

IN the last century there lived in the little town of Gaillac, in Languedoc, a young merchant, who, having arrived at an age when he wished to settle down in life, sought a wife. Providing she was sweet-tempered, witty, rich, pretty, and of good family, he was not particular about the rest; for Michael knew that he must be moderate in his desires. Unhappily he could not see in Gaillac one who appeared worthy of his choice. All the young girls had some known fault, not to mention those which were not known. At length he was told of a young lady of Lavaur endowed with innumerable good qualities, and a dowry of twenty thousand crowns. This sum was exactly that required by Michael to establish himself in business; so he instantly fell in love with the young lady of Lavaur. He obtained an introduction to the family, who liked his appearance, and gave him a good reception. But the young heiress had many suitors, from whom she hesitated to make a definite choice. After several discussions it was decided by her parents that the contending lovers should be brought together at a ball, and after having compared them a choice should be made.

On the appointed day Michael set out for Lavaur. His portmanteau was packed with his finest clothes, an apple-green coat, a lavender vest, breeches of black velvet, silk stockings with silver trees, buckle shoes, powder-box, and a satin ribbon for his *queue*. His horse was harnessed with

gay trappings. Futhermore the prudent traveller, not having a pistol to put in his holsters, had slipped in a little bottle of wine and several slices of almond cake, in order to have something to hand to keep his courage up. For in reality now that the day had come he was in a very anxious state, and when he saw in the distance the church of Lavaur he felt quite taken aback. He slackened the pace of his horse, then dismounted, and in order to reflect upon what he should do at the ball he entered a little wood and sat down on the turf. He drew from his holsters, to keep him company, the almond cake and the bottle; the latter he placed between his knees, so that without thinking of it he varied his reflections by sips of wine and mouthfuls of cake. These distractions somewhat enlivened him and gave him confidence, so much so, that he began to discover in himself a number of virtues and excellences which could not fail to ensure him the victory.

The sun having disappeared from the horizon he was about to pursue his journey, when he heard a sound behind him amongst the leaves as of a multitude of little footsteps trampling the grass in tune to the music of a flute and cymbals. Astonished, he turned round, and by the light of the first stars, he perceived a troop of fairies, who were running headed by the king, Tambourinet. In their rear, turning over and over like a wheel, was the buffoon of the little people, Drak, the fairy.

The fairies surrounded the traveller, and gave him a thousand welcomes and good wishes. Michael, who had drunk too freely not to be brave, welcomed them as old



"TURNING OVER LIKE A WHEEL."

acquaintances, and seeing their little eyes fixed upon the cake, he began to crumble and throw it to them as one would to the birds. In spite of their numbers, each one had his crumb with the exception of Drak, who arrived when everyone had finished. Tambourinet next asked what was in the bottle, and passed it from hand to hand till it reached the buffoon, who, finding it empty, threw it away.

Michael burst out laughing.

"That is justice, my little man," said he to the fairy. "For those who arrive late there remains nothing but regret."

"I will make you remember what you have just said," cried Drak, in anger.

"And how?" asked the traveller, ironically. "Do you think, now, you are big enough to revenge yourself?"

Drak disappeared without answering; and Michael, after taking leave of Tambourinet, mounted his horse again.

He had not gone a hundred paces, when the saddle turned and threw him roughly to the ground. He arose, a little stunned, rebuckled the straps, and mounted his horse again. A little further on, as he was going over a bridge, the right stirrup bent slightly, and he found himself thrown in the middle of the rivulet. He got out again in a very bad humour, and fell the third time over the pebbles in the road, hurting himself so much that he could hardly proceed. He began to

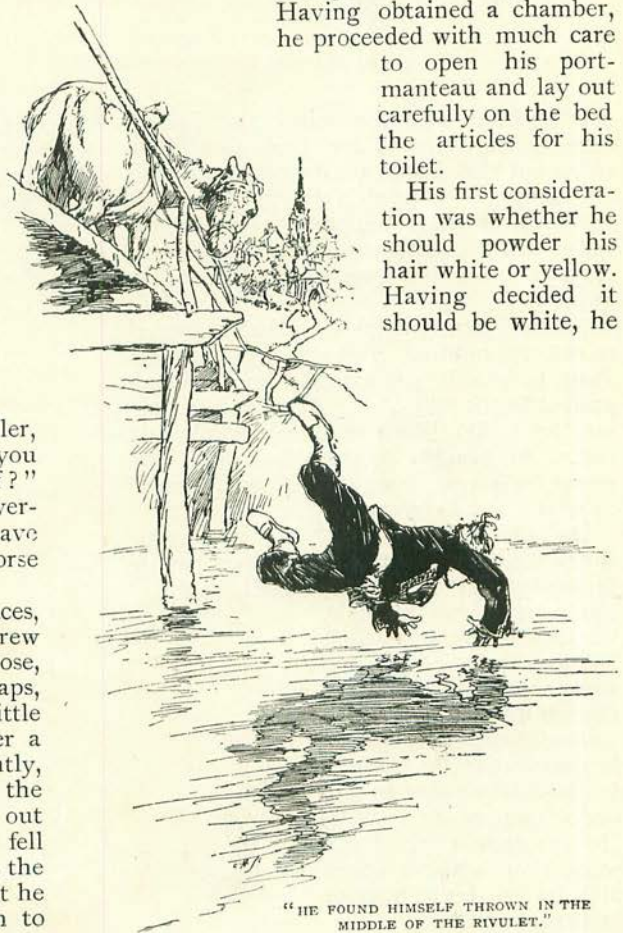
think if he persisted in riding in the saddle he would be unable to present himself at all to the family of the young lady, so he decided to ride his horse bare-backed, and take the saddle upon his shoulder. In

this manner he made his entry into Lavaur, amid the loud laughter of the people who were sitting at their doors.

