

THE LAST CLASS.

(Translated from the "Contes de Lundi" of Alphonse Daudet by Katharine Melick.)

(ALSACE-LORRAINE.)

That morning I was very late starting for school, and I had a mighty fear of being scolded, especially as M. Hamel had said that he would question us on participles, and I did not know the first word. Of a sudden the idea possessed me to avoid the class and steer my course across the meadows.

The day was so hot, so bright!

Sounds of the black birds piping in the edge of the woods, and, in the Ripert pasture, behind the saw-mill, the Prussians drilling. All these concerned me a deal more than the rule for participles. But I had force to resist, and I ran very quickly toward school.

In passing the mayor's office, I saw people stop near the little grating, before placards. For ten years it was thence that had come all ill-tidings,—battles lost, requisitions, orders of the commanders, and I thought without pausing, "What is it now?"

Then, as I crossed the place at a run, the blacksmith, Wachter, who stood there with his apprentice, reading, cried to me:

"Don't hurry so much, little one. You will get to school fast enough!"

I thought he was mocking me, and I rushed all breathless into the little court of M. Hamel.

Ordinarily, at the beginning of the class, there was a great melee of sounds, heard far into the street; desks opened, closed; lessons repeated very loud, all together, with ears closed for concentrated effort, and the great ruler of the master smiting the tables.—

"A little more quiet!"

I was counting upon all this commotion to gain my bench without notice; but precisely that day was peaceful as a Sunday morning. Through the open window I saw my comrades, already ranged in their places, and M. Hamel, passing and re-passing, with the terrible iron ruler under his arm. It was necessary to open the door and enter in the midst of that great calm. Think whether I reddened, and whether I was afraid.

Ah, but no. M. Hamel looks at me without anger, and says, very gently,—

"Go quickly to your place, little Franz. We were about to commence without you."

I strode to the bench, and seated myself instantly at my desk. Then, only, a little relieved of my terror, I remarked that our master had on his beautiful green frock coat, his fine fluted frill, and the cap of embroidered black silk, which he wore only on days of inspection, or distribution of prizes. Moreover, the whole class had an air of something unusual and solemn. But what most surprised me was to see, at the end of the room, upon the benches ordinarily empty, some of the villagers, seated and silent as we:—the old Houser, with his cocked hat, the ancient mayor, the postman and yet others. Every one seemed sad; and Houser had fetched an old spelling book, gnawed at the edges, which he held wide open on his knees, with his great glasses laid across the pages.

While I wondered at all this, M. Hamel had mounted to his chair, and in the same gentle voice in which he had saluted me, he said to us,—

"My children, this is the last time that I shall hear your class. The order has come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and of Lorraine. The new master arrives tomorrow. To-day is your last lesson in French. I pray you, be very attentive."

The words overwhelmed me. Oh, the wretches! This, they had posted in the mayoralty.

My last lesson in French!

And I, who scarcely knew how to write! Then I was never to know! It

must stop here. How I wished for the time lost, the classes failed, to hunt nests or glide over the Saar! My books which just now I was finding so wearisome, so heavy to carry,—my grammar, my sacred history, seemed now old friends whom it gave me pain to leave. So with M. Hamel. The idea that he was to depart, that I should see him no more, made me forget punishment, blows of the ruler.

Poor man!

It was in honor of this last class that he wore his beautiful Sunday clothes, and now I understand why these old villagers are come to sit at the end of the room. That seems to say that they regret not having come oftener to this school. That is a fashion of thanking our master for his forty years of good service, and of rendering their duty to the fatherland which is going—

I was there in my reflections when I heard my name spoken. It was my turn to recite. What would I not have given to be able to give that famous rule for participles, very loud, very clear, without a fault; but I entangled myself with the first words, and I remained erect, bracing myself at my bench, heart big, head not daring to lift. I heard M. Hamel say to me:

"I shall not scold you, my little Franz. You must be punished enough.—See what it is! Every day it is said, 'Bah, I have time enough. Tomorrow I shall learn.' And then you see what comes. Ah, that is the great unhappiness of our Alsace,—always to leave its learning till tomorrow. Now those people are right who say, 'How? You pretend to be French, and you know not how to read nor write your language!' In all this, my poor Franz, it is not you who is most to blame. We all have our due part of reproach to make ourselves.

"Your parents have not cared too much to see you instructed. They loved better to see you work in the field or the factory, to have a few sous the more. I,—have I nothing to reproach myself? Have I not often made you water my garden, in place of working? And when I wished to angle for trout, have I hindered myself from dismissing you?"

Then, from one thing to another M. Hamel set himself to speak of the French language, saying that it was the most beautiful language in the world,—clearest, most compact; that it remained to guard it among us, never to forget it, because when a people falls into slavery, so long as it keeps well its language, it holds the key of its prison.* Then he took a grammar and read us our lesson. I was astonished to see how I understood it. All that he said seemed easy—easy. I believe that not only had I never listened so well, but he had never put so much of patience with his explanations. One would have said that before going away, the poor man wished to give us all his knowledge, to thrust it all into our heads at a stroke.

The lesson ended, the writing was reached. For this day M. Hamel had prepared new copies after those he had written, in beautiful, round hand: *France, Alsace, France, Alsace*. This was like the little flags which fluttered all around the class, hanging from the curtain rod of our desks. How everyone wrote, and what silence! There was heard only the grating of pens over the paper. One moment, some May beetles flew in; but no one noticed, not even the very little ones, who set themselves to trace their lines, with a heart, a conscience, as if that were still French. Over the roof of the school, the pigeons cooed, very low, and I said to myself, listening,—

"Will they make those sing in German, those also?"

