

A Free Independent Republican

"FREEDOM AND RIGHT AGAINST SLAVERY AND WRONG."

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Poe's Corner.

THE WORLD WOULD BE BETTER FOR

BY W. L. CONN.

If men cared less for wealth and fame,
And less for battle-fields and glory;
If men in human hearts, a name
Scarcely better than a name or story;
If men instead of naming prizes,
Would learn to hate and to abhor—
If more relief
It were to give,
The world would be the better for it.

If men dealt less in stocks and lands,
And more in bonds and deeds of hands;
If love's work had more willing hands
To link this world to the eternal;
If men spent up love's and wife's
And on bruised hearts would pour it;
If "yours" and "mine"
Would once combine,
The world would be the better for it.

If more would see the play of life,
And fewer spoil it with a knife;
If glory would abate his knife,
Till good became more universal;
If custom, grown with ages grown,
Had fewer blind men to adore it—
If talent alone
In truth alone,
The world would be the better for it.

If men were wise in little things,
Affecting less in all their dealings;
If hearts had more of feelings
To isolate their kindly feelings;
If men, when wrong beats down the Right,
Would strike against and restore it—
If in every fight,
The world would be the better for it.

Tales and Sketches

THE PRETENDED NEPHEW.

BY ASSE T. WILBUR.

The city of Rouen, to those who see it only in descending the river, or passing along the quays, has the aspect of a new and regularly built city. Its quays are bordered with a row of lofty houses, square and yellow, most of the inhabitants of which are very proud—this serves to conceal the city, which is full of narrow, tortuous, muddy streets, it is true, but also of valuable monuments and picturesque dwellings, with crenellated and friezed corners sculptured. The inhabitants were eager to show you the cathedral, St. Owen, St. Patrick's, magnificent churches, but they are ashamed to lead you through the streets, past houses of the same age, in harmony with these *chefs-d'œuvre*; they hope one day to see these monuments surrounded by a new city, regular, square and yellow, like the quays.

At one of the old houses of the rue Rouen, a house whose ceilings, windows and doors were richly carved—was one morning knocking a young man of twenty-three or four, simply but becomingly dressed. A sort of rude domestic came to open to him, a man of fifty, whose black locks, slightly grayish, were so tangled and matted, that if it had been desired to improve them, one would have thought of carving rather than combing. His eyes of a pale blue, did not look you in the face, his voice was hoarse and hoarse. The stranger asked for M. Hamel, giving his card, to which the domestic replied:

"I will go and see if he is in."

He left the stranger at the door, which he half closed and re-entered the house. He soon returned and said:

"M. Hamel is not yet up, but you are expected, and you will find Mademoiselle Anastasia ready to receive you."

In fact, on entering the drawing room, the stranger found a fresh and plump girl who appeared about twenty-five. She was evidently *en toilette*—as appeared by a cap trimmed with lace, a handkerchief pinned around her neck, and a silk apron. She had the blue, almond-shaped eyes of the Normans, but these clear transparent, deep, spotless eyes looked at once with the whole extent, a broad but pointless glance, which one could neither meet nor avoid by another glance, because that of Anastasia would have encircled and enveloped it.

"You are," said she to the stranger, "M. Ernest Giraud."

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Very well—you come to be the secretary of M. Hamel."

"Yes, Mademoiselle—if I have the good fortune to please you first and him afterwards."

"Very well. You know that M. Hamel is old and sick?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, and that he knows how to appreciate the care you take of him by giving you his entire confidence."

"Very well. Papa, go away," said she to the servant who had introduced Ernest Giraud.

The domestic withdrew.

"We have to converse, Monsieur Giraud, on the interest of M. Hamel, whom I love like a father. M. Hamel is too good; too generous—these are his only defects, which I have not been able wholly to correct. I must see all the letters that come, not from curiosity, but to keep from him everything which could disturb him or increase his illness. I will show you especially a certain handwriting which must be the object of particular surveillance."

Mademoiselle Anastasia rang—the old domestic appeared.

"Papa," said she to him, "go and seek in my chamber for a black box which is on the commode."

"But," said Ernest Giraud, while Pere Virieux was executing his commission, "why does M. Hamel take a secretary?"

"To read him a part of the day, and sometimes at night, when he cannot sleep. I have hesitated to give you this fantasy—I have feared that a new face would displease M. Hamel, and disturb the state of quietude in which I have taken so much pains to favor him. But M. Guichard has spoken so favorably of you, so earnestly assured me that you would oppose me in nothing which I do to ensure the happiness of M. Hamel's last days, that I have consented to have you fulfill these functions. I at first attempted to fulfill them myself, so devoted am I to my respectable master. I learned to read at twenty-four—but I was too late; I know how to read, thank God, but I cannot read aloud, my tone is drawing, monotoneous, and fatigues him."

