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Excursions along the banks of the Rhine

Hugo, Victor

London, 1843

Part XVIII.

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PART XVIII.

WHERE SERIOUS MINDS MAY FIND OUT WHICH IS THE MOST
IMPERTINENT OF METAPHORS.

THE wheel was probably the wheel of Bauldour ; still it was possibly that of one of her attendants ; for Bauldour's oratory was close to her chamber, and there she often passed the day, and though she span much, she prayed more.

Thus cogitated Pecopin, yet still he listened to the whirl of the wheel with delight. Such is the weakness of a man in love, above all, when possessed of an expansive heart and a great mind.

The state of mind of Pecopin was composed of the ecstasy which dwelt upon its joy, and the eagerness which would bring it to an issue.

Pecopin, finally summoning courage, placed his hand upon the key, the door yielded, he opened and entered the chamber. "Alas !" he exclaimed, " I was mistaken, it was not Bauldour I heard, it was an old woman, nay, an old fairy, for fairies alone attain such fabulous age and centenarian decrepitude."

The duenna appeared to be in her hundredth year. Imagine, if you can, a human being bent, broken, tanned, freckled, wrinkled, and withered ; with white hair and eyebrows, black lips and teeth, yellow palsied, and hideous. Even such a venerable and

horrible creature as this was seated crouched beside the window, her eyes fixed upon her wheel, and holding her spindle like one of the destinies. She was doubtless deaf, for, on Pecopin's opening the door, she seemed not to heed him. Still, the knight made her an obeisance, as is due to such prodigious age. "Good mother," said he, approaching her, "where, I pray you, is Bauldour?"

The centenarian raised her eyes, let fall her thread, trembled in all her members, uttered a feeble shriek, half raised herself upon her chair, extended her skinny hand to the knight, and said with a weak and reedy voice, as if proceeding from a tomb, "Sir Pecopin! what are you in need of? Masses for the repose of your poor soul? Oh holy saints! what has brought you up from the dead?"

"My good woman," replied Pecopin, laughing and talking loud in order that, if at hand, Bauldour might hear him, "I am not dead. It is not my ghost you see, but Pecopin himself, in his own flesh and blood. I want no masses, but a kiss from my beloved Bauldour, whom I love more tenderly than ever. Do you hear, old lady?"

As he pronounced these words, she threw her withered arms round his neck. It was Bauldour herself! The devil's hunt had lasted one hundred years!

Bauldour was alive, thanks to God or the devil; but, at the moment Pecopin saw her again, the poor girl had just attained one hundred and twenty years and a day!