From time to time, when I lifted my

* "S'il tient sa langue,—il tient la clé qui de ses chaînes le délivre."

eyes from the page, I saw M. Hamel, motionless in his chair, gazing at the objects about him as if he would carry away in his look all the little school room. Think! Forty years he had been there in the same place, his court yard before him, and his class. Only the benches, the desks, were shining and polished with use; the walnut trees of the court had heightened; the hops which he himself had planted, engarlanded the windows now, even to the roof. What a heart-break that must be for this poor man, to leave all these, and to hear his sister, who came and went in the chamber above, prepare to close their trunks; for they were to leave tomorrow, to depart from the province forever.

Nevertheless, he had courage to carry the class to the end. After the writing, we had the lesson in history; then the little ones chanted together the "ba, be, bi, bo, bu." Below, at the end of the room, the old Houser had taken his spectacles, and, holding his spelling book in his two hands, he spelled the words with them. One could see that he also applied himself; his voice trembled with emotion, and it was so strange to hear him, that we all longed to smile and to sob. Ah! I remember that last class!

All at once the clock from the church sounded noon, then the Angelus. At the same instant the trumpets of the Prussians, who were returning from exercise, broke forth under our windows. M. Hamel arose, all pale, from his chair. He had never seemed so grand.

"My friends," he said; "my friends,—I—I—"

But something stifled him. He could not end the phrase.

Then he turned to the table, took a piece of crayon, and, summoning all his force, wrote as large as he could,—

"Vive la France!"

Then he remained there, his head leaning against the wall, and without speaking, he made this sign with his hand:

"It is ended. Go!"

Hovey to Kipling.

Only a little while before his death, Richard Hovey wrote for the Saturday Evening Post the following lines addressed to Mr. Kipling. They are now printed for the first time:

TO RUDYARD KIPLING.

What need have you of praising? Could I find
Some lonely poet no one praises yet,
I would rather choose him,
that he might know
A fellow-craftsman knew
him, marked him, loved.
But you—the whole world
praises you. What need
Have you of any speech I have to give?
Yet for the craft's sake I must not be dumb;
And for the craft's sake you will pardon me.
But I had rather meet you face to face,
And talk of other and indifferent things,
And say no word of all that I would say
(Praise and thanksgiving
for your splendid song,
Praise and the pride of the
Empires of the Blood),
But leave you, silent, as we English do—
And you would know, and
you would understand.

—Richard Hovey.

On the Piazza.

Mr. Brown—Do you see that young couple on the steps? They're engaged. A fine pair! She won the geology prize at Vassar, and he took honors at Yale.

THE CONVERSATION.

Yale Man—And would you really leave your happy home for me, lovey?

Vassar Girl—Yes; for I love you from your head down to your shoes.—Town Topics.

IN SUMMER DAYS.

[FLORA BULLOCK.]

It's gettin' mighty lonesome
sittin' here
Readin' these papers.
Wonder what Mary'd say
To see 'em scattered
on the floor this way.
She used to get sarcastic,
the first year
That we were married;
said that men
Could never figure out
to keep things clean,
And pestered women so;
and then
She'd pick them up.
It made me feel real mean,
But, well, I never could
keep things just straight,
And here I'm goin'
at the same old gait.

Wonder how the boys are,
and if Pet
Is over bein' frightened
at the "gweat bwon cow,"
Or if she tries to
catch the piggies yet,
And stuff 'em in a bird-cage.
I'll go right now
And feed that kitten:
ugly little beast
But she loves it
more'n she does me.
Wish "Gwand pop's" farm was nearer,
then at least
I'd get a day off
and go down to see.
Awful still and lonesome
when all your folks are gone.
If it only wasn't Sunday
I'd get out and mow the lawn.

Blessed is the man who has friends or relatives of hospitable disposition living in the country. Or perhaps I should say, blessed are the man's children, for it is they who reap the benefit. Even if the man can visit for a day or two,—he gets nervous by the third day and must get back to business again,—for "the country" is no wonderland to him as it is to the children. His wife may haul him off to camp somewhere in the mountains or among the lakes, leaving the children safe at home, and he can enjoy himself well enough, if fishing is good. But a simple outing in the country, on a real farm where corn grows and cows are to be driven home from pasture does not mean much to grown-up boys. After a man has exhausted talk of "prospec's" with the man who follows the plow, and has initiated the children into a few of the mysteries of a new world, trying with more or less success to be young again, he feels impelled by some obscure reason to rush back to town, open up the house a trifle and mope around, getting papers scattered in every room in the house,—oh, this is no fairy-tale,—eating miscellaneous messes at hotels, looking and feeling as forlorn as an old bachelor. He knows as no one else that it verily is not good for man to be alone.

At last they come home, the wife half-rested, half-tired, but willing to pick up papers; the children brown as berries and mottled with freckles, eager to tell great stories of what they saw and what they know. There are children who early get the habit of taking things nonchalantly. They "liked it purty well." But the typical town-bred youngster, if he is given half a chance, wants to be on the farm in summertime. It is the place of all places for him and generally he knows that better than his elders, I have seen children tease and tease to "go to grandpa's." And the farm would hardly hold them when at last they reached it. Perhaps many of us remember that strange feeling of freedom and looseness from intangible bonds which made us shout