, laid my ear to a tube, arranged for the purpose, which conveyed to me every word. If, according to his reply, I thought it as well not to receive him, I pressed a button, and a white mark that appeared in a certain part of the hall announced I was not at home to him. My servant then stated I was out, and begged the visitor to apply to the manager.

Sometimes it happened that I erred in my judgment, and regretted having granted an audience; but I had another mode of shortening a bore's visit. I had placed behind the sofa on which I sat an electric spring, communicating with a bell my servant could hear. In case of need, and while talking, I threw my arm carelessly over the back of the sofa, touched the spring, and the bell rang. Then my servant, playing a little farce, opened the front door, rang the bell, which could be heard from the room where I sat, and came to tell me that M. X—— (a name invented for the occasion) wished to speak to me. I ordered M. X—— to be shown into an adjoining room, and it was very rare that my bore did not raise the siege. No one can form an idea how much time I gained by this happy arrangement, or how many times I blessed my imagination and the celebrated savant to whom the discovery of galvanism is due!

This feeling can be easily explained, for my time was of inestimable value. I husbanded it like a treasure, and never sacrificed it, unless the sacrifice might help me to

discover new experiments destined to stimulate public curiosity.

To support my determination in making my researches, I had ever before me this maxim:—

IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO SUPPORT ADMIRATION THAN TO EXCITE IT.

And this other, an apparent corollary of the preceding:—

THE FASHION AN ARTISTE ENJOYS CAN ONLY LAST AS LONG AS HIS TALENT DAILY INCREASES.

Nothing increases a professional man's merit so much as the possession of an independent fortune; this truth may be coarse, but it is indubitable. Not only was I convinced of these principles of high economy, but I also knew that a man must strive to profit by the fickle favour of the public, which equally descends if it does not rise. Hence I worked my reputation as much as I could. In spite of my numerous engagements, I found means to give performances in all the principal theatres, though great difficulties frequently arose, as my performance did not end till half-past ten, and I could only fulfil my other engagements after that hour.

Eleven o'clock was generally the hour fixed for my appearance on a strange stage, and my readers may judge of the speed required to proceed to the theatre in so short a time and make my preparations. It is true that the moments were as well counted as employed, and my curtain had hardly fallen than, rushing towards the stairs, I got before my audience, and jumped into a vehicle that bore me off at full speed.

But this fatiguc was as nothing compared to the emotion occasionally produced by an error in the time that was to elapse between my two performances. I remember that, one night, having to wind up the performances at the Vaudeville, the stage-manager miscalculated the time the pieces would take in performing, and found himself much in advance. He sent off an express to warn me that the curtain had fallen, and that I was anxiously expected. Can my readers comprehend my wretchedness? My experiments, of which I could omit none, would occupy another quarter of an hour; but instead of indulging in useless recrimina-

tions, I resigned myself, and continued my performance, though I was a prey to frightful anxiety. While speaking, I fancied I could hear that cadenced yell of the public to which the famous song, "*Des lampions, des lampions,*" was set. Thus, either through preoccupation, or a desire to end sooner, I found, when my performance was over, that I had gained five minutes out of the quarter of an hour. Assuredly, it might be called the quarter of an hour's grace.

To jump into a carriage and drive to the Place de la Bourse was the affair of an instant; still, twenty minutes had elapsed since the curtain fell, and that was an enormous time. My son Emile and I proceeded up the actors' stairs at full speed, but, on the first step, we had heard the cries, whistling, and stamping of the impatient audience. What a prospect! I knew that frequently, either right or wrong, the public treated an artiste, no matter whom, very harshly, to remind him of punctuality. That sovereign always appears to have on its lips the words of another monarch: "I was obliged to wait." However, we hurried up the steps leading to the stage.

The stage-manager, who had been watching, on hearing our hurried steps, cried from the landing:

"Is that you, M. Houdin?"

"Yes, sir—yes."

"Raise the curtain!" the same voice shouted.

"Wait, wait, it is imp——"

My breath would not allow me to finish my objection; I fell on a chair, unable to move.

"Come, M. Houdin," the manager said, "*do* go on the stage, the curtain is up, and the public are so impatient."

The door at the back of the stage was open, but I could not pass through it, fatigue and emotion nailed me to the spot. Still, an idea occurred to me, which saved me from the popular wrath.

"Go on to the stage, my boy," I said to my son, "and prepare all that is wanting for the second-sight trick."

The public allowed themselves to be disarmed by this youth, whose face inspired a sympathizing interest; and my son, after gravely bowing to the audience, quietly made

his slight preparations, that is to say, he carried an ottoman to the front of the stage, and placed on a neighbouring table a slate, some chalk, a pack of cards, and a bandage.

This slight delay enabled me to recover my breath and calm my nerves, and I advanced in my turn with an attempt to assume the stereotyped smile, in which I signally failed, as I was so agitated. The audience at first remained silent, then their faces gradually unwrinkled, and soon, one or two claps having been ventured, they were carried away, and peace was made. I was well rewarded, however, for this terrible ordeal, as my "second sight" never gained a more brilliant triumph.

An incident greatly enlivened the termination of my performance.

A spectator, who had evidently come on purpose to embarrass us, had tried in vain for some minutes to baffle my son's clairvoyance, when, turning to me, he said, laying marked stress on his words :

"As your son is a soothsayer, of course he can guess the number of my stall?"

The importunate spectator doubtlessly hoped to force us into a confession of our impotence, for he covered his number, and the adjacent seats being occupied, it was apparently impossible to read the numbers. But I was on my guard against all surprises, and my reply was ready. Still, in order to profit as much as possible by the situation, I feigned to draw back.

"You know, sir," I said, feigning an embarrassed air, "that my son is neither sorcerer nor diviner; he reads through my eyes, and hence I have given this experiment the name of second sight. As I cannot see the number of your stall, and the seats close to you are occupied, my son cannot tell it you."

"Ah! I was certain of it," my persecutor said, in triumph, and turning to his neighbours: "I told you I would pin him."

"Oh, sir! you are not generous in your victory," I said, in my turn, in a tone of mockery. "Take care; if you pique my son's vanity too sharply, he may solve your problem, though it is so difficult."

“I defy him,” said the spectator, leaning firmly against the back of his seat, to hide the number better—“yes, yes—I defy him!”

“You believe it to be difficult, then?”

“I will grant more: it is impossible.”

“Well, then, sir, that is a stronger reason for us to try it. You will not be angry if we triumph in our turn?” I added with a petulant smile.

“Come, sir; we understand evasions of that sort. I repeat it—I challenge you both.”

The public found great amusement in this debate, and patiently awaited its issue.

“Emile,” I said to my son, “prove to this gentleman that nothing can escape your second sight.”

“It is number sixty-nine,” the boy answered, immediately.

Noisy and hearty applause rose from every part of the theatre, in which our opponent joined, for, confessing his defeat, he exclaimed, as he clapped his hands, “It is astounding—magnificent!”

The way I succeeded in finding out the number of the stall was this: I knew beforehand that in all theatres where the stalls are divided down the centre by a passage, the uneven numbers are on the right, and the even on the left. As at the Vaudeville each row was composed of ten stalls, it followed that on the right hand the several rows must begin with one, twenty-one, forty-one, and so on, increasing by twenty each. Guided by this, I had no difficulty in discovering that my opponent was seated in number sixty-nine, representing the fifth stall in the fourth row. I had prolonged the conversation for the double purpose of giving more brilliancy to my experiment, and gaining time to make my researches. Thus I applied my process of two simultaneous thoughts, to which I have already alluded.

As I am now explaining matters, I may as well tell my readers some of the artifices that added material brilliancy to the second sight. I have already said this experiment was the result of a material communication between myself and my son, which no one could detect. Its combinations

enabled us to describe any conceivable object; but though this was a splendid result, I saw that I should soon encounter unheard-of difficulties in executing it.

The experiment of second sight always formed the termination of my performance. Each evening I saw unbelievers arrive with all sorts of articles to triumph over a secret which they could not unravel. Before going to see Robert-Houdin's son a council was held, in which an object that must embarrass the father was chosen. Among these were half-effaced antique medals, minerals, books printed in characters of every description (living and dead languages), coats of arms, microscopic objects, &c.

But what caused me the greatest difficulty was in finding out the contents of parcels, often tied with a string, or even sealed up. But I had managed to contend successfully against all these attempts to embarrass me. I opened boxes, purses, pocket-books, &c., with great ease, and unnoticed, while appearing to be engaged on something quite different. Were a sealed parcel offered me, I cut a small slit in the paper with the nail of my left thumb, which I always purposely kept very long and sharp, and thus discovered what it contained. One essential condition was excellent sight, and that I possessed to perfection. I owed it originally to my old trade, and practice daily improved it. An equally indispensable necessity was to know the name of every object offered me. It was not enough to say, for instance, "It is a coin;" but my son must give its technical name, its value, the country in which it was current, and the year in which it was struck. Thus, for instance, if an English crown were handed me, my son was expected to state that it was struck in the reign of George IV., and had an intrinsic value of six francs eighteen centimes.

Aided by an excellent memory, we had managed to classify in our heads the name and value of all foreign money. We could also describe a coat of arms in heraldic terms. Thus, on the arms of the house of X—— being handed me, my son would reply: "Field gules, with two croziers argent in pale." This knowledge was very useful

to us in the *salons* of the Faubourg Saint Germain, where we were frequently summoned.

I had also learned the characters—though unable to translate a word—of an infinity of languages, such as Chinese, Russian, Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, &c. We knew, too, the names of all chirurgical instruments, so that a surgical pocket-book, however complicated it might be, could not embarrass us. Lastly, I had a very sufficient knowledge of mineralogy, precious stones, antiquities, and curiosities; but I had at my command every possible resource for acquiring these studies, as one of my dearest and best friends, Aristide le Carpentier, a learned antiquary, and uncle of the talented composer of the same name, had, and still has, a cabinet of antique curiosities, which makes the keepers of the imperial museums fierco with envy. My son and I spent many long days in learning here names and dates, of which we afterwards made a learned display. Le Carpentier taught me many things, and, among others, he described various signs by which to recognize old coins when the die is worn off. Thus, a Trajan, a Tiberius, or a Marcus Aurelius became as familiar to me as a five-franc piece.

Owing to my old trade, I could open a watch with ease, and do it with one hand, so as to be able to read the maker's name without the public suspecting it: then I shut up the watch again, and the trick was ready; my son managed the rest of the business.

But that power of memory which my son possessed in an eminent degree certainly did us the greatest service. When we went to private houses, he needed only a very rapid inspection, in order to know all the objects in a room, as well as the various ornaments worn by the spectators, such as *châtelaines*, pins, eye-glasses, fans, brooches, rings, bouquets, &c. He thus could describe these objects with the greatest ease, when I pointed them out to him by our secret communication. Here is an instance:—

One evening, at a house in the *Chaussée d'Antin*, and at the end of a performance which had been as successful as it was loudly applauded, I remembered that while passing through the next room to the one we were now in, I had

begged my son to cast a glance at a library, and remember the titles of some of the books, as well as the order they were arranged in. No one had noticed this rapid examination.

“To end the second-sight experiment, sir,” I said to the master of the house, “I will prove to you that my son can read through a wall. Will you lend me a book?”

I was naturally conducted to the library in question, which I pretended now to see for the first time, and I laid my finger on a book.

“Emile,” I said to my son, “what is the name of this work?”

“It is Buffon,” he replied, quickly.

“And the one by its side?” an incredulous spectator hastened to ask.

“On the right or left?” my son asked.

“On the right,” the speaker said, having a good reason for choosing this book, for the lettering was very small.

“The Travels of Anacharsis the Younger,” the boy replied. “But,” he added, “had you asked the name of the book on the left, sir, I should have said Lamartine’s Poetry. A little to the right of this row, I see Crébillon’s works; below, two volumes of Fleury’s Memoirs;” and my son thus named a dozen books before he stopped.

The spectators had not said a word during this description, as they felt so amazed; but when the experiment had ended, all complimented us by clapping their hands.

CHAPTER XV.

Seductions of a Theatrical Agent—How to gain One Hundred Thousand Francs—I start for Brussels—A lucky Two-Sou Piece—Misceries of professional Travelling—The Park Theatre—Tyranny of a Porter—Full House—Small Receipts—Deceptions—Return to Paris.

HAD it not been for my constant toil and the inconveniences attaching to it, I should have been quite happy and satisfied with the daily profit my performances brought me in. But one fine day the demon of seduction presented

himself before me in the obsequious form of a theatrical agent.

“Monsieur Robert-Houdin,” he said, with a smile on his lips, as if we were old friends, “I am commissioned by M. X——, manager of the royal theatres of Brussels, to offer you an engagement for the summer season.”

My first answer was a refusal, which I based on excellent reasons. As I was very successful, it would not be prudent to break the vein, while I saw no occasion to go a long distance in search of advantages I could secure at home. This reasoning would have settled any one but a theatrical agent; but nothing, it is well known, can shake off the grip of these skilful crimps.

“Permit me, Monsieur Robert-Houdin, not to be quite of your opinion. I allow, of course, that with your talents you are always secure of good receipts, but you should bear in mind that the dog-days are approaching, and your room is stifling in summer. This consideration might induce the Parisian public to defer till autumn the pleasure of witnessing your performance, while, by going to Brussels, where the theatres are large and airy, you would have no reason to fear such a result. Come,” the plenipotentiary continued, in a most candid tone, “I must tell you, without wishing to flatter you the least in the world, that everybody is talking about you in Belgium; I may add, even, that the manager has been urged to make you offers by a great number of his subscribers.”

This flattering insinuation began to shake my decision, and I offered in my defence reasons whose weakness only attested to my indecision. My clever touter noticed this, and thinking the moment arrived to strike his great blow, said:—

“Do you know, sir, the probable proceeds of my offer?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, make an estimate.”

“It is impossible.”

“Then approximate.”

“I must decline; for I understand nothing of such calculations.”

“Well, then, I understand them, and am rarely mis-

taken," said the agent, stroking his chin, "and I tell you it is an affair to you" (here my seducer stopped, as if to make a most accurate calculation)—"an affair of one hundred thousand francs."

"One hundred thousand francs!" I exclaimed, dazzled at such a prospect; "you cannot mean it."

"It is precisely because I mean it that I tell you, and repeat it again: you will clear one hundred thousand francs by your trip. Add to this, the advantage of having seen a splendid country, and being received with all the attention due to an artist of your merit. You will then return to your impatient spectators, whose curiosity, heightened by their long privation, will produce you receipts far more brilliant than any you might have expected by remaining in Paris."

Being little conversant at that period with theatrical matters, and having no reason to doubt the honesty of my eloquent "humbucker," I easily believed his fine promises. The chink of one hundred thousand francs still ringing in my ears fascinated me; and I gave way unconsciously to the same mode of reasoning the inkstand inventor had employed.

"And, really," I said to myself, "supposing for instance, that——" And, leaping from supposition to supposition, my calculations exceeded those of the agent. But, in order to be reasonable, I concluded, like my friend the inventor, in this way: "Well, to prevent any misunderstanding, suppose we say only fifty thousand francs—surely nobody can accuse me with exaggeration."

Though dazzled by this brilliant calculation, I strove to conceal my desire of accepting the offer.

"It is all very well," I said, in my turn, after the style of a perfect man of business, "but what are the conditions?"

"Oh, most simple!" the crafty fellow said; "the same as are made with all distinguished artists. Monsieur X—— will pay all the expenses, but to cover those, he will deduct three hundred francs from the gross receipts, exclusive of the claim of the poor, and the rest will be fairly divided between him and yourself."

“Still, I should like to know how much the sum to be divided will amount to?”

“How is it possible to say?” the agent exclaimed, with an aspect of the greatest sincerity. “With such success as awaits you, it will be enormous.”

In spite of my pressing, the agent always entrenched himself in his exclamations, and the impossibility of making such an estimate. Tired of the struggle, I at length formed my decision.

“I will go to Brussels,” I said, in a resolute tone.

The theatrical agent immediately drew from his pocket a printed form, which he had brought in case of our coming to terms, and we had only to add the stipulations to it.

“Tell me, sir,” the manager’s representative said, in a conscientious tone, “will you have any objection to a forfeit of six thousand francs? As the engagement is reciprocal, you must find this but fair.”

I only saw in the agent’s request a very natural desire to defend his employer’s interests; and I drew this conclusion from it: if the agreement was advantageous for the manager, it must be equally so for me, as we were to share the receipts. I consented to the clause, and affixed my signature. The agent could not repress his satisfaction, but he cleverly ascribed it to the interest he felt in me.

“I congratulate you sincerely on the engagement you have just made,” he said, as he offered me his hand; “you will soon be able to tell me of the results you will draw from it. By-the-way,” he added, in a friendly tone, after a pause, “will you now permit me to give you a piece of advice?”

“Certainly, sir—certainly.”

“I would recommend you, then, to take a collection of showy bills and posters with you to Belgium. They do not know how to get them up in Brussels, and they will produce a prodigious effect. It would be also as well to have a handsome lithograph, representing your stage; it can be put up in the various picture-shops, and you will obtain increased publicity.”

These counsels, and the familiar, almost protecting, tone in which they were given, appeared to me strange;

and I could not refrain from expressing my surprise to the man of business.

“What need of all these precautions? I fancied I understood you that——”

“Good gracious me! all professionals are alike,” the giver of advice interrupted me; “absorbed in their art, they understand nothing of business. But, tell me, Monsieur Robert-Houdin, would you feel annoyed at netting one hundred and fifty thousand francs, instead of the one hundred thousand I promised you?”

“On my word, no,” I said, with a smile; “and I confess that, far from feeling vexed, I should be very pleased at it.”

“Well, then, the more you make yourself known, the more you will add to the amount I stated.”

“But I thought that notoriety was generally the business of managers.”

“Certainly, ordinary publicity, but not extraordinary. You must see that is unlikely, as it will be all for your advantage.”

Though little conversant with business, as the agent had just remarked, I saw that his arguments were not always in accordance with logic. However, I consented to the posters and the lithograph, in consideration of the promised results.

“That is right,” the agent said, his familiarity sensibly increasing since the signature of the contract—“that is right: that is what I call managing things properly.”

And my man left me, after complimenting me once more on the arrangement I had made.

When left to myself, I indulged at my ease in day-dreams about the magnificent result promised me, and this anticipated joy was probably all I tasted from the moment of signing this engagement to its termination. The first unpleasantness it occasioned me was a slight discussion with my cashier, that is to say, my wife, who in consideration of her employment, had a deliberative voice in all theatrical matters. I could not certainly have found an employé of greater probity, or a more devoted clerk, but I am bound to say that this clerk, probably through her intimate connection with her employer, sometimes ventured to con-

tradit him. Thus I fared when I described to that functionary the brilliant perspective of my agreement.

Although I finished my statement with this harmonious phrase, on every word of which I laid a heavy stress, in order to give it more value, "and we shall return to France with one—hundred—thousand—francs clear profit," my wife, or rather my cashier, coolly said to me :

"Well, in your place, I should not have made such a bargain."

"But why not?" I said, piqued by this unexpected opposition.

"Why? because nothing guarantees you the promised profits, while you are perfectly certain as to your expenses."

Wishing to cut short a discussion from which I did not see my way out with honour :

"Women are all alike," I said, employing the phrase of the theatrical agent ; "understanding nothing of business, they oppose one out of obstinacy. But," I added, tossing my head, "we shall soon see which of us is in the right."

I confess that in this instance I allowed myself too easily to be led astray by flattering illusions ; but I must add, that it was for the last time ; for, thenceforth, I was so sceptical as regarded calculations, that my modest expectations always remained below the reality.

The period for starting soon arrived, and we made our preparations with incredible activity, for I desired to lose as little time as possible between the closing of my performances at Paris and their commencement in Brussels.

The Great Northern line not being open at that period, I was obliged to content myself with a post-chaise. Consequently, I hired from a builder of public conveyances, for two hundred francs a month, a diligence which had formerly been used in the environs of Paris ; it was composed of a coupé and a vast rotonde, over which was an impériale for the luggage. On the 25th of May, the day fixed for our departure, my carriage was loaded with an immense number of chests, containing my apparatus, and after we had taken our places, the postilion's whip cracked, and we started.

We took with us on this trip, besides my two boys who

performed with me, a manager, a workman, also acting as servant, and my wife's mother, who came partly for pleasure, and partly to help her daughter in her theatrical details. Galloping through Paris, we soon left the Faubourg and the Barrière St. Denis behind us. The weather was splendid—a perfect spring evening; my wife and I, with the children, were comfortably established in the coupé, and as it was Madame Robert-Houdin's first journey, she was so delighted with it, that I believe, if I had then offered her the calculation of my presumed profits, she would probably have her-self augmented it. For my own part, I was plunged in a delicious reverie. I recalled my journey with Torrini, and while giving a thought of regret to that excellent friend, I compared his carriage with my brilliant equipage, his modest claims on fortune with the magnificent prospects promised me; and I could not help yielding to a feeling of noble pride when I remembered I owed this position solely to my labour and to my energy. Then, finding myself freed from the annoyance of any theatrical administration, and my inventive ideas abandoned, I experienced an undefinable comfort, and were it not for the fear of making a pun, I would add, at this moment I was really transported.

What would I have given to see myself thus bowling along in my own carriage! I fancied that the very passers-by regarded us with a certain degree of satisfaction; and in this infantile illusion I smiled upon them most benignantly.

At some distance from the barrier we stopped.

“Will you please to get out and have your carriage weighed? Here is the office.”

“Before proceeding to weigh,” the receiver of the toll said, approaching me, “I warn you that I shall summons you for carrying a heavier weight than the law allows.”

I could not appeal to my ignorance of this, for no one ought to be ignorant of the law; I therefore submitted philosophically enough to the threatened summons, and we soon recommenced our journey, laughing heartily at the incident. The shades of night began to cover the country

when we reached the environs of Senlis. An old beggar, seeing us approaching, held out his hat; I understood this expressive gesture, and had the satisfaction of doing a clever trick and a good action at the same time; for I threw out a penny, which fell in his hat.

I had hardly executed this adroit manœuvre, when cries of "Stop! stop!" reached my ear; and at the same time I saw the old man running panting after the carriage, and shouting. The postilion at length stopped the horses, and he was just in time—a few paces further on, and our heavy carriage would have been upset. The worthy beggar had perceived that one of our wheels was on the point of losing its tire, and as the old man in his haste had lost his coin, and was beginning to look for it, I spared him this trouble by giving him a five-franc piece.

How true it is that an act of kindness is never lost; to a simple penny we owed our escape from an accident, the consequences of which would have been incalculable. A neighbouring cartwright soon came up and told us it was necessary to have the two wheels of the carriage repaired; and he gave us the following explanation of the accident that had occurred:

The diligence had been standing for a long time in a damp coach-house, and the fellocs had swollen. The heat produced by our rapid locomotion had dried them, and they had caught fire under the tire. The operation lasted four hours, and cost me forty francs; this was, perhaps, twenty more than it was worth, but what could I do but pay, as I should have lost precious time by appealing to the law?

I was beginning to understand that travelling impressions in a diligence are not at all of a nature to enrich a traveller; but the reflection came too late, and I could only continue my journey. I therefore did so, not very gaily, perhaps, but at any rate with a degree of careless resignation.

I will pass over the details of a thousand petty miseries we had to undergo, like so many pin-pricks echeloned on our passage to prepare us for more bitter deceptions. We at length reached Quiévrain, the frontier town of

Belgium, where we were to give up our horses and put our carriage on the railway running to Brussels; beforehand, however, we had to endure the formalities of the custom-house.

I hoped, as the theatrical agent had informed me, to pass all my traps summarily, by declaring the nature of my apparatus, and hence I went to the office and made my declaration.

“There is only one way of passing your luggage, sir,” a clerk said to me, very politely. (Belgian officials are generally very gentle and civil—at least I always found them so.)

“Then,” I replied, in the same tone, “will you have the kindness, sir, to tell me the way, that I may profit by it as speedily as possible?”

“You must unpack your instruments, put an *ad valorem* duty on them, which the comptroller will verify, and pay 25 per cent. on the amount, after which you can start as soon as you please.”

“But, sir, that is not possible,” I said, greatly annoyed at this *contretemps*.

“And why not?”

“Because my instruments are not merchandise.”

I then explained to my clerk that I was going to Brussels to give some performances, after which I intended to return to France with the same luggage. According to the information the official gave me, it seems I had neglected to fulfil a simple formality, through the want of which the office at Quiévrain would not let me go on without payment. To pass my instruments duty free, I ought to have applied to the Belgian Minister, who would willingly have granted me the permission. I could certainly do so still, but I could not receive an answer under a week, and that was just three days after the period fixed for my commencing at Brussels.

Hence I found myself between the horns of a dilemma. I must either, after paying a heavy duty, lose precious time in packing, valuing, and unpacking, my instruments, or forfeit six thousand francs to my manager while awaiting a ministerial reply. Although I made all sorts of sup-

plications to the different customs officials, I could only obtain this answer, dictated by their inflexible orders, "We can do nothing."

I was in despair; in vain, conforming to the maxim, "It is better to address the king than his officials," I pursued the director himself with my entreaties; he would not hear a word. He was a stout good-looking man, of some fifty years of age, dressed in an enormous paletot, much resembling in cut the one I have described as my costume when learning my sleight-of-hand tricks at Tours.

We were both standing at the door of the custom-house, near the high road, where my chests had been deposited. Wearied with listening to my eternal remonstrances, the director began talking to me about indifferent matters; but I always led the conversation back to the same subject.

"You are a prestidigator, then?" my stout Belgian said to me, laying a stress on this word, to prove to me that he knew the pompous title by which the juggler is distinguished.

"Yes, sir, that is my profession."

"Ah, ah! very good; I know several celebrities in that art. I have even witnessed their performances with a great deal of pleasure."

While my amateur was thus talking, an idea occurred to me, which I immediately put in execution, for I trusted the result of it would powerfully aid in favouring my entreaties.

"What are your most striking tricks?" the stout man added, in the tone of a perfect connoisseur.

"I really cannot describe them to you, it would be too difficult. There is one which can only be appreciated when seen; but I can easily give you a specimen."

"I should much like it, if you would," the official said, not sorry thus to console himself for the trouble I had caused him. My son, at this moment, was playing some distance off on the high road, and kicking a pebble about.

"Emile!" I cried, hailing him, "can you tell us what this gentleman has in his pocket?"

“Certainly!” the boy replied, without leaving off his game; “he has a blue-striped handkerchief.”

“Oh, oh!” the stout gentleman said, with an air of astonishment. Then he recovered, and putting his hands in both pockets to conceal their contents,

“That’s all very good!” he added, with an air of doubt; “but chance may have aided that discovery.”

After a slight pause, during which he seemed considerably bothered, he continued:

“Can he tell me, though, what is under the handkerchief?”

“The gentleman asks what is under the handkerchief?” I shouted to my son.

“There is,” he replied, in the same loud voice, “a green morocco spectacle-case, without the spectacles.”

“That’s really curious—very curious!” said the man of the paletot. “But,” he added, shrugging his shoulders, “I should much like him to mention the article under the spectacle-case.”

And my incredulous friend shoved his hands in his pockets. I drew a good omen from this last exclamation, and so, desirous to insure my success, I took my precautions that my son should answer correctly, and I transmitted him the question just asked me.

Emile, who had not left off his game for a moment, exclaimed, as if anxious to get rid of us, “It is a piece of sugar which the gentleman saved from his cup of coffee.”

“Ah! that is too fine?” the director exclaimed, in a tone of admiration; “the lad is a sorcerer.”

