The White and the Black

By Erckmann-Chatrian

I

At that time we passed our evenings at Brauer's alehouse, which opens upon the square of Vieux-Brisach. After eight o'clock there used to drop in, one by one, Frederick Schultz the notary; Frantz Martin the burgomaster; Christopher Ulmett the magistrate; the counsellor Klers; the engineer Rothan; the young organist Theodore Blitz; and some others of the chief townsfolk, who all sat around the same table and drank their foaming *bok-bier* like brothers.

The apparition of Theodore Blitz, who came to us from Jena with a letter of recommendation from Harmosius—his dark eyes, his brown dishevelled hair, his thin white nose, his metallic voice, and his mystic ideas, occasioned us some little disquiet It used to trouble us to see him rise abruptly and pace two or three times up and down the room, gesticulating the while, mocking with a strange air the Swiss landscapes with which the walls were adorned—lakes of indigo blue, mountains of apple green, paths of brilliant red. Then he would seat himself down again, empty his glass at a gulp, and commence a discussion about the music of Palestrina, about the lute of the Hebrews, about the introduction of the organ into our churches, about the shophar, the sabbatic epochs, etc. He would knit his brows, plant his sharp elbows on the edge of the table, and lose himself in deep thought Yes, he perplexed us not a little—we others who were grave and accustomed to methodical ideas. However, it was necessary to put up with it; and the engineer Rothan himself; in spite of his bantering spirit, in the end grew cairn and no longer continued to contradict the young organist when he was right.

Theodore Blitz was plainly one of those nervously organized beings who are affected by every change of temperature. The year of which I speak was extremely warm; we had several heavy storms towards the autumn, and folk began to fear for the wine harvest.

One evening all our little world was gathered, according to custom, around the table, with the exception of the magistrate Ulmett and the organist. The burgomaster talked about the weather and great hydraulic works. As for me I listened to the wind gambolling without amongst the plane trees of the Schlossgarten, to the drip of the water from the spouts, and to its dashing against the windows. From time to time one could hear a tile blown off a roof, a door shut to with a bang, a shutter beat against a wail. Then would arise the great clamour of the storm, sweeping, sighing, and groaning in the distance, as if all the invisible powers were seeking and calling on one another in the darkness, while living things hid themselves, sitting in corners, in order to escape a fearful meeting with them.

From the church of Saint-Landolphe nine o'clock sounded, when Blitz hurriedly entered, shaking his hat like one possessed, and saying in his husky voice—

"Surely the Evil One is about his work! The white and the black are having a tussle. The nine times nine thousand nine hundred and ninety thousand spirits of Envy battle and tear themselves. Go, Ahriman! Walk! Ravage! Lay waste! The Amschaspands are in flight! Oromage veils her face! What a time, what a time!"

And so saying he walked round the room, stretching his long skinny limbs, and laughing by jerks.

We were all astounded at such an entry, and for some seconds no one spoke a word. Then, however, the engineer Rothan, led on by his caustic humour, said—

"What nonsense is that you are singing there, Organist? What do Amschaspands signify to us? or the nine times nine thousand nine hundred and ninety thousand spirits of Envy? Ha! ha! ha! It is really comic. Where on earth did you pick up such strange language?"

Theodore Blitz stopped suddenly short in his walk and shut one eye, while the other, wide open, shone with a diabolic irony.

When Rothan had finished—

"Oh, engineer," said he; "oh! Sublime spirit, master of the trowel and mortar, director of stones, he who orders right angles, angles acute, angles obtuse, you are right—a hundred times tight"

He bent himself with a mocking air, and went on—

"Nothing exists but matter—the level, the rule, and the compass. The revelations of Zoroaster, of Moses, of Pythagoras, of Odin—the harmony, the melody, art, sentiment, they are all dreams unworthy of an enlightened intellect such as yours. To you belongs the truth, the eternal truth. Ha! ha! ha! I bow myself before you; I salute you; I prostrate myself before your glory, imperishable as that of Nineveh and of Babylon."

Finishing his speech, he made two little turns on his heels, and uttered a laugh so piercing that it was more like the crowing of a cock at daybreak.

Rothan was getting angry, when at that moment the old magistrate Ulmett came in, his head protected by a great otter-skin cap, his shoulders covered by his bottle green greatcoat bordered with fox skin. His hands hung down beside him, his back was bent, his eyes were half-closed, his big nose was red, and his large cheeks were wet with rain. He was as wet as a drake.