Pere Virieux re-entered with the box.

"Ah, papa, it has taken you a long while

to get a black box from a commode, in a chamber where there is but one commode and one black box. Try to be a little more lively. Now go and light the fire in the kitchen, and when it is kindled put on the milk to warm."

Mademoiselle Anastasia opened the box with a little key taken from a bunch of keys fastened to her girdle, and drew from it a letter which she presented to Giraud. This letter commenced thus: "How does it happen, my dear uncle, that all of my letters remain without a reply?" etc.

"This writing is that of the nephew of M. Hamel," said Mademoiselle Anastasia, "a worthless fellow, who must not be allowed on any pretext to enter here, since he would ruin his uncle, and embitter the few remaining years of his life. You understand that it would be much pleasanter for me to be relieved of a part of the cares to which my affection for M. Hamel subjects me. But this nephew, whom he has not seen since his childhood, whose father, the brother of M. Hamel, died at variance with him, this nephew thinks only of the heritage of his uncle and would make a bad use of it. He has at last ceased to write, except once or twice a year, and then the letters do not reach M. Hamel, who thinks his nephew has forgotten him. Do you think you would readily recognize this handwriting?"

"I think so; but to make sure, I will not read nor unseal a letter for M. Hamel without having previously submitted it to you—by this means I shall do my best to aid you in the cares which you have undertaken with so much zeal and perseverance."

"Your salary is small, but I can insure its being raised, if you succeed in giving satisfaction to M. Hamel and myself."

Ernest Giraud was therefore installed in the house of M. Hamel. The old man was very decrepit; the slavery and solitude in which Anastasia had kept him had almost led to his becoming imbecile. For some time Ernest was subjected to a constant espionage; while he was alone with M. Hamel the partition had ears and eyes. Pere Virieux, who exercised the functions of father and domestic to Mademoiselle Anastasia, ever found some pretext to enter the chamber of M. Hamel.

The latter soon became attached to Ernest. Ernest read well, and willingly listened to the stories of the old man, who never spoke of his present existence, and lived entirely in the past.

Mademoiselle Anastasia did not leave even to her father the cares which concerned the person of M. Hamel; she hesitated at nothing which could afford him relief or solace, and as she had declared to Ernest, it was only after long and heroic efforts that she had suffered any one to relieve her of part of her duties. Ernest came out triumphantly from the ordeal of Mademoiselle Anastasia, and made in her confidence a progress only to be equalled in the confidence of M. Hamel. Mademoiselle Anastasia admitted sentiments which she had never before experienced, and Ernest acquired an influence over her which she was long reluctant to confess.

One day Pere Virieux came to tell her what he had overheard, after being concealed three quarters of an hour in an armchair, to listen.

"The old man spoke of his nephew," said he. "I do not know what book M. Ernest was reading, but he suddenly stopped him, saying: 'This book makes me sad; it reminds me of a dear brother.'"

"Had you a brother?" asked M. Ernest.

"Yes," said M. Hamel, "and a brother with whom I was at variance when he died. This is a source of regret, of remorse even, which I can never forget. My brother died cursing me."

"He never was not so," said M. Ernest.

"How do you know?"

"Men do not curse their brothers."

"It seems that M. Ernest said some very fine things, for the old man wept."

"He wept," said Anastasia, "his physician shall forbid his weeping—and I will prohibit M. Ernest from making him weep, it is very dangerous—for me. Afterwards?"

"Afterwards," said M. Ernest, "he has entirely forgotten his uncle."

"Did M. Ernest reply?"

"Yes," he said, "that is perhaps not true."

"Very well. You will go and send M. Ernest to me, and remain with the old man. Pere Virieux hastened to obey. Ernest appeared, not in the least disturbed.

"Monsieur Ernest," said Anastasia, "has M. Hamel spoken to you of his nephew?"

"I should have to tell you all the particulars of our conversation this evening."

"I know them already," said Anastasia smiling. "What is the result of this conversation? In what disposition of mind has it left M. Hamel?"

"He is about to send for his nephew."

"It is impossible—I will not have it so; that cannot be. This fellow will be the death of me. You are to write, I suppose?"

"I have already written."

"The letter must be burned."

"That depends neither upon you or upon me; has taken it and put it in his pocket. I do not know what has inspired him with this suspicion, but he intends to give it himself to the postman."