My second sight performance was at an end; still I saw with pleasure that it produced a lively impression on the director of the customs, who, after some moments’ reflection, himself returned to the subject we had left.

“Come, sir,” he remarked, “I will infringe my regulations for your sake. We will not open your chests; I will rely on your statement of their contents and value, and you will pay the duty according to the tariff. When you have reached Brussels, and have obtained the ministerial authority to introduce your instruments duty free, I will return you the money you have paid.”

I thanked my new protector, and, a few hours later, personnel and luggage had reached the station at Brussels.

Before leaving Quiévrain for ever, I will give my reader an idea of the conjuring trick which enabled me to produce those startling instances of second sight to which I owed my deliverance.

I have already said that the director wore a paletot, with large pockets, so, profiting by the art by which I had so cleverly emptied Comte's pockets some time before, I found out what he had in them, and my son consequently learned it from me. As for the piece of sugar, it was easy enough to perceive by its regular shape that it had come from a café—besides, I could have no doubt that a lump of sugar, taken from the pocket of a man of fifty, and, above all, a Belgian, must be saved from his after-dinner coffee.

At the Brussels station, a postilion who had three horses out of work, offered to take our heavy carriage to the Tirlemont Hotel, and I consented, for I really knew not what hotel to go to. After driving through the city at full speed, we entered a winding street, in the midst of which our driver began smacking his whip loudly to announce our arrival, and with the skill of a practised driver, he turned into an archway that opened on to the hotel yard. We made a princely entrée here, which reminded me of our departure from Paris, for the master of the hotel, his wife, and the servants, were all at their posts ready to receive us worthily. We had gone safely through about half the narrow entry, when our vehicle suddenly stopped, as if riveted to the pavement: blows fell like hail on the unhappy steeds, but these, though accompanied by vigorous oaths and stimulants of every description, could not conquer the unknown obstacle.

Being quite convinced that the road was clear on either side, our postilion decided on trying a final effort: so he got down rapidly from his seat, took the horses by the bit, and drew them forward sharply. The carriage appeared to yield to this powerful attraction, and began to move slowly. All at once a sound of breaking was heard, while at the same moment cries of alarm issued from both compartments of the carriage.

The doors were hurriedly opened, women and children emerged, and the last of our party was still on the step, when the impériale gave way, and the numerous heavy trunks crashed into the centre of the carriage. In the emotion produced by such danger, I looked round my party, and, thanks to Heaven, we were all safe and sound.

My wife and children were carefully attended to, while I, though not entirely recovered from my terror, sought the cause of this unforeseen catastrophe. I soon discovered that our carriage, being too highly loaded, had caught in the projecting sides of the archway, and that this gradual and powerful pressure had forced the mouldering framework of our old vehicle to give way.

In comparison with the misfortune from which we had so miraculously escaped, the injury to the carriage was an accident of no importance—a loss which would be quickly forgotten in the success that awaited us. The carriage was sent to be repaired, and the accident was soon a thing of the past, as we sought to recover from the fatigue of our long and wearying journey.

My first walk in Brussels led me straight to the manager, who appeared delighted at my keeping my word, and gave me a most polite reception: thence I proceeded to the Park Theatre, where I was to give my performances.

This building, lately destroyed by fire, was situated on one of the most agreeable sites in the city, for it formed the angle of a magnificent park, which is to Brussels what the Tuileries are to Paris.

During the summer no theatrical performance took place, and it was to fill up this gap that the engagement had been formed with me.

This theatre was city property, and I learned the fact in the following way. The porter, whom the manager ought to have recommended to give me all necessary information, stated to me that he was attached to the theatre, both as keeper and head machinist. He also told me, with pedantic gravity, that I could not drive in a nail, form an opening in the stage, or, in a word, make the slightest change, until he, as responsible official, had referred the point to the city architect.

“Such supervision is not possible,” I said to this important personage. “How do you manage, then, when the theatrical performances are on?”

“Ah, that is different. As the architect places confidence in me, he allows me to do whatever I think proper, and I am responsible for everything.”

“If that is all, I can take the responsibility on myself, and the matter can be settled at once.”

“If you think so,” the porter replied in an ironical tone, “you can apply to the city authorities: the council will take it into consideration, and you will receive permission in a fortnight.”

I saw that the crafty gentleman wished to force himself upon me, but I soon destroyed his hopes by making him understand I would allow no stranger to be initiated into my mysterious arrangements.

This conversation had taken place on the stage, by the light of a candle which the conservator of the royal theatre held in his hand, but so soon as I had intimated my intention of doing without him, he turned on his heel and retired to his den, leaving us in perfect darkness.

“Wait a moment, sir,” I cried to him; “we cannot be groping about in this way; so open the windows.”

“Windows!” the machinist said, with a laugh; “who ever heard of windows in a theatre? What use would they be when the rehearsals always take place by candle-light?”

“Excellently reasoned, my worthy man,” I replied, checking my inclination to laugh; “I always thought like you that windows could be done without if you had lights, but when you have no lights——”

“Why, then, you do as I do, you go money in hand to the grocer’s and buy candles; I see no difficulty in that.”

And, while making this reply, the porter and his candle were gradually eclipsed. I had no time to lose in arguing, and besides, this man, whom I would have gladly brought to his senses under other circumstances, might play me some trick that might prevent me performing *mine*. My instruments would remain, so to speak, at his mercy during the night, and he would have all possible facility to do

me some injury, which he could deny in safety. Hence, I sent my servant straight to the grocer's, that natural providence of any one who wants a light.

All my readers have probably read descriptions of theatrical interiors, and they are all much alike, although their cleanliness and arrangement vary according to the intelligence of the stage manager. Nor is the same luxury of decorations and accessories visible in all theatres; some are literally encumbered with them, while others are almost entirely wanting in these qualities.

I remember that, when giving a dozen performances at Chester, I found the theatrical decorations charmingly original. Properly speaking, there was only one scene; but, as it would have been impossible to produce the scenic effect with this, the machinist had very cleverly painted a forest on the back, and the scene moved on a pivot, which my friend turned by the aid of a winch, and thus could display a hall or a forest at will.

With such feeble resources, the scenic illusion was often compromised, but, according to the machinist, the actors corrected any glaring anachronisms of place by ingenious new readings, and sometimes, too, by the *expression of their faces*.

This machinist was like his scenery, for he filled many parts; he was in turn porter, painter, wig-maker, property man, tailor, and ticket-taker; but with so many strings to his bow this worthy man found himself out of work during three parts of the year, for during that period there were no performances at Chester.

But to return to the porter, machinist, and keeper of the Park Theatre. This man could never forgive my refusal of his services, and his impertinence and ill-will pursued me to the close, and occasioned me continual annoyance; and although I complained to the manager, I could obtain no redress. The porter being paid by government, claimed the right, like his brethren the porters of Paris, of making his tenants feel his power and his independence.

I have performed in many royal theatres, but I never had to deal with any but most polite machinists and

managers, who could flatter themselves they were masters in their own house.

However, I managed to surmount difficulties of every description, and the day of my first representation arrived.

On this very day was opened that fiery furnace which was called "the summer of 1846;" and the heat was astounding. Still, the theatre was full, and the success of my experiments was as great as I could desire. The second sight, especially, produced an enthusiasm which the generally cold inhabitants of Brussels expressed by noisy bravos.

I was proud and happy, for, in addition to the satisfaction success always produces, I foresaw the realization of the theatrical agent's brilliant promises. Thus, to take a slight revenge for my cashier's obstinacy, I never failed, each time I left the stage, to say to her in a tone of triumph:

"Well! do you believe in the one hundred thousand francs now? That's how I like business."

And I returned on the stage with a smiling and animated face.

The performance over, the curtain fell on the illusions I had produced, as well as on those I had nursed as to my receipts. They were equally ephemeral in either case, for I had scarcely left the stage when I saw my manager coming towards me in the attitude once assumed by the steeds of Hippolytus, according to Theramene's recital. He, so joyous at the commencement of the performance,

*L'œil morne maintenant et la tête baissée,
Semblait se conformer à sa triste pensée.*

"Here, sir," he said, pointing to a small rouleau, "is your share."

"What! my share?" I exclaimed, in a tone of indescribable disappointment; "and the rest?"

"The rest, sir, has gone in the expenses, and the poor-rate."

"But the rest," I still insisted—"the rest, what has become of it?"

“Well, sir,” my manager replied, in a lamentable tone, “the cashier states that the greater part of the audience received free admissions.”

Irritated by such an explanation, I hurried to the office, and opened and closed the door violently. The employé turned towards me, and without being affected by my abruptness, he bowed to me politely (another instance of Belgian courtesy).

“How is it,” I said, without replying to his bow, “that so many free admissions were given without my sanction?”

“They were given, sir, by the manager’s orders,” the man replied, with a calmness that made me believe he was used to such scenes, “and you must be aware,” he added, in a conciliatory tone, “that there are numerous claims on the first night of a new performance at a royal theatre. Thus we have, for instance, the authorities, the city architect, the manager of the gas company, the newspaper writers, the manager’s relations and friends, the police inspector, who has a right to a box; and all these gentlemen, as you may suppose, bring their families with them. We have, again——”

“Oh, sir,” I replied, ironically, “for goodness’ sake, stop, for if you go on at that rate I shall begin to fear you had not a seat left for the paying public. To-morrow, I presume, I shall have to hand you back the modest sum you have just sent me. However, I shall certainly insist on an explanation with the manager.”

The next day I proceeded to call on M. X——, with the firm intention of evincing to him my dissatisfaction; but he was so ready with his explanations that I could not be angry, and we ended by agreeing that, henceforth, all free admissions should have my signature, and that they should not be dispensed quite so liberally.

This measure, perhaps, checked some new abuses, but was not enough to suppress them all, for though the theatre grew more and more crowded, my strong-box did not follow the same progression.

Far from netting the fabulous sum which had so dazzled me, I only brought back from my trip to Brussels an

illusion dispelled and experience, while, as my cashier had predicted, my expenses rather more than balanced my receipts.

I have great reason for believing that, during my stay at the Park Theatre, I was cheated out of my proper share. It was my first affair of the kind, and I was obliged to study at my own expense; but from that period I was on my guard, and evaded every attempt at fraud. I will add, too, that at a later date I had the satisfaction of dealing only with managers of well-known probity, to whom I gave my entire confidence without ever having any reason to regret it.

CHAPTER XVI.

Reopening of my Fantastic Soirées—Minor Miseries of Good Luck—Inconvenience of a small Theatre—My Room taken by Storm—A gratuitous Performance—A conscientious Audience—Pleasant Story about a Black Silk Cap—I perform at the Château of St. Cloud—Cagliostro's Casket—Holidays.

THE recommencement of the performances on my own stage largely recompensed me for my bitter *impressions de voyage*. My room was taken a week beforehand for my first performance, as well as for the following, and I had to send away four times as many persons as I could receive.

This success had been foreseen by the theatrical agent, and I owed it as much to my absence from the capital as to the attraction my experiments held out. My repertory was still a novelty to the Parisian public, as I had started for Brussels at the height of my success. This did not prevent me, however, from offering some new tricks, one of which more especially produced a striking effect.

After my son had mounted on a very small table, I covered him with an enormous stuff cone, which concealed him from sight, and then, at the sound of a pistol, the cone was thrown over, and at the same instant the lad appeared at my side. Afterwards, in large theatres, and

specially in London, this trick was improved upon, and seemed more marvellous still. Instead of appearing by my side, the boy was instantaneously transported to a box at a long distance from the stage, where everybody could easily see him.

It is a well-known fact that a man cannot enjoy perfect happiness in this world, and that the greatest prosperity has its disagreeable side; this is what is called "the minor evils of good luck." One of my special annoyances was having a room much too small, which disabled me from satisfying all the demands made for places, and, though I racked my brain, I could hit on no expedient to remedy this inconvenience.

As I have already said, my room was often taken beforehand; in that case the office was not opened, and a placard on the door announced it was useless for any non-holders of tickets to apply. But it daily happened that persons, annoyed at being unable to enjoy a promised treat, took no heed of the notice, and went straight to the pay place. On being refused admission, they abused the money-taker, and still more the management.

These complaints were generally absurd, and of the following description:—

"Such an abuse is most improper," one of these disappointed persons said, with great simplicity; "I will certainly go to-morrow and complain to the prefect of police, and we shall see whether Monsieur Robert-Houdin has a right to have too small a theatre."

When these recriminations went no further, I confess I laughed at them, but they did not always end in such a pacific manner. My employés were sometimes personally attacked, and on one occasion my theatre was taken by storm. The story is worth telling.

One evening a dozen young men, after heating their brains by an excellent dinner, presented themselves at the door of my theatre; the notice they read only appeared to them an excellent jest. Consequently, paying no attention to the observations made to them, they collected round the door, and, to employ the usual expression in such cases, they began to form "the head of the tail." Other visitors,

encouraged by their example, collected, and gradually a considerable crowd assembled in front of the theatre.

The manager, informed of what was happening, came forward, and prepared to address the crowd from the head of the stairs, after coughing to render his voice clearer. But he had scarce commenced his address, when his voice was drowned by derisive laughter and shouts, which compelled his silence. In his despair, he came to tell me the dilemma, and asked what he had better do.

“Do not disturb yourself,” I said; “all will end better than you expect. Stay,” I added, looking at my watch; “it is now half-past seven, and the ticket-holders will begin to arrive; so, open the doors, and, as soon as the room is full, the public outside will be compelled to abandon the ground.”

I had scarcely uttered the words, when a servant came in all haste to tell me that the crowd had broken down the barrier, and rushed into the room. I hastened on to the stage, and, through the hole in the curtain, could assure myself of the truth of the statement: the room was full.

I confess I was much embarrassed as to what I should do. To have the room cleared by the neighbouring guard was a scandal I wished to avoid, and I could not calculate the consequences. Besides, if the police interfered, I should have to attend at the court, and thus lose precious time. Lastly, the Prefecture, which had hitherto imposed but a single sentry on me, would not fail to send a corporal's guard, at least, to the great increase of my daily expenses.

I immediately formed a decision.

“Have the doors closed,” I said to my manager, “and put up a notice that, owing to a sudden indisposition, the evening's performance is postponed till to-morrow. As this measure applies to the ticket-holders, be in readiness to return the money to those who will not exchange their tickets. As for me,” I continued, “I have made up my mind. I will give a gratis performance, and my revenge will consist in compelling the public to be ashamed of the schoolboy trick they have played.”

This plan arranged, I prepared to do the honours of my house properly, and the curtain soon rose.

When I appeared on the stage, I noticed that the greater number of the spectators evinced considerable embarrassment; still, I soon put them at their ease by the nonchalant air I assumed, as if ignorant of what had occurred. I did even more. I performed with an unusual amount of dash; and when the time arrived to offer my small presents, I was so liberal with them that not a single spectator was overlooked.

I need not say that I was heartily applauded. The public vied with me in "reciprocating" compliments, and thus hoped to compensate me for the annoyance they fancied they had caused me.

An original and extremely comic scene was performed when my audience lingeringly departed.

Nearly all the persons present had only seen in this assault on my room a means to obtain places, and each intended to pay for his seat after having occupied it.

But, for my part, I determined on maintaining the original character of my gratuitous performance, even if my pocket suffered. Thus, foreseeing this feeling of delicacy, I had ordered all my attendants to leave before the performance was over, and they had obeyed me so well, that manager, money-taker, and box-openers had disappeared.

I then posted myself where I could see everything without being noticed. The spectators looked for the office; searched all around to find some official; thrust their hands in their pockets, and collected in small groups, until, worn out, they went away.

Still, the public would not allow themselves to be beaten, and for several days I had a regular procession of people coming to pay their debt. Some persons added their apologies, and I also received by post a note for 100 fr., with the following letter:—

"SIR,

Having been dragged into your room last night by a party of thoughtless young men, I tried in vain, after the performance, to pay for the seat I had occupied.

"I do not wish, however, to quit France without paying the debt I have contracted. In consequence, estimating the price of my stall by the pleasure you caused me, I send you a hundred-franc note, which I beg you to accept in payment of the debt I involuntarily contracted.

"Still, I should not consider myself out of your debt were I not also to offer you my compliments for your interesting performance, and beg you to accept, sir, the assurance of my consideration."

As the loss entailed on me by the assault on my room was light, I had no cause to repent the decision I had formed. On the other hand, the adventure became known, and added still more to my credit, as it is notorious the public prefer going to theatres where they are certain of finding no room.

As a general rule, family parties came to see me, but it was not unusual for a number of persons to form a rendezvous at my theatre. The following incident will offer an instance:—

The ingenious author of those eccentric caricatures, which delight everybody who is not himself attacked, Dantan the younger, came one day to my box-office.

"Madam," he said to the lady in command, "how many stalls have you to let?"

"I will consult my book," the lady replied. "Do you wish them for to-night?"

"No, madam, for this day week."

"Oh, in that case, you can have as many as you like."

"How, as many as I like?" Why, your room must be made of india-rubber?"

"No, sir, I merely mean to say that of fifty stalls I have at my disposal, you can take as many as you please."

"Very good, madam, I now understand," Dantan continued, laughingly; "then, if I can have as many as I please, have the goodness to keep me sixty."

The lady, much embarrassed to solve this problem, sent for me, and I easily arranged the affair by converting the first pit row into stalls.

The reason why the sculptor required so many seats was as follows:—

Dantan, junior, has an enormous number of friends, and

the original idea had occurred to him of inviting a certain number of them to Robert-Houdin's performance, and for that purpose he had engaged these sixty seats.

I have mentioned this incident, because it both proves the renown my theatre enjoyed at that time, and reminds me of the commencement of one of the most agreeable acquaintances I ever made in my life. From this moment I became, and have always remained, one of the intimate friends of the celebrated sculptor.

Before knowing him personally, like the majority of his admirers, I was unacquainted with his serious works, but when I was admitted to his studio, I could appreciate the full extent of his talent.

Dantan has in this room, arranged on enormous shelves, the most perfect collection of busts of contemporary celebrities, I do not think a single illustrious person of the age is missing. Each is properly classified and arranged as in a museum; monarchs and statesmen, less numerous than the others, are collected on one shelf; then come authors, musicians, singers, composers, physicians, warriors, dramatic artists—in a word, great men of every description and country. But the most interesting thing in the gallery is that every bust is accompanied by its caricature, so that, after admiring the original, you laugh heartily at noticing all the comic details of the other.

On seeing these numberless heads, it is difficult to imagine that one man's life could suffice for such a toil. Dantan, however, has a remarkable talent in catching the characteristic features of a face, and often enough he need only see a person once in order to produce an extraordinary likeness. Witness the following fact, which I will cite as much for its singularity as because it bears an affinity, in some degree, to sleight of hand:—

The son of Lieutenant-General Baron D—— came one day to Dantan, begging him to make a bust of his father. "I will not hide from you," he said to the artist, "that you will encounter an almost insurmountable difficulty in performing your task. Not only would the general never consent to sit to you, but you cannot even be introduced to

him at home. As my father has been ill for many years, he sees no other persons than his servants, and he keeps almost always alone. Hence, you will have to manage to catch a glimpse at him unawares, but I do not know how."

"Does your father never go out?" the sculptor asked.

"Oh, yes, sir; every afternoon at four my father takes the 'bus and goes to read the papers at a room in the Place de la Madeleine, after which he comes back and shuts himself up again."

"I require no more," the artist said. "I will begin making my observations to-day, and set to work to-morrow."

In fact, at four o'clock precisely, Dantan posted himself before a house forming the corner of the Boulevards and the Rue Louis-le-Grand, and soon saw the general come out and walk to an omnibus. The sculptor followed his model and entered the vehicle with him, but, unfortunately, the only two seats vacant were on the same side, and the artist could only make profile studies, being very careful not to attract attention.

At last the 'bus stopped before the Madeleine church; pursuer and pursued went in together to the same reading-room, where each took up his favourite paper, and was soon lost in the perusal.

Dantan had taken a seat opposite the general, and, while apparently absorbed in a leader, took stealthy glances at his model.

All was going on favourably, and the artist continued his studies quietly for some moments, until the general, already surprised that his fellow-passenger should come to the same reading-room, caught his eye fixed upon himself.

Annoyed by this impertinent curiosity, for which he could assign no reason, he attempted to foil it by forming a rampart of his enormous paper.

The face of the old baron disappeared, but the top of his head was still visible, and Dantan would have been able to continue his task satisfactorily, had it not been for a frightful silk cap he wore.

Many a conjuror, even the most famous, would have been checked by such a difficulty; but Dantan did not long rack his brains, which renders his trick only the more striking.

He went up to the lady at the counter, spoke with her for a few moments, and then quietly returned to his post of observation.

It is necessary to state that the reading-room, heated by a large stove, was already quite warm enough; but suddenly an insupportable degree of heat filled the room, and drops of perspiration stood on the foreheads of several persons.

The general, who at this moment held the *Gazette des Tribunaux* in his hand, and was doubtlessly amusing himself with some lugubrious drama, was one of the last to notice the heightened temperature. Even he, though, at length found it necessary to remove his silk cap, and put it in his pocket, growling, "Confound it, how hot the room is!"

The trick was done.

The reader has already guessed that the clever sculptor was the cause of this vapour-bath, which he induced the lady to produce by explaining to her his important mission.

This result once obtained, Dantan hastily made his phrenological studies on the venerable head of the old warrior; then, rising from the table, he cast a final glance over his features, photographed him, so to speak, in his mind, and ran off to set to work.

A short time after, the sculptor sent the general's family the most perfect bust possibly ever produced by his chisel.

Here I will close the parenthesis I commenced with reference to the evils the smallness of my theatre entailed on me; and I will now begin another about the pleasures my success procured me.

At the beginning of November I received a "command" to St. Cloud, to give a performance before Louis Philippe and his family. I accepted the invitation with the greatest pleasure; for as I had never yet performed before a crowned head, this was an important event for me.

I had six days before me to make my preparations, and I took all possible pains, even arranging a trick for the occasion, from which I had reason to expect an excellent result.

On the day fixed for my performance, a fourgon came at an early hour to fetch me and my apparatus, and we were conveyed to the château. A theatre had been put up in a large hall selected by the king for the representation, and in order that I might not be disturbed in my preparations, a guard was placed at one of the doors leading into the corridor. I also noticed three other doors in this apartment; one, composed of glass, opened on to the garden opposite a passage filled with splendid orange-trees; the two others, to the right and left, communicated with the apartments of the king and the Duchess of Orleans.

I was busy arranging my apparatus, when I heard one of the doors I have just mentioned open quietly, and directly a voice made the following inquiry in the most affable manner:—

“Monsieur Robert-Houdin, may I be permitted to come in?”

I turned my head in the direction, and recognized the king, who, having asked this question merely as a form of introduction, had not waited for my reply to walk towards me.

I bowed respectfully.

“Have you all you require for your preparations?” the king asked me.

“Yes, sire; the steward of the château supplied me with skilled workmen, who speedily put up this little stage.”

My tables, consoles, and tabourets, as well as the various instruments for my performance, symmetrically arranged on the stage, already presented an elegant appearance.

“This is all very pretty,” the king said to me, drawing near the stage, and casting a stealthy glance on some of my apparatus; “I see with pleasure that the artist of 1846 will justify the good opinion produced by the mechanician of 1844.”

“Sire,” I replied, “on this day I will strive, as I did two years ago, to render myself worthy of the great favour your

majesty deigns to bestow on me, by witnessing my performance."

"Your son's second sight is said to be very surprising," the king continued; "but I warn you, Monsieur Robert-Houdin, to be on your guard, for we intend to cause you considerable difficulties."

"Sire," I replied boldly, "I have every reason for believing that my son will surmount them."

"I should be vexed were it otherwise," the king said, with a tinge of incredulity, as he retired. "Monsieur Robert-Houdin," he added, as he closed the door after him, "I shall feel obliged by your punctuality."

At four o'clock precisely, when the royal family and the numerous guests were assembled, the curtains that concealed me opened, and I appeared on the stage. Owing to my repeated performances, I had fortunately acquired an imperturbable assurance and a confidence in myself which the success of my experiments fully justified.

I began in the most profound silence, for the party evidently wished to see and judge before giving me any encouragement. But, insensibly, they became excited, and I heard several exclamations of surprise, which were soon followed by still more expressive demonstrations.

All my tricks were very favourably received, and the one I had invented for the occasion gained me unbounded applause.

I will give a description of it:—

I borrowed from my noble spectators several handkerchiefs, which I made into a parcel, and laid on the table. Then, at my request, different persons wrote on cards the names of places whither they desired the handkerchiefs to be invisibly transported.

When this had been done, I begged the king to take three of the cards at hazard, and choose from them the place he might consider the most suitable.

"Let us see," Louis Philippe said, "what this one says: 'I desire the handkerchiefs to be found beneath one of the candelabra on the mantelpiece.' That is too easy for a sorcerer; so we will pass to the next card: 'The handkerchiefs are to be transported to the dome of the In-

valides." That would suit me, but it is much too far, not for the handkerchiefs, but for us. Ah, ah!" the king added, looking at the last card, "I am afraid, Monsieur Robert-Houdin, I am about to embarrass you. Do you know what this card proposes?"

"Will your majesty deign to inform me?"

"It is desired that you should send the handkerchiefs into the chest of the last orange-tree on the right of the avenue."

"Only that, sire? Deign to order, and I will obey."

"Very good, then; I should like to see such a magic act: I, therefore, choose the orange-tree chest."

The king gave some orders in a low voice, and I directly saw several persons run to the orange-tree, in order to watch it and prevent any fraud.

I was delighted at this precaution, which must add to the effect of my experiment, for the trick was already arranged, and the precaution hence too late.

I had now to send the handkerchiefs on their travels, so I placed them beneath a bell of opaque glass, and taking my wand, I ordered my invisible travellers to proceed to the spot the king had chosen.

I raised the bell; the little parcel was no longer there, and a white turtle-dove had taken its place.

The king then walked quickly to the door, whence he looked in the direction of the orange-tree, to assure himself that the guards were at their post; when this was done, he began to smile and shrug his shoulders.

"Ah! Monsieur Robert-Houdin," he said, somewhat ironically, "I much fear for the virtue of your magic staff." Then he added, as he returned to the end of the room, where several servants were standing, "Tell William to open immediately the last chest at the end of the avenue, and bring me carefully what he finds there—if he *does* find anything."

William soon proceeded to the orange-tree, and though much astonished at the orders given him, he began to carry them out.

He carefully removed one of the sides of the chest, thrust his hand in, and almost touched the roots of the tree before

he found anything. All at once he uttered a cry of surprise, as he drew out a small iron coffer eaten by rust.

This curious "find," after having been cleaned from the mould, was brought in and placed on a small ottoman by the king's side.

"Well, Monsieur Robert-Houdin," Louis Philippe said to me, with a movement of impatient curiosity, "here is a box; am I to conclude it contains the handkerchiefs?"

"Yes, sire," I replied, with assurance, "and they have been there, too, for a long period."

"How can that be? the handkerchiefs were lent you scarce a quarter of an hour ago."

"I cannot deny it, sire; but what would my magic powers avail me if I could not perform incomprehensible tricks? Your majesty will doubtlessly be still more surprised, when I prove to your satisfaction that this coffer, as well as its contents, was deposited in the chest of the orange-tree sixty years ago."

"I should like to believe your statement," the king replied, with a smile; "but that is impossible, and I must, therefore, ask for proofs of your assertion."

"If your majesty will be kind enough to open this casket, they will be supplied."

"Certainly; but I shall require a key for that."

