

Literary Department.

RECOLLECTIONS

OLD WOMAN.

ESTABLISHED FROM THE GRAMMAR OF BROWNE, BY THE BAKER OF LONDON, BY DONA WILSON.

My father was a soldier.

The time of the going out of the past century and the commencing of the present, was a strange and by no means joyous time; although much that was good did worthy struggles into existence; and strove with all its strength. By the side of the new, however, flourished a mass of olden ideas, of prejudices and habits that originally were right and good; while, through the long continued, indolent peace, had turned to more conventionalities in the homes and heads of the people. Therefore, the better and the new was either not received, or it had to take the most indirect route, and submit to the utmost difficulty to secure its reception. The temper that passed over our Fatherland in the first decade of the century, was needed for this purpose, for it tore away the cobwebs from all corners, overthrew the gentry lords, and with them the unpragmatic conditions of their state. Nothing remained standing but that which owned a healthy support.

The officers of the army were compelled, as the custom is to this day, to appeal for the consent of their superiors when they desired to marry; but not as in our day, was this consent dependent solely upon the pecuniary condition of the applicant; there existed a number of objections, duties, and formalities, and the permission depended so strongly upon the personal will of the Ruler, that it was almost impossible to obtain it. Many, therefore, refrained from the request, contenting themselves with a life of celibacy, until promotion to a higher grade, or other favorable circumstances made it convenient for them to found their domestic happiness even in middle years. And, as is the case with all human conditions, when they are so severely guarded and held to the observance, and are not moulded at the right time; this, too, served as a means of education and the growth of exorcism. The unnatural exception had become the rule; and there were regiments in which not one of the officers was married, from the Colonel downwards. And the exception to this accepted rule was looked upon as a flagrant dereliction; and the soldier who sought its evasion was almost compelled to seek his discharge or removal into another regiment to escape the ridicule and rebukes of his comrades.

The regiment that my father commanded was one of these—unnatural ones; since the last great war not one of its officers had committed matrimony; and they boasted also, that not one of their number had ever been silly enough to marry out of it. Even the sergeants were single men; and the only women in the regiment were the wives of private, poor devils, who were ordered to stand up before the altar, because it was deemed proper that the washerwomen and sculleresses should be attached to the regiment in this way.

My father had been in that regiment over thirty years, and having been promoted by several fortunate vacancies, was assured of the favor of his Ruler; and as I have heard from others, really distinguished by his talents and good qualities, had been for a year its Colonel; and was in his fiftieth year when he became acquainted with my mother, and soon repelled to demand her hand in marriage. She loved him, and gave her consent. But from that time commenced for him a series of annoyances, whose effects followed him to the end of his earthly life. The Ruler, whose declared favorite he was, placed no difficulties in his path, but replied to his personal application:

"A good family, but poor. And it is a foolish thing, to be poor. How came you with such an idea, and in your regiment, too?"

And as my father smilingly shrugged his shoulders, he continued:

"Well, after all you have told me, the thing is not to be avoided. So you must console yourself with your will and friendship. That remains to you."

But in the regiment there broke out a temper—a sort of rebellion; and the position of my father that had hitherto been so pleasant, became so uncomfortable, that a year after his marriage he demanded his removal. For he felt too poor to ask for his discharge.

I could have told you this before, to be poor, said the great man, as he presented himself. "Well, you would have it so, and I am glad that I can help you. I have just been informed that Elsie has died, so you can take the regiment, which is somewhat falling into decay. There are married officers there, and you can help them as you see fit."

Soon after the removal of my parents I was born, and remained their only child.

Although the Ruler appeared friendly and condescending, he was still dissatisfied with my father, for what he called his "foolish act," and deemed him the worst sort of soldier. Such a one, he thought, should sacrifice all to his profession. "One must be a soldier from the heart to the sole of the foot," he would say, jestingly, but in well-meant earnest. The proof that my father gave that a married man can do his duty, sufficed not; and to this was added the pain of his not being well received in the new regiment; they called him, in secret, an interloper. And when the old Ruler, after the lapse of some years, inspected the regiment, he called it a badly arranged one; and said to my father:

"Like almost all cities whose development has been bound and fettered by the presence of old fortresses, was B—, at that time still more than now, a somewhat gloomy, populous, and not very pleasant spot, without important commerce, without much industrial activity or bustle of changing life. It is situated in one of the remotest corners of the empire, too apart for the busy highway to lead by, and in a position where the soil is so moist and fertile, that the inhabitants thought of no other trade than that of the earth's cultivation."

