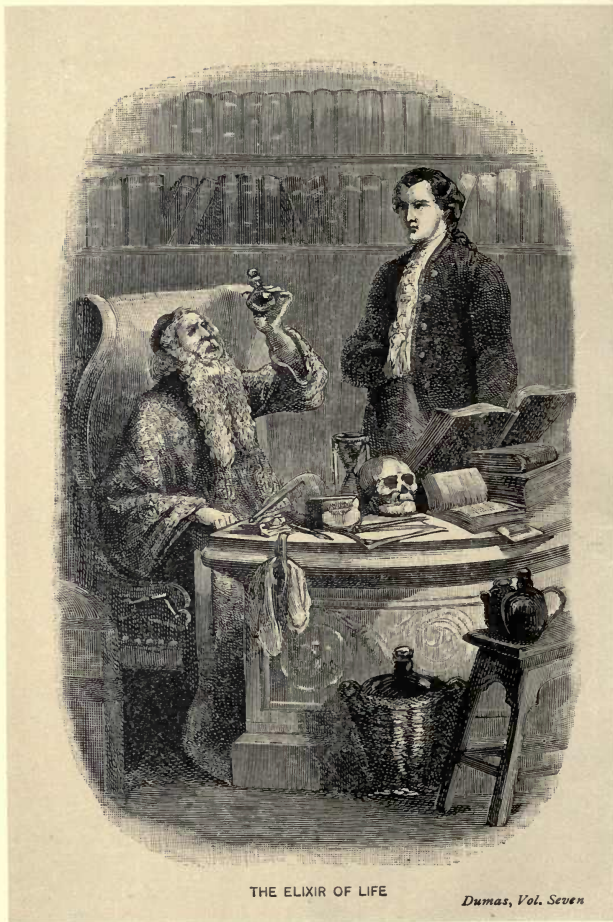


Mrs. C. L. Anderson.

THE
MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN



THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

Dumas, Vol. Seven

THE WORKS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS
IN THIRTY VOLUMES



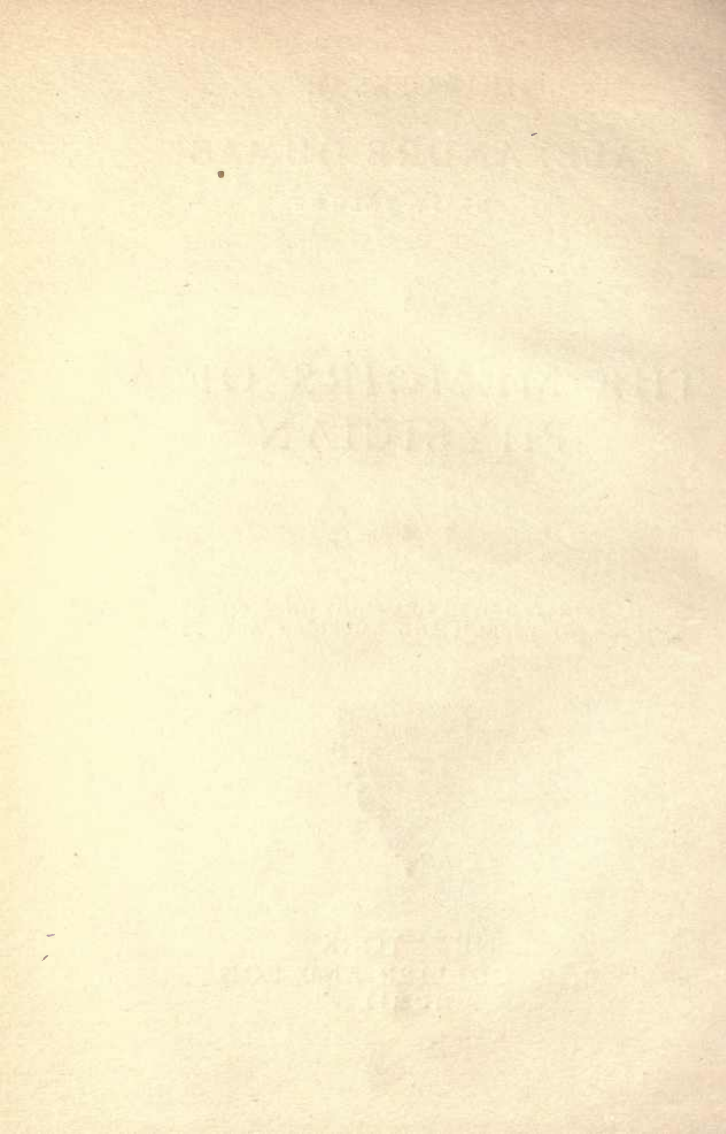
THE MEMOIRS OF A
PHYSICIAN



ILLUSTRATED WITH DRAWINGS ON WOOD BY
EMINENT FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARTISTS



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MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIELD OF THE DEAD.

GREAT storms are always succeeded by calms, fearful in their very stillness, but bearing healing on their wings.

It was about two o'clock in the morning. The moon, wading between large white clouds which hovered over Paris, showed in strong relief, by her wan and sickly light, the inequalities of this sad spot, and the pits and holes in which so many of the fleeting crowd had found an untimely grave.