"It only depends on yourself, sir, to have one. Deign to remove it from the neck of this turtle-dove, which has just brought it you."

Louis Philippe unfastened a ribbon that held a small rusty key, with which he hastened to unlock the coffer.

The first thing that caught the king's eye was a parchment, on which he read the following statement:—

THIS DAY, THE 6TH JUNE, 1786,

THIS IRON BOX, CONTAINING SIX HANDKERCHIEFS, WAS PLACED AMONG THE ROOTS OF AN ORANGE-TREE BY ME, BALSAMO, COUNT OF CAGLIOSTRO, TO SERVE IN PERFORMING AN ACT OF MAGIC, WHICH WILL BE EXECUTED ON THE SAME DAY SIXTY YEARS HENCE BEFORE LOUIS PHILIPPE OF ORLEANS AND HIS FAMILY.

“There is decidedly witchcraft about this,” the king said, more and more amazed. “Nothing is wanting, for the seal and signature of the celebrated sorcerer are placed at the foot of this statement, which, Heaven pardon me, smells strongly of sulphur.”

At this jest, the audience began to laugh.

“But,” the king added, taking out of the box a carefully sealed packet, “can the handkerchiefs by possibility be in this?”

“Indeed, sire, they are; but, before opening the parcel, I would request your majesty to notice that it also bears the impression of Cagliostro’s seal.”

This seal, once rendered so famous by being placed on the celebrated alchemist’s bottles of elixir and liquid gold, I had obtained from Torrini, who had been an old friend of Cagliostro’s.

“It is certainly the same,” my royal spectator answered, after comparing the two seals. Still, in his impatience to learn the contents of the parcel, the king quickly tore open the envelope, and soon displayed before the astounded spectators the six handkerchiefs which, a few moments before, were still on my table.

This trick gained me lively applause, but in my second sight, which was to terminate the performance, I had really to sustain a terrible struggle, as the king had warned me.

Among the objects handed me, there was, I remember, a medal, which it was expected would embarrass me. Still, I had no sooner taken it in my hand than my son described it in the following terms:—

“It is,” he said, confidently, “a Greek medal of bronze, on which is a word composed of six letters, which I will spell: *lambda, epsilon, mu, nu, omicron, sigma*, which makes *Lemnos*.”

My son knew the Greek alphabet; hence, he could read the word Lemnos, although he could not possibly have translated it.

This was in itself a severe trial for so young a lad; but it did not satisfy the royal family.

I was handed a small Chinese coin with a hole through the centre, and its name and value were immediately indi-

cated; and, lastly, a difficulty, from which I managed to escape successfully, was the brilliant finale of my performance.

I had been surprised to see the Duchess of Orleans, who took a lively interest in the second sight, retire to her apartments; but she soon returned, and handed me a small case, the contents of which she wished my son to describe, but I must be careful not to open it.

I had foreseen this prohibition; so, while the princess was speaking to me, I opened the case with one hand, and, by a rapid glance, satisfied myself as to its contents. Still, I pretended for a moment to be startled by the proposal, in order to produce a greater effect.

"Your highness," I remarked, as I returned the case, "will allow me to appeal against such a proposal, for you must have remarked that, until now, I required to see the object before my son could name it."

"Yet you have surmounted greater difficulties," the amiable duchess retorted. "However, if it is not possible, let us say no more about it, for I should be grieved to cause you any embarrassment."

"What your highness wishes is, I repeat, impossible; and yet my son, feeling anxious to justify the confidence you place in his clairvoyance, will attempt to see through the case, and describe its contents."

"Can he do so even through my hands?" the duchess continued, trying to conceal the case.

"Yes, madam, and even if your highness were in the next room, my son would be able to see it."

The duchess, declining the new trial I proposed, satisfied herself by questioning my son with her own lips.

The boy, who had long received his instructions, replied, without hesitation, "There is in the case a diamond pin, the stone being surrounded by a garter of sky-blue enamel."

"That is perfectly correct," the duchess said, as she showed the ornament to the king. "Judge for yourself, sire;" then, turning to me, she added, with infinite grace, "Monsieur Robert-Houdin, will you accept this pin in remembrance of your visit to St. Cloud?"

I thanked her highness sincerely, as I assured her of my gratitude.

The performance was over : the curtain fell, and, in my turn, I was enabled to enjoy a curious scene at my ease ; it was to look through a small hole at my audience, who had assembled in groups, and were talking about the impression I had produced.

Before leaving the château, the king and queen again sent me the most flattering messages by the person charged to hand me a souvenir of their munificence.

This representation could not increase my reputation—that was not possible—but it helped powerfully to maintain it. My performance at St. Cloud, more especially, created a sensation among the aristocracy, who, until that moment, had hesitated about visiting my small room. Their curiosity overcame other considerations, and they came in their turn to assure themselves of the reality of the marvels attributed to me.

The summer heats were, however, beginning to be felt : we had reached the commencement of July, and I had to think about closing my theatre. However, instead of running after fortune, as in the previous year, I occupied myself with changing and improving my performance. The task was heavy ; for I was filled with bold emulation, as I could not conceal from myself that my success imposed certain duties on me, and that, in order to keep it up, I must be constantly deserving of it.

The most painful part of my inquiries was, that my inventions must be completed by a certain day and hour, for the reopening of my theatre was fixed for the first of the next September, and, for many reasons, I determined on being punctual.

For two months I worked with great ardour, granting myself no rest or pleasure. Sometimes, however, after dinner on Sunday, I allowed myself a recreation which may seem strange to many of my readers : I went to the fairs round Paris, and studied the mountebanks. There I amused myself, I may say, as much as any of the spectators around me ; though the pleasure I felt was not of the same nature as that of my neighbours. I amused myself by

seeing their amusement, and nothing more; for any one who has seen this style of spectacle must have noticed that the mountebank gives his public very little for their money. The best part of the sight is often seen outside.

CHAPTER XVII.

New Experiments—Aërial Suspension, &c.—A Performance at the Odéon—A Friend in Need—1848—The Theatres deserted—I leave Paris for London—Manager Mitchell—Publicity in England—The Great Wizard—A Butter-mould used as a Puff—Singular Bills—A Prize for the best Pun.

INSTEAD of being able to recommence my performances on the 1st of September, as I had hoped, my compulsory holidays, which might be called my "penal servitude," were prolonged another month, and it was not till the 1st of October that I was prepared to offer my new experiments to the public.

My pecuniary interests were much affected by this delay, but I trusted, correctly enough, to the zeal of the public to visit me, as a compensation.

My new repertory contained the *Crystal Box*, the *Fantastic Portfolio*, the *Trapèze Tumbler*, the *Garde Française*, the *Origin of Flowers*, the *Crystal Balls*, the *Inexhaustible Bottle*, the *Ethereal Suspension*, &c.

I had devoted especial care to the last experiment, on which I built great hopes. Surgery had supplied me with the first idea of it.

It will be remembered that in 1847 the insensibility produced by inhaling ether began to be applied in surgical operations; all the world talked about the marvellous effect of this anæsthetic, and its extraordinary results. In the eyes of many people it seemed much akin to magic.

Seeing that the surgeons invaded my domain, I asked myself if this did not allow me to make reprisals. I did so by inventing my *ethereal suspension*, which, I believe, was far more surprising than any result obtained by my surgical brethren.

The subject I intended to operate on was my younger son, and I could not have selected one better suited for the experiment. He was a stout lad of about six years of age, and his plump and rosy face was a picture of health. In spite of his youth, he displayed the greatest intelligence in learning his part, and played it with such perfection, that the most incredulous were duped.

This trick was very much applauded, and I am bound to say that my arrangements were excellently made; this was the first time I tried to direct the surprise of my spectators by gradually heightening it up to the moment when, so to speak it exploded.

I divided my experiment into three parts, each more surprising than the former.

Thus, when I removed the stool from beneath the child's feet, the public, who had smiled during the preparations for the suspension, became thoughtful.

When I next removed one of the canes, exclamations of surprise and fear were heard.

Lastly, at the moment when I raised my son to an horizontal position, the spectators, at this unexpected result, crowned the experiment with hearty applause.

Still, it sometimes happened that sensitive persons, regarding the etherization too seriously, protested in their hearts against the applause, and wrote me letters in which they severely upbraided the unnatural father who sacrificed the health of his poor child to the pleasures of the public. Some went so far as to threaten me with the terrors of the law if I did not give up my inhuman performance.

The anonymous writers of such accusations did not suspect the pleasure they caused me. After amusing the family circle, I kept the letters precious as proofs of the illusion I had produced.

The fashion this performance raised could not surpass that of the previous year: I could not expect any other result than filling my theatre, and that occurred every evening.

The royal family also wished to see my new experiments; and for this purpose the whole room was taken for

the afternoon, so that my evening performances were not interrupted.

This performance, which the Queen of the Belgians witnessed with her family, was only so far peculiar, that my little room was filled with exalted personages. All the seats were occupied, for their majesties were accompanied by their respective courts, and a great number of ambassadors and royal dignitaries.

As I had reason to hope, my noble spectators were satisfied, and deigned to thank me in person.

In the midst of this general satisfaction, I had every reason to believe that I possessed the favour of the public; I learned, though, at a heavy penalty, that even if the favour of that sovereign may appear secured, a trifle will cause it almost to expire.

On the 18th of February, 1848, Madame Dorval took her benefit at the Odéon, and I promised that eminent actress to perform some of my tricks as an interlude.

I was punctual to my appointment across the water; half-past eleven struck, when the curtain fell just prior to my performance. As I had been ready to begin for some time, ten minutes were sufficient to give a final glance to my preparations.

My first care on taking possession of the stage, had been to conceal my operations from indiscreet eyes; hence, I had dismissed everybody. Unfortunately, I had not even made an exception in favour of the stage-manager, and the sorrowful effects of this measure will now be seen.

In most excellent humour, I ordered my servant to give the three usual taps, and the orchestra began playing while I walked to the side-scene, prior to making my appearance. But at the moment the curtain rose, I remembered I had forgotten one of my "accessories," and I ran to my dressing-room to fetch it. Unfortunately, in my hurry I did not notice that the machinist had inadvertently left a small trap open, and my leg slipped into it up to the knee.

The pain drew from me a sharp cry of distress; my servant ran up, and he could only release me with some

difficulty. But I was in a sad state, for my trouser was torn completely up, exposing my bleeding and lacerated leg.

In this unhappy condition, I could not possibly return to the stage; hence I looked around in search of some one to announce to the public the accident that had happened to me, but I could only see two firemen. They would not do for so delicate a mission, and although I had my servant, this worthy lad was a negro with woolly head, blubber lips, and an ebony skin, whose simple language would not have failed to raise a laugh at my painful position.

The stage manager alone could undertake the mission; but where should I find him?

These reflections, prompt as lightning, were interrupted by the commencement of a storm in the theatre; the public summoned me, for it must be remembered the curtain had risen, and in the eyes of the public I had missed my entrance; this was disrespect, and, therefore, unpardonable!

My negro, without caring for what was passing elsewhere, tore up his handkerchief and mine, and bound my wound with considerable skill. This did not prevent me suffering severe pain, but I soon experienced a torture a thousand-fold greater when I heard a violent storm burst out in the house. The public, who had begun by stamping, were now hissing, shouting, and yelling in all the discordant tones of dissatisfaction.

Overcoming my pain, I changed my trousers in haste, and decided on going myself to describe my accident. I therefore walked slowly to the door of the stage, and I was just going to open it, when a frightful noise turned me cold with terror, and checked me. My heart failed me. Still, I put a stop to this. "Courage," I said to myself, with a supreme effort—"courage!" and straightway throwing open the folding doors, I walked on the stage.

I shall never forget my reception. On one hand, cries, hisses, yells; on the other, clapping of hands and applause, enough to wake the dead. The two parties were apparently attempting to conquer each other in making a noise.

Pale and trembling at such a rough reception, I waited patiently for a moment when the combatants, wearied with the contest, would allow me to explain my delay. This moment at length arrived, and I was enabled to describe my painful adventure. My paleness testified to the truth of my words. The public allowed themselves to be disarmed, and hisses were no longer mingled with the applause which greeted my explanation.

Any one who knows the relief and comfort bravos and hearty applause arouse in the heart of an actor, will understand the sudden change they produced in me. The blood rushed to my cheeks and restored my colour, my strength returned, and, possessed by fresh energy, I stated to the public that I found myself so much recovered that I would go on with my performance. I did so; and such was the power of my excitement, that I scarce felt the pain produced by my wound.

I have said that, on my appearance, I was saluted by demonstrations of a very different nature. Although many of my spectators hissed, others applauded me. Truth extorts a confession from me. I was supported on this evening by an omnipotent protector.

This requires an explanation. Hence, that my readers may solve the enigma, I am obliged to narrate a slight anecdote.

At the period when I invented my experiment of second sight, several Parisian managers proposed to me to perform, as an interlude, in their theatres, but I had refused, because, as I was tired by my own performances, I did not wish to prolong them. My determination on this point was quite formed, when I received a visit from an actress of the Palais Royal, Madame M——, who performed the part of duennas.

“I have not the honour of your acquaintance, sir,” she said, with a certain degree of hesitation, “hence I am almost afraid to ask you to render me a great service. These are the circumstances of the case: our excellent manager, Dormeuil, has offered me a benefit, the profits of which are intended to release my son from the conscription. It only deepends on you, sir, to insure the success of the

performance by giving me your assistance." And the poor mother, deriving her eloquence from her love for her son, painted in such lively colours the distress she would feel from a failure, that, touched by her grief, I rescinded my determination, and consented to add my performance of the "second sight" to her bill.

I dare not form the flattering idea that my name had any share in the success of the performance; still the house was crowded, and the receipts more than covered the price of a substitute.

The next day the happy mother called to tell me of her good fortune, and thank me. She was accompanied by a gentleman I did not know, but who, so soon as Madame M—— had ceased speaking, told me in his turn the object of his visit.

"I have taken the liberty of accompanying Madame M—— to compliment you on what you have done for her. It is a good action, for which all her theatrical friends owe you abundant thanks; and for my part, I hope, sooner or later, to evidence my gratitude in my own way."

While flattered at my visitor's remarks, I was much puzzled as to the sense of his last sentence. He noticed it, and, giving me no time to reply, continued:

"Ah! I forgot to tell you who I am, and I ought to have begun with that. My name is Duhart, and I manage theatrical successes at the Palais Royal. By-the-way," he added, "were you satisfied with the reception you had last night?"

This confession, I grant, robbed me of a sweet illusion. I had fancied I owed my reception to my own merits, and I now could not guess what share of the applause legitimately belonged to me. Still I thanked M. Duhart for his kindness, both past and to come. Three months later, I had almost forgotten this incident, when one day, as I was going to give a performance at the Porte Saint-Martin, my friend Duhart called upon me.

"Only one word, Monsieur Houdin," he said, without taking the trouble to sit down. "I read in the bills that you are going to perform for Raucourt's benefit, and I have recommended you to P——, who will 'take care of you.'"

I was, in fact, "taken care of," for when I appeared on the stage, I was greeted by a reception worthy of the highest artistic celebrities. It was easy to recognize an ovation warmly recommended, but I was glad to notice that the public "followed suit," and that the bravos emanating from the pit radiated through the whole house.

A few months later, when about to perform at the Gymnase, came another visit from Duhart, the same recommendation to his comrade, and a similar result. In short, I rarely quitted my own stage but my grateful protector interested himself in my success.

I am forced to say that I let him do so, and saw no harm in it; far from that, these encouragements were a stimulant for me, and I always redoubled my efforts to deserve them.

I have taken a pride in relating this incident, for it admirably depicts the character of a man capable of being so long grateful for a slight service rendered to a friend. However, the performance at the Odéon was the last in which the worthy Duhart went out of his way for me, as the revolution of February arrived a few days later.

It will be remembered that this event was an utter "smasher" for all the theatres.

After exhausting all the attractive baits of their repertory, the managers, finding all their attractions fail, vainly formed a congress to relieve them from such a disastrous situation.

I was invited to the meeting, but, though I put in an appearance, it was merely through politeness, as I was in a position very different from that of my brethren.

This position depended simply on the fact that my establishment, instead of having the name of a theatre, was called a "spectacle." Through this slight difference of title I enjoyed rights infinitely more extended.

Thus, while the theatres could only have bills of a size arranged by a police decree, I was at liberty, as the manager of a spectacle, to announce my performances in unbounded proportions.

I could also lessen or increase the number of my performances at my pleasure, which was not one of the slightest advantages of my management.

Lastly, I had a right, whenever I thought proper, to put the key of my room in my pocket, dismiss my staff, and walk about at my leisure in expectation of better times.

All these advantages, to which I will add that of being burdened with very slight expenses compared with my brethren, offered me no other result than that of not losing my money. However I might try, the public remained deaf to my appeal as to theirs.

I am mistaken, though; for some days I received very polite letters from the Provisional Government, in the shape of "free passes," which begged me to find room in my hall for the students of the Polytechnic and St. Cyr schools, accompanied by their tutors.

I was enchanted, it is true, by this amiable act of politeness, which augmented the number of my scanty spectators; for I performed, at least, before a well-filled room, and I had no longer the annoyance of seeing those unlucky benches empty—a sight which usually paralyzes the most philosophic performers.

This illusion was, in truth, very ephemeral, for each evening, after the performance, my cashier assumed a very gloomy face on approaching me.

What disenchantment! What bitter reprisals on the part of the blind goddess who, for some time, had granted me such sweet favours!

Still, in these moments of distress, I may say with perfect sincerity, deceptions and torment were not confined to the profit and loss account; and though a manager does not take money, he desires to conceal his misery. In order to produce a deception, he tries to furnish his theatre, and he gives free admissions. I had recourse to this measure; but, what will appear strange, these tickets, which, a month earlier, would have been regarded as an immense favour, were viewed with considerable indifference, and it often happened that people did not take the trouble to accept my invitation.

Having become a philosopher through necessity, I ended by resigning myself to seeing my room nearly empty, and I sent out no more invitations. Besides, I had enjoyed an opportunity of studying the "free admissions," and I had

remarked that this class of spectators is, or pretends to be, quite indifferent to the performance. In fact, the "free admission," when he believes the theatre short of spectators, imagines he is doing an act of kindness by accepting the invitation offered him. If he finds the house full, he fancies all the places are occupied by gratis tickets (and he is sometimes correct), and he concludes from it that the performance cannot be very amusing. If he happen to be mistaken, he does not applaud, in his fear of being taken for a gratuitous visitor, and pass for an accomplice paying for his seat in applause.

I was in the thick of my managerial troubles when, one morning, I received a visit from the manager of the French theatre in London. Mitchell (that is his name), far from seeking to delude me by false promises, like my Brussels theatrical agent, merely made me the following simple proposal:—

"Monsieur Robert-Houdin," he said to me, "you are well known in London; come and perform at the St. James's Theatre, and I have every reason to believe you will be successful. Besides, we shall be equally interested, for we will share the gross receipts, and I will pay all the expenses. You will perform alternately with my Opéra Comique, that is to say, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, and you will begin, if you please, on the 7th of May next, or a month from to-day."

These conditions appearing to me very acceptable, I may add, most advantageous, I agreed to them most readily. Mitchell then offered me his hand, I gave him mine, and this friendly sanction was the only agreement we made for this important affair. Though there was no forfeit on either side, no arrangement or signature, never was a bargain better cemented.

From that time, during all my long connection with Mitchell, I had many occasions of appreciating all the value of his word. I may say loudly that he is one of the most conscientious managers I ever had dealings with. In addition, Mitchell adds an extreme affability, and a remarkable degree of generosity and disinterestedness to the merit of keeping his word. Under all circumstances, he will be

found to act as a perfect gentleman, and one of the most brilliant qualities he possesses as manager, is his courteous behaviour to his performers. The following instance will serve as a proof :—

Jenny Lind was singing at Her Majesty's Theatre on the same evenings I performed at St. James's, so that, despite all the wish I felt to go and hear her, I could not make up my mind to sacrifice a performance for this attractive pleasure. However, in consequence of a circumstance too lengthy to detail here, I happened to find myself free on one of the nights when Jenny Lind sang. I must add that, besides managing the St. James's Theatre, Mitchell had hired a certain number of boxes at Her Majesty's by the year, and, according to the English custom, let them out to the highest bidders. It happened at times that all the tickets were not sold, and in that case Mitchell gave them to a few privileged friends. I was aware of this circumstance, and intended to ask him a similar favour for this evening.

At the moment I was going out to seek my manager, he came into my room.

“By Jove, my dear Mitchell,” I said to him, “I was just going to prefer a request to you.”

“Whatever it may be, my dear friend,” he replied politely, “be assured it will be willingly heard.”

And when I explained to him what I wanted,

“Good Heavens! Houdin,” he said, in a tone of real annoyance, “how unlucky you should ask that of me.”

“Why so?” I replied, in the same tone; “if it is not possible, my dear friend, pray let me withdraw my request.”

“On the contrary, my dear Houdin—on the contrary, it is very easy; I am only vexed at missing the surprise I intended to offer you: I was going to give you an excellent box for to-night: here it is.”

A more delicate and amiable way of behaving could hardly be suggested.

A fortnight had scarce elapsed since my interview with Mitchell, when, after a most successful passage, I disembarked at London. On the moment of my arrival, my

manager led me to a delightful lodging close to the theatre, and showed me all the rooms. On reaching the sleeping apartment, he said :—

“ You have a celebrated bed before you : it is the one in which Rachel, Déjazet, Jenny Colon, and many other artistic celebrities, rested after the emotion produced by their successes. You cannot but enjoy the ideas which the remembrance of these illustrious guests will summon up in your dreams. To any other than you, my dear Houdin, I would say that these celebrated predecessors must bring good luck ; but your success depends on the virtue of your magic staff.”

Mitchell, feeling desirous to add all desirable attraction to my performances, had ordered a scene in the Louis XV. style, as well as a curtain, on which was painted, in letters of gold, the title adopted for my Paris theatre, “*Soirées Fantastiques de ROBERT-HOUDIN :*” consequently, I could not begin my arrangements till all these preparations had been completed.

In the mean while, having nothing better to do, I walked about daily in the magnificent parks, and collected my strength, in preparation for the fatigues I was about to undergo in my performances.

At this word “fatigues,” my reader will be doubtlessly surprised, for he has every reason to suppose that my stay in London would be in some degree a period of rest, as, instead of playing seven times a week, as in Paris, I was only to give three performances in the same period.

To explain this apparent contradiction, it will be enough for me to state that the work and fatigue are less in the performance than in its preparation. As at St. James's Theatre I had to perform alternately with the Comic Opera, I was obliged, lest I might impede these artists in their studies, to give them all necessary time for their rehearsals, which, as is well known, occupy the greater portion of the day. Consequently, I had promised to clear the stage so soon as my performance was over, and not occupy it again till the middle of the day on which I performed. Add to this, that in my labour of preparing and removing, the master's eye was not sufficient, but I had for

various reasons to set to work myself, and it may be easily understood that this caused me enormous fatigue.

It caused me at the outset a species of comical regret to find that my performances would not owe their success entirely to my own merits. In England it is almost impossible to gain the ear of the public unless every possible form of notoriety be resorted to, and the change from my peaceful retirement in Paris was very startling. Whenever I took my walks abroad, my name in gigantic letters stared me in the face, while enormous posters, on which my various tricks were represented, covered the walls of London, and, according to the English fashion, were promenaded about the streets, by the help of a vehicle like those we employ in Paris for removing furniture.

But, however great this publicity might be, it was quite modest when compared to that opposed to us by a rival, who may be justly regarded as the most ingenious and skilful puffer in England.

On my arrival in England, a conjuror of the name of Anderson, who assumed the title of *Great Wizard of the North*, had been performing for a long period at the little Strand Theatre.

This artist, fearing, doubtlessly, that public attention might be divided, tried to crush the publicity of my performances; hence, he sent out on London streets a cavalcade thus organized:—

Four enormous carriages, covered with posters and pictures representing all sorts of witchcraft, opened the procession. Then followed four-and-twenty merry men, each bearing a banner, on which was painted a letter a yard in height.

At each cross-road the four carriages stopped side by side and presented a bill some twenty-five yards in length, while all the men, I should say letters, on receiving the word of command, drew themselves up in a line, like the vehicles.

Seen in front, the letters formed this phrase:—

THE CELEBRATED ANDERSON!!!

while on the other side of the banners could be read—

THE GREAT WIZARD OF THE NORTH.

Unfortunately for the Wizard, his performances were attacked by a mortal disease; too long a stay in London had ended by producing satiety. Besides, his repertory was out of date, and could not contend against the new tricks I was about to offer. What could he present to the public in opposition to the second sight, the suspension, and the inexhaustible bottle? Hence, he was obliged to close his theatre and start for the provinces, where he managed, as usual, to make excellent receipts, owing to his powerful means of notoriety.

I have met many "puffers" in my life, but I may say I never saw one who attained the elevation Anderson reached. The instance I have quoted will give some idea of his manner, but I will add a few others, to supply a perfect idea of the man.

Whenever his performances are going to be given in a large town, though they are announced with extreme publicity, Anderson contrives to bring his wonders to the notice even of those who never read the newspapers or posters.

For this purpose, he sends to all the buttermen in the town moulds on which his name, title, and the hour of his performance are engraved, begging them to imprint his stamp on their butter-pats, in lieu of the cow ordinarily represented. As every family in England eats butter at breakfast, it follows that each receives, at no expense to the conjuror, an invitation to pay a visit to the illustrious Wizard of the North.

Again, too, Anderson sends out into the streets, before daybreak, a dozen men, carrying those open frames, by means of which, and with a brush and lamp-black, the walls of Paris have been so long covered with puffs. These people print the announcement of the Wizard's performance on the pavement, which is always kept remarkably clean in England. In spite of himself, every tradesman on opening his shop, and every inhabitant proceeding to business, cannot but read the name of Anderson, and the announcement of his performance. It is true that a few hours later these puffs are effaced by the footsteps of the passers-by, but thousands of persons have read them, and the Wizard requires no more.

His posters are equally original, and I was shown one of a gigantic size put out on the occasion of his return to London after a lengthened absence in the provinces. It was a caricature imitation of the famous picture "Napoleon's Return from Elba."

In the foreground Anderson was seen affecting the attitude of the great man; above his head fluttered an enormous banner, bearing the words "The Wonder of the World;" while, behind him, and somewhat lost in the shade, the Emperor of Russia and several other monarchs stood in a respectful posture. As in the original picture, the fanatic admirers of the Wizard embraced his knees, while an immense crowd received him triumphantly. In the distance could be seen the equestrian statue of the Iron Duke, who, hat in hand, bowed before him, the Great Wizard; and, lastly, the very dome of St. Paul's bent towards him most humbly.

At the bottom was the inscription,—

"RETURN OF THE NAPOLEON OF NECROMANCY."

Regarded seriously, this picture would be found a puff in very bad taste; but, as a caricature, it is excessively comic. Besides, it had the double result of making the London public laugh, and bringing a great number of shillings into the skilful puffer's pockets.

When Anderson is about to leave a town where he has exhausted all his resources, and has nothing more to hope, he still contrives to make one more enormous haul.

He orders from the first jeweller in the town a silver vase, worth twenty or twenty-five pounds; he hires, for one evening only, the largest theatre or room in the town, and announces that in the Wizard's parting performance the spectators will compete to make the best pun.

The silver vase is to be the prize of the victor.

A jury is chosen among the chief people of the town to decide with the public on the merits of each pun.

It is agreed that they will applaud if they think a pun good; they will say nothing to a passable one, but groan at a bad one.

