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SOUVENIRS OF THE CHESS-BOARD.

HOW IT COMES TO PASS THAT A BISHOP, FALLING NOT FROM HEAVEN BUT FROM THE POCKET OF AN OVERCOAT, MADE FOUR HAPPY.

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FTEN have I tried to ascertain the etymology of the word *Bishop*, which is the denomination given by the English and the Americans to the piece which we Frenchmen call *Fou*, but in vain. The French term may be easily understood. In former times, and especially in the middle ages, the sovereigns of Europe very often admitted to their intimacy certain individuals who enjoyed the exclusive privilege of speaking freely in their presence, of controlling their conduct and their actions under a form of jokes, warning them of the abuses and malversations of their ministers, of everything which was said or made, in short, of telling them the plain truth. Like other Brutuses they dissembled the wisdom of their remarks under an appearance of folly, thus obtained indulgence and pardon for their temerity. The King's *Fou* was an exceptional personage. Placed next to the King on the Chess-board he is in the right place. But what business could a *Bishop* have there? The magisterial attitude which is the principal attribute of that ecclesiastical dignity contrasts enormously with the part allowed to the *Fou*, with his presumptuous gambols in the opening of the games. Is there any similitude between the serious character of one and the rash eccentricities of the other? I should feel truly thankful to any one who would instruct me about the matter, and explain to me the motive which has caused our neighbors to accept the name of *Bishop*, an ex-

pression which appears to me, a poor ignorant, a veritable contradiction. Never mind; here let us go on with the word *Bishop*.

Before entering upon my narrative I must anticipate the remarks of critics who delight in characterizing my anecdotes as fantasies of my imagination. Though the substance of this narration is true, I shall not deny that in some details of it I have availed myself of the resources of that faculty, which I consider as the most precious one, of intelligence. However, according to the opinion of these gentleman, to follow the flights of imagination is a hanging matter. These gentlemen present a terrible resemblance to the fox in the fable. In presence of the grapes which he could not reach, he exclaimed: "Poh! they are sour and fit only for clodhoppers!" They despise the allurements of imagination because they have not any, and cannot have it; and, in consequence, they cannot appreciate the treasures of that faculty which comprehends with a single glance things and beings, giving them either marvelous shades or frightful aspect; of that faculty which reproduces in our mind the universe in its entirety; which can travel through the unknown, abstracts itself from the present, looks into the past as it does into the future. Sweet, amiable, attracting, seducing enchantress! She gives to pleasure the ravishing sensations of celestial ecstacies, but sometimes, also, menacing and terrible, she peoples the world with divers phantoms, creates atrocious torments, and thus gilds or darkens the picture. But enough of digression.

In the environs of Rouen, in the midst of those shady valleys where the Seine

flows, and where it majestically displays its waves, may be found scattered several country seats belonging to wealthy traders or to some offshoots of noble families, where in the Springtime they come to sojourn, in order to enjoy the wakening of Nature and its adorable enchantments. These residences take, by turn, according to the title or the taste of the proprietors, the name of castles, domains, villas, manors, cottages, or simply country houses. Amongst them arose on the top of a small hill, all luxuriant with green carpet, and whose feet were watered by the waves of the river, a habitation equally charming and original. In the construction of this building the architect had utilized a great portion of the ruins of an old abbey, which he had skillfully intercalated amongst red, yellow, and white bricks, and the whole formed an *ensemble* which appears to indicate the various ages of life: youth, maturity and old age. Some beautiful green-swards enameled with flowers, in the midst of which burst out the waters of an ornamental fountain, and magnificent walks of linden trees completed the picture.

This habitation claimed for its owner an eminent manufacturer, M. Jules Libert, whose workshops were in the suburbs of Rouen. M. Libert was an intelligent, hard-working, active, prudent, noble spirited, true-hearted and generous man. He possessed, in short, all those qualities most essential to success, and, moreover, when young, and almost in the commencement of his career, he had struggled with the vicissitudes of fortune, and the perplexities of an almost ruined position. The revolution of 1830 had entailed upon him considerable losses; but, owing to his energy, to his perseverance, and to the support of some devoted friends who had appreciated his merits, he had been able to reconstruct his fortune, and, at the time when the occurrence, which I now record, took place, he was in a position of a millionaire.