Outside the rain fell in torrents, the gutters gushed over, the spouts disgorged themselves, and the ditches were swollen into little rivers.

"Ah, heavens!" cried the good fellow. "Perhaps it was foolish to come out on such a night, and after such work too—two inquests, verbal processes, interrogatories! The *bok-bier* and old friends, though, would make me swim across the Rhine."

And muttering these words he put off his otter-skin cap and opened his great pelisse to take out his long tobacco pipe and his pouch, which he carefully laid down upon the table. After that he hung his greatcoat and his hat up beside the window, and called out—"Brauer!"

"Well, Magistrate, what do you want?"

"You would do well to put to the shutters. Believe me, this storm will wind up with some thunder."

The innkeeper went out and put the shutters to, and the old magistrate, sitting down in his corner, heaved a deep sigh.

"You know what has happened, burgomaster?" he asked in a solemn voice.

"No. What has occurred, my old Christopher?"

Before he replied—Ulmett threw a glance around the room.

"We are here alone, my friends," said he, "so I am able to tell you. About three o'clock this afternoon someone found poor Gredel Dick under the sluice of the miller at Holderloch."

"Under the sluice at Holderloch?" cried all.

"Yes; a cord round her neck"

In order to understand how these words affected us it is necessary that you should know that Gredel Dick was one of the prettiest girls in Vieux-Brisach; a tall brunette, with blue eyes and

red cheeks; the only daughter of an old anabaptist, Petrus Dick, who farmed considerable portions of the Schlossgarten. For some time she had seemed sad and melancholy—she who had beforetime been so merry in the morning at the washing place, and in the evening at the well in the midst of her friends. She had been seen crying, and her sorrow had been ascribed to the incessant pursuit of her by Saphén Mutz, the postmaster's son—a big fellow, thin, vigorous, with an aquiline nose and curling black hair. He followed her like a shadow, and never let her off his arm at the dances.

There had been some talk about their marriage, but old Mutt, his wife, Karl Bremer his son-in-law, and his daughter Saffayel, were opposed to the match, all agreeing that a "heathen" should not be introduced into the family.

For three days past nothing had been seen of Gredel No one knew what had become of her. You may imagine the thousand different thoughts which crowded upon us when we heard that she was dead. No one thought any longer of the discussion between Theodore Blitz and the engineer Rothan touching invisible spirits. All eyes were fixed on Christopher Ulmett, who, his large bald head bent, his heavy white eyebrows knit, gravely filled his pipe, with a meditative air.

"And Mutt—Saphén Mutt?" asked the burgomaster. "What has become of him?"

A slight flush coloured the cheeks of the old man as he answered, after some seconds of thought—

"Saphéri Mutt? He has gone."

"Gone!" cried little Klers. "Then he acknowledges his guilt?"

"It certainly seems so to me," said the old magistrate simply. "One does not scamper off for nothing. As for the rest, we have searched his father's place, and found all the house upset The folk seemed struck with consternation. The mother raved and tore her hair; the daughter wore her Sunday clothes, and danced about like a fool. It was impossible to get anything out of them. As to Gredel's father, the poor fellow is in the deepest despair. He does not wish to say anything against his child, but it is certain that Gredel Dick left the farm of her own accord on Tuesday last in order to meet Saphéra. That fact is attested by all the neighbours. Now the gendarmes are scouting the country. We shall see, we shall see!"

Then there was a long silence. Outside the rain fell heavily.

"It is abominable!" cried the burgomaster suddenly. "Abominable! To think that every father of a family, even such as bring up their children in the fear of God, are exposed to such misfortunes."

"Yes," replied Ulmett, lighting his pipe. "It is so. They say, no doubt tightly, that heaven orders all things; but the spirit of darkness seems to me to meddle a good deal more than is necessary m them. For one good fellow how many villains do we find, without faith or law? And for one good action how many evil ones? I tell you, my friends, if the Evil One were to count his flock—"

He had not time to finish, for at that moment a terrific flash of lightning glared in through the chinks of the shutters, making the lamp burn dim. It was immediately followed by a clap of thunder, crashing, jerky—one of those claps which make you tremble. One might have thought that the world was coming to an end.

The clock of the church of Saint-Landolphe just then struck the half hour. The tolling bells seemed to be just hard by one. From far, very far off, there came a trembling plaintive voice, crying—"Help, help!"