The room is always crowded, for people come less to see

the performance, which they know by heart, than to display their wit publicly. Each makes his jest, and receives a greeting more or less favourable; and, lastly, the vase is decreed to the cleverest among them.

Any other than Anderson would be satisfied with the enormous receipts his performance produces; but the Great Wizard of the North has not finished yet. Before the audience leave the house he states that a short-hand writer had been hired by him to take down all the puns, and that they will be published as a Miscellany.

As each spectator who has made a joke likes to see it in print, he purchases a copy of the book for a shilling. An idea of the number of these copies may be formed from the number of puns they contain. I have one of these books in my possession, printed at Glasgow in 1850, in which there are 1091 of these facetiæ.

The charlatan style of Anderson's bills is most amusing—at least I regard it as such; for it is not presumable that Anderson ever intended sincerely to praise himself in such an outrageous way. If I am mistaken, it would be more than vanity on his part, when I take into consideration his conjuring talent. Hence I believe him to be very modest at heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The St. James's Theatre—Invasion of England by French Performers—A Fête patronized by the Queen—The Diplomatist and the Sleight-of-Hand Man—Three Thousand Pounds taken at one Haul—I perform at Manchester—The Spectators in the Pillory—What capital Curaçoa!—A Torrent of Wine—A Catastropho—Performance at Buckingham Palace—A Wizard's Repast.

BUT it is time to return to St. James's: the machinists, painters, and decorators have finished their work, for the 2nd of May has arrived, the day fixed for my stage being handed over to me.

In fact, every one was admirably punctual: the new scenery was in its place at an early hour, and as, at Mit-

chell's request, the rehearsals were suspended for that day, the theatre was entirely at my service; hence I could devote myself quietly to the preparations for my performance. However, all had been so well arranged beforehand, that I was in perfect readiness when the audience began entering the house.

It may be supposed I had taken every possible precaution to insure success, for an experiment which must excite astonishment if it succeed, in the event of failure is ruin to the operator. Hence I sincerely pity those sorcerers whose supernatural power hangs on a thread.

It is true that a skilful conjuror ought always to be able to escape any difficulty that may occur to him; still, this sort of repairs very rarely meets with success, for, after all, it is only a patching together, in which the cracks are only too visible.

I had a mode of escape always at hand in any emergency, but I confess I was much vexed when compelled to have recourse to these secondary means, which, by prolonging the experiment, render it far less striking.

When a failure happens in tricks of skill an escape is impossible, for a conjuror ought no more to fail in these than a good musician play a false note. Whenever he makes a mistake in such a case, it results from his want of adroitness, which only time can correct; but in our experiments accidents at times happen which the most careful man cannot foresee. In such an event, you can only trust to the expedients which presence of mind suggests.

Thus, one day, I happened to break the glass of a watch lent me for a trick. My position was awkward, for it is a very clumsy termination to a trick to return an object lent you in any way injured.

I quietly walked up to the gentleman who had lent me the watch, and offered it to him, while being very careful to keep the face downwards; but, at the moment he was going to take it, I drew it back.

"This is your watch?" I said, confidently.

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Well, I merely wished to prove the fact; will you,

sir," I added, sinking my voice to a whisper, "lend it to me for another trick which I intend to perform presently?"

"Willingly," the obliging spectator replied.

I then carried the watch on the stage, and, handing it secretly to my servant, I bade him go at full speed to a watchmaker's, and have a new glass put in.

Half an hour later, I returned the watch to its owner, saying :

"I have just noticed to my regret that the lateness of the hour will preclude me from performing the trick I promised you ; but as I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again at my performances, please to remind me the first time you come, and I shall then be able to perform the interesting trick."

I was saved.

In the mean while, the public were entering the theatre, but so quietly that, although my dressing-room was close to the stage, I heard scarcely any noise in the house. I was frightened at this, for such a quiet entry is in France a sure prognostic of bad receipts for the manager, and sinister foreboding of a failure to the performer.

When I was able to proceed on the stage, I ran to the curtain-hole, and I saw with as much surprise as pleasure the house completely filled, and presenting, in addition, the most charming company I had ever yet performed before.

I must say, too, that the St. James's Theatre is a splendid establishment, for it is in some degree the gathering-place of the flower of the English aristocracy, who visit it not merely to enjoy the performances, but also to improve their pronunciation of French.

One fact will give an idea of the elegance and fashion of my spectators ; no lady is allowed to keep on her bonnet, however elegant it may be ; she is obliged to leave it in the saloon. This is, indeed, a thorough English fashion, for the ladies come to the theatre in evening costume, with their hair beautifully arranged, and low-necked dresses, while the gentlemen are attired in black, with white neck-handkerchiefs and gloves.

At St. James's, the pit only exists traditionally; it is driven under the boxes, and its presence is scarcely noticed. All the body of the house is filled with stalls, or rather elegant arm-chairs, to which ladies are admitted.

The price of the seats is in proportion to the comfort they offer; each stall costs seven shillings, and you can enter the modest pit for three shillings; but this is no dearer than at the Opera.

While I was surveying this elegant assembly with delight, I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder. It was Mitchell, who came to give me a delicate hint about some invitations he had thought it advisable to send out.

"Well, Houdin," he said to me, "how do you like your examination? does the audience please you?"

"It is delightful, my dear Mitchell; I may add, it is the first time I ever performed in a theatre to such a brilliant audience."

"Brilliant is the very word, my friend, for you must know that, among your admirers (pardon me this word of praise, but I am quoting Mitchell) is the whole of the English Press, which possesses a numerous staff. We shall also have as spectators some gentlemen whose opinion exercises a very great influence in London drawing-rooms. And lastly, a great number of places are occupied by artistic celebrities, who will justly appreciate the Robert-Houdin whom, to employ the champagne phrase, we have made 'sparkle' as he deserves."

It may be imagined that, after this explanation, my performance seemed to me a solemnity, and that I employed the utmost care and zeal in executing my tricks. I am justified in stating that I obtained a legitimate success.

Shall I now speak of the kindness and encouragement I received from the audience of St. James's Theatre? I will appeal to the celebrated artistes who have performed on this stage before me: Rachel, Roger, Samsou, Regnier, Duplessis, Déjazet, Bouffé, Levassor, &c.; have they ever found in Europe spectators comparable to those of St. James's? Here there are no paid clappers; they would be superfluous, for the audience take upon themselves to

encourage the performers. The gentlemen are not afraid of bursting their gloves, while the ladies make as much noise with their tiny hands as their strength allows.

But I must stop, for I should fear, were I to continue, drifting into the style of the Great Wizard.

My performances went on at St. James's, and amply consoled me for my losses in Paris. Although I only performed three times a week, their produce exceeded that of my best days at home. My readers might imagine that such unequivocal success ought to have satisfied me, but, as I have said before, I am naturally ambitious, and I longed for one decisive triumph—I wished to have my performance honoured by the presence of the Queen. Under happier auspices I doubt not that the honour would have fallen to my share, but at the moment there was a peculiar difficulty, which I saw no mode of overcoming. I will describe it in as summary a manner as I can.

After the revolution, the French theatres, as I have already said, found their receipts reduced to worthless free tickets; hence they sought in neighbouring countries, just as I had done myself, a public less engaged with politics, and consequently more apt to yield to the attraction of amusement.

England was the only country that had made no change in its habits of luxury and pleasure, and hence many managers turned their longing eyes towards this El Dorado.

The Palais Royal Theatre, which, by-the-way, was not the worst off, was one of the first to draw a bill at sight upon the rich metropolis of England.

Dormeuil, its skilful manager, divided his company into two parts, one remaining at Paris, while the other came to the St. James's Theatre in the place of the Opéra Comique, which had ended its engagement with Mitchell. Levassor, Grassot, Ravel, Mlle. Scrivaneck, &c., received a brilliant reception from our mutual audience.

This success became known in Paris, and turned the head of M. H——, manager of the Historic Theatre.

After making arrangements with the proprietors of a London theatre (Covent Garden, I think), the impresario

also came across with a portion of his company to perform his play of *Monte-Christo*, which lasted two evenings.

The arrival of these performers, all of great merit generally, disturbed the peace of the English managers, who, fearing with some reason the entire loss of their audiences, resolved to oppose this dangerous invasion.

“The French and Italian theatres in London,” they said in their attacks, “can play on their boards whatever pieces they like; they are privileged to do so, and we respect their right. But we will not permit all our theatres to be thus invaded, or Shakspeare be dethroned by foreign playwrights.”

The question of theatrical rivalry soon assumed the character of a national one. The papers took up the cause of the theatres, while the public adopted the opinion of the press writers, and formed an army to fight against the new comers.

M. H—— attempted, however, to perform Alexandre Dumas’s masterpiece; but it was impossible to hear a word, so great were the noise and confusion in the house during the whole time the performance lasted. Although the manager persevered in his enterprise, he was at length obliged to yield to this imposing protest, which threatened to degenerate into a collision, and he decided on closing the theatre.

Mitchell held out his hand to the unlucky manager, and offered him the hospitality of his theatre, that he might at least play his double piece once before he left London. For this purpose, he granted him one night of the Palais Royal performances, and promised to arrange with me for the next night.

I could refuse Mitchell nothing, and the drama was represented in its entirety, after which the company returned to France.

I granted this favour with the greatest pleasure, as it obliged many amiable performers, and I will add that, were a similar occasion offered me to oblige M. H—— again, I would gladly accept it, if only to remind him about thanking me for the first service I did him.

Fortunately for my hopes, an occasion was offered me

for performing before her Majesty of which I gladly availed myself, as it enabled me, at the same time, to do some slight service in the cause of charity. The occasion I will here describe, as it affords a pleasing trait of English manners and customs.

A benevolent fête, the object of which was to open baths for the poor, had been organized by the first ladies in the land, and it was to be held at a delicious villa at Fullam, belonging to Sir Arthur Webster, who had kindly placed it at the disposal of the lady patronesses.

This graceful swarm of sisters of charity was composed of ten duchesses, fifteen marchionesses, and some thirty countesses, viscountesses, and baronesses, at the head of whom was the Queen, who intended to honour the fête by her presence. This was more than sufficient to dispose of the tickets, however high the price might be. Still, the ladies conscientiously desired to add some attraction which would occupy the afternoon agreeably. The first idea was to arrange a concert, and, of course, the chief singers in the metropolis must be invited to join, as the company was so select; hence the committee turned their eyes to Her Majesty's Theatre.

But there a difficulty arose: they must ask each artist to display his talent gratuitously, and as this was begging a favour, the embassy placed the fair promoters in a delicate position which they hesitated to accept.

Fortunately for them, these ladies had taken care to enlist the services of my manager, whose intelligent advice would be most useful in arranging the fête.

Mitchell was requested to call on the artistes, and he soon drew up a most remarkable list: it contained Madame Grisi, Madame Castellan, Madame Alboni, Mario, Roger (then engaged at Her Majesty's Theatre), Tamburini, and Lablache.

After the concert a *divertissement* was to take place which must excite the public curiosity. A large number of ladies, dressed in costumes selected from all parts of the world, had promised to form fancy quadrilles on the lawn, in which they would perform character dances, and for this purpose elegant and spacious tents were erected.

But this spectacle could only last an hour, and there were still two to be filled up, in which the guests could only be offered the pleasure of walking about. It was evident this was not enough, especially when we remember the price of the tickets was two pounds. Hence the committee naturally thought of my performance.

Mitchell had expected this, so he took on himself, owing to our friendly connection, to obtain my consent. He did more, for wishing in his turn to offer his alms to the poor, he offered to build, at his own expense, a theatre in the ground, and transfer to it the scenery I had at the theatre. This was, in some respects, removing St. James's Theatre to Fulham.

Mitchell told me of this lucky event, from which he expected the best results, and I may say at once that his expectations were realized. As soon as it was known that the Queen would deign to be present at one of my performances, many members of the aristocracy, who had not yet visited the St. James's Theatre, sent to order boxes.

On the day fixed for the Fulham festival, I started after breakfast for Sir Arthur Webster's residence. My manager, with the machinist of the theatre, had been at work there from an early hour, so that when I arrived, I found the theatre quite in readiness for me. Scenery, drops, and curtain, everything, in short, was there excepting the foot-lights, for which the sun was an admirable substitute.

The public were to be admitted at one, and though I was not to give my performance till nearly four o'clock, all my preparations were made by the time the doors opened. The lady patronesses were already at their posts to receive the Queen and the royal family, and were assisted by stewards selected from the highest members of the aristocracy; among them being the Duke of Beaufort, the Marquis of Abercorn, the Marquis of Douglas, &c.

While waiting my turn to act, I thought I might as well take part in the fête as a simple spectator; hence I went first to the entrance gates.

I had scarce reached them when I saw the Duke of Wellington get out of his carriage, the popular hero before whom gentle and simple bowed with respectful deference.

A few moments later appeared the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, accompanied by his Highness Prince Frederick William of Hesse, and in a group immediately following these high personages, the Duchess of Kent, the Duchess Bernhard of Saxe Weimar, and the Princesses Anne and Amelia were pointed out to me.

These illustrious visitors were received by the lady patronesses with the honours due to their rank, while the band of the Royal Horse Guards played national airs.

Outside could be heard the noisy and animated crowd, pressing forward, at the risk of their lives, to see the carriages with the powdered and gorgeous footmen whose heads are taxed so highly by the government.

The numerous subscribers flocked in: all wished to be punctual, for it was known the Queen would grace the fête by her presence, and an Englishman, great or small, would not at any price miss the pleasure of seeing once again the features of her most gracious Majesty.

The place I had selected was most favourable for observing the new arrivals and not missing a single person. Still, whatever attraction this brilliant panorama might offer me, I was equally anxious to see the interior of the fairy palace, and I was just turning away, after directing a parting glance to the entrance gates. I was glad I did so, for at this moment arrived, close after each other, Prince Louis Napoleon, our present Emperor; Prince Edward of Saxe Weimar; Prince Löwenstein, and several other great personages whose names have escaped my memory.

The gardens, the conservatories, and apartments, were already crowded by all the rank and fashion of London, and it was a hard matter to move about at one's ease. At each moment a formidable swarm of marchionesses and ladies stopped the way, and forced me to yield the road to them, in my fear of crushing the most dazzling dresses I had ever seen. This was difficult enough, for whatever way I might turn in my politeness, I ran the risk of finding myself in the same dilemma, so numerous and compact was the assemblage at Fulham.

At half-past two the Queen had not yet arrived, and there

was a hesitation about waiting any longer, when frenzied hurrahs, rending the air for the length of a mile, announced her Majesty's speedy arrival.

The church-bells immediately began ringing, the band struck up "God save the Queen," while the youngest and fairest ladies formed a double avenue along her Majesty's route.

These preparations were scarce made ere the Queen left her carriage, and moving along an immense avenue, covered with red cloth, and sheltered overhead by a gay awning, she walked towards the room where her arrival was only awaited to commence the concert.

On reaching the room, the Queen took her place in the midst of a circle formed by the lady patronesses, and the concert began.

I should have gladly listened to the dulcet sounds, but, unfortunately, the hall, in spite of its vast proportions, could not contain all the spectators, and the crush was so great that it was not only crowded, but the approaches were invaded to the point where the vibration of the voices finally died away.

Hence, I was obliged to content myself with hearing outside the repeated applause bestowed on the talented singers. Roger, especially, obtained a real triumph by his aria from *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and the exquisite way in which he sings it is well known. The Queen herself commanded an encore.

The concert was scarcely over when, in accordance with the programme, the Queen proceeded to see the quadrilles, in which magnificently attired ladies were to take part.

I should have gladly witnessed this graceful sight, but I thought it advisable to cast a final glance on my stage. Hence, I proceeded towards the theatre, where a private entrance had been prepared for me, and I was just going up the few steps leading to it, when some one seized my arm.

"Ah! Monsieur Robert-Houdin," a gentleman said to me, with a smile, as he prepared to follow me up the stairs, "that is capital—we will go in together."

"Where, sir?" I asked, much surprised at this proposal.

“Why, on your stage,” the unknown said, with an air of authority; “and I trust you will not refuse me that pleasure.”

“I am vexed to deny you, sir; but that is impossible,” I said politely, knowing that in these grounds I could only meet persons who must be treated with respect.

“Why so?” the gentleman continued, most pressingly. “I find, on the contrary, nothing easier. If we cannot go in side by side, we can follow each other.”

“Pardon me, sir, if I refuse your request; but no stranger is allowed on my stage.”

“Very good,” my assailant then said, pleasantly; “if that is the case, I will tell you my name, so that I may be no longer ‘a stranger’ to you. I am Baron Brunnov, the Russian ambassador, as great an admirer of your mysteries as I am desirous to find them out.” And he continued his ascent, while striving to force the barrier. “What, Monsieur Robert-Houdin,” he added, “do you still refuse me this? I only ask one or two explanations, nothing more.”

“I must persist in my refusal, Monsieur le Baron, for several reasons, and, more especially, for this one——”

“What?”

“Your perspicuity and talent are so universally recognized, that I would not deprive you of the pleasure of yourself detecting these secrets, which are hardly worthy your powerful intellect.”

“Ah! ah!” the Baron replied, with a laugh, “how diplomatic we are. Do you wish to follow in my track?”

“I am unworthy to do so, Monsieur le Baron.”

“Very good, very good. In the mean while, I am repulsed with loss, and forced to take my place among the spectators. I yield; but tell me, Monsieur Robert-Houdin, have you ever been in Russia?”

“No, sir, never.”

“Then give me your card.”

And the ambassador wrote his name below mine.

“Here,” he said, handing it me back, “if you ever feel an inclination to visit our country, that card will be very useful to you; and, if I happen to be at St. Petersburg at the time, come and see me, and I will procure you the

honour of performing before his Majesty the Emperor Nicholas."

I thanked Baron Brunnow, and he left me.

During this conversation the quadrilles were being danced, and before their termination the crowd had occupied all the seats for my performance, save those reserved for the royal family and the court. The Queen herself soon arrived, and I immediately received orders to begin.

Would that I had a more skilful pen with which to depict in its true colours the picture which revealed itself to my dazzled gaze at this moment! At any rate, I will attempt to describe it.

Imagine a large lawn rising before me in an amphitheatrical shape, and arranged like the pit of a theatre. It would have been impossible to say whether the ground was covered with grass or gravel, so thronged was it with ladies, who were alone allowed to sit down.

In the first row, and nearest my theatre, the Queen, having her royal husband on her right, was surrounded by her young and graceful family. A little in the rear the ladies in waiting and the lady patronesses formed the royal escort. At a respectful distance behind, the wives and daughters of the subscribers took their places, while the gentlemen formed symmetrical groups round this vast space.

The sight was truly magnificent; all the ladies, dazzling with youth and beauty, covered with diamonds and flowers, and rivalling each other in good taste and brilliancy, resembled a vast enamelled prairie, on which the richest flowers of spring were displayed, while the black coats of the gentlemen who enframed this smiling picture, far from dulling it, only heightened the effect.

On either side of the lawn, old oak-trees lent their refreshing shade to this improvised theatre.

I felt a noble pride at that moment, when I thought I held, as it were at my fingers' ends, the witching eyes of duchesses, at times so haughty, but now so gracious, and which seemed at every moment to gain fresh brilliancy at the sight of the surprises I offered them.

In this unique performance the time passed so rapidly, that I was quite astonished when I found myself performing my last trick.

Before leaving her seat, the Queen, although she had several times evinced her satisfaction, sent me her compliments through an aide-de-camp, who also expressed her Majesty's desire to have a performance at Buckingham Palace at a later date.

I had made every arrangement to start for town immediately my performance was over, lest I might be delayed by the carriages waiting at the park gates. An idea of the number of my audience can be formed, when I say it took me more than a quarter of an hour to pass through the carriages drawn up in double file along the road. The receipts of the festival will supply a better proof: they amounted to 2500*l*.

The next day the royal arms appeared at the head of my bills, and below, the following passage, as a species of baptismal certificate:—

“ Robert-Houdin, who has had the honour of performing before her most gracious Majesty the Queen, Prince Albert, the Royal Family, and the Nobility of the United Kingdom,” &c.

My fashion only became the greater at St. James's.

We had now reached the middle of July, and no one but an Englishman can understand the possibility of obtaining a theatrical success during the dog-day heats. I must say then, that among our brethren beyond Channel, where all our customs are inverted, the season for concerts is from May to the end of August. In September the aristocracy retire to their estates, where they remain the other six months of the year.

I followed the example of my audience: I quitted London at the beginning of September, not like them to take rest, but, on the contrary, to commence a life even more agitated than the one I was leaving. I went to the Manchester Theatre, where Knowles, the manager, had made an engagement with me for fifteen performances.

The theatre in this city is immense; like the vast *arenæ* of ancient Rome, it can hold an entire people. To give

an idea of its size, I need only say that twelve hundred spectators scarcely filled the pit.

When I took possession of the stage, I was startled at its huge proportions; for I feared I should be lost upon it, and my voice be unheard.

The reasons for the erection of this immense building were explained to me afterwards.

Manchester, as an eminent manufacturing city, counts its workmen by thousands. Well, these hardy artisans are all fond of the stage, and in their hand-to-mouth existence they often give up one or two nights a week to this style of amusement; hence a large space was required to house them all.

Judging by the size of the house, I saw that many of the tricks I performed at St. James's were unsuited for the Manchester Theatre; hence, I was obliged to draw up a programme containing merely tricks that could be seen from a distance, and whose effect would strike the masses.

So soon as my performances were announced, the "hands" flocked in in shoals, and the pit, their favourite place, was literally crammed; while the rest of the house was nearly empty. This is, however, generally the case at a first performance in England; for many people wait for the newspaper critiques, which are sure to appear on the following day, ere they make up their mind.

The audience entered the house with a noise unexampled in any French theatre, except at those gratuitous performances given in Paris on grand occasions. Before the curtain was raised, I was obliged to wait, and give my noisy public time to cool down, and order and silence being gradually established, I began my performance.

Instead of the fashionable world, the elegant toilettes, and those spectators who seemed to spread an aristocratic perfume over the St. James's Theatre, I now found myself in the presence of simple workmen, modestly and uniformly attired, rough in their manner, and eager for amusement.

But this change, far from displeasing me, stimulated my energies and dash, and I was soon at my ease with my

new spectators, when I saw that they took a lively interest in my experiments. Still, an accident at the outset nearly aroused the popular dissatisfaction.

The Manchester artisans, far from coming to my performances to improve their French accent, were greatly surprised at hearing themselves addressed in any language but their own. Protests were put in on every side, and soon shouts were heard of "Speak English!"

As for my complying with the request, it was simply impossible; for though I had been six months in London, as I was always among my own countrymen, or persons who talked French, I had no occasion to apply myself to the English language. Still I tried to satisfy a claim that appeared to me legitimate, and make up for my deficiencies by boldness and good-will. I began by pronouncing the few English words I knew; when my vocabulary was at fault, and I was about to run short, I invented expressions which, owing to their strange shape, greatly amused my audience. Often too, when in a difficulty, I boldly asked them to come to my aid, and it was my turn to feel a great inclination to laugh.

"How do you call it?" I said, with a serio-comic air, as I held up the article whose name I wished to know; and straightway a hundred voices responded to my appeal. Nothing could be more pleasant than a lesson thus taken, when my teachers, contrary to the usual fashion, paid for the privilege of giving it.

Through my condescension, I succeeded in making peace with my audience, who warmly cemented it on several occasions by their hearty applause. The last trick especially created a tremendous excitement—I mean the *inexhaustible bottle*, produced with scenery and decorations never before witnessed on any stage.

The picture presented by this trick is indescribable, and a skilful pencil could alone reproduce its numerous details. Here, however, is a sketch as accurate as possible:—

I have already said, that although the spectators were few and far between in some parts of the house, the pit was crowded, and it consequently contained more than twelve hundred persons.

I own it was a really curious sight to see all these heads, issuing invariably from dark-coloured waistcoats, heightened by that ruddiness of face which can be only produced by the beef and porter of Great Britain.

In order that I might communicate more freely with my numerous spectators, the machinist had put up a plank running from the stage to the end of the pit, and as I also wished to address persons at the sides, two other "practicables," much shorter than the centre one, ran across to the boxes. The latter did not occupy room like the first, for they were just over a passage, while those who entered by it had to stoop down to reach their seats; but what was that slight inconvenience to the pleasure they promised themselves in seeing the "French conjuror?"

The public were still entering the pit after my performance had commenced, and so many persons were allowed to come in that there was soon no room for the laggards.

Several of them had the courage to remain bent under the "practicables," and, looking out right and left in turn they could follow my tricks. But one of these bold spectators, doubtlessly fatigued by the inconvenient posture he was obliged to keep, ingeniously passed his head through the narrow space between the "practicable" and the boxes. He managed it very cleverly, and his action was precisely that of a button going into its corresponding hole.

This innovation was, it may be easily supposed, gaily and noisily welcomed by the audience, and the unfortunate man had to endure the fate reserved for all innovators—he was laughed at and "chaffed" tremendously. But he did not trouble himself about that, and his coolness disarmed his opponents.

Encouraged by his example, a neighbour tried the button-hole manœuvre, then a second and a third, and thus, by the middle of the performance, half a dozen heads without bodies were symmetrically arranged on either side the pit, looking for all the world like skittle-pins waiting to be knocked down.

I had arrived at the bottle trick, which consists in producing from an empty bottle every liquor that may be asked for, no matter the number of drinkers.

The reputation of this famous bottle was already established in Manchester, for the London papers had fully described the experiment. Hence, a general hurrah was heard when I appeared armed with my marvellous bottle; for, in addition to the merit of the trick itself, the workmen also counted on the pleasure of drinking a glass of brandy, or any other liquor.

Flattered by this reception, I proceeded to the centre of the pit, followed by my servant, who carried an enormous tray of wine-glasses. But I had scarce arrived there when a thousand voices began exclaiming, "Brandy, whisky, gin, curaçoa, shrub, rum, &c.

It was impossible to satisfy all at once; hence, I wished to proceed in rotation, and, after filling a glass, I offered it to the man who I thought had made the first claim; but the gentleman was utterly disappointed. Twenty hands were stretched out to dispute the precious liquor, and the glass was speedily upset. The spectators, suffering the punishment of Tantalus, shouted for the liquid, which was not fated to reach their lips. I filled a second glass—it shared the fate of the previous one, and was fought for so obstinately that the glass was broken.

Further on, the same request was made; I complied, and none could profit by it.

Without troubling myself as to the result, I poured out the liquor profusely, and left my audience to fight for its possession.

Soon all the glasses had disappeared, and in vain I asked for them back to continue my bounty; not a trace of them was to be found. My experiment was, therefore, in danger of sudden termination, when a clever spectator held out his hand in the shape of a cup.

The process was as simple as it was ingenious; it was the egg of Christopher Columbus. The astonishment his neighbours felt permitted the inventor to profit by his discovery, which is unfortunately a rarity.

This improvised cup was unanimously accepted, but the

imitators saw their piracy suffer the same fate, minus the breakage, as the glasses.

Quite tired, I was about to withdraw, when a new improvement was introduced by a spectator, as thirsty as he was obstinate; throwing back his head and opening an enormous mouth, he made me signs to pour in euraçoa. Finding the idea original, I immediately complied.

“What capital euraçoa,” the man said, as he licked his lips.

This seductive exclamation was scarce heard ere every mouth was open and heads thrown back; it was enough to make me fly in terror. Still, not to leave so curious a scene incomplete, I took a watering tour, holding the mouth of the bottle as straight as I could. At times, the bottle being pushed by the neighbours, sent the liquor over a man's coat, but, save this slight inconvenience, all went on famously, and I fancied I had fulfilled the rude task of quenching the thirst of my audience. Still, I heard a few more appeals; and a glass of whisky was earnestly implored by one of the men who had thrust his head between the plank and the boxes, and seemed in a perfect state of collapse.