Though the city is neither agreeable nor enticing to the eye, yet are its surroundings celebrated for their beauty, and deserve the full measure of praise and song. As we look back upon the reminiscences of childhood, and describe its happy experiences in glorified hues of partial love; but as an old woman, who has had opportunity to behold the largest portion of Europe, who has had ample opportunities for comparing the beautiful, do I say with full conviction, I know of no scenery that can excel that of B—in loveliness, in mild placidity, in harmonious charms, in the blessings of healthful air, and the fullness of a fertile earth. Hills covered with mysterious depths of forest close around in soft folds, and shield from the cold, rough winds; through a delightful loop, the swift young stream from the neighbor land, winding with emerald green flood through the teeming valley, past the city to the outlet of the plain, where it unites with the great river awaiting it. Musically rushing on amid the towering banks, it enlivens and refreshes the landscape, without ever causing devastation by its overflow.

The plain is thus guarded and blessed; the spring comes there earlier and more lovely; the winter is later and milder than in other portions of the land; and in summer there is a truly Italian sunshine that lasts for weeks. The great heat at this time is the only drawback to this genial climate. But even this has its remedy; those who are not compelled to their daily labor, wander out into the shady woods, and there find relief from the summer's glow.

Thus much for the city and its surroundings. But not so pleasant for us was it in regard to society. The majority of the inhabitants were poor people; then a step beyond the laboring class, then the traders and their like; then the wholesale dealers, doing business only among themselves. A couple of old patrician families, who had saved their wealth out of the past, were inaccessible. The members of the jurisdiction, the dwellers in a noble educational establishment, the old and conventional officers of the garrison—all these formed among themselves a sort of club and exclusive life; for the gentlemen, and coffee-visits for the ladies, but rejected all pleasant family unions; all cheerful, unrestrained intercourse. All lived there within themselves, as the hedges in his hole; meeting but seldom in the still tedious, and calculated visits with their kind.

We were not satisfied with all the beauty and the graces of Nature. They are a source of pleasure, but in the end we cannot live with them; they form the background of life, if we so will it; but we need the society of our species, and this seemed to be wanting there. Therefore it was a chance to be deeply grateful for, when for some cause a family of French emigrants took up their abode in the fort. With them we soon became acquainted, and found a pleasant and most congenial intercourse. The family consisted of the Colonel Von Bory, his wife, a growing niece, a sister of the wife, the widowed Countess of St. Leon, and a maiden aunt of the same. The relatives would not, however, live together. The Colonel, with wife and niece, and a trusty servant, occupied a house which he had furnished with taste and elegance, as his means were ample.

Countess Marie, as she was called by her people, had taken a dwelling far less commodious in a by street, as her fortune had been considerably diminished by the expenditures of her warrior husband. Her income was principally derived from the money paid for board that was given her by the rich but penurious aunt. Why she should have accepted anything from the sister who would willingly have given her all, I know not. The intercourse of both houses was not very frequent nor affectionate. To them was added the persons of two single gentlemen; one a former Abbot, who earned a livelihood by teaching; the other, a younger and a handsome man, Herr Morcy, who had settled in the place as a physician, and who, by degrees, was gaining a limited practice.