He had sustained the loss of his wife whose heart and devotion had powerfully upheld him in the days of trials, and who had borne him two children, Adolphus and Julia. The son was then sixteen years old, and was completing his studies at the College of Rouen; the daughter, aged eleven years, was being educated in the paternal home, and was intrusted to the care of the sister of M. Libert, Mademoiselle Mathilde.

Julia (ordinarily called Lily,) was a

charming brunette, with black and brilliant eyes, fine features and intelligent physiognomy. Of an excessively cheerful disposition, she was always ready to laugh and to bewitch her good Pa with those adorable wheedlings in which her father delighted. Her aunt, Miss Mathilde, former pupil of the Royal House of St Denis, possessed in the highest degree all the naughty proclivities which were the common appanage of the House of St. Denis. Prejudices, haughtiness, the illusion of physical advantages, and what is more fatal, those of wit and cleverness, and the disdain of the classes from which they have sprung, such is the disposition which they acquire from their education. Mademoiselle Mathilde was saturated with it. She might, without difficulty, have married, but she required some wealthy aspirant, some titled individual: a Marquis, a Count, or, at least, a Baron, a true gentleman; and not any of these personages having come forth, she had remained an old maid; that is to say, a whimsical particular, peevish, troublesome girl, criticising or blaming everything, everybody, and even forgetting often the gratitude she owed to her brother who had become her chief support. It will, therefore, be easy to understand that Lily and her aunt were not on the best possible terms, but the lightness of Lily's disposition, together with paternal weaknesses, protected her against the severity and the stiffness of her aunt.

The neighbors of M. Libert were Messrs. Simon Pechard, the mayor of the village, and M. Auguste Crocquet, an old Colonel of the first Empire. The three were all great votaries of Chess; accordingly, during the sojourn of M. Libert at his country-house, every evening they met in the parlor, and arranged themselves for battle with eagerness. M. Libert was somewhat superior as a player to his antagonists. Colonel Crocquet was, decidedly, the weakest, but he made up for his inexperience by a deluge of tremendous oaths, whose sonorousness often affected Mlle. Mathilde, and caused her prompt disappearance from these sittings which were generally opened in her presence.

It was the evening before Whitsunday, an epoch when, in the Norman Provinces, the workshops are closed for at least three days; a time of holiday making, which workmen, so rarely favored with a few days of pleasure, are wont to enjoy at large. The three

friends, as well as Mlle. Mathilde, Lily and Adolphus, who had come to the villa also, were in the parlor. M. Libert and M. Pecharde were engaged in a contest. Adolphus was reading a tale. Colonel Croquet had placed his stick, like a gun, in the arms of Lily, and was showing her the exercise. "Attention! girl, stand at ease! look at four yards before you. Shoulder arms! Present arms! Pan-n-n." And then resounded three or four burlesque exclamations and bursts of laughter from Lily and Adolphus, which completed the uproar. "Croquet!" cried the mayor, "how is it possible for us to play with such a noise?" "Colonel," exclaimed the old aunt, "your conduct is atrocious!" "Be quiet a little," said M. Libert, smilingly. "Poh! Poh! is it forbidden to laugh here! Come, come along, Lily, here, nearer to me, and recommence," said the colonel. "One-two-three. Shoulder arms! that's better. Present arms. Perfect, darling, you will be a first-rate female soldier, able, perhaps, to become one day a Joanne D'Arc." Thus, I have nearly depicted this rural reunion.

Matters were now quiet. Colonel and Adolphus approached the players who appeared entirely absorbed in the combinations of their game. M. Libert was rubbing his hands, imagining that he saw a mate in three moves, when the bell of the gate was heard to sound. "At such an hour," cried M. Libert, "who can come?" Lily was the first to escape and, presently returning, called out: "Pa! one of your clerks, a very young one, has arrived galloping from Rouen. He has a letter for you; he comes up, see him here (Eh! he is very smart, this young clerk, I like him"). The bearer of the epistle was a youth of about eighteen years of age; he had one of those slight figures which excites interest and sympathy; his features bore the imprint of a certain melancholy indicating an impressionable soul, and that he already knew what it was to suffer. His father, in fact, an old correspondent of M. Libert, who was much attached to him, had succumbed to a long and dangerous illness, leaving his affairs in a very confused state, so that the resources of his unfortunate wife whom he left a widow with four children, of whom Albert Gillet was the eldest, were altogether absorbed. M. Libert, moved by the position of this family, had made this youth come to him, had installed him into his country house, and had no need to regret his charitable action; for Albert Gillet was active, intelligent, devoted,

and did all that was in his power to justify the benevolence of his employer.