Here and there in the moonlight, which was obscured from time to time by the large white floating clouds we have mentioned, might be seen, on the margin of the slopes and in the ditches, heaps of corpses with disordered attire, stiffened limbs, livid and discolored faces, and hands stretched out in an attitude of terror or of prayer.

In the center of this place, a heavy, tainted smoke, emitted from the burning embers of the timber, contributed to give to the Place Louis XV. the appearance of a battle-field.

Over this bloody and desolate plain, flitted, with rapid and mysterious steps, shadowy figures, who stopped, looked stealthily round, bent down, and then fled. They were the robbers of the slain, attracted to their prey like vultures to the decaying carrion. They had not been able to rob the living, and they came to despoil the dead. Surprised at seeing themselves anticipated by their fellow-robbers, they might be seen escaping sullenly and fearfully at the sight of the tardy bayonets which menaced

them. But the robber and the lazy watchman were not the only persons moving among the long ranks of the dead.

There were some there, with lanterns, who might have been taken for curious lookers-on. Sad lookers-on, alas ! for they were parents and anxious friends, whose children, brothers, friends, or lovers had not returned home. They had come from great distances, for the dreadful news had already spread over Paris like a hurricane, scattering dismay and horror, and their anxiety had been quickly changed into active search. It was a sight perhaps more dreadful to behold than the catastrophe itself. Every expression was portrayed on these pale faces, from the despair of those who discovered the corpse of the beloved being, to the gloomy uncertainty of those who had found nothing, and who cast an anxious and longing glance toward the river, which flowed onward with a monotonous murmur.

It was reported that many corpses had already been thrown into the river by the provostry of Paris, who wished to conceal the fearful number of deaths their guilty imprudence had occasioned.

Then, when they had satiated their eyes with this fruitless spectacle, and standing ankle deep in the Seine, had watched with anguished hearts its dark waters flow past unburdened with the loved bodies of those whom they sought, they proceeded, lantern in hand, to explore the neighboring streets, where it was said many of the wounded had dragged themselves, to seek for help, or at least to flee from the scene of their sufferings.

When, unfortunately, they found among the dead the object of their search—the lost and wept-for friend—then cries succeeded to their heart-rending surprise, and their sobs, rising from some new point of the bloody scene, were responded to by other and distant sobs.

At times the place resounded with noises of a different kind. All at once a lantern falls and is broken—the living has fallen senseless on the dead, to embrace him for the last time.

There are yet other noises in this vast cemetery. Some of the wounded, whose limbs have been broken by the fall, whose breast has been pierced by the sword, or crushed by the weight of the crowd, utters a hoarse cry, or groans forth a prayer, and then those who hope to find in the sufferer a friend, hastily approach, but retire when they do not recognize him.

In the meantime, at the extremity of the place, near the garden, a field-hospital is formed by the kindness and charity of the people. A young surgeon, known as such by the profusion of instruments which surround him, has the wounded men and women brought to him; he bandages their wounds, and while he attends them, he speaks to them in words which rather express hatred for the cause than pity for the effect.

To his two robust assistants, who pass the sufferers in bloody review before him, he cries incessantly :

“The women of the people, the men of the people, first! They can be easily recognized; they are almost always more severely wounded, certainly always less richly dressed.”

At these words, repeated after each dressing with a shrill monotony, a young man, torch in hand, is seeking among the dead, has twice already raised his head. From a large wound which furrows his forehead, a few drops of crimson blood are falling. One of his arms is supported by his coat, which he has buttoned over it; and his countenance, covered with perspiration, betrays deep and absorbing emotion.

At these words of the surgeon, which he has heard as we have said for the second time, he raises his head, and looking sadly on the mutilated limbs which the operator seems almost to gloat over.

“Oh, sir,” said he, “why do you make a choice among the victims?”

“Because,” replied the surgeon, raising his head at this interruption, “because no one will care for the poor if I do not think of them, and the rich are always well looked after. Lower your lantern, and search upon the

ground : you will find a hundred poor people for one rich or noble. In this catastrophe, with a good fortune which will in the end weary even Providence, the noble and the rich have paid the tribute they generally pay—one in a thousand."

The young man raised his torch to a level with his bleeding forehead.

"Then I am that one," said he, without the least anger ; "I, a gentleman, lost among so many others in the crowd, wounded in the forehead by a horse's hoof, and my left arm broken by falling into a pit. You say that the noble and the rich are sought after and cared for ; you see plainly, however, that my wounds are not yet dressed."

"You have your hotel—your physician. Return home, since you can walk."

"I do not ask for your cares, sir ; I seek my sister, a beautiful young girl of sixteen—killed, probably, alas ! though she is not of the people. She wore a white dress, and a chain with a cross round her neck. Though she has her hotel and her physician, answer me, for pity's sake, sir, have you seen her whom I seek ?"