This was the genial circle in which we moved, especially in that of the Colonel's family we soon became intimate. And there was every reason to hope for the continuance of this friendship. The Colonel, no longer young, was a tall and slender man, with sharply defined features, and dark, benevolently sparkling eyes; he was a model of the old French amiability and refinement; possessed of varied knowledge, and of a rich fund of experience; he was for us all a real friend, a treasure beyond price. Not less estimable than himself, his wife was the most accomplished hostess, the most exemplary lady of society, the most cordial friend. She had a stately appearance, and had preserved a beauty and clearness of complexion such as I had never seen in a woman of her age. The niece, Louise, was a glowing, cheerful girl, more graceful than beautiful, the favorite of all, flattered by her uncle and aunt, and reported their behavior to us. When our acquaintance began, I was a child about six years old; and, according to all received ideas on the subject, I could not find congenial relations and the intercourse suited to my child-mind, with those so unmythical persons. Nevertheless I found both pleasure and profit there. As the only child of my parents, I was seldom out of their presence. My father loved me intensely, and incessantly busied himself with me; my mother, did the same. My, indeed, self, was thus early developed, sooner than in the case with hundreds of children, and my physical development, also. Like many others, I learned the danger of becoming a smart child, one of the most intolerable things there is in the world. I had no companions of my age, but my kind and capable mother guarded me from extremes, and in her stronger family adopted me as their own. The French fully understood how to deal with children, when to preserve, to their level, to play with them, and to prevent, to take their hearts by storm. Their aim was to uplift the child's mind.

to teach it gently and without display of authority; in this none are more skillful than the French.

It was so with me, and I could be sufficiently grateful for that which, in old and tender, I received in that family circle. I know nothing of the heavy weight of time, I signed but for other playmates; for I was accepted as a member of the society I frequented. They laughed often at my timid advances of opinion, and my words were received, but they never mocked, nor repulsed me rudely. In this wise you can understand how it was that I obtained the knowledge of the following, not from later communications, but from my own observation and knowledge. Only a portion of the lacking narration, that unspoken, was known to the parties interested, but was intelligible to the child; I have gathered from the older ones. The first introduction of that which I have to tell you is still vividly clear in my remembrance.

One lovely evening we had assembled in the garden that stretches along the fort, and which was one of the most charming retreats in the city. It was at the time of the full bloom of the jessamine and the roses, as I well remember, for I once stood with Herr Morcy before a hedge of full-blown roses, and he was arranging a bouquet from the flowers he eagerly handed to her. I see her yet in her white, narrow dress, with its short waist and girlish giraffe, her luxuriant golden hair arranged becomingly around her well-shaped head. My mother and Frau Von Bory sat by in an arbor, occupied with some needle-work, and my father and the Colonel were pacing up and down the walks, while I satiated in the collection of the flowers, or sought skill to bind them with, or hang upon my father's arm; I was here, there, and everywhere.

The universal topic of conversation at that time consisted of the war that had newly broken out against Austria. The news of the battles of April and May had been received by us with far different feelings from our real ones, as we were obliged to appear officially glad, while in our hearts we longed for opposite results. At that moment we were deeply despondent, and deemed ourselves bound more than ever beneath the sway of Napoleon. As the news of the great victory at Wagram reached us, the Colonel expressed his doubts, and gave his opinion as to the probable and far different issue of all this, for my father replied, as he stood still for awhile.

"You have a good faith, my friend, a strange one, if we are to judge from past experiences, and yet you seem certain of the result. One might almost believe," he added jestingly, "that you had some particular acquaintance in the spirit realm, or that you possessed a sort of clairvoyance."

"Well, indeed, I do possess a gift," said Herr Von Bory cheerfully, "as if he were conscious of my father's jesting tone. The man in red, visited my wife last night, and expressed himself somewhat obscurely, but with the certainty that the star of Bonaparte was on the wane."

"What do you mean, my dear Bory?" inquired my father with astonishment. "The man in red visited your wife last night? I do not understand you."

"What, General! I have never told you of our house-spirit, or messenger, who honors my wife and self with occasional visits, and the communication of interesting news?" replied Colonel Bory, laughing.

"Joking aside, what does all this signify? I have never heard of it before," said my father, completely mystified, "and Elsie has not heard anything of the kind from you."