"Someone cries for help," said the burgomaster.

"Yes," said the others, turning pale, and listening.

While we were all thus in fright, Rothan, curling his lips in a joking fashion, broke out—“Ha! ha! ha! It is Mademoiselle Roesël’s cat singing its love story to Monsieur Roller, the young first tenor.”

Then dropping his voice and lifting his hand with a tragic gesture, he went on—“The time has sounded from the belfry of the chateau!”

“Ill-luck to those who laugh at such a cry,” said old Christopher, rising.

He went towards the door with a solemn step, and we all followed him, even the fat innkeeper, who held his cotton cap in his hand and murmured a prayer very low. Rothan alone did not stir from his seat. As for me, I was behind the others, with outstretched neck, looking over their shoulders.

The glass door was scarcely opened when there came another flash of lightning. The street, with its white flags washed by the rain, its flushed gutters, its multitude of windows, its old gables, its signboards, glared out from the night, and then was swallowed up in the darkness.

That glance of the eye allowed me to see the steeple of Saint-Landolphe with its innumerable little carvings all clothed in white light. In the steeple were the bells hanging to black beams, with their clappers, and their ropes hanging down to the body of the church. Below that was a stork’s nest, half torn in pieces by the wind,—the young ones with their beaks out, the mother at her wits’ end, her wings extended, while the male bird flew about the shining steeple, his breast thrown forward, his neck bent, his long legs thrown out behind as if defying the thunder peals.

It was a strange sight, a veritable Chinese picture—thin, delicate, light, something strange, terrible, upon a black background of clouds broken with streaks of gold..

We stood, with open mouths, upon the threshold of the inn, and asked—

“What did you hear—Ulmett? What can you see—Klers?”

At that moment a lugubrious mewing commenced above us, and a whole regiment of cats set to work springing about in the gutter. At the same time a peal of laughter filled the room—

“Au well! ah well!” cried the engineer. “Do you hear them? Was I wrong?”

“It was nothing,” murmured the old magistrate. “Thank heaven, it was nothing. Let us go in again. The rain is recommencing.”

As we took our places again, he said—

“Is it astonishing—Rothan, that the imagination of a poor old fellow, such as myself, goes astray at a time when earth and heaven confound themselves, while good and bad are struggling together, while such mysterious crimes occur around us even at this day? Is it strange?”

We all took our places with a feeling of annoyance with the engineer, who had alone remained quiet, and had seen us disconcerted. We turned our backs on him as we emptied our glasses without saying a word, while he, his elbow on the edge of the window ledge, hummed between his teeth I know not what military march, the time of which he beat with his fingers on the ledge, without deigning to notice our ill-humour.

So things went on for some minutes, when Theodore Blitz said laughingly—

“Monsieur Rothan triumphs. He does not believe in invisible spirits. Nothing troubles him. He has a good foot, good eyes, and good ear. What more is wanting to convict us of ignorance and folly?”

“Ha,” replied Rothan, “I should not have dared to say it, but you express things so well, Monsieur Organist, that one cannot disagree with you, especially in any matter that concerns yourself. As for my old friends Schultz, Ulmett, Klers, and the others, it is different, very different Any one may at times be led astray by a dream, only one must see that it does not become a custom.”

Instead of answering to this direct attack, Blitz, his head bent down, seemed to be listening to some noise without.

"Hush," said he, looking at us. "Hush."

He lifted his finger, and the expression of his face was so striking that we all listened with an indefinable feeling of fear.

The same instant heavy steps were heard in the street without a hand was laid on the catch of the door, and the organist said to us in a trembling voice—"Be calm—listen and see. Heaven be with us."

The door opened and Saphéri Mutz appeared. Should I live to be a thousand years old the figure of that man will never be erased from my memory. He is there—I see him. He advances reeling, pale—his hair hanging about his face—his eye dull, glassy—his blouse tight to his body—a big stick in his hand. He looks upon us without seeing us, like a man in a dream. A winding track of mud is left behind him. He stops, coughs, and says in a low voice, as if speaking to himself—

"Well! what if they arrest me ! What if they kill me! I would rather be here!"

Then, recollecting himself; and looking at us, one after another, he cried with a movement of terror—

"I have spoken! What did I say! Mi! the burgomaster—the magistrate Ulmett."

