

THE JUDGE'S TROUT.

Why He Fed It to the Charcoal Burner's Daughter.

"Scholaistique!"

"Take the utmost pains in cooking the trout—short boil, white wine, parsley, thyme, laurel, oil and onions in full strength."

After having uttered these last injunctions to his cook, Judge Sourdant crossed the chief street of Maryville with alert steps and gained the palais de justice, which was situated back of the Sous prefecture. Judge Sourdant was about forty-five years of age; very active, notwithstanding a tendency to stoutness; square of shoulders, short in stature, with a squeaking voice and a round, close-shaven head; eyes gray, clear and hard under bushy eyebrows; a mouth closely shut, with thin and irritable lips; browned cheeks, surrounded with whiskers badly trimmed; in fact, one of those mastiff faces, of which one says: "He can't be good every day." And surely he was not very kind, and he boasted of it. A despot, he used all of his little realm in the palais. Hard as stone toward the guilty, rough with the witnesses, aggressive with the advocates, he was a veritable furnace who fanned himself constantly into a glow. He was feared like the fire, and he was loved very little.

However, this man of iron had two vulnerable sides. Firstly, he responded to the pastoral name of Hemorin, which exposed him to ridicule, and secondly, he was a gourmand, and gave points to Brillat Savarin. His gastronomy, which was profound, had become a mania.

It was he who imagined that to plunge shellfish into boiling water before cooking them in their ordinary dressing gave them a richness and velvety savor particularly exquisite. On the day when he taught that latest refinement to the priest of St. Victor the latter could not help blushing, and raising his puffy hands to heaven he cried: "Too much! This is too much, Judge Sourdant! Assuredly it is permitted to taste with discretion the good things which divine wisdom has provided, but such sensuality as this borders upon mortal sin and you will have to render account for it to the good God."

To the scruples of the excellent priest the judge responded with a misanthropic laugh. It was one of his malign joys to expose his neighbors to temptation, and this very morning the priest was to breakfast with him, the recorder being the only other guest.

Judge Sourdant had received the evening before a two-pound salmon trout taken from the beautiful clear water of the rocky Semois. It was his favorite fish, and had fully occupied the first hours of his morning. He had demonstrated to the cook the superiority of a quick boil to the slow cooking in Geneva or Holland sauce of the books. The trout must be served cold and in the seasoning in which it was cooked.

This was with him a principle as well as a dogma, as indispensable as an article of the penal code. He continued to repeat it to himself after having clothed himself in his robe and taken his seat, though he was turning over the leaves of a document bearing upon an important case now pending.

This was a criminal affair, the dramatic details of which contrasted singularly with the epicurian speculations which persisted in haunting the cranium of Judge Sourdant.

The case was thus: During the previous week at sunrise there had been found in the thicket of a forest the body of a gamekeeper, who had evidently been assassinated and then concealed among the brambles of a ditch. It was supposed that the crime had been committed by some strolling poacher, but up to the present time there had been elicited no precise evidence and the witnesses examined had only made the mystery deeper.

The murder had taken place near the frontier, where charcoal burners were at work. The suspicions of the judge had, therefore, been directed toward them. The depositions thus far had revealed that on the night of the murder these people had been absent from their shanty and the furnaces had remained in the care of a young daughter of the charcoal burner.

Ten o'clock the door of his cabinet opened, framing the cocked hat and yellow shoulder belt of the constable.

"Eh! well?" grunted the judge.

"Eh! well, judge, I cannot find the girl. She has disappeared. The charcoal burners pretend utter ignorance."

The judge consulted his watch. The business was at a standstill; the case could not be called, and he wished to give a glance of oversight to the matters of the dining-room before the arrival of his guests. He disrobed himself and hurried home.

The pleasant dining-room, brightened by the June sunshine presented a most attractive aspect, with its white woodwork, its gray curtains, its high stove of blue faience with its marble top, and its round table covered with a dazzling white linen cloth, upon which were placed three covers artistically trimmed.

This spectacle softened the ill-humor of the judge, and he was calming little by little, while laying upon the silver salver a dusty bottle of old croton, when the hall door opened violently, and he heard in the vestibule a girl's voice, which cried: "I tell you I wish to speak to the judge. He expects me."

"What does this racket mean?" growled the judge, scowling.

"It is that little charcoal burner," responded the recorder, Touchboeuf. "She arrived at the palais just after you left, and she has followed me as far as here, in a state of wild excitement, in order that you may take her deposition."

"Eh!" groaned the judge. "You are in a great hurry, my girl, after keeping me waiting three days. Why did you not come sooner?"

"I had my reasons," she said, casting hungry eyes upon the table.

"We can better appreciate your reasons later," replied the judge, furious at the interruption. "Meanwhile we can listen to your report."

He drew out his watch. It was 10:45. "Yes, we have time, Touchboeuf. You will find at your side all that is necessary for writing. We will question her."