"Well, my dear General, such matters happen without the knowledge of our honored Commandant. But all jesting aside, as you remark; the affair is serious, as I have every reason to believe in it implicitly, and to rely upon it. Let me relate to you," he continued, "the strange circumstance. My wife, from her maiden years, has been accustomed to the appearance of a house-spirit, a true guardian, and steadfast spirit-friend, who at intervals appears at her bedside, clad in red, as a venerable little man. He converses with her, gives her counsel in trouble or difficulty, dispenses consolation, and gives insight into the future on much that it is pleasant to know. It must, indeed, be a wise and good spirit, for whenever, as is sometimes the case, he prophesies evil, he gives at the same time soothing advice and consolation, and whatever he has announced has unfailingly been verified."

"You must be joking, Colonel," was the answer, and there was somewhat of reproach in the cheerful tone.

"Not in the least. The matter is as I tell you, and you can question my wife, and she will repeat and corroborate what I have told you."

During this conversation, the gentleman had approached the arbor, and I was held clinging to my father's arm, was excited beyond measure with wonder, terror and curiosity on hearing such a story of so recent a date. As he spoke the last words, the Colonel Von Bory turned to his wife and requested her corroboration of what he had said. And, much to the surprise of my father, she expressed her entire belief in the improbable occurrences, and spoke of them as of customary and familiar events.

"What can I say, my dear friend?" she replied, in answer to my father's skeptical remarks. "The appearance of that spirit is so welcome to me, I am so accustomed to it, that it has become a part of my being. I have been acquainted with it not only from my own experience since youth, but even from the narrations of my mother, to whom it likewise was awarded, and which was no secret to her children."

"I am falling out of the clouds!" exclaimed my father, in surprise at the seeming conviction and earnestness of the Colonel and his wife. "I have never heard the like; and have always treated such stories with mockery, that I must confess, and now this I can scarcely collect myself. But do, please, tell me more, unless," he added, "with still somewhat of a mocking smile, 'you dare not speak too openly on so delicate a subject.'"

"Bah!" replied Colonel Bory, "our house-spirit is not so shy, and what caused my belief in him is that he does not envelop himself in mystery, nor draw around him any paraphernalia of gossamer like the other spirits. He is frank and open, and fulfills the duties of his mission without in the least distracting my mind, which is very welcome for I prefer to sleep at night, rather than hold such conversations. But do you, General, tell more of the story for our friends are waiting for it."

"Dear me," said Frau Von Bory, laughing, "I am grateful to my spirit-friend; I love him, and reverence him. I have nothing extraordinary to relate. It was known in my father's house that my mother was visited by a spirit, in the guise of an old man attired in red. He would sometimes come in the night, after she had said her prayers, and, taking a chair, by her bedside, would converse with her upon subjects connected with her thoughts, her feelings, or her cares; or he would tell her of events to come to herself or family, or in the outside world, and he warned, or gave consolation as the occasion warranted. When he foretold events, he did not express himself as clearly as upon other subjects, but his words were enveloped in a sort of mystical veil, through which we conjectured rather than understood his meaning. We knew that this spirit appeared to the female portion of my mother's family. One day my sister Marie and I went to our first communion, and before we left for church, our mother told us that we should probably behold our spirit-friend that night for the first time. And so it was; but, despite of all preparation, I was terribly frightened when I saw the good, old, being standing visibly before me."

"Did your sister also behold him?" inquired my mother.

"Eran Von Bory shook her head. "Only one member of the family may see him. And when Marie heard my scream, and the voice at my bedside, she knew that I was the chosen one. She envied me not a little for this privilege. And since that time," she continued, and sighed, "there has been a golden harmony between us, which I strive to say, she does not try to overcome."

"You said your sister heard the voice? How do you understand that? You do not mean that the spirit's voice can be heard by other mortal ears?" observed my father, after reflecting for a time.

"Of course, that is what Madelon means," said the Colonel. "The man in red speaks aloud, that is, for a spirit; for in our sense it is more of a whispering, but it is audible to every one in the room. It is, of course, however, that although the rest hear a language spoken, and can even distinguish words in good French, yet no one can comprehend the conversation of the spirit. That is the privilege of my wife alone. I cannot tell you of the strange impression this hearing and not understanding creates, while listening to the second voice, that of my wife, speaking intelligibly in questions and answers. I assure you," he added, laughing merrily, "that I was at first much disturbed and almost jealous. But I accustomed myself to it in the course of time; and now, when I hear the voice, I let them converse together while I sleep peacefully."