My son, who helped me on the stage, and was one of the first to hear this request, understood all the longing the poor suppliant felt; hence he ran on the stage for a glass, which I filled, and he carried to the man.

But a difficulty suddenly arose; the claimant and his comrades were shut up in their pillory, side by side, and could not raise their arms. My son, unthinkingly, offered the glass, and seeing no one take it, was about to carry it back on the stage; but a groan made him turn round, and, by the patient's air, he understood he was begging him to stoop down and place the glass to his lips.

This delicate operation was performed with considerable skill on both sides, and, despite the laughter of the public, each of the pilloried men asked the same service in turn.

This little scene appeared to have calmed the ardour of the public; and I thought it possible to terminate my trick in the usual way. When my bottle appears exhausted, I end by filling an enormous glass with liquor,

but a scene then began which I had been far from expecting.

Many writers have described the saturnalia produced by the frightful distribution of food and wine at the Restoration. Well, these orgies were respectable meals compared with the assault attempted to reach the glass I held in my hand.

A human avalanche suddenly rose before me, and from this living pyramid emerged two hundred hands to dispute their prey, while a hundred mouths were opened to swallow it.

I thought it high time to beat a retreat, in the fear of being buried beneath this shapeless mass. It was impossible; behind me a file of thirsty drinkers barred my passage.

The danger was pressing, for the pyramid was bending forward to reach me, and might lose its balance at any moment; the cries of the unhappy beings supporting its weight explained the dangerous position in which I might soon find myself; hence, I rushed with my head down through the mass, and reached the stage in time to notice the curious sight of a falling mountain.

I will not attempt to describe the cries, shouts, and applauses that accompanied this fall, while the victims were loud in their abuse, and found no way of getting up, save by stepping on their companions in misfortune. The noise was atrocious.

The curtain fell on this strange scene, but shouts and clapping were immediately heard: "The conjuror!" Houdin must come out to be complimented.

I obeyed this order, and when I made my appearance, either because I had been too liberal with my bottle, or because, as I would sooner think, my spectators were satisfied with my performance, the shouts and applause broke out in such a formidable manner that I was quite stupefied, while feeling acutely the pleasure they produced me. For I must say that the noise of the hands struck together, though so trying in itself, has nothing to shock the ear of a performer; on the contrary, the more deafening it becomes, the more harmonious it appears to the recipient.

The following performances were far from being so tumultuous as the first, and the reason is very simple. The merchants and traders, who form the aristocracy of Manchester, having heard of my performances, came with their families to witness them, and their presence contributed to keep the workmen in order. The house assumed a different aspect, and henceforth I could only praise the quietness of the pit.

Fifteen consecutive performances had not exhausted the curiosity of the inhabitants, and I could certainly have given fifteen more, at least, when, to my great regret, I was obliged to make way for two celebrities—Jenny Lind and Roger—whom Knowles had engaged to follow my performance.

Though I felt vexed at throwing such a chance away, on the other hand I was glad to escape as soon as possible from that heavy and smoky atmosphere, which makes the industrial capital of England resemble a city of chimney-sweeps. I could not accustom my lungs to inhale, instead of air, the flakes of soot constantly floating about. I fell into a state of melancholy almost akin to spleen, which did not abandon me till I reached the gay city of Liverpool, where I intended to remain several weeks.

I was at that time at the height of my fashion; my performances began with applause and ended with famous receipts. I need only add, that, after performing in turn at the theatres of Liverpool, Birmingham, Worcester, Cheltenham, Bristol, and Exeter, I returned to London to give fifteen performances ere I started for France.

A few days after my return to St. James's Theatre, the Queen, bearing in mind the desire she had expressed at Fulham, commanded a performance at Buckingham Palace.

This invitation being most agreeable, I willingly accepted it.

At eight in the morning of the appointed day, I proceeded to the royal residence, and the steward of the palace, to whom I was directed, led me to the place selected for my performance. It was a long and magnificent picture-gallery, and a theatre had been put up, on which

the scenery represented a saloon in the Louis Quinze style, white and gold, much resembling the one I had at St. James's Theatre.

My guide then showed me an adjoining dining-room, belonging, he said, to the ladies of honour, and he begged me to state at what hour I should like to breakfast.

I was too busy to think about eating, for I had my performance to prepare; however, I ordered the meal for one o'clock at any risk, and set to work directly.

Aided by my secretary (a species of factotum) and my two boys, who helped me as well as their strength permitted, I managed to overcome all the difficulties produced by the provisional arrangement of the stage. But I had not finished all my preparations till two o'clock, and I was almost dying of inanition, for, less fortunate than my companions, I had eaten nothing the whole day. Hence it was with real joy I led the route to the dining-room.

As the performance was not to take place till three, I had just an hour to recruit my strength.

I had scarce walked a dozen steps, when I heard some one calling me. It was a palace official who wanted to speak to me.

"There will be a ball, sir, in this gallery," he said, in excellent French, "after your performance, and consequently preparations will have to be made which may take more time than has been allowed for them. Hence, the Queen requests you to begin your performance an hour sooner; she is quite ready, and will be here directly."

"I am very sorry I cannot obey her Majesty's commands," I replied; "my preparations are not yet ended, and I must add, *that*——"

"Monsieur Robert-Houdin," the officer replied, politely, but with all the coolness of a Briton, "such are her Majesty's orders, and I can say no more." And without awaiting any explanation, he bowed to me and retired.

"We shall still have time to take a hasty snack," I said to my secretary, "so off to the dining-room as quickly as you please."

I had not finished the sentence, when the Queen, Prince

Albert, and the royal family entered the gallery, followed by a numerous suite.

At this sight I had not the courage to go further; I returned, and armed myself with resignation. Protected by the curtain that concealed me from the spectators, I hastily made my few remaining preparations, and five minutes later I received the order to begin.

When the curtain rose, I was dazzled at the sight that met my gaze.

Her Majesty, the Prince Consort, the Queen Dowager, the Duke of Cambridge, and the royal children occupied the first rank. Behind them were a portion of the Orleans family; while in the rear sat the highest functionaries, among whom I recognized ambassadors dressed in their national costumes, and general officers covered with brilliant decorations. All the ladies were in ball toilette, and richly adorned with jewels.

A wonderful change came over me when I began my performance: all my languor had been suddenly dispelled, and I felt in excellent spirits.

Still this change can be easily explained. It is well known that a performer feels no suffering while on the stage; a species of exaltation suspends all feelings foreign to his part, and hunger, thirst, cold, or heat, even illness itself, is forced to retreat in the presence of this excitement, though it takes its revenge afterwards.

This slight digression was necessary to explain the spirits I felt in when I appeared before my noble audience.

Never, I believe, did I throw such dash and boldness into the performance of my experiments; never, either, had I an audience which appreciated them so kindly.

The Queen deigned to encourage me several times by flattering remarks, while Prince Albert, ever so kind to professionals, heartily clapped his hands.

I had prepared a trick, called the *Bouquet à la Reine*. This is what the *Court Journal* says of it when describing my performance:—

* * * * *

“ The Queen evinced an extreme pleasure in these experiments ; but the one which seemed to strike her most was the *Bouquet à la Reine*, a very graceful surprise, and charmingly *à propos*. Her Majesty having lent her glove to M. Robert-Houdin, the latter immediately produced from it a bouquet, which soon grew so large that it could be scarcely held in both hands. Finally, this bouquet, after being placed in a vase, and bedewed with magic water, was transformed into a garland, in which the flowers formed the word VICTORIA.

“ The Queen was equally astonished at the surprising lucidity of M. Robert-Houdin’s son, in the experiment of the second sight. The most complicated objects had been prepared in order to embarrass and foil the sagacity of the father and the marvellous faculty of the son. Both emerged victoriously from this intellectual combat, and defeated every scheme.”

After the performance, the same officer with whom I had already spoken came to offer me the thanks of the Queen and Prince Albert. The Duchess of Orleans had also been kind enough to add her compliments and those of her family.

So soon as the curtain had fallen, and I was no longer supported by the presence of my audience, I felt ready to drop. I had taken a seat, and could hardly rise to go and enjoy the meal which I stood in such need of.

Still, I was about to do so, when I was roused from my exhaustion by the appearance of a large body of workmen, who had come to take down the theatre in all speed, and prepare the gallery for the ball.

My readers can judge of my embarrassment and trouble when I found I must pack up all my machinery at once, lest it might be broken.

I tried to protest and defer the execution of the task, but it was all in vain : orders had been given, and they must be obeyed. Hence, I was obliged to summon up fresh energy to finish my packing, which took me an hour and a half.

Six o’clock struck when all was finished. I had taken 10 food for exactly four-and-twenty hours.

Leaning on my manager, who had taken the precaution of ordering up the dinner, I dragged myself as far as the dining room.

Twilight had commenced, and the room was not yet lighted, and it was with some difficulty we could distinguish a table. I fell rather than sat down upon a chair I found near me, and while my son was ringing for lights, I commenced a second slight performance of my own. I succeeded famously; I laid my hand on a fork, and pricking at whatever might be before me, found something attached to the instrument. I prudently raised the object to my nose, and satisfied with this inspection, I took a triumphant bite.

It was delicious; and I fancied I could recognize a *salmon* of partridge.

I made a second exploring tour to assure myself of the truth, and, after a few mouthfuls, I convinced myself I was not mistaken. My manager and boys followed my example, and set to work manfully.

It seems that the attendance must be slow in royal houses, for before the lights arrived we had plenty of time to grow used to the darkness.

However, this meal, through its originality, became a delightful amusement, and I had seized a bottle to pour out some wine, when the door of the room suddenly opened, and two servants came in bearing candelabra. On seeing us thus seated at table and eating in the coolest way, they nearly fell backwards in surprise. I am persuaded they took us at the moment for real sorcerers, for we had great difficulty in inducing them to remain in the room and wait on us.

We then took our ease. The table was well served, the wines were excellent, and we could rest from the fatigues and emotions of the day. At the end of the dinner the palace steward paid us a visit, and on hearing of my misfortunes, he expressed his deep regret. The Queen, he assured me, would be the more vexed if she heard of it, because she had given the strictest orders that I should want for nothing in her palace.

I replied, that I was amply repaid for a few moments of

pain by the satisfaction I felt at having been called to perform before his gracious sovereign. And this was, indeed, the truth.

CHAPTER XIX.

An optimist Manager—Three Spectators in a Room—A magical Collocation—The Colchester Public and the Nuts—I return to France—I give up my Theatre—A Farewell Tour—I retire to St. Gervais—An Academician's Predictions.

A SHORT time after this performance my engagement with Mitchell terminated.

Instead of returning to France, as I should much have desired after so lengthened an absence, I thought it better to continue my excursions in the English provinces till the end of September, when I hoped to reopen my theatre at Paris.

Consequently I drew up an itinerary, in which the first station would be Cambridge, celebrated for its university; and set out.

Possibly the reader may feel no inclination to follow me on this tour, but he may be assured I will not drag him after me, especially as my second passage through England presents hardly any details worth mentioning here. I will content myself with recounting a few incidents, and among them a small adventure that happened to me, as it may serve for a lesson to all professionals, that it is dangerous both to their self-esteem and interests to drain public curiosity too deep in the various places whither the hope of good receipts attracts them.

I intended to go straight from London to Cambridge, but, half way, I took a fancy to stop and give a few performances at Hertford, a town containing some ten thousand people.

My two first performances were most successful, but on the third, seeing that the number of spectators had greatly fallen off, I decided on giving no more.

My manager argued against this resolution, and offered me reasons which certainly had some value.

“I assure you, sir,” he said, “that nothing is spoken of in the town but your performance. Every one is asking if you are going to perform to-morrow, and two young gentlemen have already begged me to keep them places if you intend to remain for to-morrow.”

Génet, my manager, was certainly the best fellow in the world ; but I ought to have distrusted his counsels, knowing, as I did, his disposition to look at the bright side of everything. He was the incarnation of optimism, and the calculations he made about this performance went far beyond those of the inkstand inventor. To hear him talk, we should have to double the price of places, and increase our staff to keep back the crowd that would rush to see me.

While jesting Génet on his exaggerated ideas, I still allowed him to send out the bills for the performance he so much desired.

The next evening, at half-past seven, I went, according to my usual custom, to order the box-office to be opened, and the public allowed admission. The performance would commence at eight precisely.

I found my manager quite alone—not a soul had arrived yet. Still, that did not prevent him greeting me with a radiant air—though that was his normal condition.

“No one has yet come to the theatre,” he said, rubbing his hands, as if giving me first-rate intelligence ; “but that is a good sign.”

“The deuce it is ! Come, my dear Génet, I must have that proved.”

“It is easy enough to understand. You must have noticed, sir, that at our former performances we only had the country gentry.”

“Nothing proves it was so ; still I will allow it. Now go on.”

“Well, it is very simple. The tradespeople have not come to see you yet, and I expect them to-night. They are always so busy that they usually defer a pleasure till the last moment. Have patience, and you will soon see the rush we shall have to contend against.”

And he looked towards the entrance-door like a man

perfectly convinced that his predictions would be fulfilled.

We had still half an hour—more than sufficient to fill the room—so I waited. But this half-hour passed in vain expectation. Not a soul came to the box-office.

“It is now eight,” I said, drawing out my watch, “and no spectators have arrived. What do you say to that, Génet?”

“Oh, sir! your watch is too fast—I am sure of it, for——”

My manager was about to support his allegation by some proof drawn from his brain, when the town-hall clock struck. Génet, finding his reasons exhausted, contented himself with silence, while casting a despairing glance towards the door.

At length I saw his face grow purple with delight.

“Ah! I said so,” he exclaimed, pointing to two young men coming towards us. “The public are beginning to arrive. They doubtlessly mistook the hour. Come, every man to his post!”

Génet’s joy did not last long, for he soon recognized in these visitors the two young gentlemen who had taken their places the previous day.

“You have kept our seats?” they said to the optimist, as they hurried in.

“Yes, gentlemen—yes; you can go in,” Génet replied, making an imperceptible grimace. And he led them in complacently, while striving to explain the emptiness of the room by saying it was only momentary. He had hardly returned to the box-office, when a gentleman of a certain age hurried up the steps, and rushed towards the pay-place with a haste my previous success probably justified.

“Is there any room left?” he asked in a panting voice.

My poor Génet did not know how to reply to this question, which seemed a jest; he therefore merely muttered one of those commonplace phrases usually employed to gain time.

“Well, sir, to tell you the truth—I should say——”

“I know—I know: there are no places left. I expected

it. But be kind enough to let me go in, and I will find some corner to stand in."

"But sir, allow me to tell you——"

"No matter."

"But if, on the contrary——"

"All the better. There, give me a stall-ticket, and I will see if I can find room in the passage."

Being at the end of his arguments, Génét supplied the ticket.

You can imagine the surprise of the eager visitor when, on entering the house, he found that he formed in his own person exactly a third of the audience.

For my own part, I soon made up my mind. After compounding with my conscience, by granting the usual quarter of an hour's grace to the laggards, and seeing no one come, I informed my three spectators that, being only anxious to be agreeable to them, I would perform.

This unexpected news produced a triple hurrah in the house in the shape of thanks.

My orchestra consisted of eight amateurs of the town; and these gentlemen, as a compliment to my French origin, always played as overture the "Girondins" and the "Marseillaise," with the assistance of the big drum, and never failed to terminate the performance with "God save the Queen."

The patriotic introduction over, I began my performance.

My audience were collected on the first row of stalls, so that, in order to address my explanations to them, I should have had to keep my head constantly down, which would have eventually become troublesome. Hence I determined to look round the house, and address the benches just as if they were well covered.

For their part, my audience made all possible row to prove their satisfaction. They stamped, applauded, shouted, so as almost to make me believe the house full.

The whole performance was a mutual exchange of compliments, and the spectators saw the last of my tricks arrive with considerable regret. This, however, was not an-

nounced on my bills, for I reserved it as the best of my surprises.

“Gentlemen,” I said to my audience, “as I require three persons to assist me in performing this trick, will any gentlemen present have the kindness to come on the stage?”

At this comie invitation the public rose *en masse*, and obligingly placed themselves at my disposal.

After my three assistants had promised to stand at the front of the stage and not look round, I gave each an empty glass, announcing that it would be filled with excellent punch so soon as they expressed the wish, and I added that, to facilitate the performance, they must repeat after me a few cabalistic words borrowed from the enhanter Merlin.

This jest was only proposed in order to gain time, for while we were performing it with bursts of laughter, a change was being carried out behind my kind assistants. The table on which I did my tricks had been removed, and another brought forward on which an excellent supper was spread, and a bowl of punch cracked in the centre.

Génet, clothed in black and a white cravat, and armed with a spoon, was stimulating a spectral flame, and when my assistants expressed a wish to see their glasses filled with punch, he said in his most solemn voice—

“Turn round, and your wishes will be accomplished.”

My musicians had been spectators of this little scene, so I begged them to join us, and try the virtues of my inexhaustible bowl. This invitation was joyfully accepted, the table was surrounded, the glasses were filled and emptied, and we passed two agreeable hours in performing this experiment.

Owing to the prodigality of my “inexhaustible bowl of punch,” my guests were all affected by a tender expansion. They almost embraced on parting; however, they contented themselves with shaking hands and vowing an undying friendship.

The instruction to be drawn from this anecdote is that, in offering a farewell to the public, you should not wait till there are none left to receive it.

On leaving Hertford, I went to Cambridge, thence to Bury St. Edmunds, Ipswich, and Colchester, always taking receipts proportionate to the importance of the towns. I have only three souvenirs of those five towns: the failure at Hertford, the enthusiastic reception from the Cambridge students, and the nuts at Colchester.

But, it will be asked, what connection can there be between nuts and a magical performance. A word will explain the fact to the reader, and all the tribulations this fruit caused me.

It is the custom at Colchester that when a body goes to the theatre he fills his pocket with nuts. These are cracked and eaten during the performance as a species of refreshment. Men and women both suffer from this cracking mania, so that a rolling fire is kept up through the house, often powerful enough to drown the voice.

Nothing affected my nerves so much as this incessant cracking; my first performance suffered from it, and despite my efforts to master myself, I went through the whole performance in a state of irritation. I consented, however, to perform a second time, but the manager could not induce me to promise a third. Although he assured me that his actors had grown quite accustomed to this strange music, and that even a minor actor might often be seen on the stage calmly cracking a nut while awaiting the reply, I could not stand it any longer, and left the town.*

Most assuredly, the theatres in the smaller English towns are not equal to those in the cities.

At Colchester my tour was to end, and I was about starting for France, when Knowles, the Manchester director, remembering my success at his theatre, proposed to me to take a trip with him through Ireland and Scotland. We had then reached the month of June, 1849, when Paris was more than ever agitated by political questions; and theatres only existed in France as memorials of the past. I

* It would not have been surprising in this oysterous, hoisterous town (as Hook christened it) to find M. Houdin astonishing the natives, but the contrary, it appears, took place: the natives decidedly astonished him.

did not waste much time in forming a decision ; I started with my English manager.

Our excursion lasted no less than four months, and I did not step on French soil again till the end of October.

Need I describe the delight with which I presented myself once more before a Parisian audience, whose kind patronage I had not forgotten? Those professional men who, like myself, have been long absent from Paris, will understand it, for they know nothing is so sweet to the heart as the applause given by a man's fellow-citizens.

Unfortunately, when I recommenced my performances, I noticed with sorrow the change which had taken place in my health: the performances which I formerly went through with no fatigue, now caused me a painful state of exhaustion.

It was easy to find a reason for this disagreeable change ; fatigue, the incessant thought connected with my performances, and still more the foggy atmosphere of England, had exhausted my strength. My life had been in some degree used up during my emigration. I should require a lengthened rest to restore it, and I could not think of it at this period, the best part of the season. I could only take precautions for the future, in case I should find myself suddenly compelled by my health to stop ; so I decided on educating a pupil to take my place in case of need, and whose labour might assist me in the mean while.

A young man of pleasing exterior, and whose talent I was acquainted with, seemed to offer the conditions I required. My proposals suited him, and he immediately joined me. The future sleight-of-hand professor evinced great aptitude and zeal in learning my lessons. I employed him in a short time to prepare my experiments, then he aided me in the management of my theatre, and when the summer of 1850 arrived, instead of closing my rooms as usual, I continued to send out my bills ; the only change was that Hamilton's name was substituted for mine.

Considering his short period of study, my provisional substitute could not be yet very expert ; still, he pleased, and the public were satisfied. During this period I enjoyed in the country a repose that had been long desired.

A man who has made a long journey never feels the fatigue so acutely as when he proposes to continue his journey after a few moments of rest. This was what I experienced when, my holiday being ended, I was obliged to leave the country to begin again the feverish existence of a theatre. I never felt such lassitude; never had I a greater desire to enjoy perfect liberty, to renounce those fatigues of an appointed hour, which may be justly called the collar of misery.

At this word, I see many of my readers start. "Why," they will say, "thus call a labour whose object is to astonish an audience, and the result to gain honour and profit?"

I find myself compelled to prove the justice of the expression.

The reader will easily understand that the fatigue, pre-occupation, and responsibility attached to a magical performance do not prevent the conjuror being subjected to the ordinary sufferings of humanity. Now, whatever may be the nature of his sufferings or his grief, he must, at an appointed hour each night, hide them in his bosom, and assume the mask of happiness and health.

This is in itself a painful task, but, believe me, reader, it is not all; he must—and this is applicable to all professionals—under penalty of ruin, enliven, animate, and excite the public, or, in other words, give them pleasure for their money.

Can this be always equally easy? In truth, the position artists hold would be intolerable, did not they find in the sympathy and applause of the public a gentle recompense which makes them forget the minor miseries of life.

I may say it with pride, to the last moment of my artist life I only met with sympathy and kindness; but the more I strove to render myself ever worthy of them, the more I felt my strength failing me, and the more, too, increased my desire to live in retirement and freedom.

At last, in January, 1852, judging Hamilton fit to succeed me, I decided on giving up my establishment to him, and in order that my theatre, the fruit of my labours,

might remain in the family, two contracts were signed; and on the same day my pupil became my brother-in-law and my successor.

Still, however desirous an actor may be of retiring into private life, he very rarely renounces at once and for ever the applause which has become an agreeable stimulant for him. Hence, no surprise will be felt on learning that, after a few months' rest, I proposed to give a few more performances, as a final parting from the public.

As I had not yet visited Germany, I proceeded to the banks of the Rhine. Desiring no unnecessary fatigue, I resolved to reserve to myself the choice of the places where I would perform. I therefore stopped, in preference, at those festal places called "Baths," and visited in turn, Baden, Wiesbaden, Homburg, Aix-la-Chapelle, and Spa. Nearly each of my performances was honoured by the presence of one or more of the princes regnant of the Germanic Confederation.

It was my intention to return to France after my performances at Spa, but, at the request of M. Engel, manager of a theatre at Berlin, I retraced my steps, and started for the capital of Prussia.

I had made a six weeks' engagement with M. Engel; but my success, and the excellent terms on which I stood with my manager, induced me to prolong it for three months. I could not have taken a more brilliant leave of the public: for, probably, I never saw greater crowds run after my performances. Thus the reception I obtained from the Berliner will ever remain one of my pleasantest reminiscences.

From Berlin I proceeded straight to the neighbourhood of Blois, to the retreat I had selected.

Whatever might be my satisfaction in enjoying the freedom I had so long desired, it would soon have undergone the fate common to all our pleasures, and have grown flat by the mere effect of enjoyment, had I not reserved for these blessed hours of leisure studies in which I hoped to find a perennial source of amusement. After gaining a fortune by labours unjustly regarded as futile, I was about to devote myself to serious researches,

as I had been formerly advised by a member of the Institute.

The circumstance to which I allude dates back to the Exposition of 1844, when I submitted my automata and mechanical curiosities.

The jury intrusted with the examination of mechanical instruments and designs had come to my productions, and I had repeated the little performance I had given a few days previously in the presence of Louis Philippe.

After listening with interest to the details of the numerous difficulties I had to overcome in making my automata, one of the members of the jury said to me :

“It is a great pity, Monsieur Robert-Houdin, that you did not apply the talent you have evinced in fancy objects to serious labours.”

This criticism wounded me the more, because at that period I considered nothing superior to my works, and in my fairest dreams of the future I desired no greater glory than that of the skilful inventor of the “*automaton duck*.”

“Sir,” I replied, in a tone that betrayed my pique, “I know no works more serious than those which give a man an honest livelihood. Still, I am ready to change my views, if you give me the same advice after you have heard me.”

“At the period when I devoted myself to chronometers, I hardly earned enough to live upon; at present, I have four workmen to help me in making my automata; and as the least skilful among them earns six francs a day, you can easily form an idea what I earn myself.”

“Now, sir, I ask you, if I ought to return to my old trade?”

My critic was silent, but another member of the jury coming up to me, said, in a low voice,

“Go on, Monsieur Robert-Houdin—go on; I am convinced that your ingenious works, after leading you to success, will conduct you straight to useful discoveries.”

“Monsieur le Baron Séguier,” I replied, in the same key

“I thank you for your encouraging prediction, and will do my best to prove its correctness.”*

I have followed the advice of the illustrious savant, and find myself all the better for it.

CHAPTER XX.

Travels in Algeria—Convocation of the Chieftains—Performances before the Arabs—A Kabyle rendered powerless—Invulnerability—A Moor disappears—Panic and Flight of the Audience—Réconciliation—The Sect of the Aïssaoua—Their pretended Miracles.

I HAVE, then, reached the object of all my hopes: I have bidden an eternal farewell to professional life, and from my retirement I wave my hand in parting salutation to my kind and obliging patrons. Henceforth I shall know no care or anxiety; free and tranquil, I am about to devote myself to my peaceful studies, and enjoy the pleasantest existence man ever had on earth.

I was busily forming my plans of happiness, when, one day, I received a letter from Colonel de Neveu, head of the political office at Algiers. This distinguished functionary begged me to proceed to our colony, and give my performances before the principal chieftains of the Arab tribes.

This invitation reached me in the full of my honeymoon, if I may employ the expression. Scarce recovered from the fatigues of my journey, I was imbibing deep draughts of happiness, and it would have been a heavy sacrifice to dispel the charm so soon. Hence, I expressed to Colonel de Neveu my regret at not being able to accept his invitation.

The colonel noted down my excuses, and, the following year, reminded me of them. It was in 1855; but I had presented at the Universal Exhibition several new ap-

* This slight incident did not prevent the jury granting me a silver medal for my automata. Eleven years later, at the Universal Exhibition of 1855, I received a medal of the first class for new applications of electricity to mechanism.

plication of electricity to mechanism, and having learned that the jury considered me worthy a reward, I would not quit Paris till I had received it. Such was, at least, the motive on which I based a new refusal, accompanied by my regret.

But the colonel kept these excuses still in mind, and in June, 1856, he presented them to me like a bill to be met. This time I had exhausted my excuses, and though it cost me much to quit my retreat and brave the caprices of the Mediterranean in the worst month of the year, I decided on going.

It was settled that I should reach Algiers by the next 27th of September, the day on which the great fêtes annually offered by the capital of Algeria to the Arabs would commence.

I must say that I was much influenced in my determination by the knowledge that my mission to Algeria had a quasi-political character. I, a simple conjuror, was proud of being able to render my country a service.