He made a bound as if he would fly, and I know not what he saw in the darkness of the night without which drove him once more from it into the room.

Theodore Blitz slowly arose. After he had looked at us, he walked up to Mutt, and, with an air of confidence, he asked him in a low voice, pointing to the dark street—

"Is it there?"

"Yes," said the man, in the same mysterious tone.

"It follows you?"

"From Fischbach."

"Behind you?"

"Yes, behind me."

"That is so, it is surely so," said the organist, throwing another look upon us. "It is always thus. Well then, stop here, Saphéri; sit down by the fire. Brauer, go and look for the gendarmes."

At the word gendarmes the wretched fellow grew fearfully pale, and seemed to think again of flight, but the same horror beat him back once more, and he sank down at the corner of the table, his head between his hands.

"Oh! had I but known—had I but known!" he moaned. We were more dead than alive. The innkeeper went out. Not a breath was heard in the room. The old magistrate had put down his pipe, the burgomaster looked at me with a stupefied air. Rothan no longer whistled. Theodore Blitz, sitting at the end of a bench, looked at the rain streaking die darkness.

So we remained for a quarter of an hour, fearful all the time that the man would take it into his head to attempt to fly. But he did not stir. His long hair coiled from between his fingers, and the rain dripped from his clothes on to the floor.

At length the clatter of arms was heard without, and the gendarmes Werner and Keltz appeared upon the step. Keltz, darting a side glance at the man, lifted his great hat, saying—

"Good evening, Monsieur Magistrate."

Then he came in and coolly put the handcuffs on Saphéri's wrists, while Saphéri covered his face with his hands.

"Come, follow me, my son," said he. "Werner close up."

A third gendarme, short and fat, appeared in the darkness, and all the troop set off.

The wretched man made no resistance.

We looked at one another's pale faces.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said the organist, and he went off.

Then each of us, lost in his own thoughts, rose and departed to his home in silence.

As for me, I turned my head more than twenty times before I came to my door, fearful that I should see the other that had followed Saphéri Mutt, ready to lay its hands upon me.

And when at last, thank heaven, was safe in my room, before I got into bed and blew out my light I took the wise precaution of looking under my bed to convince myself that *it* was not hidden there. I even said a prayer that *it* would not strangle me dining the night. Well, what then? One is not a philosopher at all times.

II

Until then I had considered Theodore Blitz as a species of visionary imbecile. His maintaining the possibility of holding correspondence with invisible spirits by means of the music composed by all the sounds of nature, by the rustling of the leaves, by the murmur of the winds, by the hum of the insects, had appeared to me very ridiculous, and I was not the only one in that opinion.

It seemed all very well to tell us that if the grave sound of the organ awoke in us religious sentiments, that if martial music swept us on to war, and the simple melodies led us into reveries, it was because the different melodies were the invocation of the genii of the earth, who came suddenly into our midst, acted on our organs, and made us participants of their own proper essence. All that, however, appeared tome to be very obscure, and I had never doubted that the organist was just a little mad.

Now, however, my opinions changed respecting him. I said to myself that man is not a purely material being, that we are composed of body and soul; that to attribute all to the body, and to endeavour to ascribe all significance to it, is not rational; that the nervous fluid, agitated by the undulations of the air, is almost as difficult to comprehend as the direct action of occult powers; that we know not how it is that even a mere tickling of our ears, regulated by the rules of counter points excites in us a thousand agreeable or terrible emotions, elevates the soul to heaven, melts us, awakens in us the ardour of life, enthusiasm, love, fear, pity. No, the first theory was not satisfactory. The ideas of the organist appeared to me more sublime, more weighty, more just, and more acceptable, looking at things all round.

Then how could one explain, by means of mere nervous sensation, the arrival of Saphéri Mutt at the inn; how could one explain the terror of the unhappy man, which forced him to yield himself up; and the marvellous foresight of Blitz when he said to us—

"Hush! Listen! He comes! Heaven be with us!"

In the end all my prejudices against an invisible world disappeared, and new facts occurred to confirm me in this fresh manner of thinking.