After some time spent in remarks upon that narrative, Frau Von Bory resumed the story where she had been interrupted. On the first night of his appearance, the spirit had gradually conquered the young girl's terror and alarm, and had soon inspired her with perfect confidence. He did not at first foretell coming events, but, as soon as he commenced, the verification followed. Her marriage, and that of her sister; the death of her parents, of her only child, and her brother-in-law; her household cares and joys; family occurrences; the threatened revolution; the execution of the royal pair; the Republic; the Consulate and Empire; all had been foretold to her. The spirit-friend would be absent for months, and then again he would appear frequently. He was ever a welcome guest, and during the past months had often made his appearance with prophecies concerning the Emperor Napoleon.

In all this there was no room for doubt. It was to be accepted as a fact, and I remember well the deep impression the narration made upon me, as well as upon my parents.

At last my father remarked:

"Indeed, it is incomprehensible. But do you know, my friends, what seems to me most extraordinary in this? It is the strange coincidence of that which is related of the Emperor. It is said that at momentous times he, too, sees the spirit form of a little man clad in red. He beholds it even in the day time, and as your visitor seems to know so much about him and his affairs, why it seems—"

"No, General," interrupted his friend, "not seem; it is the same; we know that from himself. And it is no wonder, as my wife's mother's family are originally from Corsica, although we are not aware of any relationship with Bonaparte. He has announced to us several times that the Corsican star is on the wane, no matter how bright it may seem to gleam. And he hints at a forthcoming family event, that is nearer than the world expects."

"In fact," responded my father, thoughtfully, "the possibility of a divorce has been more than once debated over, and has lately been mentioned as a certainty about to take place. Who can blame him under the circumstances for desiring an heir? Our ancient dynasty has antiquity; a new one needs children to be, or to become, legitimate."

"Poor Josephine!" said Frau Von Bory. I have met with her a few times when she was Madame Beauharnais. It would be a terrible, annihilating blow to her! A double blow aimed at the heart of the mother as well as the wife. If I were to choose one out of the whole family, I would choose the son; he is an honorable man, of whom she can be proud; and Bonaparte should feel forever contented with him."

They conversed, thus upon the occurrence of the times, that of so much public importance waited aside all private interests. The marriage of Napoleon with the Austrian Marie Louise, and the birth of the King of Rome were tidings of dread to our friends, and weighed more heavily against their hopes than all the preceding years of victory. When the news reached us of the unannounced union, the Colonel evinced the utmost agitation and loss of self-control. He seemed so deeply troubled, that my parents sought in vain to tranquilize him. At last, my mother said:

"Like yourself, do not believe in the happiness of this marriage, my dear friend; neither do I, in fact, in the continuance of Bonaparte's greatness. Something within me contradicts it, and you should entertain the same views, for you have a trusty messenger who always brings you good news and consolation."

"What says the man in red?"

"The Colonel smiled slightly, and in a low voice said: 'He said, as I told you, that the star of the Corsican star is on the wane. He like the friends of this world, who forsake us in our need, and have no consolation for us. He has been so long, a number of times; but has spoken nothing but some strange and unintelligible medley about opening one's eyes, and taking heed and harboring doubt, and so on. Of our present most important interests not a word. If he would serve us, now is the time. I had the idea last night while he was talking, and judging from my wife's replies on the same interesting topics, to put in a word, for once, and entreat him not to disturb our troubled repose with such nonsense. For indeed, Madelon is suffering as much as I, and imperatively needs rest.'"

"I observed yesterday, that Frau Von Bory seemed troubled about something," said my mother.

"We are all troubled," replied the Colonel. "And not least for our niece, Louise. What ails her we cannot fathom. There is disease of the body and temper; she is gay to extremes, and despondent in the same measure without a cause. We have sought for the reasons without result. She answers laughing, or in tears, that it is nothing, she is the same as always. We have sent August to her, but he, too, cannot divine the problem, but thinks it may be one of those inexplicable moods and changes that stray over such maiden's heads."