It is known that the majority of revolts which have to be suppressed in Algeria are excited by intriguers, who say they are inspired by the Prophet, and are regarded by the Arabs as envoys of God on earth to deliver them from the oppression of the *Roumi* (Christians).

These false prophets and holy Marabouts, who are no more sorcerers than I am, and indeed even less so, still contrive to influence the fanaticism of their co-religionists by tricks as primitive as are the spectators before whom they are performed.

The government was, therefore, anxious to destroy their pernicious influence, and reckoned on me to do so. They hoped, with reason, by the aid of my experiments, to prove to the Arabs that the tricks of their Marabouts were mere child's play, and owing to their simplicity could not be done by an envoy from Heaven, which also led us very naturally to show them that we are their superiors in everything, and, as for sorcerers, there are none like the French.

Presently I will show the success obtained by these skilful tactics.

Three months were to elapse between the day of my acceptance and that of my departure, which I employed in arranging a complete arsenal of my best tricks, and left St. Gervais on the 10th of September.

I will give no account of my passage, further than to say no sooner was I at sea than I wished I had arrived, and, after thirty-six hours' navigation, I greeted the capital of our colony with indescribable delight.

I was expected; an officer came off in an elegant boat and took me to the Hôtel d'Orient, where a handsome suite of rooms was retained for me.

The government had behaved nobly, for I was lodged like a prince. From the window of my sitting-room I could survey the roads of Algiers, and the prospect was only bounded by the horizon. The sea is always lovely when seen from a window; thus each morning I admired it, and pardoned its past slight insults.

From my hotel I also gazed on the magnificent Government-square, planted with orange-trees, such as cannot be seen in France. They were at this season laden with flowers and perfectly ripe fruit.

Mme. Robert-Houdin and myself delighted in sitting beneath their shade at nightfall and eating an ice before the doorway of an Algerian Tortoni, while inhaling the perfumed breeze borne to us from the sea. Next to this pleasure, nothing interested us so much as observing the immense variety of persons moving around us.

The five quarters of the world had sent their representatives to Algeria: there were French, Spaniards, Maltese, Italians, Germans, Swiss, Prussians, Belgians, Portuguese, Poles, Russians, English, and Americans, all forming a portion of the population of Algeria. Add to these the different Arabic types, such as Moors, Kabyles, Koulougly, Biskri, Mozabites, negroes, Arab Jews, &c., and an idea may be formed of the sight unrolled before our eyes.

When I arrived at Algiers, M. de Neveu told me that as a portion of Kabylia had revolted, the marshal-governor had started with an expeditionary corps to suppress it. In consequence of this, the fêtes to which the Arab chiefs were to

be invited were deferred for a month, and my performances put off for the same period.

"I have now to ask you," the colonel added, "if you will sign this new engagement?"

"Mon colonel!" I replied, in a jocular tone, "I consider myself in military employ. As I depend on the governor, I will be faithful to my post, whatever may happen."

"Very good, M. Robert-Houdin," the colonel said, with a laugh; "you behave like a true French soldier, and the colony will owe you thanks for it. At the same time, we will try to make your service in Algeria as light as possible. We have given orders at your hotel that madame and yourself may have no cause to regret the comfort you left to come here." (I have forgotten to say that, in signing my engagement, I stipulated that Mmc. Houdin should accompany me.) "If, while awaiting your official performances, you might like to employ your leisure evenings at the town theatre, the governor places it at your service thrice a week, the other days belonging to the operatic company."

This proposition suited me admirably, and I saw three advantages in it: the first, to get my hand in, for I had left the stage for two years; the second, to try the effect of my experiments on the town Arabs; the third, to pocket a very welcome sum of money. I accepted; but when I offered my thanks to M. de Neven, he said,

"It is our place to thank you, for, by giving performances at Algiers during the Kabylia expedition, you render us a great service."

"How, colonel?"

"By employing the minds of the Algerines, we prevent them speculating on the eventualities of the campaign, which might be very injurious to the government."

"That being so, I will set to work at once."

The colonel started the next day to join the marshal, having previously handed me over to the civil authorities; that is to say, he had introduced me to M. de Guirroye, mayor of the town, who displayed extreme kindness in facilitating the arrangements for my performances.

It might be reasonably supposed that, owing to the high patronage that supported me, I need only follow a path be-

strewn with flowers, to use the language of the poets. But it was not so: I had to endure many annoyances, which might have vexed me greatly, had I not possessed a stock of philosophy beyond ordinary mortals.

M. D——, privileged manager of the Bab-Azoun Theatre, had commenced the season with an operatic company, and, fearing lest the success of a stranger on his stage might injure his own prospects, he complained about it to the authorities.

The mayor could offer him no other consolation than saying the government ordered it. M. D—— protested, and even threatened to throw up the management, but the mayor adhered to his inflexible decision.

The city of Algiers thus suddenly saw itself exposed to a total managerial eclipse, when, through a spirit of conciliation, I offered to perform only twice a week, and defer beginning till the operatic début was over.

This concession slightly calmed the impresario, though it did not gain me his good graces. M. D—— ever maintained a coldness towards me, which evidenced his dissatisfaction, but I held an independent position, and this coolness did not render me wretched.

I also managed to escape from the annoyances aroused by certain subalterns of the stage, and, being determined that my voyage to Algiers should be a real pleasure trip, I laughed at these puny attacks. Besides, my attention was directed to a matter far more interesting to me.

The journals had announced my performances, and this statement immediately aroused a paper warfare in the Algerian press, the strangeness of which contributed no little to give increased publicity to my representations.

“Robert-Houdin,” one paper said, “cannot be at Algiers, for we see daily announced in the Paris papers, ‘*Robert-Houdin every evening at eight o’clock.*’”

“And why,” another journal asked, pleasantly, “should not Robert-Houdin perform in Algiers and yet remain all the while in Paris? Do we not know that this sorcerer possesses the gift of ubiquity, and that he often gives performances at Paris, Rome, and Moscow on the same evening?”

The discussion went on thus for several days, some denying my presence, others affirming it.

The public of Algiers were willing to accept this fact as one of those pleasantries generally denominated *canards*, but they also wished to be sure of not being victims of a delusion if they came to the theatre.

At length the matter was taken up seriously, and the editors explained that Mr. Hamilton, on succeeding his brother-in-law, had kept up the old title; so that *Robert-Houlin* was a term equally applicable to the performer and to the style of performance.

This curious discussion, the annoyances occasioned by M. D——, and, as I hope I may believe, the attraction of my performance, brought me an enormous audience. All the tickets were bought beforehand, and the house was stiflingly hot, for the centigrade thermometer denoted 35°, and we were in the middle of September.

Poor spectators, how I pitied them! To judge from my own sensations, they must all have been mummified on the spot. I feared that the enthusiasm, as is the general rule, would be in an inverse ratio to the temperature; but I had no cause to complain of my reception, and I drew from this success a happy omen for the future.

In order not to deprive my “official representations,” as M. de Neveu termed them, of the interest the reader will expect from them, I will give no details of those which preceded them, and were so many trial balloons. I may say the Arabs who came were very few; for these men, with their indolent and sensual temper, consider the happiness of lying on a mat and smoking far above a spectacle.

Hence the governor, guided by the profound knowledge he had of their character, never invited them to a fête: he sent them a military summons. This occurred for my representations.

As M. de Neveu had announced to me, the expeditionary corps returned to Algiers on the 20th of October, and the fêtes, suspended by the campaign, were fixed for the 27th. Messengers were sent off to all parts of the colony, and on the appointed day the chiefs of the tribes, accompanied by

a numerous suite, found themselves in the presence of the marshal-governor.

These autumnal fêtes, the most brilliant held in Algeria, and probably unrivalled in any country of the world, present a picturesque and really remarkable scene.

I should like to be able to paint here the strange aspect the capital assumed on the arrival of the *goums* of the Tell and the South. The native camp, an inextricable pell-mell of huts for men and horses, offering a thousand contrasts, strange as they were fascinating; the brilliant cortège of the governor-general, in the midst of which the Arab chiefs, with their stern faces, attracted the eye by the luxury of their costumes, the beauty of their horses, and the brilliancy of their gold-broidered trappings; and the marvellous hippodrome, situated between the sea, the smiling hill of Mustapha, and the plain of Hussein-Dey, over which gloomy mountains cast a sombre shade. But I will say nothing about all this. Nor will I describe those military exercises called a Fantasia, in which twelve hundred Arabs, mounted on splendid steeds, and uttering wild cries as if on the battle-field, displayed the most vigour, skill, and intelligence men can possess. Nor will I speak of the admirable exhibition of Arab stallions, each exciting the most lively satisfaction as it passed; for all this has been already described, and I am longing to reach my own performances, which, I may say, formed not the least interesting part of this fête. I will only allude to one circumstance, which struck me peculiarly.

I saw a horseman, mounted on a magnificent Arab steed, beat all the winners in a final heat. This horseman was twelve years of age, and could pass under his horse without stooping.

The races lasted three days, and I was to give my performances at the end of the second and third.

Before beginning, I will say a word about the Algiers theatre.

It is a very neat house, in the style of the Variétés at Paris, and decorated with considerable taste. It is situated at the extremity of the Rue Bab-Azoun, on the *place* bearing that name, and the facade is peculiarly elegant.

On first seeing this immense edifice, it would be assumed that the interior was enormous: but it is nothing of the sort. The architect has sacrificed everything to the claims of public order and ventilation, while the stairs, passages, and green-room occupy as much space as the house itself. Perhaps the architect took into consideration the limited number of theatre-going people in Algiers, and thought that a small house would offer performers a better chance of success.

On the 28th of October, the day appointed for my first performance before the Arabs, I reached my post at an early hour, and could enjoy the sight of their entrance into the theatre.

Each *goum*, drawn up in companies, was introduced separately, and led in perfect order to the places chosen for it in advance. Then came the turn of the chiefs, who seated themselves with all the gravity becoming their character.

Their introduction lasted some time, for these sons of nature could not understand that they were boxed up thus, side by side, to enjoy a spectacle, and our comfortable seats, far from seeming so to them, bothered them strangely. I saw them fidgeting about for some time, and trying to tuck their legs under them, after the fashion of European tailors.

Marshal Randon, with his family and suite, occupied the two stage-boxes to the right of the stage, while the prefect and other civilian authorities sat exactly facing him. As for Colonel du Neveu, he was everywhere, as the arranger of the festival.

The caïds, agas, bash-agas, and other titled Arabs, held the places of honour, for they occupied the orchestra stalls and the dress circle.

In the midst of them were several privileged officers, and, lastly, the interpreters were mingled among the spectators, to translate my remarks to them.

I was also told that several curious people, having been unable to procure tickets, had assumed the Arab burnous, and, binding the camel's-hair cord round their foreheads, had slipped in among their new co-religionists.

This strange medley of spectators was indeed a most curious sight. The dress circle, more especially, presented

an appearance as grand as it was imposing. Some sixty Arab chiefs, clothed in their red mantles (the symbol of their submission to France), on which one or more decorations glistened, gravely awaited my performance with majestic dignity.

I have performed before many brilliant assemblies, but never before one which struck me so much as this. However, the impression I felt on the rise of the curtain, far from paralyzing me, on the contrary, inspired me with a lively sympathy for the spectators, whose faces seemed so well prepared to accept the marvels promised them. As soon as I walked on the stage, I felt quite at my ease, and enjoyed, in anticipation, the sight I was going to amuse myself with.

I felt, I confess, rather inclined to laugh at myself and my audience, for I stepped forth, wand in hand, with all the gravity of a real sorcerer. Still, I did not give way, for I was here not merely to amuse a curious and kind public, I must produce a startling effect upon coarse minds and prejudices, for I was enacting the part of a French Marabout.

Compared with the simple tricks of their pretended sorcerers, my experiments must appear perfect miracles to the Arabs.

I commenced my performance in the most profound, I might almost say religious, silence, and the attention of the spectators was so great that they seemed petrified. Their fingers alone, moving nervously, played with the beads of their rosaries, while they were, doubtlessly, invoking the protection of the Most High.

This apathetic condition did not suit me, for I had not come to Algeria to visit a waxwork exhibition. I wanted movement, animation, life in fact, around me.

I changed my batteries, and, instead of generalizing my remarks, I addressed them more especially to some of the Arabs, whom I stimulated by my words, and still more by my actions. The astonishment then gave way to a more expressive feeling, which was soon evinced by noisy outbursts.

This was especially the case when I produced cannon-

balls from a hat, for my spectators, laying aside their gravity, expressed their delighted admiration by the strangest and most energetic gestures.

Then came—greeted by the same success—the bouquet of flowers, produced instantaneously from a hat; the *cornucopia*, supplying a multitude of objects, which I distributed, though unable to satisfy the repeated demands made on all sides, and still more by those who had their hands full already; the *five-franc pieces*, sent across the theatre into a crystal box suspended above the spectators.

One trick I should much have liked to perform was the *inexhaustible bottle*, so appreciated by the Parisians and the Manchester “hands;” but I could not employ it in this performance, for it is well known the followers of Muhammad drink no fermented liquor—at least not publicly. Hence, I substituted the following with considerable advantage.

I took a silver cup, like those called “punch-bowls” in the Parisian cafés. I unscrewed the foot, and passing my wand through it, showed that the vessel contained nothing; then, having refitted the two parts, I went to the centre of the pit, when, at my command, the bowl was *magically* filled with sweetmeats, which were found excellent.

The sweetmeats exhausted, I turned the bowl over, and proposed to fill it with excellent coffee; so, gravely passing my hand thrice over the bowl, a dense vapour immediately issued from it, and announced the presence of the precious liquid. The bowl was full of boiling coffee, which I poured into cups, and offered to my astounded spectators.

The first cups were only accepted, so to speak, under protest; for not an Arab would consent to moisten his lips with a beverage which he thought came straight from Shaitan’s kitchen; but, insensibly seduced by the perfume of their favourite liquor, and urged by the interpreters, some of the boldest decided on tasting the magic liquor, and all soon followed their example.

The vessel, rapidly emptied, was repeatedly filled again with equal rapidity; and it satisfied all demands, like my

inexhaustible bottle, and was borne back to the stage still full.

But it was not enough to amuse my spectators; I must also, in order to fulfil the object of my mission, startle and even terrify them by the display of a supernatural power.

My arrangements had all been made for this purpose, and I had reserved for the end of my performances three tricks, which must complete my reputation as a sorcerer.

Many of my readers will remember having seen at my performances a small but solidly-built box, which, being handed to the spectators, becomes heavy or light at my order; a child might raise it with ease, and yet the most powerful man could not move it from its place.

I advanced, with my box in my hand, to the centre of the "practicable," communicating from the stage to the pit; then, addressing the Arabs, I said to them:

"From what you have witnessed, you will attribute a supernatural power to me, and you are right. I will give you a new proof of my marvellous authority, by showing that I can deprive the most powerful man of his strength, and restore it at my will. Any one who thinks himself strong enough to try the experiment may draw near me." (I spoke slowly, in order to give the interpreter time to translate my words.)

An Arab of middle height, but well built and muscular, like many of the Arabs are, came to my side with sufficient assurance.

"Are you very strong?" I said to him, measuring him from head to foot.

"Oh, yes!" he replied, carelessly.

"Are you sure you will always remain so?"

"Quite sure."

"You are mistaken, for in an instant I will rob you of your strength, and you shall become as a little child."

The Arab smiled disdainfully, as a sign of his incredulity.

"Stay," I continued; "lift up this box."

The Arab stooped, lifted up the box, and said to me, coldly, "Is that all?"

“Wait——!” I replied.

Then, with all possible gravity, I made an imposing gesture, and solemnly pronounced the words:

“Behold! you are weaker than a woman; now, try to lift the box.”

The Hereules, quite cool as to my conjuration, seized the box once again by the handle, and gave it a violent tug, but this time the box resisted, and, spite of his most vigorous attacks, would not budge an inch.

The Arab vainly expended on this unlucky box a strength which would have raised an enormous weight, until at length exhausted, panting, and red with anger, he stopped, became thoughtful, and began to comprehend the influences of magic.

He was on the point of withdrawing; but that would be allowing his weakness, and that he, hitherto respected for his vigour, had become as a little child. This thought rendered him almost mad.

Deriving fresh strength from the encouragements his friends offered him by word and deed, he turned a glance round them, which seemed to say, “You will see what a son of the desert can do.”

He bent once again over the box: his nervous hands twined round the handle, and his legs, placed on either side like two bronze columns, served as a support for the final effort.

But, wonder of wonders! this Hereules, a moment since so strong and proud, now bows his head; his arms, riveted to the box, undergo a violent muscular contraction; his legs give way, and he falls on his knees with a yell of agony!

An electric shock, produced by an inductive apparatus, had been passed, on a signal from me, from the further end of the stage into the handle of the box. Hence the contortions of the poor Arab!

It would have been cruelty to prolong this scene.

I gave a second signal, and the electric current was immediately intercepted. My athlete, disengaged from his terrible bondage, raised his hands over his head.

“Allah! Allah!” he exclaimed, full of terror; then, wrapping himself up quickly in the folds of his burnous,

as if to hide his disgrace, he rushed through the ranks of the spectators and gained the front entrance.

With the exception of my stage-boxes and the privileged spectators, who appeared to take great pleasure in this experiment, my audience had become grave and silent, and I heard the words "Shaitan!" "Djenoum!" passing in a murmur round the circle of credulous men, who, while gazing on me, seemed astonished that I possessed none of the physical qualities attributed to the angel of darkness.

I allowed my public a few moments to recover from the emotion produced by my experiment and the flight of the herculean Arab.

One of the means employed by the Marabouts to gain influence in the eyes of the Arabs is by causing a belief in their invulnerability.

One of them, for instance, ordered a gun to be loaded and fired at him from a short distance, but in vain did the flint produce a shower of sparks; the Marabout pronounced some cabalistic words, and the gun did not explode.

The mystery was simple enough; the gun did not go off because the Marabout had skilfully stopped up the vent.

Colonel de Neveu explained to me the importance of discrediting such a miracle by opposing to it a sleight-of-hand trick far superior to it, and I had the very article.

I informed the Arabs that I possessed a talisman rendering me invulnerable, and I defied the best marksman in Algeria to hit me.

I had hardly uttered the words, when an Arab, who had attracted my notice by the attention he had paid to my tricks, jumped over four rows of seats, and disdaining the use of the "practicable," crossed the orchestra, upsetting flutes, clarionets, and violins, escalated the stage, while burning himself at the footlights, and then said, in excellent French,

"I will kill you!"

An immense burst of laughter greeted both the Arab's

picturesque ascent and his murderous intentions, while an interpreter who stood near me told me I had to deal with a Marabout.

"You wish to kill me!" I replied, imitating his accent and the inflection of his voice. "Well, I reply, that though you are a sorcerer, I am a still greater one, and you will not kill me."

I held a cavalry pistol in my hand, which I presented to him.

"Here, take this weapon, and assure yourself it has undergone no preparation."

The Arab breathed several times down the barrel, then through the nipple, to assure himself there was a communication between them, and after carefully examining the pistol, said:

"The weapon is good, and I will kill you."

"As you are determined, and for more certainty, put in a double charge of powder, and a wad on the top."

"It is done."

"Now, here is a leaden ball; mark it with your knife, so as to be able to recognize it, and put it in the pistol, with a second wad."

"It is done."

"Now that you are quite sure your pistol is loaded, and that it will explode, tell me, do you feel no remorse, no scruple about killing me thus, although I authorize you to do so?"

"No, for I wish to kill you," the Arab repeated, coldly.

Without replying, I put an apple on the point of a knife, and, standing a few yards from the Marabout, ordered him to fire.

"Aim straight at the heart," I said to him.

My opponent aimed immediately, without the slightest hesitation.

The pistol exploded, and the bullet lodged in the centre of the apple.

I carried the talisman to the Marabout, who recognized the ball he had marked.

I could not say that this trick produced greater stupefaction than the one preceding it: at any rate, my spec-

tators, palsied by surprise and terror, looked round in silence, seeming to think, "Where the deuce have we got to here!"

A pleasant scene, however, soon unwrinkled many of their faces. The Marabout, though stupefied by his defeat, had not lost his wits; so, profiting by the moment when he returned me the pistol, he seized the apple, thrust it into his waist-belt, and could not be induced to return it, persuaded as he was that he possessed in it an incomparable talisman.

For the last trick in my performance, I required the assistance of an Arab.

At the request of several interpreters, a young Moor, about twenty years of age, tall, well built, and richly dressed, consented to come on the stage. Bolder and more civilized, doubtlessly, than his comrades of the plains, he walked firmly up to me.

I drew him towards the table that was in the centre of the stage, and pointed out to him and to the other spectators that it was slightly built and perfectly isolated. After which, without further preface, I told him to mount upon it, and covered him with an enormous cloth cone, open at the top.

Then, drawing the cone and its contents on to a plank, the ends of which were held by my servant and myself, we walked to the foot-lights with our heavy burden, and upset it. The Moor had disappeared—the cone was perfectly empty!

Immediately there began a spectacle which I shall never forget.

The Arabs were so affected by this last trick, that, impelled by an irresistible feeling of terror, they rose in all parts of the house, and yielded to the influence of a general panic. To tell the truth, the crowd of fugitives was densest at the door of the dress circle, and it could be seen, from the agility and confusion of these high dignitaries, that they were the first to wish to leave the house.

Vainly did one of them, the Caïd of the Beni-Salah, more

courageous than his colleagues, try to restrain them by his words :

“Stay! stay! we cannot thus lose one of our co-religionists. Surely we must know what has become of him, or what has been done to him. Stay! stay!”

But the co-religionists only ran away the faster, and soon the courageous caïd, led away by their example, followed them.

They little knew what awaited them at the door of the theatre; but they had scarce gone down the steps when they found themselves face to face with the “resuscitated Moor.”

The first movement of terror overcome, they surrounded the man, felt and cross-questioned him; but, annoyed by these repeated questions, he had no better resource than to escape at full speed.

The next evening the second performance took place, and produced nearly the same effect as the previous one.

The blow was struck: henceforth the interpreters and all those who had dealings with the Arabs received orders to make them understand that my pretended miracles were only the result of skill, inspired and guided by an art called *prestidigitation*, in no way connected with sorcery.

The Arabs doubtlessly yielded to these arguments, for henceforth I was on the most friendly terms with them. Each time a chief saw me, he never failed to come up and press my hand. And, even more, these men whom I had so terrified, when they became my friends, gave me a precious testimony of their esteem—I may say, too, of their admiration, for that is their own expression.

Three days had elapsed since my last performance, when I received a despatch from the governor, ordering me to be at the palace by twelve o'clock, *military time*.

Of course I kept the appointment, and the last stroke of twelve was still striking by the clock of the neighbouring mosque when I sent in my name at the palace. A staff officer immediately came to me.

“Come with me, M. Robert-Houdin,” he said, with a half-mysterious air. “I am ordered to conduct you.”

I followed my conductor, and, as the door of a magnificent room was open at the end of a gallery we crossed, I saw a strange sight. Some thirty of the most important Arab chiefs were arranged in a circle, of which I naturally formed the centre when I entered the room.

“Salâm aleikoum!” they said, in a grave and almost solemn voice, as they laid their hands on their hearts.

I first returned this salutation by bowing in the French fashion, and then by several hand-shakings, beginning with those chiefs whose acquaintance I had already formed.

At the head was the Bash-Aga Bou-Allem, the African Rothschild, in whose tent I had drunk my coffee at the Arab camp during the races.

Next came the Caïd Assa, with a wooden leg, who had also offered me pipes and coffee in the same encampment. As this chief did not understand a word of French, my friend Boukandoura was enabled, during a visit we paid him, to tell me the history of the wooden leg in his presence.

“Assa,” my friend said, “having had his leg shattered in an affair against the French, owed his escape to the speed of his horse. Once in a place of safety, he himself cut off his leg above the knee, and then, in his wild energy, thrust the mutilated stump into a vessel full of boiling pitch, in order to stop the hemorrhage.”

Wishing to return the salutations I had received, I went round the group, offering my hand to each in turn. But my task was remarkably abridged, for the ranks thinned at my approach, as many of the company had not the courage to take the hand of a man they had seriously regarded as a sorcerer or the demon in person.

This incident, however, did not disturb the ceremony in any way. After a laugh at the pusillanimity of the fugitives, each reassumed that gravity which is the normal condition of the Arab countenance.

Then the most aged chief in the assembly advanced towards me, and unrolled an enormous MS. It was an address, written in verse, a perfect masterpiece of native

caligraphy, and adorned with graceful arabesques drawn by hand.

The worthy Arab, who was at least seventy years of age, then read, in a loud voice, the piece of Mussulman poetry, which was perfectly unintelligible to me, as I knew only three words of Arabic.

When the reading was ended, the orator drew from his belt the signet of his tribe, and solemnly placed it at the bottom of the page. The principal Arab chiefs and dignitaries followed his example, and when all the seals had been affixed, my old friend took the paper, and after assuring himself the imprints were quite dry, he rolled it up and presented it to me, saying, in excellent French, and in a tone that revealed his sincerity :

“To a merchant, gold is given ; to a warrior, arms are offered ; to thee, Robert-Houdin, we present a testimony of our admiration, which thou canst hand down to thy children.” And, translating a verse he had just read in Arabic, he added, “Pardon us for presenting thee with such a trifle, but is it fitting to offer mother-o’-pearl to the man who possesses the real jewel?”

I avow very frankly that never in my life did I experience such sweet emotion—never had my success penetrated so fully to my heart ; and, moved more than I can express, I turned to wipe away a tear of sympathy.

These details, as well as the following, certainly wound my modesty a little, but I cannot make up my mind to pass them over in silence ; hence, I must beg the reader to accept them as a mere picture of manners.

I declare, too, that the thought never entered my mind of having deserved such praise, and yet I cannot refrain from feeling as much flattered as grateful for this homage, and regarding it as the most precious souvenir of my professional career.

This declaration made, I will furnish a translation of the address, in the words used by the calligrapher himself :—

“Homage offered to Robert-Houdin, by the chiefs of the Arab tribes, after his performances given at Algiers on the 28th and 29th of October, 1856.

“GLORY TO GOD,

who teaches us what we know not, and enables us to express the treasures of the mind by the flowers of eloquence and the signs of writing.

“Generous-handed destiny has sent down from above, in the midst of lightning and thunder, like a powerful and fertilizing rain, the marvel of the moment and the age, him who cultivates the surprising arts and marvellous sciences—the *Sid-Robert-Houdin*.

“Our century has seen no one comparable with him. The splendour of his talent surpasses the most brilliant productions of past ages. Our age is the more illustrious because it has possessed him.

“He has known how to stir our hearts and astonish our minds, by displaying to us the surprising facts of his marvellous science. Our eyes were never before fascinated by such prodigies. What he accomplishes cannot be described. We owe him our gratitude for all the things by which he has delighted our eyes and our minds; hence, our friendship for him has sunk into our hearts like a perfumed shower, and our bosoms preciously conceal it.

“We shall in vain attempt to raise our praises to the height of his merit; we must lower our brows before him and pay him homage, so long as the benevolent shower fertilizes the soil, so long as the moon illuminates the night, so long as clouds come to temper the heat of the sun.

“Written by the slave of God,

“ALI-BEN-EL-HADJI MOUSSA.

“Pardon us for presenting thee with,” &c. &c.

Then follow the seals and signatures of the chiefs of the tribes.

After the ceremony was over, and the Arabs had left us, the marshal-governor, whom I had not seen since my performances, being desirous to give me an idea of the effect they had produced on the minds of the natives, quoted the following incident:—

A Kabyle chief, who had come to Algiers to make his submission, was taken to my first performance.

