L. D. Gaskins

DORCHESTER AURORA.

"PRINCIPLES AND MEASURES, AND MEN BY THEIR PRINCIPLES."

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MISCELLANEOUS.

[*From Waldie's Circulating Library*]

THREE FRIENDS OF BRUSSELS.

A NARRATIVE FOUNDED ON FACTS.

Some years ago there resided at Brussels three young men, named Charles Darancourt, Theodore de Valmont, and Ernest de St. Maure, whose friendship for each other was of so ardent a nature, that they were generally known by the title of *The Inseparables*—The first link which bound these youths together was the remarkable circumstance of their having been all three born on one day, and, being all of good families, they had been constant play fellows in childhood, had studied at the same academy as school-boys, and had become members of the same university in their more advanced years. Through all these stages of their existence, they had exhibited the same unvarying affection for one another, and had displayed great similarity in their tastes, feelings, and pursuits On reaching manhood, however, circumstances led them, as might have been expected, to adopt different courses of life. Darancourt, the son of an eminent physician, selected the profession of the law as the road to eminence and respectability in the world. St. Maure, whose father was a nobleman of decayed fortunes, chose the army as most suitable to his birth and pretensions. De Valmont, on the other hand, preferred the captivating study of letters and the fine arts to the pursuit of any positive profession; and the circumstances of his father, a retired colonel of engineers, enabled the young man, for the time at least, to indulge his tastes in this respect.

Ernest de St. Maure, at the period whence this narrative takes its date, had not yet joined the army, but the imperial mandate (for Brussels was then within the dominions of Napoleon) was looked for daily, and Count de St. Maure and his lady were sadly preparing their minds for parting with their only and beloved son. At this time it was that Charles Darancourt, who had been recently admitted a member of the masonic fraternity, took an opportunity of suggesting to young St. Maure the propriety of entering the same society. Darancourt's counsel was founded on certain stories told of soldiers having fallen into the hands of the enemy, and having been saved by discovering a brother-mason in some of the captors. 'Now, who knows,' cried the young barrister, with the ardor of friendship, 'but you, St. Maure, may be thrown into a similar situation, and may escape by the like means?' Though disposed to look upon the mysteries of masonry as a useless mummery, St. Maure allowed himself to be persuaded by his friend, and promised to undergo initiation of an early day.—At the same time he would consent only on condition of Darancourt himself acting as sole initiator, which the barrister, however irregular the proceedings might be, professed his willingness to undertake.

During the Sunday immediately following the day on which this conversation took place, Count de St. Maure's house was observed to be shut up by the neighbors. None of the inmates, at least, were seen to issue from it, though they had ever been remarkable for their punctuality in attendance on the services of the church. The neighbors, however, merely concluded some of them to be ill.—But about eight o'clock in the evening Chas Darancourt and Theodore de Valmont called, in order to spend a social hour with the family. Their repeated knockings at the door remaining unanswered, they at length alarmed the neighborhood. The door was burst open, and, to the horror of the spectators, four murdered bodies were found in the various bedrooms. The corpses, whose throats were shockingly cut, were those of the count de St. Maure, his lady, and their two servants. It was also found that a desk had been broken open, and plundered of valuable jewels, known to have been there. On this appalling descovery, Darancourt, whose friendship for the family was well known, appeared at first paralysed with grief. When he recovered from his trance-like stupor, he rushed from the house, exclaiming, 'My friend! my dear Ernest! Where is my poor friend?' This exclamation called the minds of the spectators, for the first time, to the circumstance of young St. Maure's absence.—The authorities were speedly called to the spot, and among other steps taken, a search was instituted for Ernest de St. Maure. De Valmont, who retained much more presence of mind than Darancourt had exhibited, conducted in person the search for Ernest. But the whole of Brussels was examined in vain. The young man was to be seen nowhere.