"It must be prevented; prepare a letter similar to the one you have written. Put in it the most discouraging things; give it to me and I will contrive to exchange it for the one M. Hamel intends sending. I must have a private conversation with you. This evening while the old man is asleep, at eleven o'clock, meet me here. If he awakes, I can hear his bell and even his voice. Be sure to give me the letter before dinner. Did he put the first one in the side pocket of his coat?"

"Yes."

"Very well; I shall expect you at eleven o'clock."

During dinner, Pere Virieux, who waited at table, dropped the gray on M. Hamel's coat; Anastasia screamed, hustled to him, asked with terror whether he was not burned, and sending her father for his dressing gown, herself took off the coat and carried it into another room to clean. Suddenly M. Hamel turned pale.

"Anastasia!" exclaimed he, "bring me my coat, and be sure to get it." But Anastasia brought it back. He drew from the pocket the letter he had placed there in the morning—then he said, "Leave the coat and come to dinner."

But Anastasia did not return till she had repaired the awkwardness of her father. The bell rang; it was the postman. M. Hamel ordered her to be called up, and himself confided to him his letter. Anastasia smiled.

In the evening Ernest, after having waited for Anastasia a long time in the room where she had appointed an interview, at last fell asleep in an arm chair. About half past twelve she arrived. She was disturbed and her voice trembled.

"Monsieur Ernest," said she, when she had seated herself beside him, "you have acquired great influence over M. Hamel; an influence which almost counterbalances mine and which I must not allow to be used to my own advantage. I deem it my duty to destroy by every means in my power, if I had not yielded to it myself, and if you had not inspired me with as much esteem as you have inspired my master. Meanwhile it is time to come to the promises you have made me; you have aided me in my projects without knowing them, and without any interest but a paltry increase of your paltry salary. You can no longer be my subordinate—you must be my ally, my associate. We must unite our efforts, for a common object. Monsieur Ernest, if no misfortune happens, at the death of M. Hamel I shall be rich; he has made a will in my favor, which with the exception of a few legacies, leaves me all his fortune. Meanwhile one danger threatens my projects, and what I have imagined to avert it, you must reply favorably. One question; shall these projects which are to be defended *à titre de bien* be shared by both?"

"A mademoiselle," said Ernest, "how have I deserved such good things? I am confused by it; expression fails me."

"Endeavor to find enough of them not to leave me in the dark," said Anastasia, drily. "Will you say yes or no?"

"Mademoiselle need I assure you that I shall be too happy?"

"Are you the only one?"

Ernest kissed her hand. Anastasia's hand had never before been kissed; she was delighted and confused. Meanwhile she quickly recovered herself, and said:

"Let us now work together. This work must not be set aside. As long as M. Hamel does not see him, he will picture him as charming; he must be brought higher and rid us of himself. M. Hamel has not seen his nephew since his childhood; seven or eight years. You, who are about the same age, must personate the nephew."

"But he knows me as Ernest Giraud."

"No matter—we will play a little comedy, of which he shall be the dupe. You have come here under the name of Ernest Giraud, but it is a fictitious name; you are really Olivier Hamel, the nephew of M. Hamel—in despair at your uncle's estrangement, repenting of your past neglect, desirous of executing the last wish of your uncle, and reconciled with your father, who, dying under his death-bed, 'Love and respect your uncle,' you learned that he had need of a secretary; you introduced yourself by this title and under a fictitious name, and reserved the avowal of your real one until the time when the secretary should have, by means of care and tenderness, re-conquered the affection which the nephew had lost."

"What an imagination!"

"It is very probable."

"But how will it be of service to you?"

"The natural sequel of the comedy will be this—M. Hamel will embrace his nephew tenderly, will repent having so long banished from his heart his brother's son, destroy the will he has made in your favor, declare his nephew his heir, and leave you an annuity, which you generously offer to share with me."

"Hear me, Monsieur Ernest. You do not look far enough. Suffer yourself to be guided by me, and aid me to obtain this fortune."

"I will do whatever you please, mademoiselle. And they separated."

From this moment Ernest Giraud and Anastasia were occupied in preparing the *coup de theatre* agreed upon. Ernest lavished upon the old man the tender and assiduous cares of a son.

Anastasia pointed nothing to be lost, and was constantly referring to M. Hamel the most minute circumstances of the respectful and devoted conduct of his secretary. When she perceived that the latter had become necessary to M. Hamel, she thought it was time to strike the grand blow. She summoned Ernest.

