

L'AVEUGLE

Il venait tous les jours s'asseoir au pied de l'escalier Boissier, sur une chaise de paille à dossier cassé qu'il apportait lui-même, accrochée à son bras.

Je le voyais arriver au bas de la rue—une large route provinciale, sans boutique,—qui tournait à grands circuits entre deux murs de cailloux, débordés de verdure. Il avait au moins quatre cents verges à marcher sans changer de trottoir, sans franchir de ruelles transversales. Et il parcourait cette distance très vite, serrant de près le mur, le bâtonnant à petits coups réguliers.

Au coin de l'escalier, il s'arrêtait court, calait sa chaise avec des précautions infinies, puis s'asseyait enfin, les pieds dans de bons sabots de bois fourrés de paille, la main qui portait la sébile réchauffée d'un gant de tricot rouge, à un seul doigt, lequel donnait à son avant-bras l'aspect d'une pince de homard.

Il n'avait ni chien ni tableau. Sa clientèle, c'étaient les bonnes gens qui montaient l'escalier, surtout le public des enterrements. De loin, il devinait l'approche des convois, à la cadence caractéristique des pas derrière le roulement léger des corbillards. Il se levait alors d'un saut, faisait très dévotement un signe de croix. Presque toujours un monsieur ganté de noir se détachait du cortège, venait jeter un sou dans la sébile.

Il disait merci. Il ne se rasseyait qu'après le défilé de la famille et des voitures.

Comme il était brave homme et point geigneur, toutes les bonnes gens qui passaient d'habitude lui disaient un mot à la rencontre.

—Ca pique, ce matin, père Francis?

Et il répondait en souriant! —Mais oui, ça pique. Ça pique plus qu'hier, monsieur Boissel.

Car il mettait beaucoup d'amour-propre à reconnaître les gens à la voix, à les interpeller congrûment par leur nom.

Chaque jour, vers midi, sa femme lui apportait la soupe dans une gamelle d'étain, étraitement fermée d'un couvercle. Déjà vieille, elle montrait des bras de lavasse douce à voir et fanés comme du velours blanc.

Elle causait un instant avec son homme, debout, les mains sur les hanches. Puis, quand il avait fini de manger, elle brossait longuement le paletot, blanchi au frottement des mailles. Ensuite, amicalement, à la façon des gens de campagne et des prêtres, ils trottaient l'une contre l'autre leurs jupes ridées.

Deux fois par jour je passais devant le Père Francis, à la descente, à la montée, pour me rendre à mes consultations de l'hôpital. Souvent je lui donnais un sou. Il finit par reconnaître mon pas, et comme chaque fois, au passage, il me saluait d'un: Bonjour monsieur le docteur! nous liâmes connaissance. Quand je montais la côte, vers midi, en été, le chapeau à la main, un peu essoufflé, à cause de mon asthme, je m'arrêtais pour faire avec l'avengle un bout de causette.

C'est ainsi qu'il me conta son histoire. Il avait travaillé trente ans dans la serrurerie. Il gagnait gros, et comme les enfants n'étaient pas venus, on vivait bourgeoisement. La femme n'exerçait aucun métier.

Un matin, il avait trouvé sa vue moins bonne. Cela avait marché de mal en pis, très vite. Au bout de deux ans, sur ses yeux, la nuit s'était faite pro-

fonde. Alors comme on n'avait point d'économies, il fallut acheter une sébile, tendre la main aux passants, tandis que la femme, courageusement, se mettait à laver chez des pratiques.

—La pauvre, qui avait des mains si tendres! disait l'avengle avec un soupir. Cette nécessité de laisser peiner sa femme semblait d'ailleurs le seul chagrin du père Francis. Il parlait de son infirmité en souriant. Il répondait aux consolations avec une bonne humeur, jamais lasse:

—Bah! monsieur, je ne m'ennuie pas tant que vous le croyez!

—Machinalement, puis avec une attention professionnelle, tandis qu'il causait, je regardais ses yeux où la flamme de vie était depuis tant d'années éteinte. L'un des deux semblait perdu. L'autre apparaissait couvert d'une blancheur laiteuse qui troublait la limpidité de l'iris.

Je demandai: —Voyez-vous des "mouches"?

—Oh! que oui, répondit-il, elles volent en tas autour de moi. C'est comme un essaim.

—Et avez-vous consulté quelqu'un pour vos yeux.

—Pas depuis quatre ans.

—Savez-vous ce que vous avez?

—Une cataracte.