The notary seated himself at the writing table with his paper and inkstand and the pen behind his ear, waiting. The judge, sitting squarely in a cane-seated armchair, fixed his clear, hard eyes upon the girl, who remained standing near the stove.

"Your name?" he demanded.

"Meline Sacacel."

"Your age and your residence?"

"Sixteen years. I live with my father, who burns charcoal at the clearing of Onze-Fontaine."

"You swear to tell all the truth?"

"I came only for that."

"Raise your right hand. You were near your home on the night when the guard Sourdant was murdered. Relate all that you know."

"That is what I know: Our folks had set out to go with the charcoal to Stenay. I watched near the furnace. Toward two o'clock, at a moment when the moon was hidden, Mancin, who is a woodcutter of ire, passed before our lodge. 'See me! Am I not watching at an early hour?' I cried. 'How goes all at your home? All well?'

"No," he answered. "The mother has a fever and the children are almost dying with hunger. There is not a mouthful of bread in the house, and I am trying to kill a rabbit to sell in Maryville. That is on the other side of Onze-Fontaine. I lost sight of him then, but at daybreak I heard the report of a gun, and I was just clearing the ashes to shield the charcoal. Then, immediately after, two men came running toward our lodge. They were disputing. 'Scoundrel!' cried the guard. 'I arrest you.'

"'Sourdant!' cried the other. 'I pray you let me have the rabbit, for they are dying of hunger at my home.'

"'Go to the devil!' said the guard. Then they fell upon each other. I could hear their hard blows plainly. Suddenly the guard cried: 'Oh!' and then he fell heavily.

"I had hidden behind our lodge, terribly frightened, and Mancin ran away into the great forest, and from that time to this he has not been seen. He is in Belgium, for sure. That is all."

"Hum!" growled the judge. "Why did you not come to tell this as soon as you received the summons?"

"It was none of my business—and I did not wish to speak against Mancin."

"I see; but you seem to have changed your mind this morning. How is that?"

"It is because I have heard that they accused Guestin."

"And who is this Guestin?"

The girl reddened and answered:

"He is our neighbor charcoal burner, and he would not harm a fly. Do you not see," she continued, "that the thought of fastening on him the guilt of another aroused me? I put these great boots on, and I have run all the way through the woods to tell you this. Oh, how I have run! I did not feel tired. I would have run till tomorrow if it had been necessary, because it is as true as the blue Heavens that our Guestin is entirely innocent, gentlemen."

"Hallo!" cried he, seeing her suddenly grow pale and stagger. "What's the matter?"

"My head swims. I cannot see." She changed color, and her temples grew moist.

The judge, alarmed, poured out a glass of wine and said: "Drink this quickly!" He was wholly absorbed and very much moved before this girl who was threatened with illness. He dared not call Scholaistique, for fear of disturbing his cooking. He looked helplessly toward the clerk, who was gnawing his penholder.

"It is a swoon," observed the latter. "Perhaps she needs something to eat."

"Are you hungry?" demanded the judge.

She made a sign of assent.

"Excuse me," she said in a feeble voice, "but I have had nothing to eat since yesterday. It is that which makes me dizzy."

"The deuce!" he cried at last heroically. Violently he drew toward him the platter on which lay the trout. After separating a large piece, which he put on the table before her, he made the charcoal burner sit down.

"Eat late, M. le Cure!" said he, imperiously.

He had no need to repeat his command. She ate rapidly, voraciously. In another minute the plate was empty, and Judge Sourdant heroically filled it anew.

The scribe Touchboeuf rubbed his eyes. He no longer recognized the judge. He admired, though not without a sentiment of regret, the robust appetite of the charcoal burner who devoured the exquisite fish without any more ceremony than if it had been a smoked herring, and he murmured: "What a pity! Such a beautiful dish!"

At that moment the door opened,

The third guest, the good priest of St. Vincent, in a new cassock and with his three-cornered hat under his arm, entered the dining-room and stopped questioningly before the strange spectacle of that little savage seated at the judge's table.

"Too late, M. le Cure!" growled the judge. "There's no more trout."

At the same time he related the history of the little charcoal burner. The cure heaved a sigh. He comprehended the grandeur of the sacrifice, but half mournful, half smiling, he tapped upon the shoulder of the judge.

"Judge Hemorin Sourdant!" cried he, "you are better than you thought. In truth I tell you that all punishment for your sin of gluttony will be forever remitted because of that trout which we have not eaten."—Romance

IT BENEFITS THE MASSES.

Good Results of the Tariff Reduction Are Already Apparent.

It is an established fact that the tariff bill passed by the democratic congress has already proven to be a blessing to the poor people of the nation. It has reduced the prices of nearly all the necessities of life and we now have cheaper goods of many other kinds than we have had in many years before. One dollar will now buy from ten to twenty-five per cent more than it would one year ago when the McKinley law became operative.

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