About five days after the scene I have described, Saphéri Mutt had been transported by the gendarmes to the prison of Stuttgart. The thousand tales which had been set afloat respecting the death of Gredel Dick died away. The poor girl slept in peace at the back of the hill of the Trois-Fontaines, and folk were busied in looking after the wine harvest

One evening about nine o'clock, as I left the great warehouse of the custom-house—where I had been tasting some samples of wine on behalf of Brauer, who had more confidence in my

judgment in such a matter than in his own—my head a little heavy, I chanced to direct my steps towards the great Alley des Plantanes, behind the church of Saint-Landolphe.

The Rhine displayed to my right its azure waters, in which some fishermen were letting down their nets. To my left rose the old fortifications of the town. The air began to grow cool; the river murmured its eternal song, the fir trees of the Black Forest were softly ruffled; and as I walked on the sound of a violin fell on my ear.

I listened.

The black-headed linnet never threw more grace, more delicacy, into the execution of his rapid trills, nor more enthusiasm into the stream of his inspiration. It was like nothing I had heard. It had no repose, no measure. It was a torrent of notes, delirious, admirably symphonizing, but void of order or method.

Then, dashing with the thread of the inspiration, came some sharp incisive notes, piercing the ear.

"Theodore Blitz is here," said I to myself; putting aside the high branches of an elder hedge at the foot of a slope.

I looked around me, and my eyes fell upon a horse-pond covered with duck-weed, where the big frogs showed their flat noses. A little farther off rose some stables, with their big sheds, and an old dwelling-house. In the court, surrounded by a wall breast-high in which was a worm-eaten door, walked five or six fowls, and under the great stall ran the rabbits, their croups in the air, their tails up. When they saw me they disappeared under the gate of the grange like shadows.

No noise save the flow of the river and the bizarre fantasy of the violin could be heard.

Where on earth was Theodore Blitz?

The idea occurred to me that he was perhaps making trial of his music on the family of the Mutzes, and, curiosity impelling me, I glided into a hiding-place beside the wall to see what would happen in the farm.

The windows were all wide open, and in a room on the ground floor, long, with brown beams, level with the court, I perceived a long table furnished with all the sumptuousness of a village feast twenty or thirty covers were there. But what most astonished me was to see but five persons in front of this grand display. There was old Mutt, sombre and thoughtful, clad in a suit of black velvet with metal buttons. His large osseous head, gray, his forehead contracted in fixed thought, his eyes sunken, staring before him. There was the son-in-law, thin, insignificant, the neck of his shirt coming up almost to his ears. There was the mother in a great tulle cap, with a distracted look, the daughter—a rather pretty brunette, in a cap of black taffeta with spangles of gold and silver, her bosom covered with a silk neckerchief of a thousand colours. Lastly, there was Theodore Blitz, his three-cornered hat over his ear, the violin held between his shoulder and chin, his little eyes sparkling, his cheeks standing out in relief from a deep wrinkle, and his elbows thrown out and drawn in, like a grasshopper scraping its shrill aria on the heath.

The shades of the setting sun, the old clock with its delf dial with red and blue flowers, and above all the music, which grew more and more discordant, produced an indefinable impression upon me. I was seized with a truly panic terror. Was it the effect of my having breathed too long the *rudesheim?* Was it the effect of the pale tints of the falling night? I do not know; but without looking farther I glided away as quietly as possible, bending down, creeping by the wall in order to regain the road, when all of a sudden a large dog darted the length of his chain towards me, and made me utter a cry of surprise.

"Tirik!" cried the old postmaster.

And Theodore, perceiving me, jumped out of the room, crying—

“Ah! it is Christian Species! Come in, my dear Christian! You have come most opportunely.” He strode across the court, and came and took my hands.

“My dear friend,” said he to me, with strange animation. “This is a time when the *black* and the *white* engage with one another. Come in, come in.”

His excitement frightened me, but he would accept none of my excuses, and dragged me on without my being able to make any resistance.

“You must know, dear Christian,” said he, “that we have this morning baptized an angel of heaven, the little Nickel Saphéri Bremer. I have celebrated her coming into the world by the chorus of the ‘Séraphins.’ Nevertheless, you may imagine that three-fourths of those who were invited have not come. Ha! ha! ha! Come in then! You will be welcome.”

He pushed me on by the shoulders, and willing or unwilling, I stepped across the threshold. All the members of the Mutt family turned their heads. I should have liked not to have sat down, but those enthusiasts surrounded me. “This will be the sixth!” cried Blitz. “The number six is a good number!”

The old postmaster took my hands with emotion, saying—“Thanks, Monsieur Species, thanks for having come! They say that honest folk fly from us! That we are abandoned alike by God and by man! You will stop to the end?”