—Si vous avez confiance en moi, je pourrai vous rendre la vue.

Il devint rouge et tourna la tête vers moi avec un sourire inquiet; on eût dit que j'avais là mon outil dans ma poche et que j'allais l'opérer séance tenante.

Il demanda, toujours timide: —Ca ne sera pas dangereux?

—Que risquez-vous, puisque votre cécité est complète.

Puis, comme il se taisait, j'ajoutai: —Voyons, vous n'avez pas peur, vous un ancien serrurier?

Alors il mit sa main dans sa main et me dit: —Je viendrai vous voir quand vous voudrez.

Ils étaient chez moi tous les deux le surlendemain, dans leurs vêtements des dimanches, lui très crâne, elle si chancelante, qu'il fallut tout de suite l'asseoir, lui faire respirer des sels.

Je reconnus à l'examen de l'ophtalmoscope que les opacités siégeaient dans le cristallin. C'était bien là vraiment une cataracte lenticulaire si mûre que je comptais m'en débarrasser très facilement par voie d'extraction linéaire.

J'avais fait asseoir l'avengle en face de la fenêtre, en bonne lumière sous le jour blanc des rideaux. Mon garçon de service lui maintenait solidement la tête. La bonne femme nous regardait faire, les jambes flageolantes; ses regards allaient de mes yeux au cystoscope et m'interrogeaient.

Comme j'installais l'écarteur à ressort qui ouvre les paupières, le père Francis bougonna.

—Bon courage, mon ami, lui dis-je, le plus douloureux est fait.

L'œil était bien immobile, je saisis mon instrument et ponctionnai la cornée en dedans de sa circonférence. Puis, rapidement, à l'aide de la curette, j'enlevai les débris du cristallin. La lumière inonda l'œil.

Le bonhomme poussa un cri. A ses pieds à genoux sa femme était tombée. Sans voix, elle levait sur lui sa pauvre face ridée.

Je lui criai: —C'est bien! Levez-vous.

Elle ne bougea pas. Elle resta là les yeux fixés sur son

homme, cherchant dans cet œil depuis tant d'années éteint l'éveil promis de la lumière.

Lui d'abord avait rejeté son buste en arrière, reculé comme sous un heurt en pleine poitrine.

Le jour qui le baignait illumina sa face transfigurée. Quelques secondes il demeura muet, la bouche entrouverte. Puis, lentement son visage s'inclina, tandis que ses mains cherchaient, pour la bénir, la tête de la femme agenouillée.

Mais au moment de toucher les cheveux gris, ses mains se relevèrent, dans un geste de navrante surprise, tout le visage se détendit, des larmes parurent, descendirent lentement sur les joues, et l'opéré murmura d'une voix brisée: —Ah! chère! comme tu as vieilli!

Hugues Le Roux.

THE SIEGE OF SEBASTOPOL

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THE BEST ACHIEVEMENT OF MODERN PYROTECHNIC SKILL

The spectacular feature of the coming Exhibition, the Siege of Sebastopol will be the first presentation of such an attraction in the Maritime Provinces. It will be presented each evening of the exhibition in front of the grand stand and there will also be introduced the specialties, acrobats, tumblers, high divers, etc., and a magnificent display of fireworks. Many of our people are not aware of the scope of this attraction and they will be all interested in the notice of its production at the Ottawa Exhibition last year, from the Ottawa Citizen, and which will be given at Halifax in the same manner and by the same firm, Hand & Teale, who gave the Ottawa production: "The Spectacular Drama 'The Siege of Sebastopol'" was presented for the first time last evening at the fair. As the prime feature of the fair several thousand people were drawn out to witness it and a better satisfied crowd of spectators never left the grounds after the conclusion of any programme of the kind. The presentation was of such as has never before been eclipsed in Ottawa. It was the culmination of the best achievements of modern pyrotechnic skill. The drama was put on in a manner that was highly creditable and the fair management deserve infinitely to praise for bringing on such an excellent representation.

The costumes of those who took part were all new. Among the two hundred militia that participated in the event were Highlanders dressed out and looking handsome in their kilts, others in the loose fitting uniform of the Zouaves, the dark uniform of the French army, the checked grey uniform of the Russian soldiers and others in the white uniform of the British tar.

The scenery was very pretty. Beneath the glare of the powerful searchlights and numerous electric lamps the scene itself previous to the attack was indeed realistic. Before the spectators lay Sebastopol in all its grandeur and mountainous surroundings as it were before the armed forces occupied it and wrought its destruction. The green sward lay as a vast plain before the city. Rising from the plain to a height of many hundred feet was a mountain with breastworks at varied distances, from which peered

forth the mouths of many canons.