"What is the matter, my boy?" "Here is a letter from your manager, sir; I was told to hand it to you as quickly as possible." M. Libert opened it and read it. It announced that a firm in New York had transmitted an order of the utmost importance amounting to about 60,000 francs, and required for the payment of the goods ordered a credit of 120 days. As the orders of this firm did not ordinarily exceed eight to ten thousand francs, the manager required the advice of M. Libert. The correspondent added that he wanted a reply as soon as possible, and as the Packet from Havre to the United States left on the following Tuesday, there was no time to be lost. Should this order be accepted?

"Well, Albert, I must finish my game, and after that I will reply. Seat yourself for a little while. You will sup with us before you go." M. Libert replaced himself before the Chess-board, and conformably to the prediction given to his adversary, he checkmates him in four moves. "Ah! that is very pretty," cried the opponent; "I must acknowledge it is a wonderful combination." "Pardon me" then, said Albert, who had looked at the termination of the game, "if you had played your Knight to the King's fifth square, you would have escaped the check and the game would have been drawn." "How is that! how is that?" exclaimed M. Libert. "See here, sir," and Albert demonstrated the correctness of his assertion. "You know Chess, then?" "A little." "But you appear to be strong; who has been teaching you?" "An old habitue of the Regence, a skillful player of the second class who had retired into my country-town." "Oh! indeed! Let us see; we will play a game together." "Willingly, sir."

M. Libert was literally crushed. The mayor took the place of M. Libert, and after some moves, fell headlong, dismounted. The colonel, who was the weakest of the party, laughed, enjoying the defeat of his usual adversaries, and then, feeling himself revenged of his own defeats, cried: "Bravo, my boy; bravo, bravissimo!" and Lily repeated: "Bravo, my boy!" The talent of the young man was thus ascertained and applauded. The occasion was too good for these brave amateurs not to profit by it. M. Libert called his confidential servant, gave him the reply, and sent him with it to Rouen directly, retaining at home the young clerk. On the

morrow and following days they all engaged in battle and united in consultation against the new athlete. M. Libert had said to him: "Albert, you will remain here during the holidays, and we shall return together to Rouen on Wednesday next. Why, good gracious, did you never tell me that you knew the game of which I am so inveterate a votary? Well, we shall see again your skill, but supper time has come; friends, follow me, and let us seat ourselves at the table."

The effect that his employer's invitation produced upon Albert will be readily imagined; nothing but the influence of the Chess-board was necessary to level the barrier which ordinarily separates a young clerk from the intimacy of his chief, and, thus, Albert, having received from all the heartiest solicitations, had comprehended how he had suddenly acquired regard in the feelings of all those who surrounded him and witnessed his triumphs. "Ah, Pa, you have found your master, then," repeated Miss Lily; "and you, Colonel, why do you pout so? Would you appear jealous; a thousand cartridges! you must avenge yourself!"

Albert, then remained at the manor three days and went on from triumph to triumph. On returning to Rouen, M. Libert told him that, henceforward, he should spend the evenings of Saturdays with him at his villa, and to complete the joy of the young clerk, he improved his situation with an increase to his salary of 1,000 francs per year.

Five or six years passed away, during which Albert Gillet continued to be admitted not only to the familiarity of his employer, but into his most intimate affections. I must say that he responded to these exceptional favors by a constant assiduity in the performance of the duties intrusted to him, by an unbounded devotion, of which he was frequently occasioned to give proof, and by irreproachable conduct. He was beloved by everybody, with the exception, it may be of the old Aunt Mathilde, who seemed excessively jealous of the interest and sympathy which this young gentleman inspired, and who minutely overlooked and controlled even his simplest actions.

During these six years, Lily had become well developed and handsome, through having preserved her genial and lovely character. She displayed now one of those striking physiognomies whose charm

is the more irresistible as its owner is ignorant of the effect which it produces, effect caused by grace, innocence and frankness.