“Yes,” mumbled the old woman, with a supplicating look. “Surely Monsieur Species will stay to the end. He will not refuse us that?”

Then I understood why the table was set in such grand fashion, and why the guests were so few. All of those invited to the baptism, thinking of Gredel Dick, had made excuses for not coming.

The idea of a like desertion went against my heart.

“Oh, certainly,” I said. “Certainly! I will stay—with pleasure—with great pleasure!”

The glasses were refilled, and we drank of a rough strong wine, of an old *markobrünner,* the austere flavour of which filled me with melancholy thoughts.

The old woman, putting her long hand upon my shoulder, murmured—

“Just a drop more, Monsieur Species, just a drop more.”

And I dared not say no.

At that moment Blitz, passing his bow over the vibrating cords, made a cold shudder pass through all my limbs.

‘This, my friends,” said he, “is Saul’s invocation to the Pythoness.”

I should have liked to run away, but in the court the dog was lamentably howling, the night was coming on, and the room was full of shadows. The harsh features of old Mutz, his keen eyes, the sorrowful compression of his big jaws, did not reassure one.

Blitz went on scraping, scraping away at that invocation of his, with great sweeps of his arm. The wrinkle which ploughed itself deep down his left cheek grew deeper and deeper, the perspiration stood on his forehead.

The postmaster filled up our glasses again, and said to me in a low imperious voice—

“Your health.”

“Yours, Monsieur Mutz,” responded I, trembling.

All of a sudden the child in the cradle commenced to cry, and Blitz, with a diabolical irony, accompanied its shrill wailing with piercing notes, saying—

“It is the hymn of life—ha! ha! ha! Really little Nickel sings it as if she were already old—ha! ha! ha!” The old clock at the same time commenced to strike in its walnut-tree case; and when I raised my eyes, astonished by the noise, I saw a little figure advance from the background, bony,

bald, hollow-eyed, a mocking smile on its lips—Death, in short. He came out a few steps and set himself to gather, by jerks, some bits of flowers painted in green on the edge of the clock-case. Then, at the last stroke of the hour, he turned half round and went back to his den as he had come out.

"Why the deuce did the organist bring me here?" said I to myself. "This is a nice baptism! And these are merry folk—ha! ha! ha!"

I filled my glass and drank it in order to gain courage.

"Well, let us go on, let us go on. The die is cast. No one escapes his destiny. I was destined before the commencement of the ages to go this evening to the custom-house; to walk in the alley of Saint-Landolphe; to come in spite of myself to this abominable cut-throat place, attracted by the music of Blitz; to drink *markobrünner* which smacks of cypress and vervain; and to see Death gathering painted flowers! Well, it is droll—truly droll!"

So I dreamed, laughing at men who, thinking themselves free, are dragged on by threads attached to the stars. So astrologers have told us, and we must believe them.

I laughed then amongst the shadows as the music ceased.

A great silence fell around. The clock alone broke the stillness with its regular tick-tack; outside the moon, slowly rising over the Rhine, behind the trembling foliage of a poplar, threw its pale light over innumerable ripples. I noticed it, and saw a black boat pass along in the moon's reflected light.

On it was a man, all dark like the boat He had a loose cloak around him, and wore a large hat with wide brim, from which hung streamers.

He went by like a figure in a dream. I felt my eyelids heavy.

"Let us drink," cried the organist.

The glasses clattered.

"How well the Rhine sings! It sings the air of Barthold Gouterolf," said the son-in-law, *"ave-ave-stella!"*

No one made reply.

Far off, far off, we could hear the rhythmic beat of two oars. "Today," cried the old postmaster suddenly, in a hoarse voice, "Saphéri makes expiation."

No doubt he had long been thinking, thinking of that. It was that which had rendered him so sad. My flesh crept. "He thinks of his son," said Ito myself; "of his son who dies today!"

And a cold shiver ran through me.

"His expiation," cried the daughter with a harsh laugh, "yes—his expiation!"

Theodore touched my shoulder, and, bending to my ear, said—

"The spirits are coming—they are at hand!"

"If you speak like that," cried the son-in-law, whose teeth were chattering. "If you speak like that I shall be off!"

"Go then, go then, coward!" said the daughter. "No one has need of you."

"Very well, I will be off," said he, rising.