"Is she materially so inexplicable?" said my mother, with some embarrassment in her smile. "May not Mr. Morcy—you understand me, my dear Colonel?"

"I do not, indeed, my friend," he replied. "What do you mean? What may not August?"

"Well, Colonel, may not some feeling for him, thus agitate Louise's being? Both are young, of prepossessing exterior and imaginative heads—would it be impossible—"

"You do the girl an injustice, my dear lady," he cried, interrupting her with a hearty laugh. "And poor August, too, neither of them lack of anything; sensible children. And yet," he added, as my mother doubtfully shook her head, "they know that it could never be, and would another such a thought if it arose within them. Indeed, you wrong them both; especially our good August, he is the soul of honor, and dear to us as a son and real friend."

You will remember that I have spoken of Mr. Morcy, as a young man who had settled in the fort as a physician; he was received in his professional capacity in the families Bory and St. Leon. As an exiled countryman, he was ever a welcome guest; and his amiable qualities known, became possessed of the entire confidence of both families. He was entrusted with the worldly affairs of the Colonel; with the arrangements of his and his wife's fortunes, and performed his office with fidelity and promptness.

Of course, I could not form an opinion of him at that time. I remember him as a handsome young man of a small, slender, but symmetrical figure; with a pleasant countenance, a pair of blue eyes, and the brightest golden hair. His manners were elegant in the extreme; and towards me he was always friendly, almost as a playmate. It was therefore no wonder that I was enthusiastic for Monsieur August, and loved him with all a child's intense love. My parents did not like him. My father did not trust him, and looked upon him as one from whom we should guard ourselves. My mother declared she could not like a person whose eyebrows met like Dr. Morcy's; in such, the human weaknesses and sins held preponderance. She had heard him pass remarks on the Bory family, that denoted to her a lack of gratitude and respect for the benefits received from them.

I must relate this, although I can link no further recollections to it, of either good or evil. We met Countess Marie still more rarely; not because we desired it; but she withdrew of her own accord, more and more from our society. She lived retired in her home and gained a reputation for piety. The former Abbot, then teacher of languages, Dr. Broca, visited her often; also a Herr Von Bering, who had lived in the place for some time, and called himself a distant relative of the St. Leon's. To us and the Bory's, he appeared an adventurer, a man of very doubtful character. But nothing could be said or proved against him, as he had brought all the necessary recommendations, and was deep in the favor of old Fraulein St. Leon.

I remember it was in the beginning of April 1811, on a lovely day, that we returned from our customary walk with Herr and Frau Von Bory. I was then almost thirteen—I grew rapidly—and was soon wearied, so that I sank down in the window alcove, and laid my tired and heavy head upon the sill. My father, with the Colonel, was in the room below; Louise had gone home and my mother and Frau Von Bory were in the room with me, packing up and down beside each other like persons who have a burden on their hearts, and know not how to communicate their trouble. My mother at last took heart and said:

"You seem despondent, my dear friend. I have observed it for several days. What is the reason? Can we help you in any way? Will you not feel better by telling me the cause of your trouble?"

Frau Von Bory sighed:

"Yes, I feel despondent," she answered. "I know that we are threatened by some evil, but I know not what it is, nor whence it will come. And this it is that affects me."

"Has the little man in red been with you?" asked my mother, with a smile. "I have not heard from him for a long time."

"Nor I either; he has been away a length of time," was the reply.

"You remember, Elsie, he has warned us against the coming evil, and has said we might avoid it. His counsel in regard to the 'how'—his opinions and assurances were all so mysterious, that I could give them no solution, and I was obliged to remain content with the impossibility of obtaining it. And, as a year has passed and nothing has occurred, I had almost forgotten the prophecy. But since three days, he comes every evening, and reminds me of what he has foretold: bids me entreatingly and in sorrow, or with angry and threatening, to beware against a person—'he does not name. He says we did not heed his warnings, and have lost confidence in his advice. It is now too late. The evil may not now be averted, but with forethought and care it may be turned to our advantage. What does all this mean?'"

"Do not ask the reason, my dear friend. It is now too late. Of course, but in vain. We are told to beware."

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meeting till the next day. We made our home











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