Albert had reached his twenty-fourth year, the epoch when the heart receives strong and vivid impressions from whatever is natural and beautiful, that amiable age when the imagination expands in the midst of burning transports, when the soul, outstripping futurity, dreams only of hope, success and love, and believes to spin with a golden woof days of which he sees not the end; but an age, also, when the smallest obstacle is considered as an inaccessible mountain, when the least disappointment destroys all the illusions, when then despair succeeds the mirage of celestial felicity.

For the last six months Albert had become melancholy, even to distraction. M. Libert could not make out this change of humor, which even Chess itself could not dissipate. It is to be remarked that on matters of heart-aches or heart-wounding attractions, husbands and parents are those who understand them the least. But Mademoiselle Mathilde thought she guessed the mystery of this change. M. Albert was enamored of Miss Julia Libert, and the old maid was not mistaken; she had, for some weeks past, increased her zeal to overlook the behavior of Albert; she had noticed in his eyes that magnetic fluid which detaches itself from the aspirations of the heart to penetrate into that of the beloved being; moreover, she had thought she could remark the fatal effect of this mystic transmission in the spirit of her niece. Albert had pleased her. Arming herself then with all austerity, she had often wished to warn her brother, but she would have wished to produce some proof that her apprehensions were well founded, and till this time nothing but suppositions justified her fears. Did their exist a communion of feelings between the two young people, it only existed in a state of platonic contemplation. It was necessary, then, to await the course of events. The opportunity soon came.

One Summer evening Mlle. Mathilde, Lily and Albert were together in the parlor. M. Libert dined with the colonel at the mayor's house, and after dinner they ought to come back to the villa and engage themselves in a game. Albert had already prepared the Chess-board and arranged the pieces. The tea was hot, the cups were

ready, as well as the box of cigars, the bottles of Spanish and Portuguese wines, and the famous bottle of fine champagne brandy. The heat had been intense during the whole day. Lily was humming some romance with the accompaniment of her piano. Albert, while listening to her, turned over the leaves. Mlle. Mathilde, laying idly upon a sofa, asleep or feigning to be asleep. Suddenly the horizon became charged with thick vapors, the sun was hidden behind mournful and thick clouds, the heavens were closed on all sides and presented no more than a gloomy vault, from which splashed out at intervals more and more frequent long, bluish flashes of lightning; the thunder rolled from afar, the unchained winds dashed down the trees to the ground, the rain fell in torrents; entire nature appeared overthrown upon its foundation; the tempest seemed to announce a universal cataclysm. A frightful crashing was heard. The thunderbolt gleams and bursts, breaking the parlor windows and, entering into the room, breaks and overthrows furniture, tea-pot, cups, tables, not excepting that on which the Chess-board was placed, but happily sparing the persons gathered there.

However Mlle. Mathilde, madly frightened, escaped to another room, thinking her dress to be on fire. The unfortunate Lily, when throwing herself back, had fallen so badly that she hurt the nape of her neck and fainted.

Albert, alone, had preserved his self-possession. At the sight of his beloved one extended lifelessly, covered with blood, he rushed forward, locked the young lady in his arms, sought to recall her to herself, and yielding to the emotions of his heart, applied his lips to those of Lily, and gave vent to the murmurs of his soul which came from its depth, and which was ready to leave his body also, in case she, whom he held in his arms, should not recover her senses. These murmurs were low, almost smothered, but the words, "oh! my Julia! my angel! my idol! my treasure! my whole! my life! come! come back! and be yourself again!" could be heard. Oh, happiness! she breathes; she has opened her eyes; she has uttered a word about which there can be no mistake. "Albert!" and her look has told the rest. He is loved!!

It is then that the aunt appears. She has seen; she has heard; she is certain of that which till this moment was only a

matter of supposition. She must speak; she shall.