VERY FORMIDABLE LOOKING

A formidable looking citadel—the Malakoff—crowned the summit of the mountain. From the top of this citadel floated the Russian flag. Behind the mountain lay the city supposedly secure behind a winding stone wall, its mosques and public buildings in full view. Farther behind a pale blue outlined other mountains in the dim distance. In the harbor to west of the city and within range of the guns of the Malakoff three men of war lay at anchor. East and west of the city and also within the shelter of the citadel guns, were pitched the tents of the Russian army. Thus lay the scene at the opening of the performance last evening.

THE BATTLE BEGINS

First a party of English redcoats stealthily approached the base of the mountain. They return the compliment and for some time desultory firing is kept up between the opposing parties from sheltered positions. Presently the Russians raised a flag of truce and sent four of their number down the mountain to ask for permission to bury their dead. The request is acceded to by the English and French generals. The dead are carried off from before the trenches. During the truce two Russian spies are discovered to be taking notes of the allied position. They are captured by the soldiers, brought before the English general for examination and found guilty. The decree went forth that they were to be shot. The penalty of death was then enacted. As the band played the "Dead March in Saul" the troops with solemn step fell into line on either side of the convicted spies. The spies close together by themselves, trembling with fear. Behind them were placed two rough coffins to receive their bodies after they were shot. Before them a few yards distant a party of Zouaves stood in line and when the order was given raised their guns and fired. The spies fell forward on their faces dead, and were immediately picked up, laid into the coffins and carried away from the spot.

ORDERS TO ATTACK

After this despatches were brought to the British headquarters arranging for a general attack by the fleet and land forces of the allied army, which brought on a general review of the troops under the French and English generals. After this review the men were dismissed. Night fell and a bivouac scene followed. The soldiers gathered together in groups, camp fires were lighted and they prepared to go to sleep.

In the distance a quartette was heard singing "Tenting to night" so sweetly and softly as to thrill the heart of each listener. Gradually the music died away until it seemed like a lingering echo. The camp was now in darkness. The soldiers were now in darkness. The soldiers were asleep.

THE SIGNAL OF DEATH

Presently the low booming of cannon was heard in the distance. It was the British men of war beginning the attack from the sea. One of the officers on the field heard the cannonading, and jumping up saw the ships firing. He rouses a bugler who instantly calls the troops into order and the grand attack on the Malakoff commenced. The Russians in their entrenched positions stubbornly resisted the attack, but eventually

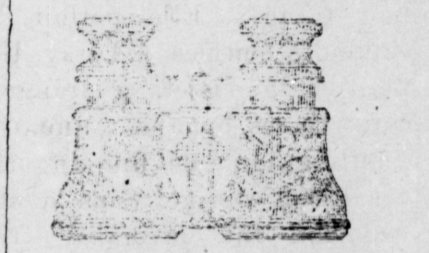
were gradually beaten up the hill by the French and English troops on either side, and at that time the air was full of exploding bombs, etc., as well as vigorous firing from all sides. At last the Malakoff was taken and the allied armies entered it and thus the siege ended.

A splendid display of fireworks followed, which for variety and beauty excelled anything ever witnessed in Ottawa before.

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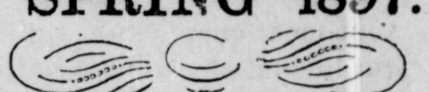
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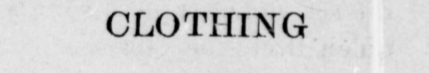
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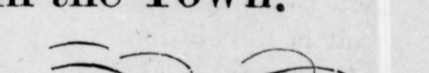
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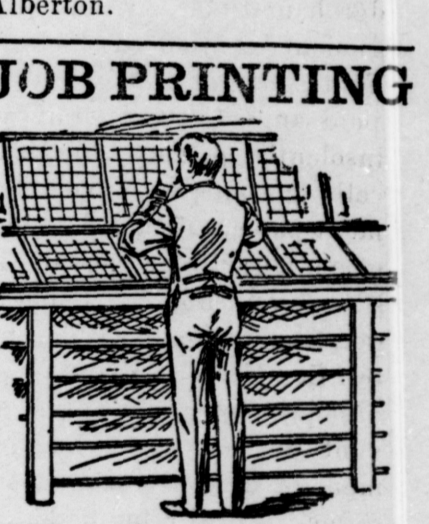


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