And taking his hat off the hook in the wall, he went away with long strides. I saw him pass rapidly before the windows, and I envied him.

How could I get away?

Something was walking upon the wall in front. I stared—my eyes wide open with surprise, and at length saw that it was a cock. Far off between the old palings the river shone, and its ripples slowly beat upon the sand of the shore. The light upon it danced like a cloud of sea-gulls with great white wings. My head was full of shadows and weird reflections.

"Listen, Peter," cried the old woman, at the end of a moment "Listen, you have been the cause of all that has happened to us."

"I," cried the old man huskily, angrily, "I! of what have I been the cause?"

"Yes," she went on. "You never took pity on our lad. You forgave nothing. It was you who prevented his marrying that girl!"

"Woman," cried the old man, "instead of accusing others, remember that his blood is on your own head. During twenty years you have done naught but hide his faults from me. When I punished him for his evil disposition, for his temper, for his drunkenness, you—you would console him, you would weep with him, you would secretly give him money, you would say to him, "your father does not love you; he is a harsh man!" And you lied to him that you might have the greater portion of his love. You robbed me of the confidence and respect that a child should have for those who love him and correct him. So then, when he wanted to marry that girl, I had no power to make him obey me."

"You should have said 'yes,' " howled the woman.

"But," said the old man, "I had rather say no, because my mother, my grandmother, and all the men and women of my family would not be able to receive that pagan in heaven."

"In heaven," chattered the woman. "In heaven!" And the daughter added in a shrill voice—

"From the earliest time I can remember, our father has only bestowed upon us blows!"

"Because you deserved them," cried the old man. "They gave me more pain than they did you."

"More pain! ha! ha! ha! more pain!"

At that moment, a hand touched my arm. It was Blitz. A ray of the moon, falling on the window-panes, scattered its light around. His face was white, and his stretched-out hand pointed to the shadows. I followed his finger with my eyes, for he evidently was directing my attention to something, and I saw the most terrible sight of which I have a memory—a shadow, motionless, appeared before the window, against the light surface of the river. This shadow had a man's shape, and seemed suspended between heaven and earth. Its head hung down upon its breast, its elbows stood out square beside the body, and its legs straight down tapered to a point.

As I looked on, my eyes round, wide opened with astonishment, every feature developed in that wan figure. I recognized Saphéri Mutt; and above his bent shoulders I saw the cord, the beam, and the outline of the gibbet. Then, at the foot of this deathly apparition, I saw a white figure, kneeling, with long dishevelled hair. It was Gredel Dick, her hands joined in prayer.

It would seem as though all the others, at the same time, saw that strange apparition as well as myself; for I heard them breathe—

"Heaven! Heaven have mercy on us!"

And the old woman, in a low choking voice, murmured—

"Saphéri is dead!"

She commenced to sob.

And the daughter cried—

"Saphéri! Saphéri!"

Then all disappeared, and Theodore Blitz, taking me by the hand, said—

"Let us go."

We set off. The night was fine. The leaves fluttered with a sweet murmur.

As we went on, horrified, along the great Alley des Plantanes, a mournful voice from afar off sang upon the river the old German song—

“The grave is deep and silent,
Its borders are terrible!
It throws a sombre mantle
It throws a sombre mantle
Over the kingdom of the dead.”

“Ah!” said Blitz, “if Gredel Dick had not been there we should have seen the *other*—the fearful one take Saphéri. But she prayed for him! The poor soul! she prayed for him. What is *white* remains *white!”*

The voice afar off, growing feebler and feebler, answered the murmur of the tide—

“Death does not find an echo
For the song of the thrush,
The roses which grow on the grave,
The roses which grow on the grave,
Are the roses of grief.”

The horrible scene which had unfolded itself to my eyes, and that far-off melancholy voice which, growing fainter and fainter, at length died away in the distance, remain with me as a confused mirage of the infinite, of that infinite which pitilessly absorbs us, and engulfs us without possibility of our escape. Some may laugh at the idea of such an infinity, like the engineer Rothan; some may tremble at it, as did the burgomaster, some may groan with a pitiable voice; and others may, like Theodore Blitz, crane themselves over the abyss in order to see what passes in the depths. It all, however, comes to the same thing in the end, and the famous inscription over the temple of Isis is always true—

I am he that is.
No one has ever penetrated the mystery which envelops me.
No one shall ever penetrate it.