The thunderbolt had made one of its whimsical caprices in overthrowing the furniture, and touching lightly the Chessmen. It had carried the head off one of the Bishops, and had covered that piece with a particular color, half sulphurous, half green, with some red spots, which no chemical agent could, from that time, henceforward cause to disappear. The storm went on raging; the three amateurs of Chess remained in the mayor's house, unable to commence play, but killing the time by smoking, drinking, chatting and speaking of their lawsuits. In Normandy, everybody of high class has his little lawsuit. It is the necessary appendix of the inhabitants of the *departments* of Lure, Culvador and Seine *inférieure*. They contest for six-pence; they spend one thousand francs with attorneys, barristers and notaries; but if they can succeed in having their sixpence, they are satisfied and happy. The Colonel was uttering a volley of imprecations against the hurricane. At last they separated themselves, and M. Libert returned home. His sister was awaiting him; as soon as he entered, she took him into her room after having sent her niece into her own and dismissed Albert. Then she made him acquainted with everything, not forgetting to point out all the details of the case with highly colored shades. "You cannot retain this young man, Jules; you must nip these proceedings in the bud, do you understand?" M. Libert knitted his brow, and contented himself with replying, "Sister, keep yourself calm; go and take your rest; it is late; I shall consider of the matter to-night, and I will decide what is to be done to-morrow; good night, go."

How many weary thoughts, indeed, swayed the spirit of the good M. Libert? On the one side, he recalled the behavior and acts of his young clerk, his aptitudes, his zeal, his devotion, the services he had rendered to him, and even the reserve about his attachment to Lily, sentiments which he had never revealed before, but kept faithfully silent in his heart; on the other side, he weighed what was in prospect for his daughter, the fortune which he intended to bequeath to her, and he compared it with the smallness of Albert's resources. Does Lily love him? Probably, but, at her age, the heart frequently deceives itself, and reason and time are powerful to shackle its earliest allurements. After hav-

ing reflected for a long time, he came to a decision at last. He was to send Albert away instantaneously, under no matter what pretext, without, however, parting with him definitely. Upon this decision he rested.

If M. Libert had passed a very agitated night, poor Albert had not been able to find a minute of repose. The aunt had seen everything; her provoked look had penetrated into the remotest recesses of his heart, she had discovered his secret. She would talk about it; he would be accused of having betrayed his benefactor's confidence. The poor lad shed tears, he wept, and his desperate soul was deluged with grief.

The following morning M. Libert sent for him. Pale and trembling, Albert appeared at his command. "Albert, I know everything," he kindly said to him; "the person at fault is not you, but myself, because I have forgotten to consider of the impressions experienced by youth; the influence which a pretty lass could exercise upon a lone heart. But we are still in time to chain it. You are honest and courageous. When you come to reflect upon the matter sensibly, you will understand that my daughter is not suitable for you. Your positions are so entirely different, and the future prospects of my child must regulate my conduct. It becomes absolutely necessary for us to part immediately, and an opportunity presents itself now. I am not very certain of the position of several correspondents in the United States of America, who for some time have increased their orders; I want exact references about their financial standing and credit. I will send you to New York, where you will get the necessary information and will overlook the details of their business. It is quite possible, also, that I shall establish a counting-house in that city of which you will be the manager. I will double your wages, and you will interest yourself in this new enterprise. Once established, you will readily find a companion who will bring comfort to you, security and happiness for the future. Such is my resolution, and it is irrevocable. Cheer up, my boy, come then, you will leave this morning directly for Havre."

Dumb, frozen, like an automaton, Albert bowed and followed M. Libert. A post-chaise was ordered and was soon ready; he entered and the door was closed; he was gone! From her chamber, Lily,

who thought that there was something very serious going on, who had been listening to every word and watching since day-break, saw the post-chaise, her beloved sweetheart's parting, then signed with her hand to Albert, and threw at him one of those looks which are full altogether of energy, will, fire and love and of an unalterable devotion. Albert readily understood it and felt some comfort to his grief.

It would be useless to occupy the reader with the events which followed the departure of Albert. Firstly, my space is limited, next, if the reader has ever loved, he knows all the anguishes, the perplexities, as he does the hopes, the illusions, and the ecstacies of this magnetism of the soul which affects or lulls our human nature; he has only to recall the remembrances and feelings of that period, and they will represent the divers' emotions which were experienced by these two persons, already united before-hand by a mystical and indissoluble contract. We arrive at the conclusion.

Eight years have passed away. During this interval, important changes took place in the respective position of our personages. Albert, after having fulfilled the mandate with which he had been intrusted, had for a long while, but vainly awaited the realization of M. Libert's project. Desirous, then, to establish for himself a prospect for the future, and to reap some wealth to be worthy of his beloved whom he knew was faithful still to him, had connected himself with a powerful metallurgic society in the United States of America, and seconded by the activity of his intelligence, the support of several very influential shareholders and, above all, by the hope of success, he had raised himself to become one of the directors of that company, only he had been necessitated to adopt another name than his own, which had disappeared in that of the firm of MacKesson & Co.