"Sir," said the young surgeon, with a feverish vehemence which showed that the ideas he expressed had long boiled within his breast, "sir, Humanity is my guide. It is to her service I devote myself ; and when I leave the noble on their bed of death to assist the suffering people, I obey the true laws of Humanity, who is my goddess. All this day's misfortunes have been caused by you. They arose from your abuses, from your usurpations. Therefore, bear the consequences. No, sir, I have not seen your sister."

And after this harsh apostrophe, the operator returned to his task. A poor woman had just been brought to him, whose two legs were fractured by a carriage.

"See !" he exclaimed, calling after Philip, who was rushing away, "see ! do the poor bring their carriages to the public festivals to break the legs of the rich ?"

Philip, who belonged to that class of the young nobility from which sprung the Lafayettes and Lameths, had often professed the same maxims which terrified him in the

mouth of this young man, and their application recoiled upon him like a judgment. His heart bursting with grief, he left the neighborhood of the hospital and continued his sad search. He had not proceeded many steps, when, carried away by his grief, he could not repress a heartrending cry of :

“Andrée ! Andrée !”

At that moment there passed by him, walking with hasty steps, a man already advanced in years, dressed in a gray cloth coat and milled stockings, his right hand resting on a stick, while with the left he held one of those lanterns made of a candle inclosed in oiled paper.

Hearing Philip's cry of grief, he guessed what he must be suffering, and murmured :

“Poor young man !”

But as he seemed to have come for the same purpose as himself, he passed on. Then all at once, as if he reproached himself for having passed unheeding by so much suffering, without attempting to console it :

“Sir,” said he, “pardon me for mingling my grief with yours ; but those who are struck by the same blow should lean on each other for support. Besides, you may be useful to me. You have already sought for a considerable time, I see, as your light is nearly extinguished, and you must, therefore, be acquainted with the most fatal localities of the place.”

“Oh, yes, sir, I know them.”

“Well, I also seek some one.”

“Then look first in the great ditch ; you will find more than fifty corpses there.”

“Fifty ! Just Heaven ! So many victims killed at a fête !”

“So many ! Sir, I have already looked at a thousand faces, and have not yet found my sister.”

“Your sister ?”

“It was yonder, in that direction, that she was. I lost her near the bench. I have found the place since, but no trace of her was visible. I am about to recommence the search, beginning with the bastion.”

"To which side did the crowd rush, sir?"

"Toward the new buildings, in the Rue de la Madeleine."

"Then it must have been toward this side?"

"Yes, and I therefore searched on this side first; but there were dreadful scenes here. Besides, although the tide flowed in that direction, a poor, bewildered woman soon loses her senses in such a scene; she knows not whither she goes, and endeavors to escape in the first direction that presents itself."

"Sir, it is not probable that she would struggle against the current. I am about to search the street on this side; come with me, and, both together, we may perhaps find——"

"And whom do you seek? Your son?" asked Philip, timidly.

"No, sir; but a child whom I had almost adopted."

"And you allowed him to come alone?"

"Oh! he is a young man of eighteen or nineteen. He is master of his own actions; and as he wished to come, I could not hinder him. Besides, we were far from expecting this horrible catastrophe! But your light is going out."

"Yes, sir; I see it."

"Come with me; I will light you."

"Thank you—you are very good; but I fear I shall incommode you."

"Oh, do not fear, since I must have searched for myself. The poor child generally came home very punctually," continued the old man, proceeding in the direction of the streets, "but this evening I felt a sort of foreboding, I waited up for him; it was already eleven o'clock, when my wife heard of the misfortunes of this fête from a neighbor. I waited for two hours longer, still hoping that he would return. Then, as he did not appear, I thought it would be base and cowardly in me to sleep without having news of him."

"Then we are going toward the houses?" asked the young man.

"Yes; you said the crowd must have rushed to this side, and it certainly has done so. The unfortunate boy had doubtless been carried this way also. He is from the provinces, and he is alike ignorant of the usages and the localities of this great town. Probably this was the first time he had ever been in the Place Louis XV."

"Alas! my sister is also from the provinces, sir."

"What a fearful sight," said the old man, turning away from a group of corpses clasped together in death.

"Yet it is there we must look," replied the young man, resolutely holding his light over the heap of dead.

"Oh! I shudder to look at it, for I am a simple and unsophisticated man, and the sight of destruction causes in me an unconquerable horror."

"I had this same horror; but this evening I have served my apprenticeship to butchery and death! Hold, here is a young man of about eighteen; he has been suffocated, for I see no wounds. Is it he whom you seek?"

The old man made an effort, and held his lantern close to the body.

"No, sir," said he, "no; my child is younger, has black hair, and pale complexion."

"Alas! all are pale to-night," replied Philip.

"Oh, see!" said the old man, "here we are, at the foot of the Garde Meuble. Look at these tokens of the struggle. The blood upon the walls, these shreds of garments upon the iron bars, these torn dresses on the points of the railing."

"It was here—it was certainly here," murmured Philip.

"What sufferings!"

"Oh, heavens!"

"What?"

"Something white under these corpses! My sister had a white dress on. Lend me your lamp, sir, I beseech you."

In fact, Philip had seen and snatched a shred of white cloth. He let go his hold, having but one hand to take the lamp.

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