The next day, at an early hour, he went to the palace, and asked to speak with the governor.

"I have," he said to the marshal, "to ask your permission to return immediately to my tribe."

"You must be aware," the marshal replied, "that the forms are not yet filled up, and the papers will not be in order for three days; you will, therefore, remain for that period."

"Allah is great," the Arab said, "and if it pleaseth Him I shall go away before; you will not be able to stop me."

"You will not go, I feel certain, if I forbid it. But tell me, why are you in such a hurry to leave?"

"After what I saw yesterday I don't wish to stay in Algiers; a misfortune would happen to me."

"Did you regard the miracles as real?"

The Kabyle surveyed the marshal with an air of astonishment, and, without replying directly to the question addressed him, said:

"Instead of killing your soldiers in conquering the Kabyles, send your French Marabout to the most rebel tribes, and before a fortnight he will bring them all to you."

The Kabyle did *not* leave, for the interpreters managed to remove his fears; still he was one of those who kept furthest aloof from me during the ceremony I have described.

Another Arab also said, on leaving one of my performances:

"Our Marabouts must now do very great miracles to astonish us."

These statements from the governor's own lips were very agreeable to me, for up to that moment I had felt rather uneasy; and although I was certain I had produced a startling impression by my performances, I was enchanted at learning that the object of my mission had been carried out according to the wishes of government. In addition, before I started for France, the marshal was kind enough

to assure me once again that my performances in Algeria had produced the happiest effect on the minds of the natives.

Although my performances were ended, I was in no hurry to return to France. I was curious, in my turn, to witness a conjuring performance of the Marabouts, or other native jugglers. I had also promised several Arab chiefs to visit them in their *douars*, and I wished to enjoy this double pleasure.

There are few Frenchmen who, after a short stay in Algeria, have not heard of the Aïssaoua and their marvels. The stories I had been told of the experiments performed by the followers of Sid-Aïssa had inspired me with the liveliest desire to see them, and I was persuaded that all their miracles were only more or less ingenious tricks, which I should be able to detect.

As M. le Colonel Neveu had promised me the opportunity of seeing them, he kept his word.

On a day chosen by the Mokaddem, the usual president of this sort of meeting, we went, accompanied by several staff officers and their wives, to an Arab house, and proceeded through a low archway into the inner court, where the ceremony was to take place. Lights artistically fixed on the walls, and carpets spread on the pavement, awaited the arrival of the Brothers, while a cushion was reserved for the Mokaddem.

We all took our seats where we should not disturb the performance, and our ladies went up to a gallery on the first floor, and thus represented our dress boxes.

But I will let Colonel Neveu himself describe this scene, by copying *verbatim* from his interesting work "The Religious Orders among the Mussulmans of Algeria."

"The Aïssaoua entered, formed a circle in the courtyard, and soon began their chants. These were at first slow and solemn chants, that lasted a long time; then came the praises of Sidi-Muhammad-Ben-Aïssa, founder of the order; after which the Brethren and the Mokaddem, taking up cymbals and tambourines, gradually increased the speed of the chanting.

"After about two hours the songs had become wild

cries, and the gestures of the Brethren had followed the same impulse. Suddenly some of them rose and formed a line, dancing, and pronouncing as gutturally as they could, and with all the vigour of their energetic lungs, the sacred name of Allah. This word, issuing from the mouths of the Aïssaoua, seemed rather a savage growl than an invocation addressed to the Supreme Being. Soon the noise increased, the most extravagant gestures began, while turbans fell off and exposed their shorn heads, which look like those of vultures; the long folds of their red sashes became unfastened, embarrassing their movements and increasing the disorder.

“Then the Aïssaoua moved about on their hands and knees, imitating the movements of wild animals. They seemed to be acting under the influence of some muscular force, and they forgot they were men.

“When the excitement had reached its height, and the perspiration was running down their bodies, the Aïssaoua began their juggling. They called the Mokaddem their father, and asked him for food; he gave to some pieces of glasses, which they champed between their teeth; he placed nails in the mouths of others, but, instead of swallowing them, they carefully hid their heads in the folds of the Mokaddem’s burnous, in order not to let the audience see them remove them. Some devoured thorns and thistles; others passed their tongues over a red-hot iron and took them in their hands without burning themselves. One man struck his left arm with his right hand: the flesh appeared to open, and the blood poured forth abundantly; then he passed his hand over his arm, the wound closed, and the blood disappeared. Another leaped on to the edge of a sabre held by two men, and did not cut his feet; while others produced from small leathern sacks scorpions and serpents, which they boldly placed in their mouths.”

I had concealed myself behind a pillar, whence I could survey everything without being noticed. I insisted on not being the dupe of these mysterious tricks: hence I paid the closest attention.

Both through the remarks I made on the scene of action,

and the ulterior researches I undertook, I am now in a position to give a satisfactory explanation of the miracles of the Aïssaoua. But, not to interrupt my narrative, I will refer the reader who is anxious for these details to the end of this volume, and the special chapter I have christened A COURSE OF MIRACLES.

I believe myself the more competent to supply these explanations, as some of the tricks belong to conjuring proper, and others are based on phenomena drawn from the physical sciences.

CHAPTER XXI.

Excursion in the Interior of Africa—The Abode of a Bash-Aga—A comical Repast—A Soirée of Arab Dignitaries—A Marabout mystified—Tent-life in Algeria—I return to France—A terrible Storm—Conclusion.

ONCE possessed of the secret of the juggling performed by the Aïssaoua, I was able to start for the interior of Africa. I therefore set out, provided with letters from Colonel de Neveu, to several heads of the Arab department, his subordinates, and I took with me Mme. Robert-Houdin, who was quite delighted at the thought of making this excursion.

We were going to visit the Arab beneath his tent or in his house; eat his "couscoussou," which we only knew by name; study for ourselves the domestic manners and customs of Africa: this was certainly enough to inflame our imagination. So much was this the case, that I hardly ever thought that the month in which we should re-embark for France would be the one in which the Mediterranean is so stormy.

Among the Arabs who had invited me to visit them, Bou-Allem-Ben-Sherifa, Bash-Aga of the D'jendel, had pressed me so strongly that I determined on commencing my round of visits with him.

Our journey from Algiers to Médéah was most prosaic, for a diligence conveyed us there in two days.

Apart from the interest inspired in us by the peculiar vegetation of Algeria, as well as the famous peak of the Mouzaia, which we passed at a gallop, the incidents of the journey were the same as on any French high road. The hotels were kept by Frenchmen, and you dined at the table-d'hôte on the same fare, at the same price, and with the same attendance. This bagman's existence was not what we had anticipated on leaving Algiers. Hence, we were delighted to get out at Médéah, as the diligence did not follow the same road as ourselves beyond this point.

Captain Ritter, head of the Arab office at Médéah, to whom I went, had seen my performances at Algiers: hence, I had no occasion to hand him the letter of recommendation addressed to him by M. de Neveu. He received me with great affability, and Mme. Ritter joined her entreaties to her husband's that we should visit the town. I indeed regretted being obliged to leave such agreeable persons the next morning; but I was obliged to hurry my tour over before the autumnal rains set in, which render the roads impracticable, and often, indeed, very dangerous.

The captain acceded to my wishes; he lent us two horses from his stable, and gave us as a guide to Bou-Allen's a caïd who spoke French excellently.

This Arab had been caught when quite a youth in a hut which Abd-ul-Khadr had been forced to abandon after one of his numerous defeats. The government sent the lad to the Louis-le-Grand College, where he got on excellently in his studies. But, constantly pursued by the remembrance of his African sky, and the national "cousecousson," our bachelor of arts asked the favour of being sent back to Algeria. Owing to his education he was made caïd of a small tribe, whose name I have forgotten, but which lay on the route we were going to take.

My guide—who I will call Muhammad, because I have forgotten his name also (for Arab names are difficult to remember by those who have not lived some time in Algeria)—Muhammad, then, was accompanied by four Arabs of his tribe: two of them were to carry our baggage and the other two wait upon us. All were mounted, and proceeded before us.

We started at eight in the morning, as our first stage was not to be long, for Muhammad assured me that, if it pleased God (a formula a true believer never omits in speaking of the future), we should arrive at his house in time for breakfast. In fact, about three hours after we had set out, our little caravan reached Muhammad's modest *douar*, and we dismounted in front of a villa, entirely composed of branches, of which the roof was hardly of man's height. This was the caïd's reception-room.

The door was opened, and our guide showed us the way by walking in first. Only one piece of furniture ornamented the interior; it was a small wooden stool, which my wife converted into a seat. Muhammad and I seated ourselves on a carpet, which an Arab had spread at our feet, and breakfast was soon served up. Muhammad, who, I fancy, wished to gain our pardon for a grave crime he was about to commit, treated us sumptuously, and almost in the French style. A rich soup, roast fowls, various ragoûts, which I cannot describe, as my culinary studies have been very limited, and pastry, which Félix himself would not have disowned, were placed before us in turn. More than that, my wife and I had been handed an iron knife, fork, and spoon—an unheard of thing at an Arab's.

The meal had been brought from an adjacent *gourbi*, where the caïd's mother resided. This lady had lived in Algiers for a long time, where she had acquired the skill of which she had just offered us a specimen.

As for Muhammad, he had resumed the fashions of his ancestors, with the Mussulman costume, and lived on dates and "couscoussou," save when he had any guests, which was extremely rare.

Our breakfast over, the host advised to set out again, if we wished to reach Bou-Allem's before nightfall; and we followed his advice.

From Médéah to Muhammad's *douar* we had followed a tolerable road, but on leaving his house we entered on a barren and desert country, where we saw no other signs of a road than those left by ourselves. The sun poured its most torrid beams upon our heads, and we found no shade along our route, to protect us from it. Frequently, too, our

progress became very laborious, for we came to ravines, into which we had to descend at the risk of our horses' knees and our own necks. To restore our patience, our guide told us we should soon reach more even ground, and we continued our journey.

About two hours after leaving our first halt, Muhammad quitted us at full gallop, saying he would soon return, and disappeared behind a mound.

We never saw our caïd again.

I learned, afterwards, that in his jealousy of Bou-Allem's wealth, he preferred incurring a punishment sooner than pay a visit to his rival.

This flight rendered my wife and myself very uncomfortable, and we exchanged our ideas on the subject with no fear of being understood by our guides. We were alarmed by the bad example given by Muhammad. Suppose the four Arabs were to imitate their chief, and also abandon us! What would become of us in a country where, even if we were to meet anybody, we could not make him understand our wishes?

But we escaped with the fear. Our worthy guides remained faithful to us, and were even very polite and attentive during the journey. Besides, as Muhammad had told us, we soon reached a road leading us straight to the abode of Bou-Allem.

Compared with the caïd's house, the bash-aga's might be considered a princely residence, less, however, through the architectural beauty of the buildings than through their extent. As in all Arab houses, only walls could be seen from without; all the windows looked on court-yards or gardens.

Bou-Allem and his son, warned of our arrival, came to meet us, and paid us in Arabic compliments I did not understand, but which I supposed to be the usual *salâm-alecks*, that is to say:

“Be ye welcome, oh ye invited of Deity!”

Such, however, was my confidence, that, whatever might have been said to me, I should have accepted it as a compliment.

We dismounted, and sat down upon a stone bench, where

coffee was soon served up to us. In Algeria people drink coffee and smoke the whole day long. It is true that this beverage is not made so strong as in France, and the cups are very small.

Bou-Allem, after lighting a pipe, handed it to me: it was an honour he did me to let me smoke after him, and I could not decline it, though I might have preferred it to be just the "other way about."

As I have already stated, I only knew three or four words of Arabic, and with such a poor vocabulary it was difficult to talk with my hosts. Still, they evidenced great joy at my arrival, for every moment they renewed their protestations, while laying their hands on their hearts. I replied by similar signs, and hence had not to draw on my imagination to keep up the conversation.

Later, however, urged by an appetite whose prompt satisfaction I did not calculate on, I ventured on a new pantomime. Laying my hand on the pit of my stomach, and assuming a suffering air, I tried to make Bou-Allem comprehend that we required more substantial food than civil compliments. The intelligent Arab understood me, and gave orders for the meal to be hastened on.

In the mean while, and to keep us quiet, he offered, by gestures, to show us his apartments.

We ascended a small stone staircase, and, on arriving at the first floor, our guide opened a door, which offered this peculiarity, that, to pass through it, you were obliged to lower your head and lift your foot simultaneously. In other words, this door was so low, that a man of ordinary height could not pass through it without stooping, and, as the floor was raised, you were obliged to step up on it.

This chamber was the bash-aga's reception-room; the walls were covered with red arabesques relieved with gold, and the ground strown with magnificent Turkey carpets. Four divans, covered with rich silk stuffs, completed the entire furniture, with a small mahogany table, on which were spread pipes, porcelain coffee-cups, and other objects especially used by Mussulmans. Among them, Bou-Allem took up a flask filled with rose-water, and poured it on our hands. The perfume was delicate: unfortunately, our host

wished to do things grandly, and in order to show the esteem he held us in, employed the rest of the bottle in literally sprinkling us from head to foot.

We visited two other large rooms, more simply decorated than the first, and in one of them was an enormous divan. Bou-Allem made us comprehend that was where he slept.

These details would have been very interesting at any other moment, but we were dying of hunger, and, according to the proverb, "a starving belly has neither eyes nor ears." I was just going to recommence my famous pantomime, when, in passing through a small room, in which the only furniture was a carpet, our cicerone opened his mouth, pointed with his finger that something was going to be placed in it, and thus made us understand we were in the dining-room. I laid my hand on my heart to express all the pleasure I experienced.

By Bou-Allem's invitation we sat down on the carpet, round a large waiter put down in place of a table.

Once seated, two Arabs came in to wait on us.

In France, servants wait with their heads uncovered; in Algeria, they keep on their head-covering; but, in return, as a mark of respect, they leave their shoes at the door, and serve barefooted. Between our servants and those of the Arabs the only difference is from head to foot.

We were the only guests seated with Bou-Allem, for the son had not the honour of dining with his father, who always ate alone.

A species of salad-bowl, filled with something like pumpkin-soup, was brought in, and I am very fond of that dish.

"What a fortunate thing," I said to my wife, "Bou-Allem has guessed my taste; how I will do honour to his cook."

My host, doubtlessly, understood the meaning of my remark, for, after offering us each a clumsy wooden spoon, he begged us to follow his example, and plunged his weapon in up to the wrist. We imitated him.

I soon took out an enormous spoonful, which I hastily lifted to my mouth; but I had scarce tasted it ere I exclaimed, with a horrible grimace:

“Pouah! what can that be? My mouth is on fire.”

My wife withdrew the spoonful she had raised to her lips, but either her appetite or her curiosity induced her to taste it. She did so, but soon joined me in coughing. It was a regular pepper-pot.

While apparently vexed at this contretemps, our host swallowed enormous spoonfuls of the soup, and each time he stretched out his arm with an air of beatitude, intended to convey to us “And yet how good it is.”

The soup-tureen was taken away almost empty.

“Bueno! bueno!” Bou-Allem exclaimed, pointing to a dish just placed before us.

Bueno is Spanish, and the worthy bash-aga, knowing two or three words of that language, was not vexed to display his learning to us.

This famous dish was a species of ragoût, bearing some affinity to haricot mutton. When I lived at Belleville, this was the masterpiece of Mme. Auguste, and I always gave it a very good reception. Hence, in remembrance of my good old cook, I was about to fall on the ragoût; but I looked around in vain for a fork, a knife, or even the wooden spoon handed us for the soup.

Bou-Allem released me from the dilemma; he showed me, by himself plunging his fingers into the dish, that a fork was a very useless instrument.

As hunger tormented us, we overcame our repugnance, and my wife, to encourage me, delicately fished up a small piece of mutton. The sauce was very highly spiced, but still, by eating very little meat and a great deal of bread, we were enabled to render the poison innocuous.

That I might be agreeable to my host, I unfortunately repeated the Spanish words he had taught me. This compliment, which he believed sincere, caused him extreme pleasure, and he drew out from the dish a bone with meat hanging to it, and after tearing off some pieces with his nails, offered them politely to my wife.

I wondered how Madame Houdin would get rid of this singular present; but she did so much more cleverly than I expected. Bou-Allem having turned his head to give an order, the piece of meat was restored to the dish with

astounding craft, and we were much inclined to laugh when our host, unsuspectingly, took this very piece of mutton for his own gratification.

We welcomed with great satisfaction a roast fowl served after the ragoût; I took on myself to carve it, or, in other words, to tear it asunder with my fingers, and I did so most delicately. We found it so much to our taste that not a particle was left.

Then came other dishes, which we tasted with due care, among them being the famous "couscoussou," which I found detestable, and the meal terminated with sweet-meats.

Our hands were in a deplorable condition, and an Arab brought us each a basin and soap to wash them.

Bou-Allem, after performing the operation, and washing his beard with the greatest care, took a handful of soap-suds, and rinsed his mouth. This was the only liquor served at table.

After dinner we proceeded to another room, and, on the road, were joined by a young Arab whom Bou-Allem had sent for. This man had been for a long time servant at Algiers, and spoke French excellently; hence he would serve as our interpreter.

We entered a small room very elegantly decorated, in which were two divans.

"This," our host said, "is the room reserved for guests of distinction; you can go to bed when you like, but if you are not tired, I would ask your leave to present to you several chief men of my tribe, who, having heard of you, wish to see you."

"Let them come in," I said, after consulting Madame Houdin, "we will receive them with pleasure."

The interpreter went out, and soon brought in a dozen old men, among whom were a Marabout and several talebs, whom the bash-aga appeared to hold in great deference.

They sat down in a circle on carpets, and kept up a very lively conversation about my performances at Algiers. This learned society discussed the probability of the marvels related by the chief of the tribe, who took great pleasure in depicting his impressions and those of his

co-religionists at the sight of the *miracles* I had performed.

Each lent an attentive ear to these stories, and regarded me with a species of veneration; the Marabout alone displayed a degree of scepticism, and asserted that the spectators had been duped by what he called a vision.

Jealous of my reputation as a French soothsayer, I thought I must perform before the unbeliever a few tricks as a specimen of my late performance. I had the pleasure of astounding my audience, but the Marabout continued to offer me a systematic opposition, by which his neighbours were visibly annoyed; the poor fellow did not suspect, though, what I had in store for him.

My antagonist wore in his sash a watch, the chain of which hung outside.

I believe I have already mentioned a certain talent I possess of filching a watch, a pin, a pocket-book, &c., with a skill by which several of my friends have been victimised.

I was fortunately born with an honest and upright heart, or this peculiar talent might have led me too far. When I felt inclined for a joke of this nature, I turned it to profit in a conjuring trick, or waited till my friend took leave of me, and then recalled him: "Stay," I would say, handing him the stolen article, "let this serve as a lesson to put you on your guard against persons less honest than myself."

But to return to our Marabout. I had stolen his watch as I passed near him, and slipped into its place a five-franc piece.

To prevent his detecting it, and while waiting till I could profit by my larceny, I improvised a trick. After juggling away Bou-Allem's rosary, I made it pass into one of the numerous slippers left at the door by the guests; this shoe was next found to be full of coins, and to end this little scene comically, I made five-franc pieces come out of the noses of the spectators. They took such pleasure in this trick that I fancied I should never terminate it. "*Douros! douros!*" they shouted, as they twitched their

noses. I willingly acceded to their request, and the *douros* issued at command.

The delight was so great that several Arabs rolled on the ground; this coarsely expressed joy on the part of Muhammadans was worth frenzied applause to me.

I pretended to keep aloof from the Marabout, who, as I expected, remained serious and impassive.

When calm was restored, my rival began speaking hurriedly to his neighbours, as if striving to dispel their illusion, and, not succeeding, he addressed me through the interpreter:

"You will not deceive me in that way," he said, with a crafty look.

"Why so?"

"Because I don't believe in your power."

"Ah, indeed! Well, then, if you do not believe in my power, I will compel you to believe in my skill."

"Neither in one nor the other."

I was at this moment the whole length of the room from the Marabout.

"Stay," I said to him; "you see this five-franc piece?"

"Yes."

"Close your hand firmly, for the piece will go into it in spite of yourself."

"I am ready," the Arab said, in an incredulous voice, as he held out his tightly closed fist.

I took the piece at the end of my fingers, so that the assembly might all see it, then, feigning to throw it at the Marabout, it disappeared at the word "Pass!"

My man opened his hand, and, finding nothing in it, shrugged his shoulders, as if to say, "You see, I told you so."

I was well aware the piece was not there, but it was important to draw the Marabout's attention momentarily from his sash, and for this purpose I employed the feint.

"That does not surprise me," I replied, "for I threw the piece with such strength that it went right through your hand, and has fallen into your sash. Being afraid I might break your watch by the blow, I called it to me: here it is!" And I showed him the watch in my hand.

The Marabout quickly put his hand in his waistbelt, to assure himself of the truth, and was quite stupefied at finding the five-franc picce.

The spectators were astounded. Some among them began telling their beads with a vivacity evidencing a certain agitation of mind; but the Marabout frowned without saying a word, and I saw he was spelling over some evil design.

"I now believe in your supernatural power," he said; "you are a real sorcerer; hence, I hope you will not fear to repeat here a trick you performed in your theatre;" and offering me two pistols he held concealed beneath his burnous, he added, "Come, choose one of these pistols; we will load it, and I will fire at you. You have nothing to fear, as you can ward off all blows."

I confess I was for a moment staggered; I sought a subterfuge, and found none. All eyes were fixed upon me, and a reply was anxiously awaited.

The Marabout was triumphant.

Bou-Allem, being aware that my tricks were only the result of skill, was angry that his guest should be so pestered, hence he began reproaching the Marabout. I stopped him, however, for an idea had occurred to me which would save me from my dilemma, at least temporarily; then, addressing my adversary:

"You are aware," I said, with assurance, "that I require a talisman in order to be invulnerable, and, unfortunately, I have left mine at Algiers."

The Marabout began laughing with an incredulous air.

"Still," I continued, "I can, by remaining six hours at prayers, do without the talisman, and defy your weapon. To-morrow morning, at eight o'clock, I will allow you to fire at me in the presence of these Arabs, who were witnesses of your challenge."

Bou-Allem, astonished at such a promise, asked me once again if this offer were serious, and if he should invite the company for the appointed hour. On my affirmative, they agreed to meet before the stone bench I have already alluded to.

I did not spend my night at prayers, as may be sup-

posed, but I employed about two hours in insuring my invulnerability; then, satisfied with the result, I slept soundly, for I was terribly tired.

By eight the next morning we had breakfasted, our horses were saddled, and our escort was awaiting the signal for our departure, which would take place after the famous experiment.

None of the guests were absent, and indeed, a great number of Arabs came in to swell the crowd.

The pistols were handed me; I called attention to the fact that the vents were clear, and the Marabout put in a fair charge of powder and drove the wad home. Among the bullets produced, I chose one which I openly put in the pistol, and which was then also covered with paper.

The Arab watched all these movements, for his honour was at stake.

We went through the same process with the second pistol, and the solemn moment arrived.

Solemn, indeed, it seemed to everybody—to the spectators who were uncertain of the issue, to Madame Houdin, who had in vain besought me to give up this trick, for she feared the result—and solemn also to me, for as my new trick did not depend on any of the arrangements made at Algiers, I feared an error, an act of treachery—I knew not what.

Still I posted myself at fifteen paces from the sheik, without evincing the slightest emotion.

The Marabout immediately seized one of the pistols, and, on my giving the signal, took a deliberate aim at me.

The pistol went off, and the ball appeared between my teeth.

More angry than ever, my rival tried to seize the other pistol, but I succeeded in reaching it before him.

“You could not injure me,” I said to him, “but you shall now see that my aim is more dangerous than yours. Look at that wall.”

I pulled the trigger, and on the newly whitewashed wall appeared a large patch of blood, exactly at the spot where I had aimed.

The Marabout went up to it, dipped his finger in the

blood, and, raising it to his mouth, convinced himself of the reality. When he acquired this certainty, his arms fell, and his head was bowed on his chest, as if he were annihilated.

It was evident that for the moment he doubted everything, even the Prophet.

The spectators raised their eyes to heaven, muttered prayers, and regarded me with a species of terror.

This scene was a triumphant termination to my performance. I therefore retired, leaving the audience under the impression I had produced. We took leave of Bou-Allen and his son, and set off at a gallop.

The trick I have just described, though so curious, is easily prepared. I will give a description of it, while explaining the trouble it took me.

As soon as I was alone in my room, I took out of my pistol-case—without which I never travel—a bullet-mould.

I took a card, bent up the four edges, and thus made a sort of trough, in which I placed a piece of wax taken from one of the candles. When it was melted, I mixed with it a little lamp-black I had obtained by putting the blade of a knife over the candle, and then ran this composition in the bullet-mould.

Had I allowed the liquid to get quite cold, the ball would have been full and solid; but in about ten seconds I turned the mould over, and the portion of the wax not yet set ran out, leaving a hollow ball in the mould. This operation is the same as that used in making tapers, the thickness of the outside depending on the time the liquid has been left in the mould.

I wanted a second ball, which I made rather more solid than the other; and this I filled with blood, and covered the orifice with a lump of wax. An Irishman had once taught me the way to draw blood from the thumb, without feeling any pain, and I employed it on this occasion to fill my bullet.

Bullets thus prepared bear an extraordinary resemblance to lead, and are easily mistaken for that metal when seen a short distance off.

With this explanation the trick will be easily understood. After showing the leaden bullet to the spectators, I changed it for my hollow ball, and openly put the latter into the pistol. By pressing the wad tightly down, the wax broke into small pieces, and could not touch me at the distance I stood.

At the moment the pistol was fired, I opened my mouth to display the lead bullet I held between my teeth, while the other pistol contained the bullet filled with blood, which, bursting against the wall, left its imprint, though the wax had flown to atoms.

After a pleasant journey, we reached Milianah at four in the afternoon. The head of the Arab office, Captain Bourseret, received us most kindly, and begged us to regard his house as our own during the whole time of our stay.

M. Bourseret resided with his mother, and that excellent lady showed Madame Robert-Houdin all those delicate attentions which only a friend of long standing could have claimed.

Our trip across the D'jendel had fatigued us, hence we passed the greater portion of the next day in resting ourselves.

At night, the captain gave a grand dinner, to which the general commanding, the lieutenant-colonel, and some notabilities of the town were invited. After the repast, I thought I could not better repay my polite reception than by giving a small performance, in which I displayed all my skill. As I had told M. Bourseret during the day of my intention, he had invited a large evening party; and I must suppose my experiments pleased, if I may judge by the greeting they received. Besides, my public were so favourably disposed towards me, that they often applauded on trust, as they could not all see very well.

Milianah was the end of my journey. I could only remain three days, if I wished to return to Algiers in time for the steamer that would convey us to France.

M. Bourseret arranged an excursion for the second day of my stay at his house to visit the Beni-Menasseh, a

nomadic tribe, at that time encamped a few leagues from Milianah.

At six in the morning we took horse, accompanied by some of the captain's friends, and went down the mountain on which the town is built.

We were escorted by a dozen Arabs attached to the office, all clothed in red mantles, and armed with guns.

Orders had certainly been given beforehand, for, on reaching the plain, at the first *goum* we passed through, ten Arabs mounted their horses and formed our escort. A little further on another troop joined the first, and our band, acting like a rolling snow-ball, ended by attaining considerable proportions. It was composed of about two hundred Arabs.