At the solemn investigation which took place into the whole of this tragic affair, circumstances came out which tended strongly to fix the guilt of parricide on the missing youth A penknife marked with his initials, was found near the scene of slaughter, covered with blood. This, to all appearance, was the instrument with which the murders had been committed. Rewards were offered for the apprehension of young St. Maure, and in the estimation of all men he was accounted a parricide, until, on the sixth morning after the murders, a new turn was given to the affair by the discovery of the youth's body in a stagnant well in the outskirts of the city.—At first, indeed, as no wound was seen on the body, it was only thought that he had added self-destruction to his other crimes; but, on a more minute examination, a small puncture was detected on the breast, immediately over the heart. This had well nigh been passed over as a trifling and accidental scratch. At the urgent entreaty of one surgeon, however, the chest was thoroughly laid open, when it was found that the heart had been pierced to its centre by a sharp instrument of exceeding minuteness, in a direct line with the external puncture. This obviously had been the cause of death. As the young man could not have thus slain himself, and then have conveyed his body to the well, it became apparent to all that Ernest de St. Maure also had fallen a victim to the same conspiracy which had overwhelmed his parents. This, at all events, was the strong presumption; and so satisfactory did the discovery appear to the authorities, that they laid the son in the same grave with his parents, thus clearing his memory as far as they could, from the dreadful charge of being a parricide. The arguments of Charles Darancourt were chiefly instrumental in procuring this justice for his departed friend. The young advocate displayed in this cause all the warmth of sorrowing affection, and all the power of forensic genius.

No further light was thrown on the fate of the St. Maures, until some weeks after the tragical event. Several papers were then discovered in an escritoire by the late Count's brother, which threw a dark suspicion on one of the most intimate friends of the deceased—on Theodore de Valmont! It appeared by these documents that De Valmont had fixed his affections on Emily Duplessis, a beautiful young lady, who returned his passion, in spite of a long standing quarrel between their families. Ernest de St. Maure and Charles Darancourt had been de Valmont's only confidants, and had assisted him in procuring interviews with the object of his affections.—Being thus occasionally brought into contact with the young lady, Ernest de St. Maure had himself been inspired with a deep and unhappy passion for Emily Duplessis He had confessed this to Darancourt, and had at the same time declared his resolution to root it out of his mind, and to die rather than injure De Valmont. But the passion had not been so easily overcome, and De Valmont had at length become aware of the truth.—This led to a series of letters between him and St. Maure, which letters were now discovered. In some passages of these, De Valmont reasoned with Ernest as with a brother on the subject of his misplaced passion, while in others Theodore used language, that now bore a most unfortunate aspect. 'You know me too well,' said De Valmont in one letter 'not to feel convinced, that, independently of all other motives, an innate sense of what is due to my own honor would urge me to inflict the most ample vengeance on the head of him who could avail himself of my unbounded confidence to estrange from me the affections of my adored Emily.' These, and other passages of the discovered correspondence, admitted of an inference so unfavorable to Theodore de Valmont, that the authorities, on having the letters laid before them, immediately took him into custody. Various other circumstances of a disadvantageous nature came subsequently into view It was remembered, by those who had been present, how comparatively little emotion had been shown by Theodore on the discovery of the murderd bodies, while Darancourt had displayed such agitating grief and horror. Besides, De Valmont, it now appeared, had been met and recognized near the scene of guilt on the night of the murders. When asked to explain where he had been, De Valmont showed manifest confusion, and said he had been visiting a friend, but positively refused to name that friend. And, moreover, a respectable female came forward, who averred that, on the third or fourth day after the tragedy, she had washed a shirt for the prisoner, the right sleeve of which was clotted with blood. The explanation which De Valmont gave of this circumstance was lame, confused, and improbable. On these grounds of suspicion, Theodore de Valmont was appointed to take his trial for the murder of the St. Maures, though no one could even imagine a reason for his having included the parents in that revenge which Ernest alone seemed to have merited at his hands.

Charles Darancourt was unremitting in his attempts to sustain his imprisoned friend under the heavy affliction of such a charge as this. To Darancourt Theodore confided the task of communicating the intelligence of this accusation to Emily Duplessis. The young lady was so dreadfully affected as to sink into a violent fever, during the ravings of which she revealed to her parents the fact of her having not only loved De Valmont, but of her having been recently united to him by a private marriage. This information, which she did not gainsay on recovering partially from her illness, had the effect of widening the circle implicated in these dark transactions, since the parents of Emily had the grief of seeing her fate bound up with that one on whom a charge rested of the most atrocious kind. Their previous hostility to the De Valmonts the parents might perhaps have readily got over; but there was now deep disgrace attending any connection with the very name of De Valmont. The discovery of the marriage was therefore concealed

The morning allotted for De Valmont's trial arrived. The officers went to his cell to remove him, but lo! the place was empty! The prisoner had undermined the cell, and escaped by scaling the prison walls. On the table lay a letter addressed to Mademoiselle Duplessis, which was opened by the authorities, and found to contain an animated and solemn assertion of the writer's innocence—But, seeing circumstances to bear against him he had resolved (the letter said) to take the only visible mode of saving his life, in the hope of one day proving his innocence; and until this was established, he never would return (he said) to Brussels. An energetic search was made for Theodore de Valmont, but it proved fruitless.