For his part, M. Libert had for a second time experienced the vicissitudes of fortune. The revolution of 1848 had compromised his position most fatally. Considerable losses and the suspension of the works had necessitated him to compromise. Those multiplied and prolonged disasters had undermined his constitution, annihilated his energy, disorganized his intellectual faculties, and to avoid a misfortune more terrible still, and, without doubt, irreparable, his family, acting upon the advice of doctors, had considered it necessary to settle his establishment, and to seclude him from

society. Hardly could they save a small income to supply his wants and those of his poor daughter, Julia, who had refused all the offers which had been made to her. At last his son endeavored to utilize his abilities and his time to assist his good father and his sister.

One day the office boy, of the house of MacKesson & Co., came into the director's private room, and informed him that a person without desire to be immediately presented to him. "Who is this person—" "M. Adolphus Berville—Adolphus Berville; I do not know him; I have never heard of him; what does he want?" "This gentleman is bearer of a letter of introduction to the director of the firm. Admit him."

The boy then introduced a young man of about twenty-eight to thirty years, with a modest, almost a timid countenance, and whose deportment was more than confused. "What is your wish, sir?" "To hand you this letter; it will explain to you the object of my visit."

Albert read the letter, and cast a look of compassion upon the stranger whom, nevertheless, he examined with attention; passing his hand over his brow, his hair, as if to recall something to his memory, and said, "I regret, sir, that I am unable to avail myself of your services, as every place in the office is filled; however, as this letter mentions highly your abilities and character, at some future time, there may be some vacant situation; therefore leave your address with me." Adolphus Berville handed his card, and prepared to retire. And it seemed to him also, as though something has fastened upon his memory; the director's voice had moved his heart; he thought he could recognize this voice as one which he had already heard. It may be also that he was struck by the benevolent physiognomy and kind manner of his interlocutor; it may be that some incoherent souvenirs recalled to him the Norman country, his poor father; it may be he was affected by the ill-success of his visit. However it was, he felt tears falling down his cheeks, and that he might dry them before retiring he drew a handkerchief from his pocket. A small object fell, at the same time, on the ground. Albert, more alert than his visitor, stooped and picked it up. "What is that?" said he. "A Bishop of a game of Chess! dear me, what a curious Bishop! It is speckled with various colors, green, yellow, red, and half of its head is off. A curious Bishop, upon my word;

but whence does it come from?" "Oh, sir, no matter; it is a Bishop of my Chess-board which has found its way out of the box, my father's box who gave it me." "And your father is called Berville?" "No, sir; the name of Berville belongs to my mother; my father's name is—" "Libert," cried the director. "Yes, but how do you know that secret?" "Remain here a little while more," replied Albert; "the offices are about to close; you will come and dine with me, and I shall explain all; and firstly to tranquilize you, I will admit you into my cabinet as private secretary, with one thousand dollars annual salary. Come.

Explanations did not occupy a long time. The visitor recounted the misfortunes and the illness of his poor father; the resistance of his sister Julia to all the demands for her hand, and assured Albert of her immediate consent in his favor if he still wished to take her for his wife. Albert then gave an account of his adventures, and of the successful results of his efforts. The following day Albert held a council of the other directors of the company and exposed to them that family affairs of the highest importance necessitated him to leave immediately for France for three months; he obtained the consent of the council, explained to Adolphus what he would have to do during his absence, and embarked directly two days after.

The reader may imagine with what transports he was received by his beloved Lily, with what raptures he found her ready to marry him, with what joy they could now look at the future. The position, or rather the fortune, of Albert could repair the misfortunes of his father-in-law. He went immediately and visited M. Libert, informed him with all possible management of the events happened, and asked him for his daughter's hand.

The sincerity of the devotion of his former clerk, his generosity, his offer to make him a partaker of his wealth, to take him with Julia to his home, determined a favorable crisis and re-established the faculties of the old man.

Some months afterwards Albert returned to his post with his wife and her aged father, who enjoyed the happiness of his children, blessing heaven which had reserved for him to die in their arms.

As for the old aunt, Albert settled on her an income adequate to her necessities. By this way the little half-headed Bishop had made four happy people.