"I am anxious," said she, "respecting the manner in which you will play your part—this is the only difficulty. I fear you will not appear with sufficient enthusiasm in the scene I am preparing for this evening—and yet it is on the success of this scene that your fortune depends. Do you remember clearly all the details I have given you to enable you to play naturally the part of Olivier Hamel?"

"Notwithstanding the assurance given by Ernest that he had forgotten nothing, Anastasia related to him a long history of Olivier Hamel, his father and his uncle."

This was M. Hamel's birthday. At the hour of dinner, Anastasia came as usual, to tell him that it was ready; he entered the dining room, leaning on the arm of Ernest Giraud. The dinner passed off about as usual, but at the dessert there appeared a magnificent cake and enormous bouquet.

Anastasia embraced her master with the usual good wishes of a daughter.

Ernest Giraud read some verses full of allusions to the position of himself and M. Hamel.

"I have found in you a father," said he, "may you sometimes think you have found a son."

Ernest read in a voice of emotion, the old man wept, Anastasia exclaimed:

"I must speak!"

"Whoinders you, my child?" said M. Hamel.

"Monsieur Ernest," said she, "I know all—chances has discovered it to me. Monsieur Hamel, this young man who has for three months past surrounded you with cares, and for whom you have acquired, a lively affection—well! it is nature which speaks in your heart—this young man whom you call Ernest Giraud, is the son of your brother, your nephew, Olivier Hamel. Do you dare assert, sir, that you are not Olivier Hamel? Come, embrace your uncle, who pardons your neglect, and who has constantly in the morning absence of his brother's son, regretted the loss of M. Hamel's nephew."

"In the name of God, are you the son of my brother? Are you Olivier?"

"Yes—yes, uncle!"

"Then come to my arms!"

Ernest threw himself into the arms of the old man—Anastasia saw tears in the eyes of the young man.

Explanations followed. Their mutual mistakes were explained—how the nephew had believed his uncle selfish and hard, or still unjustly irritated against his dead brother—while the uncle thought his nephew negligent, or that he had inherited the resentment of a father, with whom his sudden death had prevented a reconciliation. Ernest did not make a single error, and replied to all questions. "The old man," besides, so happy, so affected, that he would have been satisfied had Ernest been less perfect in his part.

It was agreed that he should assume in the family the title and the rights of the nephew; but he still insisted upon performing the duties of a secretary. When Ernest had retired to his chamber, Anastasia remained with M. Hamel.

"Well, sir," said she, "did you then suspect nothing?"

"No, indeed, Anastasia; yet I ought to have been warned by his resemblance to my poor brother."

"How, did you think that for a hundred paltry francs per month, which you gave to a young man so distinguished, that he would consent to pass his life in your house, deprived of all amusements, and lavishing so much care and attention upon you? Ah, sir, there are duties which we do not perform for money; I hope you do not suspect that it is for money that I serve you."

"O, you, Anastasia, it is different!"

"No, it is not different, for it was precisely this which made me suspect M. Olivier, until I found a letter in his address, then a handkerchief marked O. H., and twenty other proofs."

"Alas! my child, it is precisely on this dissimilarity of which you speak, and which I have always recognized in you, that I must rely to-day."

"Rely upon it, sir."

"Now that my nephew is here, I no longer disinherit the son of my brother—you have seen the will by which I instituted you my sole legatee?"

"Ah, sir, I had forgotten that it existed; it must be destroyed without delay."

"But, Anastasia, I do not wish to be ungrateful towards you."

"I am so unfortunate as to serve you, sir, I shall only need enough to enable me to withdraw to some quiet place in the country with my wife and child. Five or six hundred francs would enable me to do that."

"Excellent girl!"

It was consequently agreed that the will should be destroyed, and Olivier Hamel reinstated in his rights by another. Meanwhile the execution of this project was postponed on various pretexts—now forgotten for divers reasons.

There came a day when Anastasia said to Ernest:

"The first act of the comedy has been successfully played; you have performed your part admirably. We come now to the second act; your part will be easier. As you told me when I first talked with you, if we pause here, our projects will be destroyed and we shall have made the fortune of the true nephew. This is not my intention. The nephew must now begin to give him causes of complaint, and by-and-by arrive at such a pitch as to be turned out of doors. For this you must follow my directions. In this case if the true nephew should ever arrive, I shall no longer have anything to fear from him. You will commence by a want of punctuality in your duties. You will come in late to dinner and go out in the evening—you will talk loudly about the will to be made in your favor, and threaten to leave if this is not done. You will ask for money often; if you must follow my directions. In this case if the true nephew should ever arrive, I shall no longer have anything to fear from him. 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