After two hours' march, we quitted the high road, and entered a plain that extended an immense distance in front of us.

Suddenly, the Arabs who accompanied us, probably in obedience to a signal from the chief, started off at a gallop, and proceeded five or six hundred yards ahead. There the troop divided, formed four deep, and the men of the first file rushed upon us, uttering frenzied cries, as they held their guns to their shoulders and prepared to fire.

Our little band happened to be in front at this moment. The Arabs rushed upon us with the velocity of a steam-engine, and in a few seconds we should have suffered a collision that must have crushed us all.

A sound of firing was heard: all the horsemen had discharged their guns with admirable precision over our heads. Their horses plunged, turned on their hind legs, and started off at full speed to join the troop.

The Arab might have been taken for a perfect centaur, when we saw him, while riding at this frantic speed, load his gun, and perform with it all the tricks peculiar to the drum-major.

The first file of horsemen had scarce retired when the second came forward, and went through a similar performance, which was repeated at least twenty times. Our captain had arranged for us the surprise of a fantasia.

At the noise of the firing some of our horses had started,

but, the first moment of surprise passed, they remained perfectly quiet. My wife's horse was an animal of approved docility, hence it was far less affected than its rider; still, every one did my wife the justice of stating that, after the first shock was over, she remained as calm as the boldest warrior among us.

The fantasia terminated, the Arabs took their place in the escort again, and within an hour we reached the tents of the Beni-Menassch.

The Aga Ben-Amara was awaiting us. On our arrival he advanced towards us, and humbly kissed the captain's hand, while other men of his tribe, in order to do honour to our visit, discharged their guns almost under our horses' noses. But men and beasts were case-hardened, and there was not the slightest movement in our ranks.

Ben-Amara conducted us into his tent, where each sat down at his ease on a large carpet.

Our arrival caused a sensation in the tribe, for while we were smoking and drinking coffee a large number of Arabs, impelled by curiosity, ranged themselves in a circle round us, and in their immobility resembled an avenue of bronze statues.

We devoted about an hour to the pleasures of conversation, waiting for the *diffa* (meal), which we were all impatiently desiring. We even began to find the time very long, when we saw a procession approaching, with banners at its head.

These banners puzzled me, and seemed very strange, for they were folded up. All at once the ranks of our peaceable spectators opened, and my surprise was great on finding what I took for banners were only sheep roasted whole and spitted on long poles.

Two of these sheep-bearers marched in front. They were followed by some twenty men, ranged in line, each of whom bore one of the dishes intended to compose our *diffa*.

These consisted of ragouts and roasts of every description, the inevitable "couscoussou" and, lastly, a dozen dishes of dessert, the handiwork of Ben-Amara's wives.

This perambulating dinner was a delicious sight, especially for people whose appetite had been singularly

sharpened by the fresh air and the emotions produced by the fantasia.

The head cook marched in front, and, like *M. Malbroug's* officer, carried nothing; but, so soon as he joined us, he set to work actively. Seizing one of the sheep, he unspitted it, and laid it before us on a lordly dish.

To my companions, nearly all Algerian veterans, this gigantic roast was no novelty; as for my wife and myself, the sight of such food would have been enough to pacify our hunger under other circumstances, but now we hastened to join the circle round this gigantic dish, which was worthy of Gargantua.

We were obliged, as at Bou-Allem's to pull the animal piecemeal with our fingers; each tore off a strip at will—I must confess, at starting, with some repugnance. Then, impelled by a ferocious appetite, we fell on the sheep like wolves, and I know not whether it was owing to the sauce we all had, but the guests unanimously declared they had never eaten anything so good as this roast mutton.

When we had selected the most delicate pieces, our cook proposed to produce the other animal, but, on our refusal, he served up roast fowls, to which we did our manly devoir. Then, turning up our noses at the pepper-pot and "couscoussou," which smelled strongly of rancid butter, we made up for the want of bread during the meal by nibbling excellent little cakes.

There was something really princely about the aga's reception, so, to thank him, I proposed to give a small performance before my numerous spectators, who, in their passionate admiration, could not leave the ground. By their chief's orders they drew nearer and formed a circle round me. The captain was kind enough to act as my interpreter, and, thanks to him, I was enabled to perform a dozen of my best tricks. The effect produced was such that I could not possibly continue, for every one fled at my approach. Ben-Amara assured us they took me for Shaitan himself, but, had I worn the Muhammadan costume, they would have cast themselves at my feet as an envoy from Heaven.

On our return to Milianah, the captain, to crown this

delicious day of pleasure, gave us the spectacle of a chase, in which the Arabs, galloping at full speed, caught hares and partridges without once firing.

The following day we took leave of M. Bourseret and his excellent mother, and proceeded towards Algiers, but not by a cross road, for we had had enough of them in traversing the D'jendel. This sort of party of pleasure, in reality a party of pain, may be agreeable for once, for it serves to revive in our inconstant minds the remembrance of the comfort we have voluntarily given up. Hence we took the diligence to Algiers, and on this occasion fully appreciated all the advantage of this mode of transport.

The *Alexander* steamer, which had brought us from France, was to start within two days, and this was all the time I had to take leave and thank all those who had shown me so much kindness.

On quitting Algiers I had the satisfaction of being conducted on board the vessel by two officers of high rank, whose kindness I can never repay. M. Palin du Parc, Colonel of the Marine Staff, and Colonel de Neveu did not leave me till the wheels had begun to turn, and those gentlemen were the last whose hands I pressed on the African coast.

Were I to describe all my travelling incidents, I should have a great deal to narrate before I reached my hermitage at St. Gervais; but I will adhere to my expressed intention of only alluding to events connected with my professional life.

A frightful storm at sea—a tornado at the summit of the Pyrenees—death staring us in the face twenty times—are events as terrible as they are interesting to relate. But these moving episodes, which affect all alike, have been already described by far more skilful pens than mine, hence my description would offer no novelty; I will content myself, therefore, with giving a summary of this terrible return to France.

A tempest assailed us in the Gulf of Lyons, and our engines were disabled. Our vessel, after being tossed about for nine days by the winds, at length reached the

coast of Spain, and we managed to make the port of Barcelona, where the authorities would not allow us to land, as we had no passports for Spain. We coasted this inhospitable country during a frightful storm, and at length reached the little port of Rosas, where we intended to ride out the tempest.

Here I landed, and crossed the Pyrenees in an open carriage, a hurricane, the result of the tempest at sea, threatening to hurl us into an abyss at every moment. At last we safely reached France, and Marseilles, where I was obliged to fulfil a promise made to the managers of the Grand Theatre on my former passage through the town.

I was, indeed, famously recompensed for the fatigues and dangers of my journey; for the Marseillais displayed towards me such unexampled kindness, that these last performances will ever remain on my mind as those in which I received the greatest applause. I could not take my leave of the public in a more solemn way, and I hastened my return to St. Gervais.

CONCLUSION.

I CAN, in ending this work, repeat what I said at the beginning of my penultimate chapter: "I have reached the object of my every hope." But this time, if it please God, as my guide Muhammad would say, no temptation will again come to modify my plans of happiness. I hope still for a long time (always if it please God) to enjoy that gentle and peaceful existence which I had scarce tasted when ambition and curiosity took me to Algiers.

On returning home, I arranged round my study my performing instruments, my faithful comrades, I may almost say, my dear friends; henceforth I intended to devote myself to my darling study, the application of electricity to mechanism.

It must not be believed that, for that purpose, I disown the art to which I owe so much pleasure. The thought is far from me, I am more than ever proud of having cultivated it, as to it alone I own the happiness of devoting

myself to my new studies. Besides, I diverge from it less than my readers might be inclined to suppose, for I have, during a long period, applied electricity to mechanism, and I must confess—if my readers have not already guessed it—that electricity played an important part in many of my experiments. In reality, my labours of to-day only differ from the old ones in the form; but they are still experiments.

A lingering love for my old clockmaking trade has made me choose chronometro-electrical works as the objects of my study. I have adopted as my motto, “*to popularize electric clocks by making them as simple and exact as possible.*” And as art always supposes an ideal which the artist seeks to realize, I already dream of the day when the electric wires, issuing from a single regulator, will radiate through the whole of France, and bear the precise time to the largest towns and the most modest villages.

In the mean while devoted to the sacred cause of progress, I labour incessantly in the hope that my humble discoveries will be of some service in the solution of this important problem.

My performance is ended (I must remind my readers that I offered them my narrative under this title); but I live in hope to begin it again soon, for I have still so many mysteries, great and small, to unveil. Sleight of hand is an immense quarry on which public curiosity can work for a long time; hence I do not take leave of my audience, or rather of my readers, for in the second form of performance I have adopted my farewell will not be definitive, until I have exhausted all that may be said about SLEIGHT OF HAND AND ITS PROFESSORS. These two words will serve as the title of the supplemental part of my Memoirs.*

* It is possible that M. Robert-Houdin intends to take this revenge, owing to the unfair way in which he was treated during his professional career. In 1850, a man who had been seven years in his service, and in whom he placed entire confidence, allowed himself to be seduced by the brilliant offers an amateur made him, and sold the secret of some of his master's tricks at a high price. Justice was appealed to, and stopped this disgraceful traffic: the seller was awarded two years' imprisonment, but the buyer could not be touched, and thus many of M. Houdin's tricks passed into strange hands.

CHAPTER XXII.

A COURSE OF MIRACLES.

It has been said of the augurs, that they could not look at each other without a laugh; it would be the same with the Aïssaoua, if Mussulman blood did not flow in their veins. At any rate, there is not one among them who is deceived as to the pretended miracles performed by his brethren, but all lend a hand to execute them successfully, like a company of mountebanks, at the head of whom is the Mokadden.

Even supposing that their pretended miracles could not be explained, a simple reflection would destroy their prestige. The Aïssaoua call themselves invulnerable—then, let them ask one of the audience to place the red-hot iron on their cheek, or some other part of their persons; they assert they are invulnerable—then, let them invite some Zouaves to pass their sabres through them. After such a spectacle, the most incredulous would bow before them.

Were I incombustible and invulnerable, I should find a pleasure in offering undoubted proofs. I would put myself on a spit before a scorching fire, and while roasting, would amuse myself with eating a salad of pounded glass, seasoned with oil of vitriol. Such a sight would attract the whole world, and I should become a prophet.

But the Aïssaoua have reason to be prudent in the performances of these tricks, as I will prove. The principal miracles are as follow :—

1. Running a dagger into the cheek.
2. Eating the leaves of the prickly pear.
3. Laying the stomach on the edge of a sabre.
4. Playing with serpents.
5. Striking the arm, causing the blood to flow, and stopping it instantaneously.

6. Eating pounded glass.
7. Swallowing pebbles, bottle-heels, &c.
8. Walking on red-hot iron, or passing the tongue over a white-hot plate of iron.

Let us begin with the most simple trick, that of thrusting a dagger into the cheek.

The Arab who performed this trick turned his back on me ; hence I could get very near him, and watch his movements. He placed against his cheek the point of a dagger, which was round and blunt as that of a paper-knife. The flesh, instead of being pierced, went in for about two inches between the molars, which were kept apart, exactly as a cake of india-rubber would do.

This trick is best performed by thin and aged persons, because the flesh of their cheeks is peculiarly elastic. Now, the Aissaoua fulfilled these conditions in every respect.

The Arab who ate the prickly pear leaves gave us no opportunity of inspecting them, and I am inclined to believe that the leaves had been prepared so as to do him no injury, otherwise he would not have neglected this important point, which would have doubled the merit of the miracle. But even had he shown them to us, this man went through so many unnecessary manœuvres, that he could very easily have changed them for harmless leaves. In that case, it would be a fifteenth-rate trick of conjuring.

In the following experiment, two Arabs held a sabre, one by the hilt, the other by the point ; a third then came forward, and after raising his clothes so as to leave the abdomen quite bare, laid himself flat on the edge of the blade, while a fourth mounted on his back, and seemed to press the whole weight of his body on him.

This trick may be very easily explained.

Nothing proves to the audience that the sabre is really sharpened, or that the edge is more cutting than the back, although the Arab who holds it by the point is careful to wrap it up in a handkerchief ; in this imitating the jugglers who pretend they have cut their finger with one of the daggers they use in their tricks.

Besides, in performing this trick, *the invulnerable* turned his back on the audience. He knew the advantage to be derived from this circumstance; hence, at the moment when about to lay himself on the sabre, he very adroitly pulled back over his stomach that portion of his clothing he had raised. Lastly, when the fourth actor mounted on his back, he rested his hands on the shoulders of the Arabs who held the sabre. The latter apparently maintained his balance, but, in reality, they supported the whole weight of his body. Hence, the only requirement for this trick is to have the stomach more or less pressed in, and I will explain presently that this can be effected without any injury or danger.

As for the Aïssaoua, who place their hands in a bag filled with serpents, and play with those reptiles, I will rely on Colonel de Neveu's judgment. This is what he says in his work already quoted:—

“ We often pushed our incredulity and curiosity so far as to order the Aïssaoua to come to our house with their menagerie. All the animals they stated to us were vipers (*lifá*), were only innocent lizards (*hanech*), and when we offered to put our hand in the bag holding their reptiles, they hastily retired, convinced that we were not duped by their tricks.”

I will add that these serpents, even had they been of a dangerous character, could have had their teeth pulled out, so as to be harmless. In support of this assertion, I noticed that these reptiles left no wound where they bit.

I did not see the trick performed of striking the arm and making the blood issue; but it seems to me that a small sponge filled with ruddle and concealed in the striking hand, would be enough to accomplish the prodigy. On wiping the arm, the wound is necessarily cured.

When I was a boy, I often made wine come out of a knife, or of my finger, by pressing a small sponge full of the liquor which I concealed in my hand.

I have often seen men champ wine-glasses between their teeth, and not hurt themselves; but not one of them swallowed the fragments. Hence, it was difficult for me to

explain this trick of the Aïssaoua, till, by the assistance offered me by a physician, I found in the *Dictionnaire des Sciences Médicales* for 1810, No. 1143, a paper written by Dr. Lesauvage on the harmlessness of powdered glass.

This gentleman, after quoting various instances of people he had seen eat glass, thus describes various experiments he made on animals:—

“After placing a great number of dogs, cats, and rats on a dietary of pounded glass, the fragments being two to three lines in length, not one of the animals was ill, and on opening some of them no injury could be detected all along the alimentary canal. Being convinced, too, of the harmlessness of swallowing glass, I determined to take some myself in the presence of my colleague, M. Cagel, of Professor Lallemand, and several other persons. I repeated this experiment several times, and experienced not the slightest feeling of pain.”

These authentic statements ought to have satisfied me; still, I wished to witness this singular phenomenon with my own eyes. Hence, I gave one of my house cats an enormous ball of meat seasoned with pounded glass. The animal swallowed it with the greatest pleasure, and seemed even to regret the end of this succulent meal. My family thought the cat booked for death, and began deploring my barbarity, but the next day the animal was perfectly well, and sniffed the spot where on the previous day it had enjoyed the meal.

Since that period, whenever I want to indulge a friend with this sight, I regale my three cats, in turn, so as not to excite any jealousy among them.

It took me some time, I confess, before I could decide on performing Dr. Lesauvage's experiment on myself, and, indeed, I saw no necessity for it. Still, one day, in the presence of a friend, I performed this bravado, if it be so; I also swallowed my bolus, though I was careful to pound my glass much finer than what I gave to my cats. I know not whether it was the effect of imagination, but I fancied I enjoyed my dinner much more than usual: did I owe this to the pounded glass? At any rate, it would be a strange way of arousing the appetite.

When the trick of swallowing bottle-heels and pebbles was to be done, the Aïssaoua really put them in his mouth, but I believe, I may say certainly, that he removed them at the moment when he placed his head in the folds of the Mokaddem's burnous. However, had he swallowed them, there would have been nothing wonderful about this, when we compare it with what was done some thirty years back in France by a mountebank called "the sabre swallower."

This man, who performed in the streets, threw back his head so as to form a straight line with his throat, and really thrust down his gullet a sabre, of which only the hilt remained outside the mouth.

He also swallowed an egg without cracking it, or even nails and pebbles, which he caused to resound, by striking his stomach with his fist.

These tricks were the result of a peculiar formation in the mountebank's throat, but, if he had lived among the Aïssaoua, he would assuredly have been the leading man of the company.

Or what would the Arabs have said had they seen the conjuror who passed a sword right through his body, and when thus spitted, also thrust a knife into either nostril up to the handle? I witnessed this feat, and others have probably done the same.

This trick was, in reality, so terrifying, that the public would implore the man to leave off; but without troubling himself about their cries, he would reply, speaking frightfully through his nose, "that it did him no harm," and sing in his singular voice the "*Fleuve du Tage*," which he accompanied on a guitar.

I could not endure the sight of this trick, and would turn my head away in horror when the troubadour drew out the sword, and begged us to notice that it was stained with blood.

Still, on reflection, I was certain the man could not really pierce his stomach thus, and that there must be some trick concealed.

My love of the marvellous made me desire to know it; hence, I applied to the *invulnerable*, and on condition of a

certain sum, and promises not to use it, he sold me his secret.

I may, in my turn, communicate it to the public without asking from them the same promise. The trick is, however, rather ingenious.

The performer was very thin—an indispensable quality for the success of the trick. He pressed in his stomach very tightly with a waist-belt, and produced the following result: the vertebral column being unable to bend, served as a support, and the intestines gave way and fell in about half the space they originally occupied. The mountebank then substituted for the suppressed part a cardboard stomach which restored him to his original condition, and the whole being concealed beneath a flesh-colour *tricot*, appeared to form part of his body. On either side, above the hips two ribbon rosettes hid the apertures by which the sword-point would go in and out, these openings being connected by a leathern scabbard which led the weapon securely from one end to the other, while, in order to produce the blood, a sponge filled with a red liquid was placed in the middle of the sheath. The knives in the nostrils were a reality. The *invulnerable* was very pug-nosed, which allowed him to draw the cartilage of the nose up prior to the introduction of the knives.

I possessed the necessary physical qualifications for the sabre trick, but none for that of the knives. I did not attempt the first, much less the second.

By the way, I may remark that, when a lad, I used to perform two *miracles*, which might be useful to the Aïssaoua, if they were ever told of them. I will explain them here.

The corn-curer who taught me to juggle, also showed me a very curious trick, consisting in thrusting a small nail into the right eye, which is then made to pass into the left eye, thence into the mouth, and end by returning into the right eye.

It may be imagined how I burned with the fire of necromancy, since I had the courage to practise this trick, which I found charming. A very disagreeable circumstance, however, deprived me of my faith in the effect produced by it.

I sometimes spent the evening at a lady's house who had two daughters. I thought I could not select a better place for my first performance, and asked leave to do the trick. Of course this permission was granted, and a circle was formed round me.

"Ladies," I said, with a certain degree of emphasis, "I am invulnerable. To furnish you with a proof, I could easily stab myself with a dagger, a knife, or any other sharp instrument; but I fear lest the sight of blood might produce too agitating an effect on you. Hence, I will offer you another proof of my supernatural powers. And I performed my famous trick of "the nail in the eye."

The effect of this scene was most unexpected, for the performance was scarce over ere one of the young ladies was taken ill and fainted. The evening's amusement was disturbed, as may be supposed, and fearing some recriminations, I bolted without saying a word, declaring that I would never be caught again at such tricks.

This, however, is the explanation of the trick:—

A small lead or silver pin may be introduced, without the slightest feeling of pain, in the corner of the eye, near the lachrymal duct, between the lower eyelid and the pupil; and, strangely enough, this piece of metal once introduced, you do not in the least notice its presence. To bring it out again, you need only press it with the finger.

If desirous to perform the trick I have alluded to, you proceed in the following way:—

After secretly placing one of these small nails in the left eye, and another in the mouth, you commence as follows:—

You openly thrust a nail into your right eye, then, pressing the skin with the end of the finger, you pretend to pass it through the nose into the left eye, whence you withdraw the one put in beforehand. This you return again to the eye, and the nail appears to pass into the mouth, whence you produce the one already hidden there, and thence into the right eye, whence you withdraw the one originally inserted.

When this is done, you go on one side and remove the nail still remaining in the left eye.

But to return to the last trick of the Aïssaoua, which consists in walking over hot iron, and passing the tongue over incandescient plates of the same metal.

The Aïssaoua who walks over hot iron does nothing extraordinary, if we consider the conditions under which the trick is performed.

He quickly glides his heel along the iron; but the lower-class Arabs, who all walk with naked feet, have the lower part of the foot as hard as a horse's hoof, hence this horny part burns without occasioning the slightest pain.

And, besides, may not chance have taught the Aïssaoua certain precautions known to more than one European juggler, before Dr. Sementrici proved their use and explained them to the public?"

Let us quote some performances of our own mountebanks, and we shall find that the followers of Aïssa as miracle-mongers are a long way behindhand in their pretended marvels.

In February, 1677, an Englishman, of the name of Richardson, came to Paris, and gave some very curious performances, which proved, according to his statement, his incombustibility.

He was seen to roast a piece of meat on his tongue, light a piece of charcoal in his mouth by means of a pair of bellows, seize a bar of red-hot iron in his hand, or hold it between his teeth.

This Englishman's servant published his master's secret, which may be found in the *Journal des Sciences*.*

In 1809, a Spaniard, of the name of Leonetto, gave performances at Paris. He also handled a bar of red-hot iron with impunity, passed it through his hair, or stepped upon it; drank boiling oil, plunged his fingers into melted lead, put some on his tongue, and ended his performance by licking a piece of red-hot iron.

This extraordinary man attracted the attention of Professor Sementrici, who began carefully watching him.

The professor remarked that the tongue of the *incom-*

* 1677, first edition, page 41, and second edition, 1680, pp. 24, 147, 252.

bustible was covered with a gray layer, and this discovery led him to try some experiments on himself. He discovered that rubbing in a solution of alum, evaporated to a spongy state, rendered the skin insensible to the action of red-hot iron. He also rubbed himself with soap, and found that even the hair did not burn when in that state.

Satisfied with these investigations, the physician rubbed his tongue with soap and a solution of alum, and the red-hot iron produced no sensation on him.

The tongue, when thus prepared, could also receive boiling oil, which grew cold, and could then be swallowed.

M. Sementrici also detected that the melted lead Leonetto employed was only Arctet's metal, fusible at the temperature of boiling water. (For further details consult the historic notice of M. Julia de Fontenelle, in Roret's *Manuel des Sorciers*, page 181.)

These explanations may appear sufficient to disprove the pretended incombustibility of the Aïssaoua; still, I will add a personal fact, whence the conclusion can be drawn that a man need not be inspired by Allah or Aïssa to play with red-hot metals.

Reading one day the *Comus*, a scientific review, I found a critique of a work called *Study on Bodies in a Spheroidal Shape*, by M. Boutigny (d'Evreux). The editor of the review, the Abbé Moigno, quotes several of the most interesting passages, among them being the following:—

“We passed our fingers through jets of red-hot metal” (M. Boutigny is speaking). “We plunged our hands into moulds and crucibles filled with metal that had just run from a Wilkinson, and of which the radiation was insupportable, even at a long distance. We carried on these experiments for more than two hours, and Madame Coulet, who was present, allowed her daughter, a child of from eight to ten years to put her hand in a crucible of red-hot metal, which caused not the slightest injury.”

Knowing the character of the learned abbé, as well as that of the celebrated naturalist and author of the work, it was not possible to doubt: still, I must say, this fact appeared to me so impossible, that my mind refused to accept it, and I wished to see, that I might believe.

I decided on calling on M. Boutigny, and expressed to him my wish to see so interesting an experiment, while carefully avoiding any expression of doubt on the subject.

This gentleman received me kindly, and proposed to repeat the experiment before me, when I might have an opportunity to wash my hands in molten metal.

The proposition was attractive, scientifically speaking; but on the other hand, I had some fears which the reader will appreciate, I think. In the event of a mistake I should reduce my hands to charcoal, and I was bound to take the greater care of them as they had been such precious instruments to me. Hence I hesitated with my reply.

“Do you not place confidence in me?” M. Boutigny asked.

“Oh, certainly, sir, I have plenty of confidence, but——”

“But you are afraid—out with it!” the doctor interrupted me, with a laugh. “Well, to ease your mind, I will try the temperature of the liquid before you place your hands in it.”

“And what is about the temperature of molten metal?”

“Close on one thousand six hundred degrees.”

“One thousand six hundred degrees?” I exclaimed. “Oh! the experiment must be splendid: I consent.”

On the day appointed by M. Boutigny, we proceeded to Mr. Davidson’s foundry at La Villette, after he had granted us permission to make the experiment.

I was strangely affected on entering this vast establishment; the deafening noise produced by the immense blasts, the flames escaping from the furnaces, the sparkling jets transported by powerful machines and running into gigantic moulds, the wiry, muscular workmen, blackened by smoke and dust,—all this medley of men and things produced a strange and rather solemn effect upon me.

The manager came up to us, and pointed out the furnace to which we were to proceed for our experiment.

While waiting for a jet of metal to run, we remained for a few moments in silence near the furnace; then we com-

menced the following conversation, which was certainly not of a nature to encourage me :—

“ I would only repeat this experiment, which I am not fond of, for your sake,” M. Boutigny said; “ I confess that, though I am morally sure of the result, I always feel an emotion which I cannot dispel.”

“ If that be the case,” I replied, “ suppose we go? I will believe your word.”

“ No, no; I am bound to show you this curious phenomenon. But, by-the-way,” the learned doctor added, “ let me see your hands?”

He took them in his.

“ Hang it,” he went on, “ they are very dry for our experiment.”

“ You think so?”

“ Certainly.”

“ Then it is dangerous?”

“ It might be so.”

“ In that case, we will go,” I said, turning to the door.

“ That would be a pity,” my companion replied, holding me back; “ stay, dip your hands in this bucket of water, dry them well, and they will be sufficiently damp.”

I must mention that to insure the success of this marvellous experiment no other condition is requisite than to have the hands slightly damp. I regret I can offer no explanations as to the principle of the phenomenon, for this would require many a long chapter; hence I will refer my readers to M. Boutigny’s work. It will be enough to state that the metal when in a state of fusion, is kept at a distance from the skin by a repulsive force, which opposes an insurmountable barrier.

I had scarce finished wiping my hands when the furnace was opened, and a jet of molten metal, about the thickness of my arm, burst forth. Sparks flew in every direction, as if it were a firework performance.

“ Wait a few minutes,” M. Boutigny said, “ till the metal is cleansed, for it would be dangerous to try our experiment at this moment.”

Five minutes later the stream of liquid fire left off bubbling and emitting scorïæ; it became, indeed so

limpid and brilliant, that it scorched our eyes at a few yards off.

All at once my companion walked up to the furnace, and calmly began washing his hands in the metal as if it had been lukewarm water.

I make no pretence to bravery; I confess at this moment my heart beat as if it would burst, and yet, when M. Boutigny ended his strange ablutions, I walked forward in my turn with a determination that proved a certain strength of will. I imitated my professor's movements, I literally dabbled in the burning liquid, and, in my joy, inspired by this marvellous operation, I took a handful of the metal and threw it in the air, and it fell back in a fire-shower on the ground.

The impression I felt in touching this molten iron can only be compared to what I should have experienced in handling liquid velvet, if I may express myself so.

I now ask what are the red-hot bars of the Aïssaoua, in comparison to the enormous temperature to which my hands had been exposed?

The old and new miracles of the incombustibles are, therefore, explained by the experiments of a skilful naturalist, who while making no pretence to trickery, only appreciates such phenomena in their relation to the immutable laws by virtue of which they are accomplished.

THE END.

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