Thus was justice again baffled, at a time when it had fixed, in its own belief, on the true criminal But Theodore's letter, which was long and eloquently pathetic, made a deep impression in his favor on many persons, and among others, on the parents of his wife, Emily Duplessis, or rather De Valmont.—On conversing with their daughter, they moreover learned that Theodore had been visiting Emily on the night of the murders, and had hurt his right arm in crossing the garden wall of her father's house. Not knowing that Emily in her illness had revealed the marriage, De Valmont would not betray the secret, and hence his confused answers when questioned as already mentioned. Knowing these things, Emily s parents longed for Theodore's return, which might now have been comparatively safe. But he could not be heard of any where. The parents now consented to the open acknowledgement of their daughter's marriage with the absent Theodore, which consent Emily had strong reasons for entreating from them. When Theodore had been absent seven months his wife gave birth to a son, for whom Charles Darancourt stood sponsor at the font Darancourt, on this occasion, after pledging to the mother and child, called on the guests present to join him in drinking 'to the happy return of the absent father, and may his innocence soon be established!' Strange to say, this wish seemed in some measure fulfilled, not many days after its utterance, in a manner that deeply affected him who uttered it. A cart was stopped one night at the city barrier by one of the collectors of the imposts.—No contraband goods were found in the cart, but, in the act of search, a small box fell off, and was crushed by one of the wheels. The collector assisted in gathering up the contents, and while doing so, picked up a brilliant diamond brooch. The collector had been once in the service of the Count de St. Maure, and instantly recognised the brooch, which was of great value, as having belonged to that nobleman. The carter was taken into custody, and on examination, stated that he had been employed by a gentleman to carry trunks and various articles of furniture to a country house about a mile distant from Brussels.—Being asked the gentleman's name, the man readily gave it as "Monsieur Darancourt, the younger, residing in the Grand Square."

Charles Darancourt was ere long, as his friend De Valmont had been before him, consigned to a prison on the charge of murdering the St. Maures. The strange fate which had thus caused suspicion to fall on the very dearest friends of the deceased, made the case most remarkable in the eyes of all men.—Charles Darancourt was brought fairly to trial. He defended himself with equal calmness and ability, declaring the brooch to have been given to him in a present by the Count de St. Maure. On the other hand, the collector proved that the count had ever seemed to regard the brooch as the most valuable of his family jewels, and had once refused it, in the witness' hearing, to his own son. There was on the very face of it, an improbability in the notion that a man of small fortune, like the Count, should give away a jewel of such value as a mere friendly present. It was further proved that Ernest de St. Maure had been last seen entering the prisoner's house, on the night before his disappearance; and on being called forward to tell what they knew, Charles Darancourt's three servants were found to have been all sent out of the way on various errands, on the night in question. A chain of presumptive evidence of this nature was established against Darancourt, and, in despite of the talent with which he defended himself, he was condemned to die for the murder of the St. Maures.

Charles Darancourt solemnly protested his innocence, and continued to repeat the assertion during the interval spent in awaiting the fulfilment of his sentence The fatal day at length came, and the prisoner was led out to the scaffold, to die an ignominious death in the presence of assembled thousands, who looked on with strangely mingled feelings of pity and satisfaction, caused by the ambiguous and mysterious nature of the case. The majority of the spectators could not bring their minds to believe in the commission of such whole-sale murders by one man, and that man an ingenuous youth and a dear friend of the sufferers. But the decision of the law, though it could not remove doubt, was not to be opposed When all was ready on the scaffold, and eternity immediately before him, Charles Darancourt pulled from his bosom a sealed packet, and handed it to the priest in attendance, with directions that it should be given after his death to his father. The fatal cord was about to be fixed, when a loud shout arose from the populace, and the crowd was seen opening up to permit the passage of a horseman, accompanied by several soldiers. "A respite!" was the cry. The populace, already excited by this event, were still more so when they beheld the horseman spring to the scaffold, embrace the prisoner, and then advance to address themselves. It was Theodore de Valmont! He spoke at some length to the multitude, telling them that, on hearing of Darancourt's condemnation, he had flown to Paris, and had detailed the whole circumstances to the emperor, who had been thus moved to grant a respite. "I knew my own innocence," continued Theodore, "and I could not doubt that my beloved friend was equally innocent with myself.—Our intimacy with the unfortunate deceased has well nigh brought death on both of us, for that intimacy is our sole crime. The mystery which hangs over this sad story heaven will clear up in its good time." The shouts of the people rose joyfully on the air, for the words of De Valmont carried conviction with them.