"Laugh! laugh! you great stupid," murmured Michael; "is it very marvellous that a man should carry his saddle when it will not carry him?"

At length he reached the inn, where he alighted, and asked for a room in which to change his travelling clothes. Having obtained a chamber, he proceeded with much care to open his portmanteau and lay out carefully on the bed the articles for his toilet.

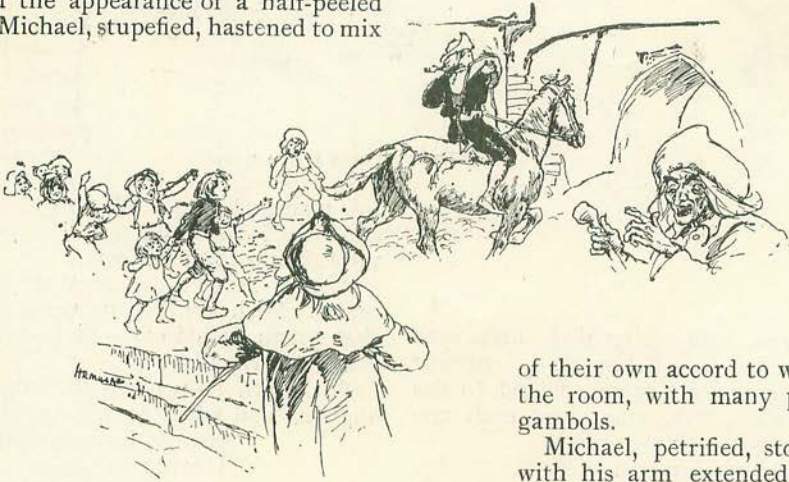
His first consideration was whether he should powder his hair white or yellow. Having decided it should be white, he



"HE FOUND HIMSELF THROWN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RIVULET."

seized the swansdown powder-puff, and commenced the operation on the right side. But at the moment when he had finished that side, he saw that an invisible hand had powdered the other side yellow, so that his head had the appearance of a half-peeled lemon. Michael, stupefied, hastened to mix

Furious, he finished by putting on his travelling boots, and was about to take his velvet breeches, when immediately he approached the bed, lo! the breeches began



"LAUGH, LAUGH, YOU GREAT STUPIDS!"

the powder with the comb, and finding himself too pressed for time to seek to think out the reason of the mischance (he was always a slow thinker), stretched out his hand towards the reel on which the satin for his *queue* was wound. The reel escaped from his fingers and fell to the ground.

Michael went to pick it up, but it seemed to roll before him. Twenty times he was about to seize it, and twenty times his impatient hands missed it. One would have said he looked like a kitten playing with a reel. At length, seeing that time was going, he lost patience and resigned himself to wear his old ribbon.

He now hastened to put on his morocco shoes. He buckled the right, then having finished the left, he stooped to admire them, but as he did so the right buckle fell to the ground. He replaced it, but no sooner had he done so than the left followed suit. He had hardly put that right before the other one claimed his attention again in the same manner as before. He proceeded thus for some time, without being able to get both buckles fastened together.



of their own accord to walk about the room, with many provoking gambols.

Michael, petrified, stood mute, with his arm extended, contemplating with a frightened air this incongruous dance. But you may guess how he looked when he saw the vest, coat, and hat join the breeches at their respective places, and form a sort of counterfeit of himself, which commenced to walk about and parody his attitudes.



"IT SEEMED TO ROLL BEFORE HIM."

Pale with fear, he drew back to the window, but at this moment the Michael-esque figure turned towards him, and he saw under the cocked hat the grimacing face of Drak, the fairy.

Michael uttered a cry.

"It is you, you villain, is it? I'll make you repent of your insolence if you don't instantly give me back my clothes."

after a peregrination of an hour or two across this Pyrenees of the cats and swallows, Drak gained a high chimney, at the foot of which his pursuer was forced to stop.

Drak, leaning over towards Michael, who was out of breath and discouraged, said:

"You see, my good friend, you have forced me to spoil your ball-dress, but, happily, I see underneath me the copper of



"PALE WITH FEAR, HE DREW BACK."

So saying, he rushed to take them, but the fairy, turning sharply round, ran to the other side of the room. Michael was beside himself with anger and impatience, and rushed again towards the fairy, who this time passed between his legs and rushed out on to the staircase. Michael pursued him angrily up four flights of stairs till they arrived at the garret, where the fairy dodged him round and round, and then skipped out of the window. Michael, exasperated, took the same route. The malicious fairy led him from roof to roof, dragging the velvet breeches, the vest and coat in all the gutters, to Michael's despair. At length,

a laundress, where everything can be put right for you."

With these words Drak shook the velvet breeches over the chimney-pot.

"What are you doing, rascal?" cried Michael.

"I am sending your dress to the wash!" said the fairy.

And so saying, the vest, coat, and hat followed the breeches into the smoking gulf.

The young gallant sat down upon the roof with a cry of despair. But rising immediately said, with resolution:—

"Well, I'll go to the ball in my travelling dress."

"Hark!" interrupted the fairy.

The sound of a bell rang out from a neighbouring steeple. Midnight struck! Michael counted the twelve strokes, and could not restrain a cry. It was the hour designated by the parents when they would proclaim to the suitors who had presented themselves at the ball their daughter's choice for a husband. He wrung his hands in despair.

"Unhappy man that I am!" he cried.

"When I arrive all will be over; she and her parents will laugh at me."

"And that would be justice, my big man!" replied Drak, with a pointed sneer. "For you have said yourself, *For those who arrive late there remains nothing but regret.* This will serve you, I hope, as a lesson, and prevent you another time from laughing at the feeble, for from henceforth you will know that *The smallest are big enough to avenge themselves.*"