What were the feelings of Charles Darancourt on being thus snatched from the grave? He retained all his calmness, and merely uttered a few broken sentences expressive of gratitude to heaven for his liberation from the charge of being a murderer and a robber. He then turned mildly to the priest, and requested the restoration of the packet. The priest was about to comply when one of the attendant officers snatched it from the holy father's hands declaring it to be his duty to retain and show it to his superiors. The prisoner quietly remonstrated against this seizure of papers relating only to private family affairs But the officer was obstinate. Darancourt and De Valmont were then conveyed to prison, as the respite ordered, till the emperor's will should be further known. On reaching prison, Charles Darancourt immediately communicated with his friends, and protested anew against the seizure of his papers. The authorities did not listen to his request.

Well might Darancourt struggle for the re-possession that fatal packet! Believing death inevitable, Darancourt had there made a confession—and what a confession! A confession of five cool and deliberate murders effected by him without an accomplice! The following is an abstract of that paper's contents:—"Having formed a deep attachment to Emily Duplessis, Darancourt had resolved to cut off both De Valmont and Ernest de St. Maure, as obstacles in his way. Ernest fell first into his power. This victim came to the house of Darancourt to be initiated into the mysteries of masonry. Under pretence of performing these, Darancourt had contrived to bind the young man so that he could stir neither hand nor foot, and then opened the victim's dress, and thrust a knitting kneedle between the ribs into the centre of the heart! Ernest died instantly, almost without a groan. Taking a key, by which the deceased let himself into his own house at night's, from Ernest's pockets, and also a penknife, Darancourt then carried the body by a back road to a neighboring well, and threw it in. He then hurried to the Count de St. Maure's house, let himself in, and murdered the master of the house, his wife, and his two domestics, while sleeping in their beds The principal motive for Darancourt's entering the house was a desire to gain possession of a bond for 5,000 francs, which, out of his slender means, the count had lent the young lawyer to prosecute his studies. The murder of the servants, and, indeed, of the other victims also, was committed lest they should disturb him in the robbery of the house, which proved to be a temptation too strong to be overcome when the murderer found the chance in his power. Family jewels and cash to a considerable amount were the price of his guilt. By leaving the penknife, Darancourt hoped to throw suspicion on the son of the count; and this really turned out as he anticipated, though the unexpected opening of the old well had subverted that part of the expected issue. Darancourt had doomed De Valmont to death at the first opportunity.

This fearful revelation—from the murderer's own hand—filled the minds of Brussels with the deepest horror. Had the packet been returned to the guilty Darancourt, mystery, it seemed probable, would have permanently hung over the fate of the St. Maures; for the accomplished hypocrite, who had shed so much blood, seemed to know naught of conscience or its stings. When he was again taken to the scaffold, it was amid the execrations of multitudes, and no man's pity followed the wretch into eternity. His crimes had been committed with as little remorse, and under as unnatural circumstances, as any that ever disgraced the annals of mankind.

Theodore de Valmont was restored to the arms of his beloved Emily, and enjoyed as perfect happiness as ever falls to human lot. In the close concealment which he was compelled to preserve after his flight, he had not heard of the acknowledgement of the marriage, otherwise he would probably have braved all danger, and returned earlier to Brussels. This narrative, as the Oriental Herald (from which we derive the materials of the article) informs us, is founded upon facts which really occurred.

Not so slow.—The following was stated by a professor at Paris, to his pupils:

A gentleman dying made his will, by which he provided that if his wife, shortly to be confined, should have a boy, he would take two thirds of the property, and his mother the remainder; but if it was a girl, then the mother was to have two thirds, and the daughter one third. Now it so happened that a boy and a girl were born. The professor inquired how the property was to be divided according to the wish of the testator. He called upon one of the pupils and asked him gravely—"Sir, what was the intention of the testator?"

"Sir," answered the student, "his intention was to have but one child."

A GOOD 'UN.—While the celebrated iron steamer Robt. F. Stockton was lying at Bordentown a day or two ago, a tall, raw boned Jerseyman came on board, and ranging from one end of the vessel to the other, appeared to be examining into her construction with great minuteness.

'Well,' said the Captain, turning to the stranger, 'what do you think of her?'

Hesitating and looking somewhat confused, the other replied—

'Why, in my judgment she's no great affair, but I was not so anxious to see the boat as to get a look at the darned fool that came over in her.'—Balt. Post.

"I wonder this child don't go to sleep," said an anxious mother to a female friend.—"Well, I don't," replied the lady; "its face is so dirty it can't shut its eyes."